

Letter to World Citizens

Garry Davis

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Disarmament without law?

I attended a U.N. conference in New York in April called “Disarmament at a Critical Juncture.” The opening day, April 24th, the subject was “General and Complete Disarmament: Dead Letter or Continuing Commitment.” The main speakers were Jonathan Dean, of the Union of Concerned Scientists; Randall Forsberg, Institute for Defense and Disarmament Studies; Daniel Plesch, British American Security Information Council; and Jordana Friedman, Council on Economic Priorities. Conference Room 3 was packed with citizens eager for solid answers to the subject matter.

Yet, from past experience, I did not expect to hear any of the distinguished speakers claim that disarmament of nation-states could only follow the institution of world law. I was not disappointed. None even mentioned global anarchy as a major cause of national arms, nuclear or conventional. It was as if they lived on another planet. Only nations were real to these “experts,” it seemed, not ordinary humans.

That evening, the Stephen Wise Memorial Synagogue on West 68th Street was packed. Professor Joseph Rotblat, the 1996 Nobel Peace Laureate, was the speaker. Rotblat was a nuclear physicist at Los Alamos who quit when he learned that the a-bombs were part of a strategy to “win” the Cold War against the Soviets. Both Einstein and Sakharov later advocated a world government to cope with the new, total destructive power that nuclear bombs represented. I anticipated that Rotblat, the one and only nuclear physicist honored by the Nobel Committee as a peace laureate, would ally himself with his colleagues by firmly supporting world government.

After explaining from the floor mike who I was and that I represented hundreds of thousands of individuals throughout the world claiming world citizenship, that we were already united in a world government over 40 years old, I asked him whether he at least supported the concept. After graciously acknowledging that he knew of my “crusade” and even often referred to himself as a “world citizen,” he said that world government was “maybe a hundred years in the future” but that now we had to deal with nations as the only viable players on the world stage.

I found his response incomprehensible. How can “peace” be divorced from law—world “peace” from world law? Why would not a Nobel Peace Laureate arrive rationally at this conclusion? We, ordinary mortals, find it self-evident, at least many of us do. Yet, incredibly, I know of no living Nobel Peace Laureate who advocates world law as the *sine qua non* of world peace.

The next day, April 25, the 10th anniversary of the Chernobyl tragedy, which exploded once and for all the myth of national frontiers, Professor Rotblat again spoke at the U.N. conference on “A Nuclear-Weapon-Free World Leading to a War-Free World.” Ah, I thought, he is at least going to mention world citizenship if not world government after admitting last night that he thinks of himself as a “world citizen.” Alas, no mention of world citizenship, world law or world government. The deadly radioactivity of Chernobyl that went coursing around the world ten years prior, I thought, would have impelled a clear recognition at least of the desperate need of global political control of nuclear power.

On the contrary, nuclear proliferation is on the rise. How much time is there before we sow what we have reaped?