European Review, Vol. 27, No. 1, 91–96 © 2018 Academia Europæa
doi:10.1017/S1062798718000613

Science and Dissent

ROBERT L. BERNSTEIN

Random House Publisher; Founder: Human Rights Watch.
Email: r.l.bernstein@att.net

Reading C.P. Snow's 1959 lecture, 'Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution' in 2017, I was struck by the ways in which the essay, written over half a century ago, addresses issues that I've been engaged with for most of my life. Snow defined a world of cultures split between: 'Literary intellectuals at one pole, at the other scientists. Between the two a gulf of mutual incomprehension, sometimes hostility and dislike, but most of all lack of understanding.' I've encountered this lack of understanding in my own profession and in public life. But it was Snow's closing argument that really grabbed my attention: he proposed to his Cambridge audience that they had 'better look at education with a fresh eye' and that there was a 'good deal to learn from the Russians'. Not really. If, as Snow proposed, 'Scientists have the future in their bones', we'd all do better to respond to the cool reason of dissidents such as Andrei Sakharov and Anatol Sharansky and to recognize the ultimate power of free speech, which only exists in a free society.

Now, I am neither a scientist nor what Snow describes as a 'literary intellectual', although I have published works by both intellectuals and scientists. I've spent my working life as a book publisher and, as I'll explain, was inadvertently drawn to an issue now defined as 'human rights'. It is my involvement with that issue that has made me aware of the difference in styles of thinking between scientists and literary intellectuals. For 25 years, ending in 1990, I was President and Chairman of Random House, the book publisher. During that time, I was drawn into the struggle for human rights and, in 1978, I founded Human Rights Watch, assembled a wonderful board, and served as Chair until 1998. I am just short of 95 years old as I write this and remain Founding Chair Emeritus of Human Rights Watch, and am still actively engaged in human rights issues.

During the last 10 years, I have become mostly focused on human rights issues in the Middle East and in China. After reading Snow's lecture, I became aware of how much the split in the ways of thinking between scientific and 'intellectual' cultures might help explain the seemingly irreconcilable differences in approach to the conflict between the State of Israel and the Arab world at large. Snow wrote in his essay:

> I constantly felt I was moving between two groups, comparable in intelligence, identical in race, not grossly different in social origin, earning about the same incomes who had almost ceased to communicate at all, who in intellectual, moral and psychological climate, had so little in common.

And then Snow concluded, 'the separation between scientists and nonscientists is much less bridgeable among the younger than it was even thirty years ago.' These phrases could describe the different approaches of two separate cultures, scientific and intellectual, in offering ideas to bridge the Israeli–Palestinian divide.

Dissidents and Human Rights

Some of my personal history may be pertinent. I became President of Random House in 1965, and in 1970 the Soviet Union decided it was interested in joining the International Copyright Convention. This meant that the Soviets would, for the first time, pay foreign authors when they published their books in Russian in the Soviet Union, and that Soviet authors would receive royalties when their books were published in other languages abroad. Together with three other publishers, I travelled to the Soviet Union several times to negotiate their joining the Copyright Convention and, on 27 May 1973, the Soviets finally signed the document.

Before the Soviets signed, a considerable number of Russians had begun drawing attention to human rights abuses in the Soviet Union, writing and publishing reports and sometimes organizing demonstrations – extremely dangerous activities in a country with a repressive totalitarian government. The most important and outspoken Russian dissidents were scientists. In 1968, Andrei Sakharov, the Soviets Union's most prominent scientist, who was instrumental in developing the Soviets' hydrogen bomb, published his first book, *Progress, Co-Existence and Intellectual Freedom*,[1] a plea for rapprochement between the Soviet Union and Western nations. He opened the book with these words:

> The division of mankind threatens it with destruction, civilization is imperiled by a universal thermonuclear war, catastrophic hunger for most of mankind, stupification from the narcotic of 'mass culture' … a spreading of myths that put entire peoples and continents under the power of cruel and treacherous demagogues.

Sakharov argued further, 'Intellectual freedom is essential to human society… Freedom of thought is the only guarantee of the feasibility of a scientific democratic approach to politics, economy and culture'. For expressing these opinions, Sakharov lost all his privileges as a member of the Soviet elite. All of the many honours and medals that had been bestowed on him were withdrawn, and he became the Soviets' leading dissident and human rights advocate. In 1970, Sakharov, along with two other physicists, Valery Chalidze and Andrei Tverdokhlebov, formed the Moscow Human Rights Committee.[1]

As the Soviets were negotiating their joining of the Copyright Convention, official state publishing bureaucrats kept urging American publishers to sign their authors. As a publisher, most especially of serious non-fiction and literary authors, I was

interested, but only in their dissident authors, most of all Andrei Sakharov. I had met Elena Bonner Sakharov, Andrei's wife, in Rome in 1974, and we stayed in touch; she was a trained paediatrician who had served in the Second World War. When Andrei was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975 for his role in defending human rights, the Soviet government denied him permission to travel to Oslo, Norway, to accept the award. Instead, Elena, who was allowed to travel, delivered his eloquent acceptance speech on Andrei's behalf. My wife, Helen, and I attended the ceremony in Oslo at Elena's invitation. Two years later, the Soviets invited me once again to Moscow to meet their authors. On the same trip, the Moscow bureau chief of the *New York Times* invited me to meet Sakharov. Helen, Elena, Andrei, and I sat in a corner talking for over an hour. We concluded our talk with Andrei agreeing to write an autobiography for Random House. I later succeeded in having Random House sign several dissident authors.

In 1978, the Western powers, including, of course, the United States, and the Soviet Union signed an agreement, not actually a treaty, called the Helsinki Accords. A part of this document, known as Basket III, were words that were an almost identical version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document signed three decades earlier that guaranteed basic human rights – freedom of speech, freedom of assembly – to the citizens of all nations who signed the agreement. The Soviet Union had not signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. But, now, in signing the Helsinki Accords, they were essentially agreeing – at least in principle – to support these principles. It was a major diplomatic breakthrough.

Soviet scientists seized on this event. Nuclear physicist Yuri Orlov, mathematician Anatoly Sharansky, biologist Sergei Kovalev, Sakharov's close friend, and Elena Bonner Sakharov, representing her husband, formed the Moscow Helsinki Committee, a group of concerned citizens, to monitor the Soviet Union's compliance with the newly signed Helsinki Accords.

The signatories of the Helsinki Accords came together for a follow-up meeting in Belgrade in 1977. Arthur Goldberg, newly retired from the US Supreme Court, headed the US delegation. He came back from that meeting and made a novel suggestion. He concluded that the part of the Helsinki Accords concerning human rights was not being effectively discussed in the official government-to-government meetings. He thought it would be beneficial to set up a non-governmental organization, like the Soviet citizens group already had. In turn, the US government asked the Ford Foundation for help, and McGeorge Bundy, a former national security advisor to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and who was then leading the Ford Foundation, asked me if I could help start a US group to monitor international compliance with the Helsinki Accords. I said I could. The result was the US-based Helsinki Watch, which was founded to support the efforts of the Soviet scientists. In the years following, along with an excellent and very active board, we added Americas Watch, Asia Watch, Africa Watch, and Middle East Watch, all of which were subsequently brought together under a single umbrella to create what is today Human Rights Watch. I spell out this history to show the enormous importance of scientists in actually launching today's human rights movement.

The same story unfolded in a slightly different way in China. China's leading astrophysicist, Fang Lizhi, became known as the 'Sakharov of China', speaking out about the need for freedom of speech and an open society, and inspiring students and others who gathered peacefully in Beijing's Tiananmen Square and in other places around China in early June, 1989, to urge their government to change. Fearing imprisonment after the Chinese government's brutal crackdown on 4 June, Fang fled to the United States embassy, where he remained in sanctuary for more than one year. High-level negotiations between the US and China finally resulted in a deal that sent Fang into exile in the United States, where he spent the rest of his life. He died in 2012.

The Middle East Muddle

Now how do these past events relate to my reading of Snow's essay and my current attention to the Middle East? It seems to me that in the debates on how to settle the Israeli–Palestinian dispute – indeed on the widespread sectarian problems faced by the Arab world – the 'scientists' are losing out to the 'intellectuals'. As a result, the scientific method which Snow describes, 'Only scientists are trained in classical logic, in the dispassionate observation and analysis of facts', is much ignored on the intellectual side. As a result, the facts on the ground and the challenges they present have not been sorted out analytically in a way to help craft an overall solution.

The intellectuals, led by international human rights groups, student activists, and European political leaders, often joined by artists and literary doyens, focus exclusively on Israeli violations against the Palestinians without acknowledging the very real security threats Israel faces on a daily basis.[2] Human Rights groups opine on how wars should be fought, and have conflated human rights and humanitarian law standards and enforcement strategies. Today, Israel is routinely accused of committing war crimes and grave breeches of the Geneva Conventions. Some even call on the International Criminal Court to prosecute Israeli soldiers and political leaders. These accusers ignore rocket attacks and violent acts which indiscriminately target both soldiers and Israeli civilians.

In their zeal to delegitimize Israel's existence, many in the intellectual community seek to turn it into an international pariah. To accomplish this objective, they also choose to ignore many facts. First, that Israel is a human rights leader in the Middle East region, with a record that includes a commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which includes freedom of speech (without which all other human rights are in peril), the right to pray and love as you wish, and a commitment to the rights of women. Most of these rights are sorely lacking throughout the region. Rather than respecting free speech, almost all of the region's governments routinely incite their populations to using hate speech and anti-Semitic vitriol, a pattern that has played out since the establishment of Israel almost 70 years ago. The enormous power of incitement through hate speech in closed societies – where challenging the leadership is forbidden, and where governments have failed in many cases to provide

adequate education – is perhaps the most overlooked human rights crime, a fact that any careful analysis would quickly reveal.

One recent example demonstrates the cultural difference still evident in Snow's homeland, and ours. In concord with actions taken by some American literary groups, the University and College Union of Great Britain (representing more than 120,000 college-level educators) voted on 30 May 2006 to pass a resolution calling for a boycott of Israeli academics and universities. In response, Martin Rees, the President of the Royal Society, re-affirmed the opposition of the Society, the UK's national Academies of Science, to such boycotts: 'Moratoria on scientific exchanges based on nationality, race, sex, language, religion, opinion and similar factors thwart [our] goals.'[3]

A scientist from the old Soviet days also spelled it out. Anatoly – now Natan – Sharansky, a mathematician who survived nine years in a Soviet prison (mostly in solitary confinement) and a charter member of the Moscow Helsinki Watch, said in his 2008 book, Defending Identity, about international human rights thinking:

> The hypocrisy and double standards of the international human rights organizations reflect the disappearance of clear moral criteria that alone can guard human rights. A refusal to see the difference between free and totalitarian societies, between a state at peace and a state at war against terrorist regimes, undermines the universal values on which a claim to human rights is based…
>
> In its refusal to distinguish democratic from nondemocratic regimes, the human rights movement undercuts its own commitment to democratic freedoms and itself becomes a tool of undemocratic powers. The principle of human rights has not succeeded in its role as the guardian of Western democracy because, in the end, this guard and guarantor of Western values is blind: It can no longer recognize the critical moral distinction between democracy and totalitarianism.[4]

I think Snow would agree with Sharansky. Indeed, I'd bet that Snow would agree that many international 'human rights' advocates are not rigorous enough in their thinking; they are certainly not supported by scientists in the solutions they propose for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, namely the demonization of Israel. Returning to Andrei Sakharov's words, I think using 'dispassionate observation and analysis of facts' would clearly show the need for a two-state solution, with the development of a Palestinian state that must include the recognition of Israel and with the commitment to coexistence with Israelis in peace and security. If, as Snow proposed, 'Scientists have the future in their bones', we'd all do better to respond to the cool reason of Sharansky and the Royal Society and recognize the ultimate power of free speech, which only exists in a free society.

References

1. A.D. Sakharov (1974) Progress, co-existence and intellectual freedom. In *Sakharov Speaks* (New York: Alfred A Knopf), pp. 58–59.
2. Anon (2007) Boycotting universities: Slamming Israel, giving Palestinians a free pass. *The Economist*, **14**(June), p. 68.

3. E.B. Davies (2006) Royal Society opposes academic boycott of Israeli scientists. http://www.mth.kcl.ac.uk/staff/eb_davies/boycott.doc (accessed 2006).
4. N. Sharansky (2008) Defending identity. *Public Affairs*, pp. 92–93.

About the Author

Robert L. Bernstein, after Harvard and military service, rose to become CEO of Random House (1966–1991), publishing the stars of American letters: William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, James Michener, William Styron and Theodor Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss. Bernstein's second career began when he supported and published the work of dissident scientists such as Andrei Sakharov and Anatoly Sharansky. In 1978, Bernstein founded Helsinki Watch and in following years added Asia Watch, Middle East Watch, Africa Watch, and Americas Watch. The Watch Committees merged into Human Rights Watch, which Bernstein chaired until 1998, when he became Founding Chair Emeritus. Bernstein's memoir, *Speaking Freely* (2016), recounts this story.