

## NOW IS THE CHANCE!

Johan Galtung

Many of us in the West have been trained to see the West in general and the United States in particular as flexible, and the East in general and the Soviet Union in particular as hopelessly rigid. The general idea has been that nothing can be done to the East-West conflict unless there is a basic change in the Soviet Union. We in the "free world," in the democracies have to wait, watch carefully the Soviet Union and the other countries in the Eastern part of Europe and then be ready to act positively when there are signs of positive change.

Well, there are, indeed, such signs. I am not thinking only of what the Western press, in its ceaseless individualism, discusses in terms of one man only, Gorbachev. In the Soviet Union a new class is not only taking shape and rising, but is getting into power: the urban-industrial-intelligentsia. There are millions of Gorbachevs. They are very well educated; this is what the Soviet Union does well, the economy they do badly. This new class want their expertise to dominate, not only to cement their own power position but to bring about another Soviet Union, not only internally but also in its relationship to the rest of the world. I think we can see the signs: a foreign policy less based on export of dogma and bullying, more on peaceful exchanges including trade. And we see the same signs from Bulgaria, Rumania and Hungary. Only Czechoslovakia, Poland and DDR are somehow lagging behind, but that will probably also change soon. In any case, gone are the days of messianic communism in the East; what we find are people seriously trying to build better societies.

So, these are precisely the signs we presumably have been waiting for. And what happens? Only wish we could say nothing; far worse than that. The US is seriously preparing a totally new weapons system based on particles and various types of laser beams (and rail gun projectiles), capable of incinerating cities and countries (Argonne National Laboratory, R&D Associates think tank) when used offensively, probably capable of very little when used - as Star Wars has been marketed, as SDI - defensively. Reagan came to Reykjavik willing to give up nuclear arms as long as he could keep something even more threatening, leaving no radio-activity, possibly less "nuclear winter," capable of hitting even individuals, of striking with no warning, with literally speaking lightning speed. Gorbachev came to Reykjavik also willing to give up nuclear arms provided he could stop Star Wars. Agreeing on nuclear arms but on totally different premises they, of course, made no progress. And in the meantime the US president sinks more and more deeply into a morass of his own making, trying to play god, settling the whole Middle East "situation" with one stroke - trying to do so with people with thousands of years of experience in politicking.

Even more shocking, however, are the NATO "allies," proving themselves to be precisely that, not governments of their own peoples. Loyalty to the Western superpower, united front, unanimity has higher priority than the exploitation of the new openings and efforts to stop that star war madness. In such cases the most rigid country sets the tone: the United States. And we can understand a Soviet Union feeling despair at the lack of response, at this incredible rigidity when they are shouting to the world: let us stop the arms race, it is ruining both of us, it may lead us into nuclear disaster.

So, let us hope that the Soviet Union does not give up on these petrified governments in the West - some of them no doubt also seeing Soviet readiness to negotiate as weakness. And we have to step up our efforts to work on those who play cards with us, our children, our grandchildren - in order no to lose the best chance we ever got. Our task for 1987!