

Expert Says Slavery Not Truly Abolished

By Kerry PRECHT, Gateway

EDMONTON (CUP) -- Twenty-seven million people worldwide are enslaved. They work in the cocoa, sugar, and steel industries; some are domestic labourers in the United States and others are sex workers in Thailand. In 2003, how did we get to this place?

Dr. Kevin Bales, the world's leading authority on contemporary slavery, addressed that question for a packed crowd at the Horowitz Theatre Monday night in the University of Alberta's fifth annual Visiting Lectureship in Human Rights.

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"I want to make it clear that we're talking about slavery," he said. "We're not talking about sweatshops [or] people who have really bad jobs. We're talking about people who are truly enslaved, who are controlled by violence, and who receive no pay."

As director of Free the Slaves, a

U.S.-based anti-slavery non-governmental organization, Bales knows what he's talking about. His book *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* was a Pulitzer Prize nominee, and in 2000, he was awarded the Italian Premio Viareggio award for service to humanity.

Bales said slavery cannot be reduced to a simple equation of good versus evil if it is to be understood.

"Slavery is actually a relationship. It's a social and an economic relationship, which is grossly unequal, marked by violence [and] horrific exploitation."

In the last 50 years, the slavery relationship has changed in ways "that are greater, more dramatic, and in many ways, more deadly than in all the history of slavery," explained Bales.

Slavery used to be a long-term relationship, but today, slaves are disposable. In 1850s America, a 19-year-old, healthy, male agricultural worker cost the equivalent of \$38,000 and generated an annual profit of five per cent. Today, men of the same description are bought for as little as \$40, even though they generate profits of higher than 800 per cent each year.

Bales noted three key reasons for this recent transformation: the population explosion in the developing world, the economic transformations of modernization and globalization, and corrupt governments and police forces.

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The products of slave labour are part of North American living, but boycotting particular companies is not an effective way to fight slavery, Bales said. The products of slave labour are generally found at the basest levels of production and are integrated with supplies of raw materials not produced by slaves.

Instead, Bales encouraged the audience to create awareness and find like-minded individuals with whom to take collective action.

"What good is the enormous economic and political power that we hold if

we can't use it to end slavery?" said Bales.

"Our job is to make sure that countries enforce their own laws and that slaves, when freed, have an opportunity for rehabilitation, reintegration, and education."

Free the Slaves has recently seen success with the Chocolate Protocol, which will see chocolate producers taking responsibility for their production chain and bankrolling the removal of slave and child labour from their organizations.

Bales said the job left for this generation is an easy one, because the abolitionists of the past have already won the legal, economic, and moral battles.

Despite its persistence, slavery is illegal everywhere. No economies will crumble if slavery is ended tomorrow. And morally, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights asserts no one should be victimized by slavery, said Bales.

"You have the phenomenal good fortune to be living in the generation that could actually be the generation that is able to say, through all of human history, slavery has ridden on our backs like an ugly spirit but we're the generation that brought it to an end."

Choice Cuts

Title: *Childhood's End*
Author: Arthur C. Clarke
By Jonathan Smith

Most people will recognize Arthur C. Clarke more for his novel *2001: A Space Odyssey*, but *Childhood's End* is well worth checking out as well. It begins with a rather well-worn science-fiction plot (though maybe not cliched at the time it was written in 1953) involving a race of aliens who come to earth *Independence Day*-style. However, from there it takes many strange turns and ends up being much different than it first seems. The material can be controversial and is likely to offend some, but those with a liking for sci-fi and with an open mind may enjoy its truly bizarre ending.

Title: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
Author: George Orwell
By Jonathan Smith

I am well aware of the fact that many people probably read this book back in high school or in a university English course. However, I think that this is a book to be read again, and encourage all those who haven't read it yet to do so. Written more than half a century ago, the novel

depicts a fictional totalitarian society that is disturbingly mirrored by some of the real ones that exist today. Even in our democratic societies, with a war brewing on the other side of the world and our only source of information what the media gives us, many parts of Orwell's work are becoming more and more relevant. The book isn't the most exciting and fast-paced, and can be down right boring at times. However, it is not the narrative itself that is important, but rather what it depicts. A good choice for anyone who wants a book to think about than rather than escape with.

Movie: *Long Life Happiness and Prosperity*
By Brodie MacRAE

I really wanted to like this movie, really I did, mostly because it is Canadian. Unfortunately, it didn't give me much choice. While it had its good qualities (as everything usually does) I've seldom experienced an hour and a half that long.

"Long Life, Happiness and Prosperity" was directed by Mina Shum and produced by Toronto's Shaftesbury Films. It is set in the Chinese community of downtown Vancouver and follows the intertwining lives of three Chinese-

Canadian families: Kin, a single and unhappy mother and her daughter Mindy, who labours to improve her mother's life by casting Taoist spells so that good fortune will shine on them; an elderly couple, who are struggling through the husband's recent job-loss and subsequent broken religious faith; and a butcher trying to make amends with his estranged father, unaware that in the process he may estrange his own son. Unbeknownst to the Mindy, the magic she weaves effects all of their lives.

This may sound like an interesting and charming tale, but it is actually quite dull on the screen. Not only does it move along at a snail's pace, it is also terribly indecisive about its mood. Is it a drama, a comedy, a dramatic comedy? It fails to commit to any of these, the end result being a film whose tone lacks any kind of focus and comes across just plain tedious.

The screenwriter also seemed unable to decide why exactly everything that happened to the characters actually happened. Was it because of some divine greater plan or because of some meddling child misfiring a few spells? The film continually questions faith in higher powers by having three different Chinese religions play a significant role in the unfolding of events for the families, but while it felt as though the film were trying to offer

insight, it really didn't seem to have any better idea about the issue than those it was trying to instruct.

In the end, we are left with the impression that it is some unknown combination of destiny and a child miscasting Chinese magic that resolves all difficulties. So what is the message? That fate will sort out all problems, as long as a little girl who dabbles in Taoist enchantments lives in our neighbourhood? Great, just great.

Generally, the characters didn't have much depth. There isn't enough revealed about them to garner audience sympathy toward their plights. I was entirely indifferent to their problems. The screenplay is to blame for this, as the actors all seemed competent, but without enough to work with.

Sandra Oh, who played Kin, was the most believable in her role as a single and slightly embittered-towards-men mother, and Valerie Tian, who played Mindy displayed a great deal of potential. The two also developed a mother/daughter relationship that came across nicely to the audience.

This is a cute story, but a cute story that would have been much better suited to a short story than a film. Had I the choice, I wouldn't see this again for any more than two dollars.