

Nuclear Weapons and Representative Democracy

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Swedish nuclear weapons and unilateral nuclear disarmament

Shortly after the end of World War II, the Swedish government decided to acquire a nuclear arsenal. It was one of a number of countries to make this decision. By 1952 the promoters of the idea had set themselves the goal of manufacturing ten Nagasaki-type nuclear bombs, employing plutonium diverted from Sweden's "peaceful" nuclear power generation program. The project's political sponsors were all in the ruling Swedish Social Democratic Party. They included the veteran Socialist leader Tage Erlander and his protégé and successor Olof Palme. The politicians were supported by the heads of the armed forces and the state's Institute of Defence Studies. Given that rank-and-file Social Democrats were mostly opposed to Sweden possessing nuclear weapons, Erlander and his collaborators were obliged to work secretly, behind the back of parliament and in opposition to party resolutions. The diversion of fissile materials from Sweden's "peaceful" nuclear power generation program took place – of necessity – clandestinely. But at the same time, on the level of policy recommendation, there was a "pro-nuclear" tendency in the Social Democrats which operated openly. Olof Palme headed this tendency as chairman of the Social Democrats' Nuclear Weapons Committee. In 1965, when the Swedish military adopted a new strategic conception of nuclear weapons, Palme and the other nuclear "hawks" were forced to come to terms with the idea that Swedish nuclear weapons were not to be. The nuclear weapons programme was gradually run down and, in 1972, after a series of simulated nuclear tests, terminated. .

Sweden's turning away from nuclear weapons is a shining example of voluntary unilateral nuclear disarmament. It seems to have been an educational experience for Palme. But it was an experience he was never willing to share with the public, for it impinged upon his own perceived reputation. Palme was not a private citizen who could indulge in the luxury of a "confessional" approach to his past. He was a parliamentary politician, surrounded by potentially merciless and self-righteous competitors and critics in his own party and other parties, not to mention the media. His subsequent evolution into one of the world's best known spokesmen for nuclear disarmament is part of the record on the basis of which, if he were still alive, he would wish to be judged. I do indeed judge him on that basis, and not only him but also other anti-nuclear campaigners who have shared with him the high-profile orientation and mass-politics approach to nuclear disarmament. This high-profile stance stands in polar antithesis to the discreet anti-nuclear orientation that was successfully implemented by the Swedish military, taking the form of a simple unilateral decision to have nothing more to do with nuclear weapons. It is the Palme approach of international anti-nuclear conferences, public relations offensives and United Nations resolutions – not the Swedish military approach of a simple unilateral decision behind closed doors – that has become the established mode of operation of the international anti-nuclear movement. The result is that nuclear weapons and the problems they cause are still as much with us as they

ever were.

Nuclear Weapons and Mass Politics

I am not interested in this paper in discussing questions of individual innocence or guilt. What concerns me is a certain mode of behaviour that flows from the demands of mass politics and the need to win elections. From this viewpoint, what most needs explaining about Sweden is how it succeeded in achieving nuclear disarmament where so many other countries with politicians at least as committed to anti-nuclear-weapons policies as Palme later appeared to be, have failed.

The military considerations that led Swedish military experts to recommend abandonment of the nuclear weapons programme later became part of the patrimony of the anti-nuclear weapons movement - namely that nuclear weapons undermine national security, turning a country into a nuclear target, that they breed mass insecurity and at the same time encounter the problem of the steadily deteriorating credibility of the threat they are said to embody. These are ideas that were to be put forward by specialists in other countries that were later to become nuclear powers: the difference is that in Sweden they were heeded, proving stronger than the subjective - and in many cases perhaps instinctive - conviction of politicians and the general public that in a world where nuclear weapons exist, security depends on possessing them.

Undoubtedly a decisive factor in the Swedish context was the absence of an obvious and immediate enemy. Sweden had been a neutral country for all of the twentieth century. Political passions on questions of national security did not run high. Most voters had other priorities and other interests. Neither had the mass ideologies of Fascism/Nazism or Communism and anti-Communism made the deep inroads into the hearts and minds of subjects of the kingdom of Sweden that they had in other European countries or in what were to become the "two superpowers". Politicians were therefore not "calling the shots" as they were in Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union.

These three last-mentioned countries were the first to become nuclear weapons states. Two of them embodied the opposite ideological poles of the bipolar system that came to dominate international politics after the Second World War. The third was a constitutional monarchy allied with the United States but still retaining some pre-mass-politics elements in its political culture. It was here, in the more thoughtful and informed sections of the British "establishment" that opposition to nuclear weapons and support for British unilateral nuclear disarmament first became entrenched. But of course for such policies to be implemented, given the pro-nuclear orientation of the bulk of Britain's ruling elite, in the first instance a parliamentary majority for unilateral nuclear disarmament had to be obtained. This was a task that the anti-nuclear sections of the establishment decided to assign to the Labour Party.

The Labour Party and CND

In the 1950s Labour's 'Left wing', led by Aneurin Bevan, favoured unilateral British nuclear disarmament. The problem was that, given the pro-nuclear-deterrence dictates of "common sense", the policy was electorally unsaleable. So as not to have to go "naked into the negotiating chamber", in 1957 Bevan performed an about-face. It was his dramatic speech renouncing unilateral nuclear disarmament at the Labour Party conference of that year that triggered the formation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).

Essentially a parliamentary lobby, CND used demonstrations, marches and public meetings to influence public opinion and thus votes and hopefully political party policy. It was on the last front that it was least successful, only sporadically managing to get its resolutions accepted, for a short time, by Labour Party annual conferences. On the international diplomatic front, by contrast, CND was more successful. It had an input into the deliberations of the United Nations and from there managed to acquire an element of borrowed prestige. The high point of achievement was the passage of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, bringing to an end the worst threat to public health from United States and Soviet atmospheric nuclear testing. But while conferring prestige on one hand, on the other the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was a factor, together with the rise of Third World Solidarity politics, that served to marginalise CND in the 1960s, lending credibility to the view that the established international diplomatic channels were able to address at least the worst problems caused by the continuing nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. CND went into a downward spiral, from which it was not to emerge until the end of the seventies, as a result of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's foreign and defence ministers' decision in Brussels to "modernise NATO's long-range Theatre Nuclear Forces", i.e. install in Europe a new generation of first-strike "Euromissiles".

European Nuclear Disarmament

The revival of the anti-nuclear movement in Britain following the Brussels decision took a twofold form. Alongside a renewed growth of CND, the April 1980 Appeal for European Nuclear Disarmament resulted in the rise of a smaller but politically more sophisticated competitor, END, whose goal was not unilateral British nuclear disarmament (correctly held to be impossible owing to the effect of "enemy-image stereotyping" on the British electorate) but "a nuclear-free Europe from Poland to Portugal", in other words a form of European unilateralism depending for its success on Warsaw Pact co-operation, and specifically on removal from Europe of the Soviet SS-20 nuclear missiles that were said to necessitate the installation in Europe of NATO's intermediate-range "first-strike" nuclear missiles.

END rejected the Communist-controlled peace movements of the World Peace Council, claiming that they were not really interested in peace because the states that sponsored them were participants in the nuclear arms race. END saw the nuclear arms race as fuelled by antagonism between two superpower blocs, each of which needed the other as an external threat in order to justify the imposition of internal discipline. The antagonists were in a sense in collusion: The enemy images each projected of the other functioned reflectively as a source of legitimation for both sides. The abstract pacifist propaganda of the WPC was merely one of a number of instruments used to perpetuate the rule of an undemocratic Communist bureaucracy. A nuclear-free Europe could not be achieved through peace activists following the dictates of Warsaw Pact diplomacy. It must be a product of the self-emancipation of civil society in both East and West.

With a view to encouraging the growth of civil society in Eastern Europe, END proceeded to discover and encourage peace groups in Warsaw Pact states that were independent of – and in opposition to – the official World Peace Council organisations. The first of these was the Moscow Group for Trust, set up in June 1982 and setting a precedent soon to be followed in Hungary, East Germany and Poland. END's annual conventions, held every summer from 1982 onwards, became the arena for an ongoing dispute between the two basic currents in the non-aligned peace movement, the

first opposing all collaboration with or even dialogue with the WPC until the Warsaw Pact

governments granted equal recognition to the END-supported “independent” groups. The second current (associated with CND), while rejecting theories of nuclear deterrence and proposing unilateral nuclear disarmament for Britain, was nevertheless prepared to extend a certain degree of recognition to the patriotically pro-Russian and “pro-deterrence” groups of the WPC. It was of course this element in CND’s politics that lay at the basis of the media-supported Tory jibe that CND “should propose unilateral nuclear disarmament to the Russians”.

The Coming of Gorbachev

Mikhail Gorbachev’s coming to power in the Soviet Union introduced a new factor into the equation. In contradistinction to the previous Soviet line, which had rejected any idea of linkage between the Soviet SS-20s and NATO’s new generation of first-strike theatre nuclear missiles, Gorbachev was conspicuously willing to accept such linkage and by extension the implication that Soviet nuclear weapons strategy in Europe was aggressive, not merely a “deterrent” to NATO’s threatened first use of nuclear weapons.

This implied one of two things: either Soviet diplomacy was willing – in the interests of the possible diplomatic gain of a “nuclear free Europe” – to forego the purported military advantage of forward stationing of intermediate-range and relatively accurate nuclear missiles. Or, given that there was no guarantee that the Europeans would stick to their side of the bargain and denuclearise Western Europe in response to a Soviet denuclearisation of Eastern Europe, possibly the Soviets were beginning to query the deterrent capacities of nuclear weapons in a more general sense, in other words to reach similar conclusions to those which had led Sweden’s military theoreticians to insist on unilateral nuclear disarmament of Sweden. There is much circumstantial evidence for this view: NATO’S two-stage nuclear-war-winning strategy in Europe was, unlike earlier “massive retaliation” strategies, contingent on the existence of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. The hostage-taking of European populations by the Pershing 2 and Cruise missiles was possible only because of Soviet embroilment in the nuclear arms race.

The Euromissiles

Circulating on trucks on built-up areas where the Soviets would never dare a pre-emptive strike against them, the Euromissiles targeted nuclear installations in the Soviet Union. NATO’s threat was as follows: do what we say, because if you don’t we will destroy your nuclear weapons sites, and if you react to that, we will send America’s ICBMs against your cities. In this scenario the Soviet nuclear arsenal played the role of missing link in the scenario of nuclear escalation. If it had not been built in the first place, creating the political prerequisites (mass hysteria) for a plausible threat of second-strike bombardment of Soviet cities, there would have been no politically credible targets for the Euromissiles.

It is unclear how far the Soviet Union was ever truly threatened by nuclear strikes in the forties and fifties. After the initial atrocities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki American presidents had always opted for less extreme measures than actual utilisation of nuclear bombs in war, despite the less than total pliability of the then Soviet leadership and despite the fact that for most of this period Stalin possessed no nuclear “deterrent” worth mentioning. If one compares the resilience of Stalin in the face of attempted nuclear blackmail by Truman, Byrnes, etc. in the period before the Soviets acquired nuclear weapons (it is said to have greatly exasperated Secretary of State Byrnes) with the extreme vulnerability to blackmail

of a Gorbachev sitting on top of the second largest nuclear arsenal in the world, the message should become sufficiently clear. Writing to Gar Alperovitz in 1965, George Kennan said: "I never at any time attached any importance to our possession of the atomic bomb, as a weapon of diplomacy or as a means of pressure on the Russians. I tended rather to agree with Stalin's view that this was something you used, if you like, to frighten people with weak nerves." Many examples could be cited of the United States using the nuclear weapons threat more as a means of impressing its own domestic public opinion than of trying to influence the behaviour of the Soviets or other external enemies. Take Truman's oft-cited boast that he had forced the Soviets into precipitate withdrawal from Iran by threatened use of nuclear weapons against Russian cities. Alperovitz claims that there is no record of such a threat ever having been issued to the Soviets by Truman. Another example could be mentioned from period of the immediate aftermath of the 1991 Moscow coup against Gorbachev and in fact I will look at it when I come to deal with that period.

If one introduces other facts such as the superior survival power of Castro's non-nuclear Communist Cuba to the nuclear-armed Soviet Union, one begins to find more than circumstantial evidence for the hypothesis that the Soviet nuclear arsenal was a key factor in the political, military and economic vulnerability of the USSR, and in its final collapse.

The INF Treaty: Triumphalism

The INF Treaty signed by Reagan and Gorbachev in December 1987 satisfied some of the demands of the END Appeal: namely withdrawal and destruction of the land-based intermediate-range nuclear missiles of the Soviet Union and of NATO that had been stationed in Europe. But it did not bring into existence "a nuclear-free Europe from Poland to Portugal". In political terms its most significant effect was subordination of the anti-nuclear policies of the Soviet-line World Peace Council groups to those of the victorious (in one sense) "independent" peace movement, as personified by groups such as END. For the WPC this meant the exchange of one set of delusions, their own patriotic faith in the "deterrent" powers of Soviet nuclear weapons, for the corresponding delusions, or hypocrisy, of their "independent" rivals, namely that the INF Treaty's destruction of "an entire category of nuclear weapons" represented the first step - utilising the established international mechanisms of the United Nations - on what was to be a steady march towards "a nuclear-weapons-free world by the year 2000". But no INF-Treaty enthusiasts could convincingly claim that the Treaty would be the first step towards "a nuclear-free Europe from Poland to Portugal". This demand was therefore silently abandoned by END and its allied groups after the signing of the INF Agreement.

After that it was not long before END began to divert most of its energies away from nuclear weapons into a campaign for preparing "civil society" in Eastern Europe for its coming showdown with the Communist bureaucracy. The Prague-based Helsinki Citizens' Assembly set up after the INF Agreement by a number of END leaders concerned itself with a whole gamut of human rights issues but by the time of its Third Conference in Ankara in 1993 did not have nuclear weapons on the agenda at all.

The other party to the INF agreement, the partisans of perestroika and glasnost, persisted in anti-nuclear initiatives post-INF, both at the level of intra-state politics and at the grass-roots level, where Gorbachev met with any number of Green personalities of the time from Petra Kelly to Jutta

Dittfurth, inviting the anti-nuclear movements to apply "pressure from below" to which he

could respond from his position above. But the climate which generally prevailed in that period was one of an abstract and hysterical “Gorbymania”, quite free from any trace of the dialectic between “civil society” and official nuclear weapons politics that had been so much part of END rhetoric prior to December 1987.

The August 1991 Coup

The Berlin Wall came down, the Gulf War came and went. Finally the watershed was reached: the August 1991 coup against Gorbachev. The last head of the KGB Krioutchkov later claimed that this coup was triggered by Russian anxieties at the impending surrender of the Soviet nuclear arsenal to the Americans. Whatever the truth of this, there is no doubt that August 1991 was the golden opportunity for the Western peace movements to press ahead with the demand for unilateral Soviet nuclear disarmament, something which if achieved would have given a tremendous boost to the prospects for realisation of the demands of the END Appeal and ultimately perhaps even to the prospects for nuclear disarmament of the United States.

In British party-political terms, the logic of such a demand was obvious. Tories had long resorted to the jest of summoning proponents of unilateral British nuclear disarmament to make the same unilateralist proposal to the Soviets. If the British peace movement at this juncture had done exactly that, the Tories would have been in a deep fix. If, at that particular moment of high drama and anti-Communism, the Tories had tried to argue – as Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans did successfully in the CTBT context only five years later – that one should respect BOTH superpowers’ need for “nuclear deterrence”, they would have made themselves into a laughing stock.

Arguing these ideas with Edward Thompson at the time, I received the reply that “I think your positions are certainly worth discussion. But my doubt is that ‘the end of the Cold War’ has been so one-sided: NATO firmly in place, now joined by WEU and a possible Euro army, but Warsaw Pact dismantled, etc. a one-sided campaign to rid the Soviet Union of all nukes – if the campaign came from the West, from movements which can’t persuade their own governments to stop Trident or Hades...all this raises my doubts.” Of course by this time E.P. Thompson was at the very end of his life. He confessed that discussion of the idea of unilateral Soviet nuclear disarmament was exhausting him, and he requested that we should discontinue it. But what I wanted to know then, and would still like to know, is why other leaders of the European peace movements who were younger and in better health were not pressing these demands, which seemed to me so self-evident. Or if they were, why we did not succeed in finding each other.

CND had also received correspondence from me, which their spokesperson found “very interesting”. But in late 1991 they were taking the position that “there is now no enemy”, so that Western nuclear arsenals had lost their last shred of justification. This position ignored the fact that the Cold War mindset had reflected not just an intra-ideological conflict but also an intrastate conflict, involving not just anti-Communism but also geopolitical anti-Russianism. The dissociation of these two elements in the wake of the August coup, as a result of which Communists lost their control of the Soviet nuclear arsenal, had presented certain opportunities for the anti-nuclear movements, but CND did not try to exploit them, or apparently even perceive them, however “interesting” they might have been.

The peace movements apparently could not grasp that the conceptual confusions of Cold War politics were two-edged weapons that could be turned against their originators.

Whatever its subjective intentions, CND's "there is now no enemy" stance was only too easy to recast as an invitation to find a new enemy. This was exactly what END-HCA later did, systematically demonizing Russian nationalists like the now forgotten clown Zhirinovsky, not to mentioned Serb leaders such as Milosevic and Karadjic.

After August

Even after the August coup, in the months remaining before Gorbachev's final demise, there was time for the peace movements to intervene. With powers greatly reduced, virtually confined to presiding over the nuclear arsenal, Gorbachev tried to stay in the game by acting as mediator between Russia and the Muslim republics of the Soviet Union. Yeltsin, at that time unencumbered by the need to retain credibility with the military, was even keener than Gorbachev in his advocacy of nuclear disarmament. On 3rd September 1991 he announced to the Russian parliament that he favored total destruction of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. The French Defence Minister of the day, Pierre Joxe, stated publicly "France will not be the first to put on the brakes if there is a large world-wide movement for nuclear disarmament."

There was no need for France to put on the brakes. The anti-nuclear movement put them on itself, needing no help from Pierre Joxe or any other politician.

The call for nuclear disarmament did not come from the peace movements, so not surprisingly the moment of opportunity soon began to recede. President Bush entered the debate with announcements of "unilateral nuclear disarmament of the United States", basically cutbacks in land-based ICBMs and tactical nuclear weapons.

It was a move which seemed to catch Gorbachev off-guard. Perhaps the Soviet President was uncertain as to who he should attempt to represent, the comatose Western anti-nuclear movements or his own disintegrating country. In his response to Bush's "unilateral" proposal, Gorbachev agreed to reduction in the Soviet land-based strategic arsenal, but not to its total abolition.

President Bush's "disarmament proposals" had been well-prepared. Throughout September 1991 NATO had been announcing plans for a new generation of air-launched nuclear missiles, the TASM. Such interest in nuclear weapons as existed among the public was thus artfully focused on the nuclear weapons not of the USSR but of NATO.

NATO's sudden bout of muscle-flexing injected fear into an already-dazed public consciousness, making it even less likely that Gorbachev or Yeltsin would find an audience that could penetrate the logic of the games being played at the top and persist in demands, in the first place, for Soviet nuclear disarmament.

This clearly constitutes another example of the phenomenon mentioned earlier, of deployment of nuclear weapons being used not to deter a military enemy but to confuse and demoralise public opinion.

Bush's spectacular public relations coup had succeeded in demonstrating that Gorbachev was not prepared to make corresponding offers of "unilateral nuclear disarmament of the Soviet Union". The political sophisticates of END made no attempt to help Gorbachev by exploring how the Soviet leader would react if called upon by "civil society" to adopt such policies.

The later 1990s

As the 90s progressed, nuclear disarmament disappeared altogether from the agendas of the movements and political parties that had formerly supported it, even if only on the level of diplomatic initiatives in the framework of international arms control negotiations. With the re-emergence of the nuclear testing issue in the light of China's and France's resumption of underground nuclear testing, on June 26, 1995, Greece's PASOK Socialists, formerly conspicuous for their big-budget international anti-nuclear-weapons fiestas, voted against the protest statement from Western European states condemning the resumption of French nuclear testing. The abdication of the parties left the field free for Greenpeace to take up the anti-nuclear-testing issue in the name of "civil society", but Greenpeace was not interested in promoting regional initiatives of unilateral or bilateral nuclear disarmament such as the one put forward in the 1980 END Appeal... Action was rigorously confined to high-visibility media-oriented protests against nuclear testing, perhaps with lip service to ideals of generalised nuclear disarmament through the United Nations (and so subject to US sabotage). There was thus no serious challenge to United States policy of preventing nuclear testing by other nuclear weapons states while utilising its own technological superiority to carry out through laboratory simulation such testing as it deemed necessary.

Even worse, in 1996 when India refused to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, supposedly in protest at this above-mentioned American hypocrisy - and Greenpeace itself had previously, when it was a question of opposing French nuclear testing, chosen not to talk about this aspect of things - Greenpeace, indeed the anti-nuclear movement in general, had then allowed the nuclear-armed Indian government to play the role of their anti-nuclear attorney against the USA. They therefore did not condemn India's refusal to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and so pulled the rug from under Benazir Bhutto and her attempts to curb the expansion of the nuclear weapons program of Pakistan. Bhutto fell from power in October 1996, brought down by this issue among others. The anti-nuclear movements' indulgence of nuclear-armed India's anti-nuclear rhetoric against the United States stands in glaring contrast to their former absolute intolerance of similar double-standard politics from the peace committees of the Communist-controlled World Peace Council in the heyday of the Soviet Union. (see appendix for discussion of Indian and Pakistani nuclear weapons).

When India, and then Pakistan, a year or so later actually started nuclear testing, as it was obviously only a matter of time before they would, once again there was Greenpeace exuding moral indignation from the television screens, this time conveniently in step with the explicit, and not merely the unacknowledged, priorities of United States nuclear weapons policy. This intellectual degeneration foreshadowed the absolute theoretical primitivism of nuclear weapons discussion in the first decade of the 21st century.

National Missile Defence

Now, faced with the prospect of American abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972 and implementation of the National Missile Defence system known as Star Wars, some key participants in the END mobilisations of the 1980s, notably Ken Coates and the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, would like to see a revival of those movements for the purpose of defending the threatened Treaty, a task which "cannot be left to diplomats". Reading Ken Coates position paper "Present Nuclear Dangers" in which he outlines these new proposals, one notes in the preamble the familiar invocations of hopes held by "most people" in the late 1980s that "the threat of wholesale nuclear destruction had been lifted",

followed by the equally familiar confession that these views were “overoptimistic”. Personally, not ever having been one of those who harboured such hopes, nor knew anyone who did, I would like to suggest that one prerequisite for any revival of the anti-nuclear movements of the eighties or anything approaching them will be an acknowledgement of the disingenuous, misguided or at any rate unreal character of this assertion concerning “hopes”, and its function of disguising a certain reality: the reality that in the wake of the INF Treaty the Western supporters of the Appeal for European Nuclear Disarmament simply withdrew support from their side of the deal, namely that denuclearisation of Eastern Europe would be matched by parallel denuclearisation of Western Europe. The “hopes” allegedly existing at that time are simply the formula clothing accommodation to the climate of contentless euphoria that was then so prevalent. But the euphoria served a purpose. It disguised the fact that there was no reciprocation from European governments to the Warsaw Pact’s compliance with NATO’s demands. It was not only governments that did not reciprocate. The Western peace movements did not reciprocate either, to the Warsaw Pact’s carrying out what was demanded of them in the European Nuclear Disarmament Appeal of April 1980. They did not even protest. They simply lost their political and moral bearings and were integrated willy-nilly, along with their Eastern bloc counterparts, into the virtual reality of the mass media and the political agendas of the winning side of the Cold War.

The withdrawal from Europe and the destruction of one category of land-based intermediate Soviet and American nuclear falls a long way short of being a “nuclear-weapon-free Europe from Poland to Portugal” or even a first step in that direction. What occurred was not only a moving of the goalposts but also an imposition of the insistence that any Eastern bloc protest at such moving of the goalposts (which in any case did not occur) should be immediately categorised as a return to “old thinking”. There is in fact only one way of escaping the conclusion that the proponents of “old thinking” in the Soviet Union are and were right, and that is to conclude that the whole idea of building a Soviet nuclear arsenal was a mistake in the first place.

The Return to “Old Thinking”

In “Present Nuclear Dangers” Ken Coates takes the other option: that of becoming a defender of the new “old thinking”. The recommendation that the anti-nuclear movements should react with sympathetic understanding to Mr. Putin’s repudiation of the doctrine of “No First Use” because “their conventional forces are already greatly enfeebled, and the sick state of their economy makes it difficult to recuperate military strength” and moreover that American deployment of National Missile Defence “would cancel such residual defensive capacity as the Russian state felt it possessed” amounts to nothing more or less than a reassertion of the old World Peace Council position of solidarity with Soviet/Russian nuclear “deterrence”, in effect implying that the whole trajectory of European Nuclear Disarmament was a mistake from beginning to end.

Of course there is a demand in the countries of the ex-Soviet Union that their governments should “do something”, just as public opinion in the West wanted their governments to “do something” in Yugoslavia, but this doesn’t mean that the something that is done has any point to it, or is justifiable. One of the truly tragic aspects of the spread of representative democracy to so many countries of the world is how it has served as a catalyst for the proliferation of doctrines of mass ignorance such as nuclear deterrence. It is no longer just the British Tories who win elections by heaping ignorant ridicule on the heads of would-be nuclear disarmers. The same now happens in India and Pakistan. Even in the countries of

the former Soviet Union, politicians can now win support through pandering to the populist fantasy that security is to be had through the acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Preservation of the putative deterrent potential of either Russian or of European Nuclear Weapons is not the right argument to be used to oppose the development of the American National Missile Defence System. Nor is the United Nations, with its current image of being the destroyer of national sovereignty and international law an appropriate instrument to try to use to get the United States to opt for less destabilising security policies. Nothing could be better calculated to get the nationalistic American right loyally supporting even such ideas as Star Wars and its progeny. There is not going to be any “strong movement of opinion” to support the diplomats in their defence of the 1972 ABM Treaty. Nor are significant numbers of people going to be willing to “grease up the walking boots and refurbish the banners” of nuclear disarmament. Because just as the idea has caught on that it was wrong to think that if you want nuclear disarmament you should support the Communists, so people are now unwilling to be taught the lesson that if you want nuclear disarmament you should support the United Nations. In either case there is the suspicion that the threat of nuclear weapons and the prospect of nuclear disarmament have both been instrumentalized in order to blackmail people into supporting institutions and proposals they would not otherwise tolerate, much less support. The nuclear weapons industry and the nuclear disarmament industry are perceived as being in a symbiotic relationship, as being two sides of the same coin.

Grease Up the Walking Boots

I don't think I am the only one who has had enough of street politics, and not only because one is getting older. Why after all, should we go on accepting this division of labour where we take to the streets, presumably in the hope of “putting pressure” on the politicians, while the politicians continue to look on us as a form of human capital whom they may or may not invest in for a while, until it suits them to sell us out. Likewise the media, whose interest in us is as a spectacle that may or may not boost their ratings. Are we supposed to go in again for those “die-ins” in the street, and dressing up in skeleton costumes? Let's leave antics of that kind to Greenpeace, who are professionals, and can do it much better. Street politics on the one hand has been commodified to the extent that one feels like a fool and a sucker to get involved in it. On the other its very function has been rendered dubious by the breakdown of respect for legality that has begun to manifest itself on every level from the United Nations War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague down. The conventions of parliamentary democracy are no longer upheld even by parliamentarians. Perhaps particularly by parliamentarians. How many European politicians protested about the way Kostunica came to power in Yugoslavia? The rule of law is replaced by the media glorification of “direct action”. For me that kills it.

Which brings us back to Olof Palme, the parliamentary politician and one of the stars of the nuclear disarmament industry, who was launched on his international anti-nuclear career by certain Swedish military professionals having no involvement whatever either with parliamentary politics or with international diplomacy and arms control but simply deciding – and being allowed to decide – that they didn't want nuclear weapons for their country for the simple reason that such “weapons” would be militarily useless and indeed dangerous, not to the enemy but to themselves. This is the experience we must investigate. We must find out the secret of their success.

What can be done?

I believe that there is a way of dealing with the threat of America's National Missile Defence. What is recommended is a return to the point where the European nuclear disarmament movements lost their bearings in December 1987, when they celebrated the INF Agreement and forgot that they had been proposing to the Russians and the Eastern Europeans: that removal of the SS-20s from Europe would be matched by the Western peace movements delivering - or at least demanding - a nuclear-weapons-free Western Europe. But please no more of the old kind of anti-nuclear activism with the street politics and the fear-mongering. People are tired of all that. We should ourselves be tired of it.

On 3rd November 2000 in Groningen Daniel Cohn Bendit gave a speech where he called upon Europeans to go ahead and complete the political structures of the European Union, with a European Constitution, a grand European guiding vision, a second chamber of the European Parliament, a European head of state. In terms of detail, much of his conception was overly influenced by what now exists in America and as such is unacceptable, for the American institutional status quo is no model even for Americans, much less for Europeans. But in the most general sense Cohn-Bendit's proposal is worthy of support. The details of how a second chamber of the European Parliament should constitute itself and what its functions should be are the subject for another paper, but the European nuclear disarmament movement should set itself the task of building, in fact of BEING, that European second chamber. Cohn-Bendit spoke of a unifying European idea but he did not speak of a policy objective which a second chamber might serve and which indeed might help to bring it into existence as a living entity. I believe that the policy objective should be European nuclear disarmament, to be specific the content of the Appeal for European Nuclear Disarmament of 28th April, 1980 which proposed a nuclear-free Europe from Poland to Portugal.. That would represent a belated keeping of the promise to the Russians that was contained in that appeal in the first place and it would represent a restoration of the moral order that was overturned when the promise was broken.

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