

## **BIO-ACTIVISM: TOWARD A CULTURE OF PEACE**

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The late Andrei Sakharov, one of the world's greatest scientists, was also one of the foremost advocates of human rights in the former Soviet Union. Sakharov dedicated his life to the cause of tolerance and human dignity. It is entirely appropriate that the International Sakharov Festival, held in his name, should be a forum for leaders to focus awareness on the necessity for ethical values and the right to live in a healthy environment. As the Sakharov festival hopes to show, the bio-environment, human rights and the arts are unifying components in nurturing a bios culture.

In exploring the search for such a bio-culture grounded in peace and human rights, this paper looks at the contribution which bio-activism can make to building a sustainable future. It starts by exploring the concept of bio-activism from below, in the context of the worsening crisis in world society. The case study of the Biopolitics International Organisation is used as an example of how grass-roots activism can make a substantial contribution to preserving the bio-environment. The search for a culture of peace through enhanced global habitability is juxtaposed to the worsening economic and political situation in Europe. We can be sure that Andrei Sakharov would have enthusiastically supported this challenge of promoting a bio-culture, which forms the central theme of this important conference.

### **Bio-Activism: Peace from Below**

Andrei Sakharov devoted his life to the cause of human rights and human dignity.<sup>1</sup> From his legacy, the reports of the famous Sakharov hearings make disturbing reading and point to the critical nature of human rights advocacy.<sup>2</sup> Of central importance is the necessity for promoting new ethical values and the right to live in a healthy environment and enjoy a better quality of life. As one of the world's greatest scientists, Dr. Sakharov was co-developer of the Soviet hydrogen bomb. His acute experience of the potential destructiveness of scientific progress inspired his vociferous efforts to ensure the peaceful use of science within the hostile environment of the Soviet regime. He defended the concept of democracy and human rights against the mounting tensions facing the former Soviet Union and lobbied the Supreme Soviet on the necessity to democratise society for the development of science, the economy and culture.

Because of his efforts on behalf of human rights Sakharov was fiercely attacked by writers, composers, workers and scientists. Indeed, few Soviet intellectuals defended him before his eventual confinement at Gorky. Sakharov was a true advocate of the cause of bio-culture and it is fitting that this festival is held in his name. Therefore, I warmly congratulate the Preparatory Committee for this latest conference organised by the Biopolitics International Organisation. The salience of the conference theme, with its emphasis on bio-environment and bio-culture through which we work toward a sustainable future, cannot be under-estimated. We live in times that are characterised by increasing threats to our living environment. The global political system impinges on the rights of people and the global environment is deteriorating so rapidly that it threatens the very quality of our being. The mounting crisis in the world ecosystem is a challenge to action for all of those concerned with the quest for a sustainable future. Such a future can only remain protected within an equitable model of society, which recognises the critical nature of bios for our times. The organisers are to be thanked for convening such an important symposium on such a vital theme and at such a critical time for the future of world society.

The role of bio-activism and the quest for a sustainable future are integral to the planning of this conference and from the outset I wish to make it clear that I believe bio-activism has tremendous potential to encourage the development of society in the direction of a sustainable future. But before I do that, I want to persuade you in the direction of a totally novel way of thinking about the totality of a sustainable future. This must take us to the very kernel of life itself, the idea of bios, and especially the issue of Biopolitics, which is literally political activism for the protection of bios. Biopolitics is essentially the defensive strategy, the protective mechanism, for our future - the future of bios against the encroachment of rampant capitalism and the degradation of contemporary society. This is the realpolitik of working towards a better environment, towards the defence of our right to a sustainable future.

I want to do two major things. I want first, to give an example of how bio-activism can actually contribute to the quest for a sustainable future. And second, to present some reasons why bio-activism is critical in this quest.<sup>3</sup> So, the solid example. You have heard many brilliant speeches about the theoretical potential for a sustainable future. I want to show you how it can happen by demonstrating one example where it is already happening.

### **Environmental Politics and Sustainable Outcomes**

In leading you toward a way of thinking about the totality of life itself and the need for its protection, I want to show you a case-study. The country is Greece, the city is Athens, a beautiful but polluted classical city, and the movement is the Biopolitics International Organisation.

The Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.) has evolved in order to campaign for the protection of the idea of bios itself and to press for a better understanding of bios, the key to life, at every level of society. To do that, the B.I.O. lobbies governments, presses for change, involving the protection of the environment at governmental and inter-governmental levels and acts as a custodian for the very concept of bios. This is an awesomely important task.

"Bios has evolved over hundreds of millions of years. If we consider the evolution of bios as a twenty-four hour day, the appearance of humans is realised only during the last few minutes. Let us hope that our presence will not lead to midnight, but to the dawn of hope, since technology offers the expansion of human potential. A new vision is required for the next millennium, which represents only a few seconds in terms of bios evolution. We possess the knowledge to provide abundant nourishment for all the children of the world and to heal our planet from the wounds to the bio-environment.... Humanity possesses the option for alternative futures.... Biopolitics may serve as an ideal pathway, leading to the fulfilment of peace and the revelation of harmony."<sup>4</sup>

This salient quotation is from the concluding address of Dr. Vlavianos-Arvanitis, esteemed president and founder of the Biopolitics International Organisation, at a major symposium on this subject in Athens in 1988. Her words reveal much about the importance of what we might call "bios thinking" in our lives. In endeavouring to bridge the gulf between technological developments and societal values, the Biopolitics International Organisation proposes the bios theory. This is part of its overall strategy for promoting the implementation of international co-operation for the better understanding of bios.

The B.I.O. advocates the formulation of international legislation on Bios Rights and the bio-assessment of technology, in an effort to improve the global quality of life. This involves the sensitisation of public opinion toward the increasing impact of the biological sciences on other disciplines.<sup>5</sup> Integral to this process has been the development of curriculum materials at the school and university level, to include Biopolitics in a range of relevant disciplines.

These subjects have included biology, physics, geography, natural history, and most of the natural sciences. They have also included the social sciences, and the bios concepts and thinking have permeated many aspects of the study of mankind and its impact upon the environment. This takes us into a whole arena of academic disciplines. Of these, an area where there have been particularly interesting developments is that of Peace Studies or the science of peace. Biopolitics has had a profound impact on thinking in Peace Studies as academics and practitioners in that field have become increasingly concerned about the threat to our global future and issues of global-habitability.

### **Peace Studies, Bio-Activism and the Biopolitics International Organisation**

Biopolitics poses critical questions for Peace Studies, which the Peace Studies curriculum is beginning to address. In recent years, especially in the USA and the United Kingdom, the Peace Studies curriculum has begun to reflect a growing concern with bios issues. These include environmental hazards and environmental damage, global habitability and global, or environmental, stewardship. There are also many additional issues and considerations.

These deliberations are only slowly beginning to have an impact. There has been a time-lag while scientists and academics grasped the implications of so many of these concepts and began to think truly in terms of bios.

At this stage, the related concerns of Peace Studies have been directed towards natural resource and environmental issues, which raise questions of global and regional inequality and structural violence, which have had a profound impact on moulding the human habitat. It also includes analysis of the environmental and human impact of man-made disasters which have multiplied, as the world ecosystem and our need for living space have grown, from considerations of environmental protection and the extremes of the natural world.

We are out of step with the potential of the living environment and the result is invariably stark in those countries which lack the minimum resources to protect their populations from catastrophic natural and human disasters. We are unselfconsciously playing a dangerous game of "environmental roulette" with an environmental system that is at best problematic and finite, and at worst, highly explosive. It is on these kinds of disasters that Peace Studies and the ideals of the Biopolitics International Organisation can have such an impact.

The Biopolitics International Organisation has been looking carefully at the potential of Peace Studies and bio-activism for urging and working towards a sustainable future. A typical Peace Studies curriculum would include modules in international relations such as super-power rivalry, world and global studies, development and so-called North-South affairs, citizen diplomacy and the concept of world citizenship. It might also include discussion about the dangers posed by nuclear weapons, the North-South divide, the disaster of environmental degradation and the challenge of Green Politics.

Such a curriculum would also include studies of the global habitat and the notion of planet management. The Gaia Atlas of Planet Management, published in 1985, was written, in the words of its editor, Norman Myers, "for today's caretakers of tomorrow's world."<sup>6</sup> We appreciate this conference for raising these issues. The environmental non-governmental organisations represented at this conference are to be encouraged in their efforts. They have the future of the planet in their hands.

Echoing the concern of The Gaia Atlas of Planet Management is Frank Barnaby's The Gaia Peace Atlas, published in 1988 and sub-titled Survival into the Third Millennium. It makes us chillingly aware that such a survival is dependent on our most strenuous efforts for resource and conflict management.<sup>7</sup> It is vital that we understand just how inseparable these equations actually are. Peace Studies, armed conflict and environmental concerns go absolutely together. Thus the strongest focus in Peace Studies which bears directly on Biopolitics, is upon humanity's responsibility toward our environment. This is one of several related strands of thought which bios theory reflects.

The recent concerns of many writers in Peace Studies have moved directly toward an implicit dialogue with bios theory. Peace Studies too has its lobby of those dedicated to something like the bio-environment in the general areas of human ecology, social studies, the environment and aesthetics. Much of this interest relates to the concept of a peace culture and the association of balance which it engenders. This thinking is absolutely concerned with the idea of a culture of being, enshrined in the protection of basic standards of human experience, protection from the elements and from want. This is, quite strongly, a rights issue. This is taking us implicitly along a chain of thought which will logically produce and sustain a culture of peace and human rights.

### **Bio-Activism and the Quest for a Culture of Peace and Global Change**

Given this critical preoccupation with reaching a balance of a culture of peace, it is quite evident that Peace Studies has an enormous amount to contribute to the on-going evaluation of how bios issues should be discussed in the classroom. The Biopolitics International Organisation has been extremely supportive of this dialogue. It has organised and financed numerous teachers' conferences and academic symposia in this field, in Athens and abroad. B.I.O. has pioneered the notion of injecting bios into everyday life and into all the components of a school curriculum so that it becomes part of an integrated programme.

The potential for further development is hinted at in many of the recent Peace Studies syllabus guides such as that produced in 1989 by the World Policy Institute. This Guide to Peace and World Order Studies discusses a number of potential core curricula for Peace Studies which could be adapted to treat bios issues more directly.<sup>8</sup> We are confident that the research and teaching frontier for Peace Studies (already so much concerned with issues of environmental balance) will eventually include whole sections on what has come to be known as Bios Theory.<sup>4</sup> Such a measure has necessitated increasing attention both to the philosophical and technological dimensions of bios thinking.

Of necessity, it has involved a special focus upon international co-operation and the political, economic, educational, and legal aspects of these fields. With a growing in-put from Peace Studies to academic and popular journals, in such fields as ecology, law, pollution studies and the interaction of technology and society, it is clear that such programmes have something of definite value to contribute to a better appreciation of bios. This has been a profoundly important task but the result has been the large-scale proliferation of bios ideas across whole sectors of academic, and, still more importantly, everyday, life. So, explicitly and implicitly, bios theory has found its way into the deepest reaches of our thinking and lives. That result has made us increasingly conscious of the critical nature of the environment and bios in our lives. The B.I.O. is to be applauded for its excellent and strenuous endeavours to make this happen.

### **Creating a Culture of Peace and Global Action**

In evaluating the "state of play" as to the teaching of bios in Peace Studies courses at this moment, it is clear that a number of such courses in the USA, the UK and elsewhere directly confront such issues. Several programmes offer material centrally relevant to bios theory and this effort is further underlined by the attempt of Peace Studies to encourage international co-operation over world order problems. This is bios theory carried to its logical and final conclusion. It is the most important stage in a long process in which bios thinking has gained credibility. The logic of this process is deceptively obvious. If international action is possible over arms limitation and environmental threats, it might equally be fostered to promote understanding and appreciation of bios. Much is already being done in this field but, these efforts need to be more coherent and more explicit. In this task, schools and universities have an important role to play since the development of curriculum materials which discuss bios issues will make a vital contribution to greater academic and public understanding. The place of the university is very important since in the educational histories of both Western Europe and the USA, universities have been centres of innovation, often proving themselves capable of moulding opinion and promoting change, against severe odds. There is every evidence that universities have been called upon to adopt precisely the same role and in the same way, in the counties of the new Eastern Europe and in various parts of the South.

A Peace Studies programme for bios-action, whether at Master's or undergraduate levels, must espouse bios thinking implicitly and also explicitly. Such a Peace Studies curriculum should emphasise the multi-dimensionality of conflict in all societies and at all levels within societies. Of course, conflict itself is not a cause for serious concern, as long as just and peacefully effective methods of conflict resolution

exist. Let us not forget that Peace Studies is an inter-disciplinary programme of applied academic study which addresses itself precisely to such conflicts. In this task, one is anxious to probe the possibility of mutual help and co-operation in the interests of the global good.

Drawing on such ostensibly diverse fields as politics, international relations, sociology, environmental studies, history, psychology and philosophy, Peace Studies seeks to explore the complex nature of conflict and co-operation. Equally importantly, a concentration upon world order problems provides examples of a range of difficulties which should, and occasionally do, provide foci for international action. This takes us very far along the road toward environmental balance and a culture of peace.

### **Bio-Activism: a Force for Global Habitability**

The Biopolitics International Organisation has implicitly contributed to the development of a model of Peace Studies which will contribute to thinking and action in the interests of bios. Encouragingly, many Peace Studies courses have explored international and regional conflict in the context of global issues and pressing matters of world concern. The Gulf War has sensitised just about everyone to the appalling environmental consequences of modern war.

In Peace Studies courses, these problems are often approached in terms of the structure of the existing world order and the causes and outcomes of action in world society. In this former category, the politics of the environment are discussed and this is related to an analysis of the debate in world societies. The B.I.O. seeks to move this kind of approach directly towards an intellectual and practical confrontation of bios issues. In recent years, they have shown how this debate and action can be effective for the future of the planet.<sup>9</sup>

International co-operation is absolutely vital if progress is to be made towards a truly sustainable future. This requires a new model of international thinking which eschews national selfishness or global frontiers. While the international political system is composed of independent sovereign States, there are many international issues which, by their nature, cannot be resolved by individual States acting independently. The result must be co-operation between states if these problems are to be resolved. Peace Studies poses such a genuinely equitable approach to these issues. It focuses attention on such matters as the North-South divide, the possibility of a new and more socially equitable international order and the self-determination of people.

Increased public awareness of bios theory will undoubtedly have a broader impact upon international co-operation and action in response to the most critical world problems. The B.I.O. has done a great deal of practical work in this area to develop genuinely popular and accessible syllabi and curriculum materials which embody bios thinking.<sup>10,11</sup> Bios constitutes an enormous force for global unity in the interests of the totality of the planet. As technological expansion continues, in the words of the Biopolitics International Organisation:

"Bios...may act as a lever to lift the spirit of people throughout the world. Respect for bios may serve as a catalyst and allow the incorporation of new values so that man feels that technology is being harnessed for his well-being. The role of man may be placed on a perspective of optimism leading to the desired dimensions and expanding strategies for future societies."<sup>4</sup>

It is hoped that the work of the B.I.O., the Peace Studies curricula in the UK and elsewhere, may make an important and growing contribution to a more informed grasp of the global problems of our planet. Peace Studies and bio-activism have enormous potential for promoting such understanding. Considerable progress has been made in the appreciation of bios. Several Peace Studies programmes already offer options on Biopolitics and Bio-habitability. What is required in order to accelerate this process is a delineation of the integrity of bios thinking within the curriculum. If Peace Studies and bio-activism are to contribute to the development of a more bios-relevant syllabus, truly comprehensive consideration of the nature of bios is necessary. Much can be done by bio-activism and peace activists to increase our respect for bios and to emphasise the gravity of this task in our concern for world progress.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Role of Bio-Activism in the New World Order**

There can be little dispute that bio-activism in the new world order constitutes a critical agency for progress towards a sustainable future. There are a number of major factors as to why this is the case:

- Bio-activism can provide a genuine reality of empowerment which rescues these issues from being the exclusive concern of the dominant international powers and may provide the potential for effective action.
- Bio-activism itself may prove to be something of a "con-trick" or an illusion - ostensibly providing avenues for articulation which end as a powerless "talking shop" - an excuse for not taking effective action. Therefore bio-activists have to think hard about ways in which they can translate abstract theory into practical action toward building peace from the ground up.
- Bio-activism may provide alternative, questioning routes which stand aloof from, and indeed challenge, government opinion. Bio-activists might oppose violations of international law and the open and hidden agenda of the new world order. Bio-activism may, for instance, act as a voice and indeed an arm of defence, for those who lobby governments in the interests of bios. Where governments will not act, bio-activism can and must.

- Bio-activism may prove to be the only way to find a truly independent antidote to the absence of democracy and the failure in the protection of human rights which characterises the modern world. Perhaps only through bio-activism can people be truly empowered to exercise their natural rights.
- Through the effective work of bio-activism, it is conceivable to find truly democratic procedures and direct democracy which represents a true alternative to the ideas imposed by the international system.
- The only genuine route to a sustainable future lies in involving people at grassroots level in their own future. The international order is characterised by a vast superficial illusion of industrial expansion at the expense of consumer exploitation. It has already been ruined by capitalist advancement at the cost of the exploitation of labour (a malady which only perpetuated inequality and never even worked well in Western Europe but which has become a sick panacea for Eastern Europe). It is spoiled by national and international degradation and environmental exploitation, at the cost of international co-operation over environmental protection and a sustainable future.
- The B.I.O. has shown how effective an international non-governmental organisation can be in promoting the protection of the bio-environment. It has also lobbied successfully in such vital areas as population growth and social equality.<sup>12</sup> Such NGO's have enormous potential for working toward the safeguarding of the bio-environment.
- The international order postulates a political reality which is the opposite of a sustainable future. It is a fundamentally negative order; it deflects attention conveniently away from the real issues of world hunger, poverty, sickness, inequality. It simplifies the world, but even so, it is full of inherent contradictions.
- How sustainable our future can be is intimately dependent on removing real decision-making from being the prerogative of a small number of powerful governments (especially the current inequitable world order which excludes over 75% of the world's people from major international decisions); that perpetuate an implicit racism by excluding the countries of the South from effective power. Bio-activists can act as a beacon of hope, they can articulate the message, lobby in the dark places, in the confidence that such efforts do count. They can have a tangible result in working toward an alternative world order of peace and human rights.
- Bio-activism must be given adequate recognition for its key role in the process of empowerment which will ultimately wrest decision-making from the international powers and may contribute to the growth of genuinely equitable models of governance. This may allow us, at last, to overcome the terrible asymmetry in power relationships which has profoundly held back twentieth century history and abandoned millions to economic misery.

### **Toward a Sustainable Future - Bios and a Culture of Peace**

This paper has attempted to show the potential of bio-activism for the articulation of change and the search for a sustainable future. These are major objectives which are further encouraged by communiqués from important conferences of this kind. The search for economic improvement and human rights is integral to achieving a sustainable future, amidst a deteriorating international political and economic climate. This momentum is a source of encouragement to all who desire peace and a greater recognition of the critical nature of bios. This conference is a fitting reflection of this desire for international dialogue to solve our global problems.

I congratulate the Biopolitics International Organisation for their important contribution to this challenging and valuable symposium. It is vital that the links between ecology/environment, the crisis in international/regional structures and the denial of human rights should be defined. As an antidote, only grass-roots organisations provide effective routes to a sustainable future. So I warmly applaud their efforts in working toward a truly sustainable solution to our global problems and not the continued misery of the world's population which is the prevalent reality of today.

I equally appreciate the efforts of the Preparatory Committee of this Conference for their vision and great commitment to the ideals of a sustainable world. Specifically I take this opportunity to congratulate the founder and president of the Biopolitics International Organisation, Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis and her staff for their path-breaking work over the many past years in preparing these important events. They have contributed enormously to this challenging spirit and they deserve our deepest thanks. The B.I.O. has done much to make an equitable, just world order a reality. They deserve our warmest congratulations for supporting this important work for peace and human rights.

In 1955, Andrei Sakharov had the first of many confrontations with Marshal Nedelin over the Soviet nuclear programme, during which Sakharov expressed his hope that the nuclear weapon being tested would never be used. The marshal rudely responded with the revealing statement that: "in deciding such questions the leaders can get along without advisers."<sup>1</sup> Sakharov consistently challenged the dogmatic, geo-political goals of his leaders. He would have approved wholeheartedly of this festival and it is fitting that an event so vital to the bio-environment has been held in his name. The B.I.O. deserves a tribute for keeping alive the ideals which Sakharov strove to defend. "Bios may serve as a lever to uplift the spirit of humanity." Certainly, it is only in our recognition of the centrality of bios in our lives that we will find the path-way toward a culture of peace.

My very best wishes to the organisers and to Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis for hosting this festival which does so much to advance the cause of bios-rights. Defence of bios-rights is integral to the advancement of all our human and environmental rights in an increasingly troubled world. We must build support for bios-rights into all of our educational endeavours.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately we sink or swim, depending on our commitment to the protection of bios-rights. This conference has shown the centrality for our future of bio-environment, bio-education, bio-

economy, and bio-diplomacy. Let us hope for renewed commitment in defence of these vital principles, which may yet determine whether we have a future on this planet.

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