

Vivian Milroy

PEACE ISN'T JUST 'OUT THERE'

One of the problems of the peace movement as opposed to the "Peace Movement" - is the confusion between end and means. Apart from a few psychopaths and the occasional armament manufacturer, there can surely be no one in the world who is against the basic objective of world peace? This is particularly so now that war may involve large numbers of the population instead of being confined to an organised struggle between two specialised fighting forces.

Part of the argument has to do with what we mean by "peace". The spectrum can range from the mere absence of war, via absence of threatening noises about war, to positive co-operation between peoples and finally to every group in the world loving every other group. In human terms all these things are obtainable but in different time scales from I suppose five years, to be optimistic, up to a thousand years. Again, there can be a split between not only the different means, but also the different ends. I suppose most peace activists would rule out the ultimate end as too utopian and unreachable. Most people would be found in the "absence of war" or "active co-operation" groups. And here again there will be arguments about means.

This brings up another confusion in the particular area of human thinking - that between peace in general and 'nuclear' peace. There is a general feeling that nuclear war is something quite different from ordinary war. On the surface this may seem to be so. The scale of course is entirely different; the possibility of large scale ecological damage is quite different; but from the point of view of the individual victim, I would suggest that there is no difference at all. Whether you have your skull smashed in by a stone axe or are incinerated by a nuclear blast, the result for you is exactly the same. This is total annihilation of your physical sensations leaving you only with whatever after-death options you have acquired in life. For the individual victim war is final and disastrous - and anti-human - whether waged with bows and arrows, or machine guns or nuclear weapons.

What I am saying is that war is war is war, and that I would like to avoid it whatever weapons are used. Clearly, the bigger the weapon the more energy I am prepared to spend in avoiding it or neutralizing

it. So it does make some kind of strategic sense to gain some kind of international agreement on outlawing nuclear weapons as a starting point. Providing one is not at the same time implying that to be blown up by dynamite or shot by a high velocity bullet is OK.

Can it be that some of the furore today about abolishing nuclear weapons is not so much a wish for peace and for an end to war, as a fear that in this kind of war one is going to be a victim and not an onlooker. It is easier to be objective about warfare if one sits calmly at home and watches it on television. To sit waiting for it to fall through one's own roof is another matter entirely.

So together with most of the human race, I am against nuclear war. Together with say a quarter of the human race, I am against any kind of war. As far as strategy is concerned I am reasonably sure that most of the more vociferous and active peace movements are more concerned with fighting their own wars of strategy than with promoting peace.

This is an age of universal democracy and mass demonstrations to call attention to or even try to enforce a particular point of view. Thus I find mass demonstrations for peace wholly admirable and will support them however and with whatever I can. I find mass demonstrations for one particular strategy - which usually turns out to be for unilateral nuclear disarmament - as being usually misapplied and also misconceived. If one is convinced that this particular strategy is the only possible one to achieve peace, then one is right to bring this as forcibly as possible to the people whose opinions need to be changed. This, to my mind, is primarily governments - including American and Russian - and secondly ordinary voters. To attempt physically to disrupt the installation or day-to-day operation of a nuclear missile site has a blind destructive Luddite quality about it. This is the kind of dogmatic aggression that ultimately is the cause of war.

In common with another quarter of the human race, I am completely unsure as to whether unilateral or multilateral disarmament is likely to work better or indeed at all. I just don't know. But I am quite sure that either way, this is not enough. What is needed is a positive, energetic, loving desire to change the hearts of men, both friends and potential enemies and potential allies.

Carl Rogers (Self and Society Vol.X No. 5) wrote about the great work done in contact and communication between warring minorities - black/white in America and catholic/protestant in Northern Ireland.

This seems to be the crux of the matter. Those of us who are aware of the importance of loving communication must find ways to reach out and change those who are aggressive, unaware or just frightened.

And if this can be done in mass demonstrations, so much the better. But these must be peaceful in the full sense of the word. To refrain from physically attacking people who uphold different strategies, while verbally attacking them and trying to make their lives as difficult as possible, is not enough. This is the "peace" of the cold war. Like charity, peace begins at home, in our own hearts. Only when we have achieved this may we presume to instruct other governments, our own government, other peace seeking groups in how to achieve world peace.

JOANNA MACEY interviewed by JOHN ROWAN

J.R.: I wonder if we could just go back to the beginning of this thing, when you discovered your own despair? I saw a very brief account of that, and it sounded like quite a key thing.

J.M.: Yes, it was. It was. It was exactly six years ago this Spring. I was on a train in Boston, crossing the Charles River, returning from an all-day symposium on the threats to our survival. There was a barrage of information and audio-visual representation about these threats, ranging from radio-active pollution to the extinction of animal species, to you name it - oil spills, deforestation, all of it. The cumulative weight of all this - none of which was news to me, because I'd been involved all my life in social concerns - but it was the cumulative effect, I think particularly of the final thing, a film about the baby seals, struggling . . . Where I - suddenly, my defences broke, against the knowledge that we could do ourselves in. And that possibility, even when it's only glimpsed as a possibility, but genuinely seems a possibility, pulls you into a new dimension of experience. Something is lost, some quality of innocence. And I experienced there, for those moments on that train, an inner abyss, a horror. And grief; tremendous grief.

As a matter of fact, I was looking - the tears were pouring down my face as I looked at the faces on the subway, over the Charles River to New England, and for weeks afterwards I was preoccupied with the question of how one manages - literally manages to live