

Interview: Reverend John Morgan

Petitioning for peace

by Jim Stanford

Reverend John Morgan is a practicing Unitarian Church minister and President of the Canadian Peace Congress, a nation-wide organization of peace and disarmament activists affiliated with the World Peace Council in Helsinki, Finland. He is on a nation-wide speaking tour to kick off a major petition campaign; the Peace Congress hopes to present the Canadian government with a million signatures, pressuring it into taking the threat of nuclear war into account in its formulation of foreign and economic policies. It was the Canadian Peace Congress that sponsored the immensely successful Stockholm Appeal petition in Canada in the early Seventies, gathering over a million signatures with that campaign. The Gauntlet interviewed Rev. Morgan while he was in Calgary last week promoting the petition.

Gauntlet: What do you hope to accomplish with this petition campaign?
Morgan: As you talk with people about the present world situation, what you are finding is an immense change of attitude over the past five years. The last two or three years, they've been bombarded with all kinds of frightening stories about what's happening in the world; they're aware of a great deal of war talk, and they're worried, they're anxious. They also don't know what they can do about it, and many people don't know, really, if anything *can* be done about it.

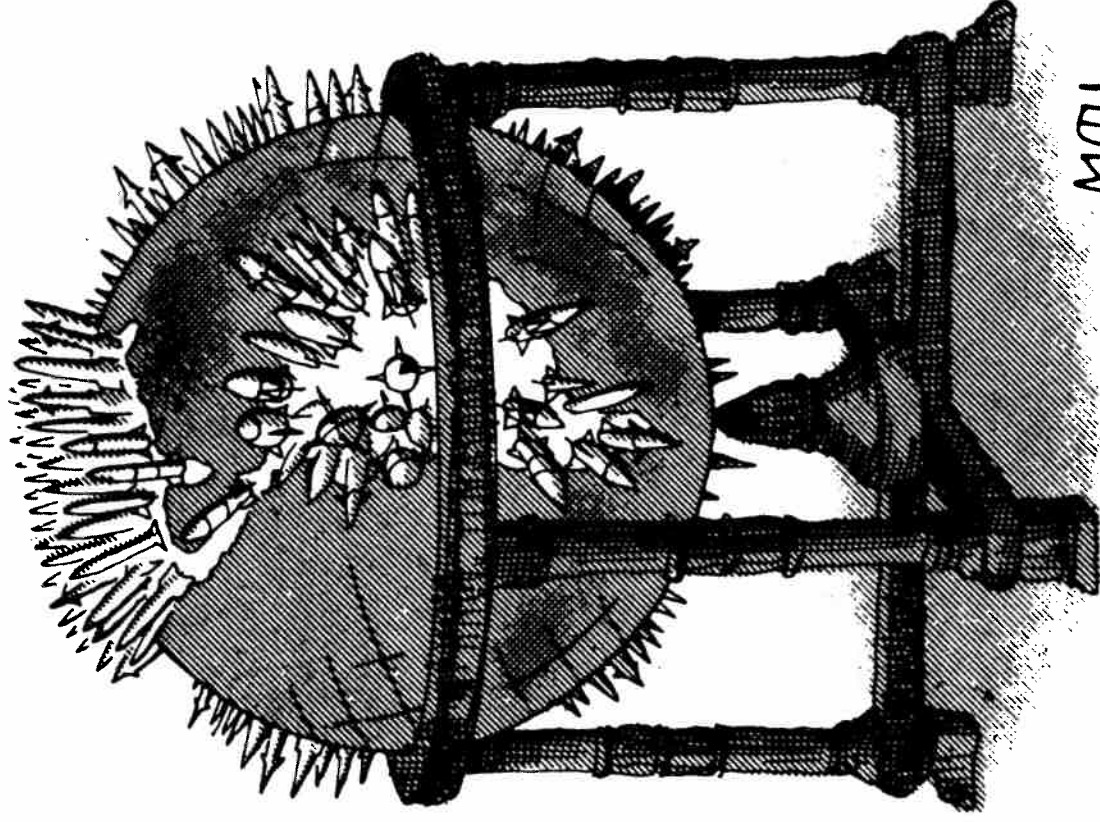
We're convinced something can be done, and that the people need some specific action - they need to *act*, in order to have some hope for the future. So we've arranged a petition that has several very concrete, action points - directed at the Canadian government - and we are organizing, city to city, across the country, to get a million individual signatures. That not only will mean a great deal to the people who join us in this action, but it can have an impact - a very strong impact - on our government and its attitude towards foreign relations, its attitude towards the military-industrial complex south of the border, from which most of these war sounds are emerging.

Gauntlet: So you see it just as important to get a million people involved in a peace action - even if it's just signing a name - as the actual pressure on the government that may result.

Morgan: That's right - if we leave this issue strictly up to governments, I'm afraid we've got a very shaky future. Governments need the input from their own people; even a country such as ours, which prides itself on a lot of free speech and so on, nevertheless too rarely has organized, rational programs backed by huge numbers of people. When this happens, even if the government doesn't like what the people are pushing, they still have to pay attention to it. Our proposals are not outlandish, pie-in-the-sky suggestions but specific concrete ideas, so the people we're talking to on the streets will quickly read this petition and understand that's the case.

Gauntlet: Is a million signatures a realistic goal to work for?

Morgan: It's realistic if we have two things: first of all, if people *feel* - really become emotionally convinced - that something can be done, other than simply despairing over the world situation; and secondly, if we have good organization. You can have enthusiasm, which is necessary, but in order to implement it, you need to be organized very well, indeed. Fortunately, the Canadian Peace Congress has had many years of experience, and our people are very good organizers, once we get seized with the enthusiasm to do it. And we can communicate that enthusiasm to those who would help, because the Canadian Peace Congress, of course, can't get a million signatures on its own. It's only by mobilizing much larger public activity and other organizations that this can be achieved.



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recent federal budget, military spending has gone up 16%. Then after that, the war talk began; the American Presidency, and then the Pentagon, began discussing more and more about the need for greater arms. And they when the present American President came in, the talk has gotten even worse. So the Europeans have increasingly been more uneasy, and there have been large meetings all over Europe, petitions, marches. The Dutch had an immense campaign to keep the neutron bomb out of Holland, and they succeeded; some other NATO countries don't want it. In England in the past couple of years there has been the formation of at least 500 new peace committees; in London's Trafalgar Square there was a meeting some months ago of some 70,000 people. The thing is moving, it's on the march again. In the United States there are committees forming all over the country, to get into it, as Americans like to do, on an ad-hoc basis, and then combining forces on up the line. It's a very dangerous time, and people are responding.

Gauntlet: Just in relation to this worldwide activity, the Canadian Peace Congress has affiliates in other countries. Are they involved in any of this?

Morgan: Yes, we are affiliated with the World Peace Council, which has other peace groups in 130 countries affiliated with it. It is the largest single non-governmental agency recognized by the UN; it is the largest peace organization in world history. It is made up of volunteer groups, like the Canadian Peace Congress, but it is also supported by some governments, who recognize the importance of peace. So when we meet with these other organizations - we all get together a couple of times a year - you are getting an immense course in political science, in the most practical way you can imagine! It's a fantastic and extremely valuable experience to work with these other groups from all over the world. You can't come home narrow-minded after doing it. And these groups are, of course, all very active in the peace movements in their own countries.

Gauntlet: How can you get more young people involved on the peace question? There seems to be a lot of fatalistic feeling among young people today.

Morgan: They have every reason to have a feeling of anxiety, of foreboding. And then they've gotten such a hammering from the media over the last three years, it creates a feeling like something terrible - nuclear war - is going to happen, and you can't do anything about it. Because nobody has been bringing forth viable programs, we're not really encouraged to think that something *can* be done about it. Now, young people can't live with that; life is made up of hope, of ideas about the future, of the zest of being alive and young! So we feel that they need to *act*, and as they act, this feeling that nothing can be done will go away, and they'll realize that, "Yes, I can do something."

Not only will that action be this petition - and that's very important, to think you are joining a million people to say these things. We've had this march across Canada, so to speak, a march against the ultimate disaster of nuclear war; as Terry Fox valiantly marched from city to city against the disaster of cancer, we will march from city to city against the social cancer of nuclear war. As young people participate in this, they begin to feel better, because while we're doing this - it will take us two or three years - other positive things will be happening on the peace front.

Gauntlet: If there is a widespread dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, with the threat of war very close, how can it be organized into an effective peace movement?

Morgan: In the first place, there are a lot of peace movements - we don't need to be exclusive. If the people find the language of Operation Dismantle more appealing, fine; get involved with *something*. The churches have peace movements, a labor peace movement has been forming; I'm sure the student movement will get involved, as well. The people involved in the nuclear energy question now realize fully that a nuclear war could do more

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damage in twenty minutes than decades of leakage from nuclear plants. We think that our petition has a particular role to play because the points in it are very specific - very viable action projects: let's go back to the bargaining table and sign a strategic arms limitation treaty, break up these terrible military pacts around the world that threaten peace. For goodness sake, call a conference on disarmament in Europe, which has 20 times the level of armaments of the rest of the world, and is the part of the world out of which the other two world wars came. These are very specific, concrete things. So all of us have a role to play, and there are all kinds of peace organizations; nobody really has an excuse not to get involved.

Gauntlet: What do you see as the real reason behind this recent upsurge of war talk and militarist sentiment among the

media and our political leaders?

Morgan: We know that, tragically, the powerfully negative social movements of the 1930's - fascism, Nazis, and all that - came out of the terrible economic attrition of the Great Depression, and even before that in Europe, left over from the WWI era. This really rolled in the Thirties, when the Depression got to be immense, and the people in Europe in effect exported their problems onto other people in the form of war. As Hitler said to his generals in 1939, "The time has come to solve the economic question." By that he meant, unload it on your neighbors, and he did, backed by the most reactionary section of German big business. Today, the American state is in trouble, Europe is in trouble, there is around 18 million unemployed in Western Europe and the United States - a massive loss. Inflation continues. The world is chang-

ing; the Third World is no longer so readily accessible as it used to be - these people are making their own demands. It's more profitable to invest abroad, which deprives your own people of investment, and they get increasingly restless. The rich become profoundly disturbed about this, and begin to make abrupt and not entirely rational decisions; it is not rational to have a bunch of missiles going around and around in circles in Utah costing \$40 billion; it is not rational to talk about international relations as Mr. Reagan has been doing - whatever he may think of the Russians or the Cubans, that isn't how you conduct human affairs. It isn't rational to talk about the possibility of a 'first strike'. This is the talk, in my opinion, of people who are losing a sense of reality and responsibility, who will try to do anything to preserve their positions. They are people who have always been used to being

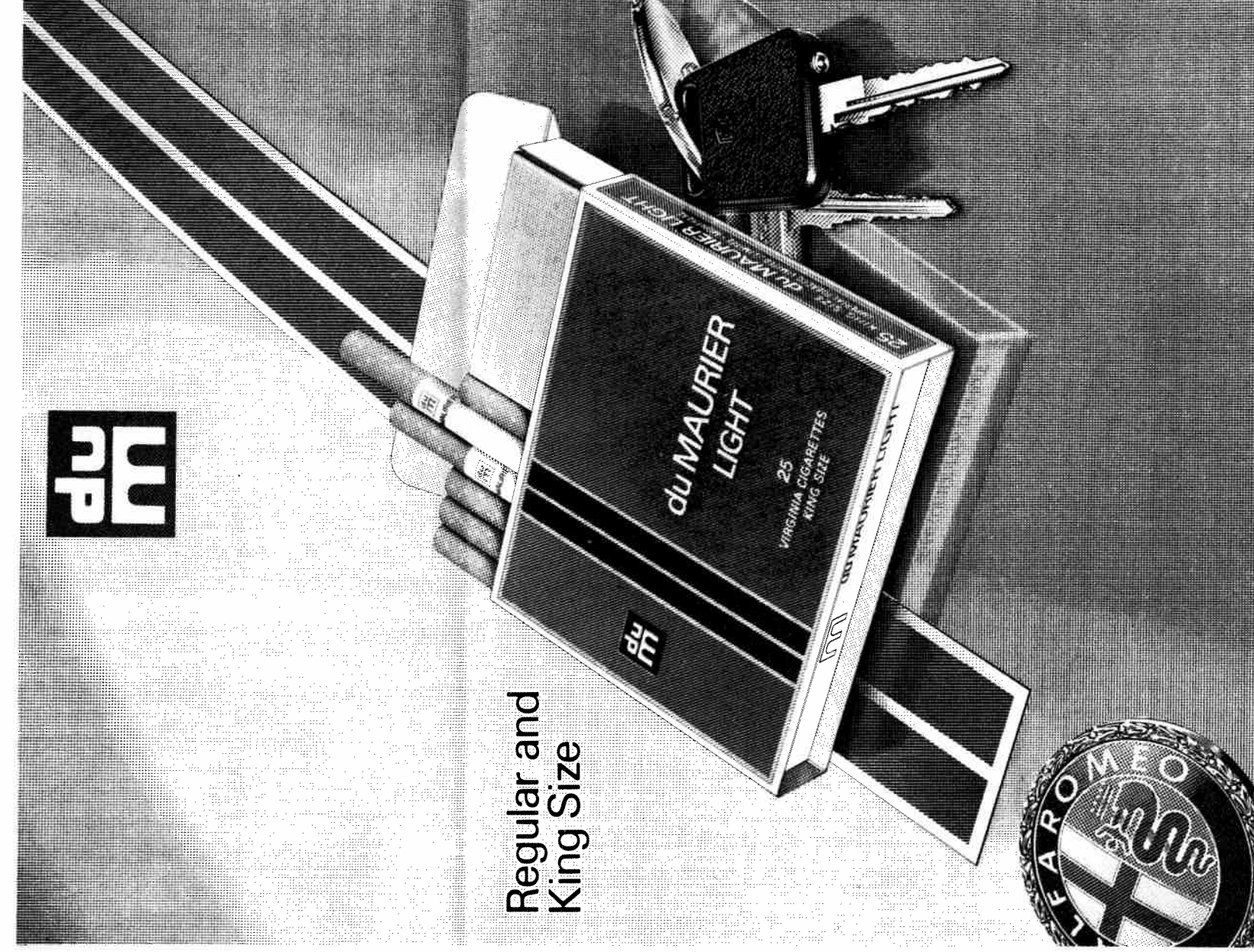
Number One, and they gained world power so fast that now that world power is going, they are reacting in an almost insane way.

Gauntlet: Are you optimistic about our prospects for the future?

Morgan: We make the future. There is no mysterious force in the Pentagon that means whatever they're going to do is inevitable. There was a time when the Pentagon wasn't there; there was a time when the United States was not a massive military state; there was a time when NATO didn't exist. These things were all brought into being, and they can be taken out of being so that we can build another world. So yes, I am optimistic, I have to be optimistic.

Any interested persons wishing to find out more about the Canadian Peace Congress and its petition can contact this reporter at 289-0623.

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The Editor of the Gauntlet

T.E. Flanagan
Department of Political Science

March 13, 1981

Would you kindly print the enclosed letter about the recent peace petition? In view of the prominence given to the interview with Rev. Morgan, I would hope that you might give an appropriate heading to this letter or draw attention to it in some other way.

TEF:mcg
Encl.

The Editor of the Gauntlet

T.E. Flanagan
Department of Political Science

March 13, 1981

Students at the University of Calgary have recently been gathering signatures on a petition to the Canadian government, calling for immediate steps toward disarmament. The origin of this petition was explained in a Gauntlet interview with the Rev. John Morgan, March 11, 1981. According to the Reverend Morgan, the petition is sponsored by the Canadian Peace Congress, which is affiliated to the World Peace Council (WPC).

The WPC is one of the largest and most successful Communist-front organizations. Founded in 1949, its first president was the fellow-travelling French scientist, Frederic Joliot-Curie. The current president is Romesh Chandra, a prominent Indian Communist who was at one time a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India. Headquarters of the WPC are in Helsinki. Peace associations from about 130 nations belong to the organization, which also has complex, interlocking ties with other Communist fronts like the World Federation of Democratic Youth. Most people associated with the WPC are not Communists; they are well-meaning idealists who believe in the cause of peace. However the permanent apparatus of the organization is carefully manipulated by Communists who occupy key positions.

The WPC is ostensibly neutral in politics. It professes adherence to principles supported by almost all mankind: peaceful coexistence, disarmament, non-intervention, and self-determination. However, it systematically applies these principles in a one-sided direction. Criticism is continually leveled at the military activities of the United States, NATO, and (since the Sino-Soviet split) the People's Republic of China. Immune from criticism are the Soviet Union, Warsaw Pact, Vietnam, Cuba, and other clients of the USSR. This one-sidedness was obvious in the interview with the Rev. Morgan. Only the United States and NATO were named as threats to peace; uncomplimentary references to the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact were studiously avoided.

Below is a chronology of some of the more interesting episodes in the history of the WPC.

- 1951 - Head office transferred from Paris to Prague after expulsion from France for security reasons.
- 1952 - Accuses United States of conducting bacteriological warfare in Korea; refuses offer of Red Cross to investigate.
- 1958 - Split by internal divisions of opinion, the WPC fails to take a position on the Soviet intervention in Hungary. Many West European Communists, like Jean-Paul Sartre, become disillusioned and resign.
- 1961 - Resumption of nuclear arms testing by USSR is explained as justifiable reaction to Western threats against Berlin.

- 1962 - No denunciation of Soviet rocket sites in Cuba, even though WPC professes opposition to foreign bases.
- 1966 - Chinese finally withdraw after several years of bitter conflict with the Soviets for mastery of the WPC.
- 1968 - WPC expresses "deepest regret" over the Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia, simultaneously emphasizing that these nations are "very dedicated" to peace and that there must be resistance to imperialist provocations. Many Western delegations protest, but attention is quickly diverted to the war in Vietnam.

This pattern has continued in more recent years. The WPC, for example condemned the Chinese invasion of Vietnam but was silent about the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia which helped precipitate the Chinese action. There has, of course, been no denunciation of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. (There is a certain grim humour in the WPC's relation to Afghanistan. In August, 1979, the organization staged a large conference in Kabul to express solidarity with the Taraki regime, which was then backed by Moscow. A few months later, Taraki was killed in a coup d'etat organized by the USSR, which had decided to back a different protege. But the WPC is flexible enough to adopt to these changing realities.)

The WPC has no genuine concern for peace; rather, it manipulates the universal desire for peace as an instrument of Soviet foreign policy. It cynically enlists the services of sincere idealists in projects whose aims and timing are determined by the needs of the Soviet state. The current petition is no exception. During the 1970's, the Soviet Union, under the cover of detente, achieved arms equivalence, or even superiority, to the NATO powers. It now sees its strategic position threatened by a changing public mood in the West. Naturally enough, it has revived the well-tested technique of disarmament petitions, which it has used several times before. Similar publicity campaigns are now being launched in other Western nations. One will search in vain, however, for the equivalent in the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe. It would be unthinkable for the "peace movement" in those countries to pressure their own governments toward unilateral disarmament.

I am not challenging the right of the Canadian Peace Congress to circulate their petition. But I believe the public should be informed of the background and context of the campaign. How many Canadians would sign the petition if they understood its origin? It is easy to see why the Reverend Morgan was less than candid in his Gauntlet interview. Personally, I am revolted at this cynical manipulation of the youthful idealism of our student body.

T.E. Flanagan
Professor of Political Science