

## Editorial

### *What about human rights!*

In virtually the last week of the Reagan administration, the United States signed on for the Moscow Human Rights Conference—a conference planned for four years from now. Why the haste? Why indeed!

It appears that the Soviets have been demanding this most cynical of all concessions as a precondition for allowing the arms reduction talks to proceed apace. Perhaps it is appropriate that there should be a linkage between U.S. betrayal of the oppressed nations of the East bloc, by acquiescence in the charade of a Moscow-sponsored conference on human rights, and disarmament agreements whose only purpose is to strip down Western defenses and decouple the United States from Europe. Perhaps the old saying might be more aptly paraphrased: The Road to Hell is Paved with Bad Intentions.

On Nov. 17 representatives of national-democratic movements in the U.S.S.R. drafted an appeal to the Vienna conference on the Helsinki Accords while meeting with members of a U.S. congressional delegation in Moscow to meet with Soviet officials and dissidents. The appeal urged the Vienna conference not to agree to hold a conference in Moscow on humanitarian affairs. It was signed by groups representing Estonia, Ukraine, the Crimean Tatars, Latvia, Lithuania, and Armenia.

They state in their petition: "The realization of political reforms that are being proposed by the new leadership of the U.S.S.R. attests to the fact that it does not wish to democratize the government, which is subordinate to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

"We are witnessing the sped-up process of centralizing economic and social life. Russification of national minorities has not been halted. Nothing has been done to give genuine sovereignty to the republics. Prisoners of conscience continue to languish in concentration camps and in exile. Public movements are being repressed. Meetings and demonstrations are forbidden. New laws that regulate the civic and political activity of citizens have a reactionary, anti-democratic character."

The statement concludes by agreeing to such a conference only on the fulfillment of four conditions: true sovereignty to republics; expanding the rights of the individual which includes allowing democratic elections; releasing all prisoners of conscience; adopting a law on cults which would guarantee freedom of conscience.

We heartily agree with the signators of this call. If anyone needs convincing that the Soviets have in no way changed their policy of brutal disregard of all human rights, they have only to ponder the viciousness with which the Russian government has escalated its persecution of the Armenian people in face of the devastating tragedy of the earthquake.

It was reported on NBC national television news, by on-the-spot observers, that relief supplies were not getting to the victims of the earthquake in the first few weeks. Now the Soviets have reversed their policy.

They are making bread available to those victims of the earthquake whom they have not forced to emigrate to camps outside Armenia, but they are *selling* all other relief supplies to those who remain. Since most Armenians are not only homeless but without jobs, this means that they are now in danger of dying of malnutrition, despite the generous international efforts to come to their relief.

At the same time the Soviets are jailing Armenian officials as well as members of the Nagorny Karabakh Committee as enemies of the state. Among other punishable crimes in the Soviet Union, is the complaint that Armenian children have been removed from the country and sent to camps where they are out of reach of friends and families. Are these children to be brainwashed to become *spetsnaz* and terrorists of the future?

Some Armenians believe that the Soviets deliberately suppressed warnings about the incipient earthquake in order that the maximum destruction of their nation might occur. Whether or not this is proven so, Moscow has used the occasion to accomplish its genocidal purpose to the fullest extent, considering that there has been an international spotlight on Armenia.