

File - Szilard / Personal

OF DOLPHINS AND MEN

LEO SZILARD. "The Voice of the Dolphins and Other Stories." Simon and Schuster, New York, 1961.

ANIMALS hold a prominent place in satirical literature. Swift gave us the Houyhnhnms—wise and noble in contrast to human narrow-mindedness and meanness. Anatole France used the penguins to ridicule bourgeois civilization.

Now we have an American author creating a new satirical image, the dolphin. The author is Leo Szilard and his book is the story of how the dolphins led mankind out of the disarmament stalemate and into a world without war.

The story is interesting in its conception, and also because of the personality of its author. Dr. Szilard is a scientist of world renown, his fields of research being atomic energy and biophysics. Interesting, too, is the evolution of his thinking. For Dr. Szilard was one of the pioneers of nuclear physics and had an active share in the making of the first nuclear bomb. But then he became a confirmed opponent of nuclear war and joined the ranks of America's progressive scientists. He has devoted himself entirely to the promotion of peace. He has attended the Pugwash conferences. He has called on scientists to co-operate in saving mankind from disastrous war. In this country he has been welcomed as a friend.

And Dr. Szilard tries to promote peace and co-operation not only in his scientific treatises and articles, but also in his short stories. His genre is satirical science-fiction. And this volume, especially the opening story, "The Voice of the Dolphins," is a supreme example of his masterly style.

"The Voice of the Dolphins" is, essentially, a picture of the world 40 years hence, at the close of the century. The author sees it as a world without bombs and war, a world of prosperity and happiness. But how was enduring peace achieved in the forty years that separate us from that picture?

The greatest discovery of the early sixties was that the dolphins possessed remarkable intellectual capacity. Scientists knew that the organization of the brain of the dolphin had a complexity comparable to that of man, but now they learned that the dolphins were superior to humans in intellectual capacity. That applied especially to the field of mathematics. The dolphins saw the future in a much clearer and more

profound way than humans. And they could teach them much, could show them the sure path to agreement and peace. But the chief obstacle was that men had not yet learned the language of the dolphins and could not therefore avail themselves of their wisdom and prevision. However, that, too, was overcome: mathematical formulas became the means of communication between scientists and leading dolphins.

The discovery amazed the world. An international institute was established in Vienna and in it men and dolphins worked together. Most of the scientists were drawn from the United States and the Soviet Union. There were periodical scientific conferences at which the dolphins reported the results of their research, which were then translated from dolphin to human language. No one challenged their scientific acumen. Their recommendations to the leading great powers were made the basis of policy.

The scientific sessions were followed by government conferences to act on the dolphins' recommendations. The main difficulty here was that governments and peoples still did not trust each other and could not, therefore, immediately, or within some reasonably short time, break the deadlock into which the world had been driven in the first half of the century. But little by little the dolphins led mankind towards closer understanding. Their programme provided for a ten-stage build-up of international confidence. Transition from one stage to another was not easy and met with adamant resistance now from one, now from the other side. It took more than thirty years to reach final agreement on general and complete disarmament. At long last, the war clouds were dispelled, never to gather again.

The dolphins had done their job and could now quit the scene. And they did, killed by some unknown virus. A fire in the Vienna institute destroyed all the documents, records, resolutions and the recommendations made by the dolphins. The voice of the dolphins was never again heard...

The American scientist wants to show fellow-Americans what they and the world could be like thirty or forty years from now. An amusing make-believe picture? Yes, but it also reveals Dr. Szilard as a man

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of wisdom moved by concern for the future and supreme devotion to peace. We cannot say he is a typical American. Rather he expresses the views and sentiments of the minority of American intellectuals. But the important thing is that there are such men, that their voice is being heard, that they are trying to influence other Americans. There are facts to show that scientists who think like Dr. Szilard are not isolated exceptions, that their voice is becoming increasingly louder, and that they represent a growing, though not decisive, force in American life today.

These stories, as other of Dr. Szilard's writings, show that he is haunted by the thought of a possible world catastrophe. At times his humour borders on the macabre. In one of the shorter stories, for instance, he describes our planet after all life had been destroyed in a fratricidal war. Only buildings remain as mementoes of our civilization. A scientific expedition from another planet tries to form a mental picture of what that civilization was like. In Dr. Szilard's satirical description it looks anything but attractive.

But for all that, Dr. Szilard is neither a pessimist nor a fatalist. He has implicit faith in man's ability to prevent war and its disastrous consequences—even if dolphins have to be called in to help. Distrust and prejudice can be dispelled; peace and friendship can gradually be built up. But for that we humans must show more intelligence. That applies in particular to Americans, for it is to them that the author addresses the story of the dolphins, who symbolize this process of intellectual enhancement.

Firm faith in the power of the human intellect and science dominates every page of the book. Apparently Dr. Szilard does not attach great, let alone decisive, importance to social and political ideas or systems. He satirizes American democracy, showing that it is not government by the majority, but by a tiny minority which has subjected the interests of the people to its own, selfish interests. These are ignorant men. They exploit science and scientists, but disregard their counsel.

That is the chief source of all the difficulties on the road to peace. In Dr. Szilard's view, the ideal is a society governed by scientists, a sort of twentieth-century Platonic Utopia. If the President were surrounded by scholars and not by generals, diplomats and millionaires, the road to peace could be considerably shortened. But Dr. Szilard is aware that it is incomparably easier for dolphins to find their way to the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon and Congress, than it is for men of reason, knowledge and progress. Washington's refusal to recognize the People's Republic of China is the height of folly, and

the folly is ended by the dolphins early in their career, in the latter part of the sixties.

The ideas the author advocates are noble and lofty. They come from a noble and lofty mind. Dr. Szilard has unswerving faith in the power of the ideas of peace. But he does not, apparently, share Marx's view that ideas become a real force only when they grip the minds of the masses. That is why all his hopes are built not on belief in the triumph of the peoples fighting to bring the idea of peace to reality, but on belief that scholarly minds are bound to exert a decisive influence on world affairs. That is one of the weak aspects of his Utopia.

There is no denying that scientists, confirmed opponents of aggression and war, have played an important part in bringing the idea of peace to the peoples. And we highly appreciate the activities of progressive men of science, even though they are as far removed from Marxism as is Dr. Szilard himself. However, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that in some countries the ideas of peace grip the masses more profoundly and more quickly than in others. In this respect, we cannot equate the people of the socialist world, where the desire for peace has become the driving force of social and political progress, with the people of countries where the road to the triumph of reason and international amity is a much slower one.

We are justified in describing as peace-loving peoples united in active struggle for peace, nations where in this respect there is no distinction between government and people. Unfortunately, we cannot regard as fully peace-loving peoples which, though they stand for peace, are not sufficiently active in pressuring their governments to abandon their policies of aggression, the cold war and war preparation. We should not ignore the fact that in the capitalist countries, and notably in the Nato countries, a sizable part of the population still succumbs to anti-peace propaganda. In these countries "anti-communism" serves as an unscrupulous screen for criminal warmongering.

Peace supporters who try to equate genuine peace-loving peoples with those whose governments make peace professions only to deceive the masses, are guilty of a serious error. In a way, that applies to Dr. Szilard's dolphins. It seems that they are very strong in higher mathematics, but weak in history and arithmetic. When the dolphins try to blame the Soviet government for holding up the peace talks, they are sinning against the truth. Hence, the long time it took to rid the world of the bomb and war. The dolphins required nearly 40 years to do that. We in the Soviet Union believe that peace can be achieved in an incomparably shorter time.