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Interview with Peter Ustinov

Conducted by
Jonathan Power
January 10, 1983

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Interview with Peter Ustinov

Conducted by J. Power, 10 January 1983, London

Tape Side 1

Power: Sir Robert Jackson - Barbara Ward's ex-husband - is sort of 'Mr. Relief' at the United Nations and broke the siege of Stalingrad for UNRRA. He likes to think he created UNICEF although I gather he has a certain kind of ego that isn't quite true to history. But he had an important part to play and we did a wonderful interview a couple of weeks ago in New York in which he told me about, in a sense, the incipient UNICEF, before it was formally constitutionalized, but was really growing out of UNRRA at the end of the war. Working in the concentration camps and reuniting children with their parents...and they had this incredible sort of team of women who would look at the photographs, old funny photographs, to try and match and it was just a very sort of painstaking slow work - matching parent with child. They would only bring what they thought was the possible parent and the possible child together if they really thought they had it, and the excrutiating pain when they failed... And the early decision to have a Day for Children, which they got the Vatican to support, and the whole euphoria at the end of the war, to try

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and do something that would really sustain the work of helping children in a situation of calamity or bereavement or whatever it happened to be. And how they got the Soviets to really go along and push, they went up through the Ukraine and into Stalingrad. He told me a wonderful story about when they were dealing with the Cambodian famine two years ago. Everyone was appallingly worried about whether the Soviets were going to co-operate or whatever. When they flew into Phnom Penh to the surprise of the Minister from the Soviet Embassy who was out at the airport to meet them, and he said 'You are probably a bit surprised I'm here' and they said 'Mmmmm - maybe we are a bit surprised. Well, I was a UNICEF baby - you rescued me in Stalingrad, and my mother told me never to forget UNICEF'. He must be almost as old as MacMillan now. He has these wonderful early stories. What's your first story of UNICEF? When did it first come into your consciousness?

Ustinov: It came in my consciousness in a completely artificial way by my being asked by somebody I didn't know, but who has now become a very great friend of mine, Leon Davico, a Yugoslav journalist, from Belgrade and a civil servant - who was then the Information Chief at UNICEF when UNICEF's headquarters was still in Paris. He cabled me and asked me to host a huge concert at the Odeon in Paris, for all sorts of very disparate elements. I can't remember the exact details

but there were at least four orchestras, and Polish dance ensemble, and a Russian dance ensemble, and Mario del Monaco(?) and a Rumanian choir. The wings, even at the Odeon, were so full, you could hardly move! And the Poles started the evening, and, as sometimes happens in these things, they started with a mountaineer dance - a whole lot of men with axes - and one of them cut through my microphone cable by mistake, and so I had to shout for the rest of the evening! I couldn't get back on the air again and I ended the evening hoarse, but terribly excited by 'what sort of organization was this that could engender such goodwill?'. Then I found out that all the hotels had given their space free and all the airlines had given the tickets free - things which would be impossible if this was a commercial venture. It couldn't have been held anyway - it would have been prohibitive. Then I began to take an active interest in it. I began to feel, and I still feel, that if more people were asked - I get endless requests from people, even eminent people, wondering how they can be of any assistance. It's sometimes difficult to see exactly how they can be - I send their names in and so on. But I think that UNICEF has an awful lot of goodwill - there are cynics who believe that the money doesn't reach the field very often and that probably there is a huge overhead which is used to clean the windows of the UN building or something, but that's not true, either. I think in order to appreciate UNICEF you simply have to go to

the receiving part of the world and where these things arrive. I'm not sure myself whether I think that the actual setup of the UNICEF is as equitable as it should be, but when you have people of the quality of Jim Grant on top, you don't even ask that question. I can't imagine anybody to replace him. I mean, the fact that the chief is selected according to the contribution of the people .... the Swedes are sometimes on the point of outbidding the Americans ..... but, in the last moment, the Americans find a bit more cash and it's always an American who's at the head of it. It's indicative that the Americans make no such effort with UNESCO, nor do I think it is possible - it's a different kind of setup. But since then, of course, I've been pretty actively engaged whenever I can be and even if I have to go on location on a film - I had to go to the Manila Festival last year, well I took time off to go and visit their schemes there. I don't think I do really very much for it, except that I go on obviously with my own work, because I think I would lose my value to them if I didn't. I'm not by temperament a Mother Teresa who can disappear into the bush and do good things. I have to go on doing what I'm doing, but if that helps them - and they are all very kind enough to say that it has helped in the past, and, in fact Liv Ullman is doing very considerably at the moment - it is a very good, I suppose, method of propaganda for what they wish and it also consoles people who don't expect to see you, in countries where you don't usually

go. I have found extraordinary welcomes in Thailand, and Jordan, and Guatemala. So, my function has been, in the past, as far as Europe is concerned, to try and perform in galas and television specials and all the rest of it, as a kind of anchor-man - it's a side I don't like very much - the money-raising side, but it's very imperative in an organization which is constituted in such a way that governments respond according to the private sector's contribution. And also I've done commercials for UNICEF, in Australia and in Canada which, on the whole, have gone very well.

Power: When you talk about doing good things..... did you do good things before you met UNICEF, or was UNICEF something that came along and made you think at a certain stage in life, having had so much sucess and so much accolade and so much achievement that you were due to pay something back, or has that always been part of your nature?

Ustinov: I like to think it's always been part of my nature, but it's certainly true that if you happen to be lucky enough to get on in this world, I have always thought, even before I started, that your responsibilities increase - they don't diminish. And having four children myself who are more or less agreeable to talk to and more or less good to look at, I think the time to repay your debt is when everything is going well, and not

to wait for some disaster and then to throw all your energies into alleviating that particular disaster. I never think that's a very honourable thing, however understandable it is on a human basis. But I was very touched - my children - when I was younger and so were they, of course - had a whole lot of brochures which had been given away free by UNICEF. They stole a whole lot and sold them and gave the money to UNICEF, which is perhaps a more economic way of running things.

Power: But UNICEF is your first kind of venture in a kind of official commitment to a great cause, or have you always been interested in great causes?

Ustinov: No, no, no...having mixed blood as I have and thinking that most of the statements of politicians are, on the whole, in this day and age, so dangerous - rather thoughtless - seeing Mr. Heseltine appear on television yesterday and say 'Russia is the enemy', and Mrs. Thatcher too. I think that we are all at this moment terribly conditioned. If you think that the Russians are conditioned by a dictatorship, I think we are just as conditioned. If they are censored, we are self-censoring. I think we are all pushing in the same direction, and I get very frightened when Mr. Bush flies over here in order to co-ordinate our response - I don't think this should be necessary. I think anything which blends us into a mass of toffee is a dangerous thing and I think the Americans

should talk directly to the Russians and we should talk to the Poles and the Czechs and people who have commensurate problems. I think the more ventilated all these things, the better. So, in a world of increasing danger, including some of the things we have been talking about such as the problem not only of nuclear armaments, which worry me less than conventional armaments, because all sorts of obsolete weapons, or obsolescent weapons are going to armies that really have no need for them. This tendency is, to me, shocking. I don't like political in-fighting within the United Nations family because I don't think that should exist. Your story about Kampuchea is very moving and also the fact that the Russians in point of fact did operate there - this is not generally known - the fact that they supplied all sorts of serums. And I'm not talking in a pro-Russian way, just in a balanced way now. Serums for cholera in Africa were supplied very quickly by the Soviet Union because they have a large amount of it. This was never known and, in fact, when I went with Jim Grant to Washington to talk about increased funds, I found such a pressure not to mention these things that I was very deeply shocked. Because I don't think that is the function at all of independent people working for UNICEF. I would suggest that another of my functions in UNICEF is that, since I'm not paid by them, I therefore am able to act in a completely undiplomatic way when necessary and say exactly what I think.

Power: Did you tell Congress?

Ustinov: I didn't talk to Congress - it was a working dinner with Senators and ....(?)

Power: Did you blow your top and tell them the other side of the story?

Ustinov: Yes. I don't know whether Jim approved entirely because I was extremely sarcastic with the American Ambassador in Thailand, Mr. Ambramowitz who I found absolutely intolerable, but absolutely intolerable. And just horrifying. And I said I didn't think these things should be politicized and he said 'There's no way out of it, Peter - they are, by their very nature' - he talked like Haig does. I said 'Well, don't include me in your speeches' and we talked about various things. But I've always lived in hopes, and I know this is one of Jim's, too, to try. The Russian contribution to all this is minimal and I very much regret it. I'm not talking about their actual physical aid, but their financial contribution is minimal. I wish to God - it would do them so much good internationally if they only bothered. I've been working on that in a sly way because I think it gives them a completely wrong image. Even from a purely pragmatic thing, I think their whole Egyptian adventure went wrong, simply

because there's no baksheesh and, of course, they became terribly unpopular because they never even bought a trinket - they hadn't the money. They were herded off into their compounds. I think it's very shortsighted and I hope to God this may change, but at the same time I am very conscious of the feeling that it shouldn't change because otherwise we've lost an enemy - which I don't really find a very constructive attitude.

Power: Do you talk to the Soviets about this kind of thing and what kind of response do they give to you?

Ustinov: Well, they're very slow to change, but I think perhaps with an intelligent man at the helm, instead of a statue, this may - who knows - it may at least change the direction of all these things. Because - I had a very interesting experience, which had nothing at all to do with UNICEF. I was approached by people in the White House, during Carter's reign, to try and help them put together, a television - something - which would help in the general acceptance of the SALT Agreement within America. I couldn't think of anything at all and then IBM came into the field and they wanted to do a thing about the horror of nuclear weapons. I felt really quite out of my depth except I talked to Tom Watson, who was head of IBM at the time and then became the American Ambassador to Moscow, and he put it very colourfully (and I told MacMillan today -

and he laughed) but he said 'I sit on various committees watching the military for the President and when I hear one of our generals state that we have the capacity to destroy the world ten times over, and in his estimation, according to his information the Russians only have the capacity between six and seven times, and he regards that as an advantage, as a businessman I gotta say he's crazy'. I like that very much. Nothing subversive about it at all! At last a businessman who's struck by the lunacy of what's going on. Well, I found out by some fluke that the BBC was thinking of the same thing but hadn't really the funds to do it, and I put them together and we did it - a thing called 'Nuclear Nightmares'(?), which was an hour-and-a-half television programme in which I worked with Nigel Calder. Fine - we did this thing. I tried to get the Russians involved - I said 'It's in your interest'. I was in Moscow. I tried to see them - they shoved me all over the place. Nothing at all. Eventually, when we were already in America shooting in various bases, I had lunch with (?) whom I've known for a long time and I said 'Listen, this is too stupid'. He said 'I agree. If you have any trouble in the future, come straight to me' and so on... 'But in this instance, I don't think we can help you because we don't trust the BBC'. Having worked in Leningrad with the BBC, I understood their point of view, although my opinion of the BBC as a broadcasting agency is very high, especially of the foreign service.Then the film was

finished. Afghanistan happened and the Americans shelved it for a year, having paid for it all. I ran it in UNESCO. The Russians saw it and they were absolutely hysterical with (?) and said they didn't think that the worst could be as objecting(?) and as un---it was a very central(?) point of view. Well with nuclear weapons you can't do anything else but (?) point of view, unless you're a fool (like some of the generals and politians). And the Russians were talking of buying it straight away and having it run in the Soviet Union which, for God's sake they may have done by now. The Americans held it up for a year before they showed it.

Power: Did it go out on PBS in the end?

Ustinov: It went out on PBS.

Power: Well, let's get back to - we could talk forever about this - but we ought to get back to UNICEF and those early days of the Odeon concert and the impact it made on you. How long after that was it before you actually got involved to the point of going to a third world country and seeing what they were up to?

Ustinov: Oh, it was quite a time, really because I spent most of my time in Europe because I was working fairly intensively then, and in various parts of Europe, so that I usually did these things in Germany, quite often; in Austria; in Britain hardly at all; in France, and in Scandinavia - I went to Finland and to Norway and to Denmark.

Power: Basically the fundraising end of life?

Ustinov: Basically the fundraising end of life. Then came the opportunity to go further afield, and I leapt at it. I'd even tried to do a film (interrupted by telephone).

Power: So I was asking you when you actually got at all involved and what was actually happening in the field.

Ustinov: Yes. It's very much a question of personalities, too. Davico was a very far-seeing fellow and he left UNICEF, unfortunately. That usually happens, with a sort of clash of personalities in Geneva, with the Englishman who was in charge there - Carter - he's gone now. A nice man, but a very forbidding man.

Power: What about Dick Heyward?

Ustinov: Dick Heyward is great fun. I like Heyward and this is just in parenthesis - it has nothing to do with the main theme - but

when I was in - when Heyward was on the point of retiring - I don't know whether he has yet - but I was in Tasmania doing some concerts for UNICEF, a one-man show in Hobarth, and a very, very old politican from there came up to me and said 'Do you live in New York?'. I said 'Yes, yes'. 'How's young Heyward doing?'. Which I didn't hesitate to tell! Future still ahead of him. And they threatened to send Davico, who was after all a Yugoslavian communist, to Santiago, to be in charge of the office there after being Information Chief in Europe. I thought this was scandalous and I wrote to Brian Urquhart with whom I was at school.

Power: I must say I am one of Brian's greatest fans. I'm manoeuvering to do The New Yorker piece about him - I really want to do it so badly.

Ustinov: He's a great man. I talked also to Waldheim and said 'This is absolutely scandalous - why, when you've got the right man, inspired with enthusiasm and so on'... Also, having no children of his own, he was absolutely addicted to this cause. He has now adopted a couple but it hasn't changed his attitude at all. He went off to UNESCO so then I did one or two round tables and things for them and now he's the Information Chief of the High Commissioner for Refugees, so I

have done things for them as well as for UNICEF, because I can't bear friction between various UN Agencies. It seems to be absolutely - that's really counter-productive, and so many refugees are children in any case that they really overlap, so I went to Tokyo and represented him, or made a speech there, at Osaka - such a huge gathering of Japanese business men. And Japan is a country which is interesting in any case because they have absolutely no tradition of charity, apart from throwing coins to beggars.

Power: They don't even have a word in their language.

Ustinov: No, exactly.

Power: I remember with Amnesty - they don't have a word for Amnesty in their language.

Ustinov: Really! Well, they have suddenly begun to understand the inter-dependence of people. Just as people began to realize at one point that the human body is - if you cut your finger and you neglect it, it is liable to infect your hand, and if you neglect that it will affect your arm and if you go on like that you will eventually die, rather perplexed as to why it has come so soon. People have understood that at last but now they must realize that the human body is a microcosm of the world and you can't sit in Canada in luxury and say 'We're

so far from Sri Lanka'. You know, 'What happens on the toe doesn't concern the finger'. Nonsense. Well - the Japanese have begun to understand that and their resurgence and their eagerness to do things is really very touching, because one sees that it's a pristine mind which is being affected by these sudden considerations of fellowship. So I have really done things for all three and I'm never really concerned whether - the French have - I have just done a big concert in Paris the day before yesterday but that was just for rehabilitating children - nothing to do with the U.N. but they obviously associate me very much with children. I try and shave my beard off around Christmas-time because it can be embarrassing and I am asked to do too many silly things.... but I suppose it's a sort of image which has been created, not by me, but by the few things I have managed to do, and of course I'm absolutely rabid in favour of it - in favour of UNICEF.

Power: Tell me when you moved away from just making the concerts and raising the money and you actually went out to Guatemala or wherever it happened to be, and you got involved at the other end. This was a very different kind of thing and I'm not quite sure what you were actually trying to do by going to see it in the flesh, as it were.

Ustinov: First of all, you have to know what you're talking about and secondly, it's a tremendous experience.

Power: You managed to talk about it for a long time without going.

Ustinov: Yes, but it was never as convincing, because once you have been, once you have things to really talk about, once you have actually been to these places... I was a little annoyed that they sent me to rather 'safe' places. They sent Liv Ullman to Somalia which I would have preferred to Kenya, where I was, but I was shooting a film there so it started out in Kenya then we went on to Jordan which again is a fairly safe place, and then on through Pakistan to India and then to Thailand which, again, is a safe-ish place. And from there on to Australia and New Zealand where I did my one-man shows for them, as a fundraising thing again and then on to Guatemala. Because I was trying to shoot a small film, but it's very difficult to do that. I did it and it's being shown in one or two places, but it's not the way that you can best serve UNICEF, because after all, they're government things very often and they steer you away from... After all, the whole thing about UNICEF is not always to show how well it works, but also to show the things it can't do, because otherwise how can you raise money? I think it's much more effective to go to really worrying and disturbing places - the High Commissioner for Refugee people wanted me to go this month to Pakistan to the Afghan camps, because the BBC is doing a big programme on refugees but I said I won't go there unless I can

go to another one as well, so that it's absolutely sure that it isn't another political thing, because I don't want that. I'd like to see all sorts of refugees and not just refugees for the sake of refugees. That's the whole point of these organizations - not to involve themselves with the causes, so much, of refugees, but in order to see what can be done for them. It's very ironic, although it's absolutely understandable that in a very short time the High Commissioner for Refugees has become the largest agency of the U.N.

Power: But tell me - what I am anxious to find out is, when you went out to Kenya, or Thailand, or Guatemala, or wherever this happened to be, was your notion, was UNICEF changed from the way you just represented it off the cuff in your early concerts?

Ustinov: No - it didn't change, but it was far enriched and it was a change in one respect, that I was very struck, and that gave me a feeling of hope about things which are usually rather bleak - that the people who are most effective in all places are foreigners. Even if they are foreigners representing another third world nation. In other words, a Tanzanian working in Sri Lanka can be very effective, because he's different. And this came to a head in Guatemala, where suddenly a nun appeared, who was not at all Guatemalan by appearance and who was dressed in the uniform of Mother

Teresa's Order, and I said 'What are you doing here?'. She said 'We came for the earthquake'. I said 'What are you doing now - you are waiting for the next earthquake?'. And she looked at me candidly and said 'I know what you are asking - you are asking what are we Indian nuns doing here?'. I said 'Exactly!'. 'Well you know, we're different to these people and they look up to us because they've never seen people like us before and therefore we can do things that Guatemalans can't'. And I said 'Well, that's absolutely logical because Mother Teresa herself is not Indian at all, and therefore she has managed to do things in Calcutta which are impossible for an Indian'. And I think you see symptoms of that all over the place and that's very touching because it gives you an integrated feeling of a much wider concern than just local things.

Power: And coming back to the perspective you have - which was very much the kind of major event, being on the stage, representing the cause in its best light which as you talk you still do - for all I know you may not have any criticisms at all, but maybe you feel it is not your place - the public performer on behalf of UNICEF - to voice your reservations. (Interruption of telephone). But, as you go round in this rather privelaged and rather public position, you must actually get a sense of what works and what doesn't work, and you have to talk about what works - because that is your role. But, in private terms, when we're trying to do something for the internal history of UNICEF, do you ever go round and feel, you know, that one of the cogs is missing, and the wheels aren't turning as they should?

Ustinov: Well you know it's awfully difficult. It's like talking about any large thing. I think, I have always felt, that the strength and weakness of UNICEF are the same thing - the fact that it should be non-religious, a-political, and really as neutral and takes, like a chameleon, the colour of what it lands on. This has been its success, really; in Biafra, where it was let in before the other United Nations agency, for the reason that nobody's yet found a method of making children subversive, and, the end of the Vietnam war in which the government of South Vietnam and representatives of North Vietnam and the Viet Cong all congregated in Geneva asking UNICEF to get in the field as quickly as possible to save as many children as possible. This is, to my mind, a guarantee of its success in a way. I know that the Americans were rather upset that they didn't go to New York, but of course they couldn't get the visas, so Geneva has certain advantages from that point of view. And also the fact that, which strikes me as a ridiculous feature, that UNICEF had an office in Hanoi all the way through but couldn't mention it because of the American laws about having intelligence with the enemy - it seems rather ...but one has to play that sort of game occasionally - the things that go on - but UNICEF usually finds a way to do things unobtrusively, around the back. I think, obviously endless criticisms can be put forward with any organization of that size which tends, as all

organizations everywhere, to become bigger and bigger and bigger. In a sense, the privations that have been imposed on Jim Grant are probably an advantage, however much I hated them, because otherwise nobody would have thought of this package costing 10 cents. But also I think that the battle against the unscrupulous selling of powdered milk is absolutely valid and viable. I think that's a terrible thing because it's a tendency that's going to become more and more evident as large corporations run out of markets and try and invade the third world with some of the advantages of our civilization which, seen in that context, are not necessarily so when you can't get clean water or are incapable of reading the instructions on the inside of the tin or bottles.

Power: My early article in the Herald Tribune about six years ago about the baby foods started this thing off. I once went to see Nestle. They took me round and I saw all this scientific propaganda they concocted about how valuable it was to working mothers and so on. Then they took me for an interview with the managing director (can't think of his name now) - perhaps he was called Adolf.

Ustinov: Adolf! Great!

Power: I can't remember his surname.

Ustinov: Wasn't Field Marshall?

Power: No... Anyway, you see, what I want to try and do in trying to get raw material for this history is to sort of try and get people who have been very closely associated with the organization, like you have, to talk about how they saw it coming up against problems, the organization that is, how it came up against its problems and overcame them. And I wonder - (?) see the answer very simply because you're talking about children. First of all I told you about the Russian diplomat in Phnom Phen - talks about the kind of credit and quodos they have. I was just talking to another person earlier this afternoon who had been the British delegate on the UNICEF Board for eight years, who said there was never ever a political discussion on the UNICEF Board, everything was very a-political. And I wonder, in practice, if political tensions are really as sublimated as this suggests. I mean - is it really true that we do live in a world where you can actually talk about women and their children without the horror of normal political idealogical polarization splattering itself all over the subject matter? I mean, have we actually since the second world war advanced to that point?

Ustinov: I think personally that what horrified me in Washington on that one visit, was that they seemed to assume normally that it could not be so. And in my experience, it always has been so, because I find that children are, after all, a civilizing influence on everybody, as I said in a speech in UNESCO - that it's the only constant result of human ecstasy, and it's a great pity - the responsibility...should come from that, but the sense of responsibility gradually fades after the ecstasy is over. And one is dealing, of course, with countries with different traditions - one has to be careful in this day and age not to be patronising about them. It's not just cleanliness - it's a question of people having a lot of children in order to have enough domestic servants or agricultural workers in their own families - one way of getting staff is to have large families - and there are all these aspects of it which are very thorny ones because UNICEF, I have a feeling, tries not to interfere with local traditions, unless local traditions are scandalously unhealthy. If the local tradition says it's good to drink muddy water, there UNICEF will try and intervene, but ... I find on the whole that ... oh, for instance, in the Philippines: a delegation of elderly midwives approached, begging for two sets of forceps - they said it was impossible to deliver competently with one - at least, they weren't used to doing so. I passed that on to a competent authority - I

know nothing about midwives. We have four children - I wasn't there - I was working, and I don't know how many forceps you need, but it seemed to me valid that people who had been doing this for a long time with success, and who find it in themselves to make this appeal, they must know what they're talking about. I don't think they wanted the second pair in order to sell them on the black market - didn't give me that impression. It seemed to me absolutely sincere. Also, the Chinese have influenced UNICEF a great deal without realizing it - like these barefoot doctors as they are called. This operates extremely well in places like Thailand where they have an automatic, instinctive leaning towards cleanliness in any case - everything is spotless, even if they're penniless it's spotless, or well organized. And they have people that are able to be competent in the treatment of certain diseases. In all these countries, of course, they have far fewer diseases than we have. There's far less choice because they don't live in huge civilized communities, in which we behave in a way or eat things that produce new diseases the whole time which are not yet understood fully. I went to a children's hospital in Kenya, for instance, where it had, I think, 120 or 130 children. One matron who was competent, who had six children of her own I gathered from listening to different people, but one doctor - the other one was away - but they had no oxygen, they had no X-rays, and they had no ambulance. They had one of the original

Volkswagons, so the dying person had to be transported on filthy roads sitting in the back, whatever their condition. The doctor said 'It's very difficult, but on the other hand' and he mentioned it, a youngish man...'it is very difficult for us - but we do have fewer diseases to choose from, and we are extremely hardy of course', which is another thing which is not true of us in large cities. A woman in her 80's came complaining of some kind of internal pressure and he siphoned off a pale sort of pus from her liver, and she looked at it afterwards and said 'All that from me', and walked away. He said 'We're helped by that; because of this, I don't really need X-rays because I can diagnose things without them, because there's very little to choose from. When people get ill, it's always the same thing - they haven't got the wide pallet that you have'. All this is very interesting. And when things are reduced to their lowest level, you very often find things that worked surprisingly well. There are moments, of course, as we also had in Kenya, where the District Commissioner, walking with the aid of a walking stick he didn't really need - a huge man - but it was a sign of authority - came to a little hut in the field and said 'This is where the girls learn to sew'. Opened the hut, which had no electric light - I don't know what they could see in there - and there was nobody in it. And he saw a small girl running away across the field and he shouted at her and she refused to stop. And he screamed at her and she stopped, and

came back tearfully, and he said furiously 'Where are the girls?'. And she said 'They didn't know you were coming today'. So ... of course, there are human elements at that sort of level that you find the whole time. And all sorts of schemes to interest people, and they are all really very fundamental and according to the local possibilities. An enormous amount of goodwill. A lot of Scandinavians showing people how to do things, which are obviously part of their own balanced view of life. Danish electricians trying to teach people in pitch darkness how electricity works; people trying to mend a Morris Minor - I did one shot - it was marvellous because the Morris Minor worked and after they had been shown how it worked, they put it together again and they had to push it away because it didn't work any more ... and things like that.

Power: Do you ever step back from your own contribution and think of the whole range of people who have given from the artistic world, whether it's Danny Kaye, Liv Ullman or whatever, and think 'Is there something peculiarly of the nature of this organization that attracts people of this kind and has that managed to actually permeate the skull of public recognition, like nothing else? Or do you actually think UNICEF would probably have done pretty well on its own resources? Do you actually feel, looking back, that you have broken through threshholds of public understanding of the nature of the work,

where you have really had a sense when you have done a concert, that the mass of people there haven't just come to watch Peter Ustinov or Liv Ullman or Danny Kaye, but they have actually buried deep into the body of this organization and begun to understand its work? For example: when I can write article in the Herald Tribune the other day about this 10 cent packet, it was actually a line of communication that can feed into public consciousness, which wouldn't happen if you were writing the same kind of piece about (?) of organization.

Ustinov: I can't judge that very well, except that I can say that in countries like France and Belgium I should think a quarter of the people who have come up and said they have liked something that I have done, or disliked it or whatever - at least a quarter - say 'Thanks for all you're doing for UNICEF'. So in that sense, I think that UNICEF is something which is kind of above criticism; therefore it can have a very civilizing influence on all sorts of other things. That's why I regret that there isn't a fuller - the Scandinavians are obviously the people who contribute per capita the greatest quantities as part of their view of life. But some other people, are really very extraordinary, too; there are some very extraordinary people connected with it, who sometimes shock the administration.

Power: I suppose what I am trying to say is that you can kind of 'show-biz' this kind of thing in the nicest kind of way, and it gives a kind of life and vitality and communicates to people, and this is terribly important, but there's another level, and I think Jim is very conscious of this, that you really want to use UNICEF for a real vehicle to make people think about the wider issues - the problems of development in the third world.

Ustinov: Absolutely.

Power: And in a sense, with this new statement of The State of the World's Children, by singling out sort of four essential things that could really change the face of the basic unit of the family - you are going to have a very profound impact on the third world - and I wonder how we can actually use that avenue, or that window, that's there with UNICEF - to take public opinion through to something that's in fact much bigger, more complicated and difficult, and not as appealing and amusing or as sensitive or as heartrending, or whatever it happens to be, as the cause of the woman and her child in the moment of stress and tension.

Ustinov: Well I don't think you can discuss it these days without linking it to other problems. The problem of the cost of armaments, for instance. Things like that, which are really part... (we were discussing that with Harold MacMillan today). I think it's an extraordinary situation that anybody who as an individual reacts one way is taught to think differently because of a government's position. Everybody thinks it's stupid that one has an overkill to this extent and are now discussing 'amending' this overkill. It's nonsense. And, at the same time, of course, the plight of children is an absolutely logical counterbalance, because these are the people... as I said once, 'It's idiotic to spend so much on the canons and so little on the fodder - it's bad business, it's idiotic'. I think this captures a certain public imagination, certainly. I'm very chary of expressed idealism because it never seems to work. People think it's impractical. But this has now become so urgent that I think it really carries quite a lot of clout - this whole argument.

SECOND SIDE

Ustinov: Most people have children, they're extremely worried as to what's going to happen to those children. You can see these nuclear disarmament movements which have swollen, and it's no use saying that it's something which is inspired by subversive elements. That's ridiculous. It's just common sense which says 'Don't put missiles here - we'll get hit' and I don't see any way out of that argument. Children are a vital part of that because people with children look to them for a certain continuity. It's their hope of immortality, children. I'm talking to you now, and it's really elements of our great-grandparents who are also talking to each other. And it is a very real sense of immortality that exists in having children and watching what happens to their children, and you feel you're a link in a chain. But if all that is threatened by imbecility and stupidity, which would be intolerable in one person, but which is apparently allowed when it's a huge collectivity that's doing it, or two or three of them, then I think there is a very viable point in talking about children in that context. For instance, in my commercial for Australia I said 'I have never been stopped in a street by kind people soliciting money for nuclear weapons, because evidently government thinks that that is its responsibility,

but I have often been stopped by people asking for money for children, the aged, the infirm. I leave you to draw your own conclusions. That was my 30-second spot for UNICEF. In in a world in which we are being bombarded by information, both true and false, pathetic pictures of black children with swollen bellies don't mean a thing any more. You have to think of something else - and something which really brings it into peoples' homes much more - the threat to them. Then the other things will follow. But the one thing I have noticed, and this is a philosophical point probably of no value to your particular trend of thinking, is that when you do travel around a great deal, seeing many different people, you realize that sheer babies are practically indistinguishable from each other. Listening to them, you don't know whether it's a Japanese child or a black child from Africa - they make the same noise. They have not yet been formed by language, and even children are very similar - their reactions are similar, their generosities and their cruelties are very similar. Old people are very similar, they are closer to the mysteries of birth and death. In other words, Harold MacMillan today was talking the same kind of wisdom that a clever child might, except that his was the result of experience and theirs might be the result of

instinct, but they have arrived after a long journey at the same forest clearing that they start from. It's the people in the middle which make all the difference - that macho element, which are the furthest from these mysteries, and most full of energy and most sort of thought everything as matured and they are the ones who say 'Don't ask silly questions'. 'We know what we're doing'.

Power: I ought to make you stop, because otherwise you'll be late.