

Fri Mar 4 18:17:38 EST 1988

Retrospective on P275 - Conference of Nobel Laureates hosted by Francois Mitterrand and Elie Wiesel in January 1988.

On July 23, 1987 I received a letter from La Presidence de la Republique, date July 15. This was an invitation from Francois Mitterrand and Elie Wiesel to attend a Conference of Nobel Laureates to be held in Paris January 18 to 21, 1988.

My immediate reactions were

- a) to support Wiesel as a symbol of world repentance over the holocaust. I had never met him. I also wished to encourage Mitterrand in his stance against French anti-semitism which was starting to become very ugly;
- b) the thought to use the forum for some human purpose;
- c) it would be fun and glitter;
- d) I could be useful as a harmonizer: among the science laureates I was one of the more policy active and
- e) represent Rockefeller University in a public event of some notability.

I had to note however it conflicted with the board meeting scheduled for January 21. I was evenly divided about the merits but I must have been interested enough to go to draft a letter to Bill Baker and David Rockefeller: somewhat to my surprise, they gave me strong encouragement to go and offered to give my excuses to the rest of the board.

As time went on I became rather uneasy not hearing very much about the structure of the meeting and decided to call on Wiesel. He was very happy to hear from me. I soon learned that he had had no political counselling but he had started to give some structure to the meeting especially with the help of his very able associate Dr. Carol Rittner. He had mentioned at that time the possibility of starting a more permanent organization. I urged him to come into the meeting with a prior caucus and consolidation of what he planned to do. He readily agreed and we scheduled this for the 4th of January. We had a somewhat larger list, but as it turned out only Jim Grant and David Hamburg, and Marguerite, were able to join us.

By coincidence, the Hamburgs had been to dinner not long before and I had shared my concerns with him. The very next day Breznits called him from Israel to ask him to take some role at the meeting, but this proved to be inconvenient. I did find that Wiesel had cleared his channels of communication with the Nobel Foundation and although they gave his meeting no official cognizance, it turned out that they had several of their folks in attendance chairing some of the committees and so forth, so obviously they were not holding back.

At the caucus we advised him to be careful about any possible politicization of the conference and we very quickly agreed that there should be no formal resolutions, no votes, and thereby minimizing the likelihood of grandstanding. The press would also be controlled. Wiesel did ask me and then later confirmed it whether I would give one of the plenary papers.

The next week I ran into George Klein in Tucson for the Bristol Meyers Cancer Scholars meeting; and expecting and learning that he knew Wiesel very well consulted with him. He

agreed it would be a great mistake to establish a formal organization. Wiesel could exercise a good deal of personal leadership. On the strength of that, I sent Wiesel the enclosed letter.

Wiesel was kind enough to invite Marguerite (who attended the January 4th caucus) as well as myself to be official participants in the meeting and we certainly can complain in no way about the hospitality we received. To meet in the Elysee and the Hotel Marigny, attended by the Republican Guard, and by motorcycle escorts through Paris, is not our accustomed way of living. At one point I suggested to Monsieur Mitterrand that all of this was being laid on us to heighten our conscience about being worthy of such attention and therefore to provide still deeper effort with respect to the global problems we were addressing. His response in joke was: "Mais, c'est normal."

Substantively the best part of the meeting were the formal addresses by Mitterrand himself by Kissinger, by Soyinka, by Larry Klein, by Abdus Salam and if I may say so, myself. I am looking forward to their publication. I urged on Breshnits that we not publish much of the seminars; but let each laureate contribute a personal, 2-page statement. The plenary meetings occupied a couple of hours a day; another four hours or so (besides lunch, dinner, entertainment and so forth) were spent in the smaller specialized sessions; and perhaps the less said about these the better. The one that I mainly attended had to do with science and technology. It was a very motley mix. The biologists did get into some discussions about biotechnology and especially as Dausset was eager to press for some resolutions on the regulation of genetic engineering in human. We had a consensus that the existing regulatory framework was quite sufficient and it was hardly necessary to pile still more layers on that. This was one of the meetings that Mitterrand himself attended.

The net conclusion was well stated by Wiesel that it is our *own* humanity that is at stake. He left me feeling rather badly that I had not joined him in his pilgrimage to Auschwitz the day before the formal start of the meeting: the anniversary of the date of his own liberation. objectively, it was essentially impossible for me to do that since I had my commitments to the speeches in New York right through the previous week.

I wasn't too clear about what I was going to be talking about, but after my talk on Plagues at the New School for Social Research and the very deep interest with which that was received, it was obvious that I should prepare a shortened version of that which indeed I did. The word processor was just wonderful in helping put all that out in a fairly short time.

I mentioned the seminars: Bengt Samuelsson had his hands full with Yalow. At the Plenary Brian Josephson made a fool of himself (as I'm told he will customarily do) with his gibberish about laying on of hands for healing. The most material content of our discussion was the focus on third world debt and its remission, that Larry Klein introduced and was reemphasized by Mitterrand and others. The discussions about disarmament and peace in other dimensions were pretty shallow.

The net of the meeting was a heightened conscientiousness that probably surprised even the most skeptical of the observers. I had no doubt that I personally had communicated very effectively with Gajduusek and with Blumberg in material terms: that is how they viewed their own work. And many others had spoke of having been moved by the natural historical

representation of pandemic that was in my talk. I continued to have that experience ever since in a way that have attended very few of my public statements.

The meeting was already under the shadow of the events in Gaza, but fortunately they had not reached the pitch that they have subsequently or there might have been in fact some definite political disruption within the conference. Wiesel is certainly in a dilemma. It is interesting that he will be meeting with Shamir in a couple of weeks and I will have a chance to learn more of his position on that particular set of problems. {3/4: Carol just called me re a trip to Israel: "to listen"}

As homework for these meetings I had set out to read Einstein on Peace and I found this a most disturbing book in many ways on the one hand deeply inspirational and of course I find him a role model in this as in scientific spheres of great sentimental depth. But as I believe I wrote to Wiesel, one realizes with some consternation that Einstein's deepest convictions were repeatedly overtaken by history. He was a pacifist from 1914 until 1933; then he had no choice but to turn around and try to spearhead the awakening of the threat from Hitler. In 1939 he sent the famous letter to FDR, pressed by Szilard. And of course he spent most of the post war era in trying to undo the consequences of the development of nuclear weapons. He was not totally taken in by the myth of communism but one has to say he was a little bit slow in recognizing the severity of the Stalinistic dictatorship. In his later years I imagine he came around on that.

He was absolutely right in fixing on the central problem of trying to find a successor to national sovereignties and of course achieved absolutely no success in that direction. So, one has to put down that part of life as having been an almost absolute futility, I must not forget Wiesel about his own humanity being also at stake.

What now for Wiesel? For any sense of organization of intellectual elites? Perhaps one should look to CSAP for one crystalized articulation.

P.S. A byproduct of the meeting was the opportunity it gave Marguerite to speak intimately (at a state dinner, sandwiched between FM and HK) with Mitterand about her girlhood experience in Jarnac, about her father (who was FM's father's personal physician.) Antoinette Mitterand had been most helpful to Marguerite's mother during WW-2.

I also had a good talk with HK, mostly at the airport in NY, about his personal outlook on "Discriminate Deterrence", on START, and on contemporary geopolitics. HK's own talk at Paris was remarkably eloquent.

HK = Kissinger