

Cold War Distracts From Competition In Ideas

In our national preoccupation with proposed budget cuts and taxes, we should not ignore other issues which deserve attention. For example, Mobilians last week were reminded that there are millions of people who have even more serious problems than we in America.

Sister Ann Gillen, who heads the National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry, spoke at Ashland Place United Methodist Church and also met the following day with area religious leaders, over coffee and Danish, in our Cathedral rectory.

Sister Ann's preoccupation stems from a historic and amazing by-product of Detente: the Helsinki Accords of 1975. Those agreements, ratified by the Soviet Union, not only incorporated the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights: they also provided for periodic review of how faithfully the Accords provisions were being observed by signatory nations.

Thus, "Helsinki Watch" groups were set up by brave souls in Russia and in enslaved countries such as Lithuania, and they have sent to the West a stream of reports about human rights abuses behind the Iron Curtain.

Did anyone really expect the Soviet leaders to grant such human rights as emigration, free press and freedom of

religion? However we might speculate, the Helsinki Watch led to a radically different type of dissent within Russia and her satellites. Formerly, dissenters were fragmented into self-alienating groups such as Lithuanians, Volga Germans, Poles, Catholics, Jews, Pentecostals, Orthodox, democrats and revisionist Marxists. Now the Watch concept has led to a united human rights movement behind the Iron Curtain.

But what good does unified heroism do, even if the whole world is thereby made aware of Russia's criminal internal policies? I suspect that Soviet leaders are ecstatic over our new preoccupation with El Salvador, and with Red intrusions into Africa and the Near East. The more we revert to Cold War confrontations, the more we put our trust in the "reeking tube" so stigmatized by Kipling, the more will Russia be free to suppress the identities of her own citizens.

In a world which perhaps can be saved only by reduction of armaments, (and the conversion not only of Russia but also of America?) it would seem necessary to compete with Russia in the field of free ideas rather than in megatonnage. Just as in El Salvador, oppressed peoples within Russia know that peace, freedom, food and even justice will result only from patient education and negotiation — not from armaments.

— Robert L. Anderson, S.J.



EXPERT ON SOVIETS — Sister Ann Gillen, seated at left above, visits with Mary and Paul Filben (standing) and Diane Hampton after reception in Cathedral rectory March 14.