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POLITICS FOR PEACE

The Two Peaces

Any sensible discussion of the politics of peace must make quite clear from the outset to what sort of peace it is addressing itself, for the word has acquired two distinct meanings when related to matters of defence. To some, it simply means 'the absence of War', and the word is frequently used in this sense by the advocates of nuclear deterrence when they claim that nuclear weapons have kept the peace in Europe for thirty-five years. By 'peace' here they mean no more than that there has been no overt East-West military conflict in Europe during that time (though it is, of course, arguable whether the possession of nuclear weapons has been the chief cause of this fact). They ignore the almost continuous Cold War that has pertained between East and West since the Iron Curtain came down; they ignore the fact that both sides spend £ billions each year, and employ most of their best-trained, best-qualified scientists in devising ever more spectacular means to bring about the mass-destruction of each other's civilian population. Despite all this, they claim that nuclear weapons have kept 'the peace'.

The other meaning of peace cannot be contained in the essentially negative concept of the mere absence of War. It implies harmonious co-existence, co-operation, mutual respect. In this sense there has not been one hour of peace between East and West since 1945, while peace between nations in the wider international scene has become a species so endangered as to tremble on the threshold of extinction. Such Peace is just not compatible with the stockpiling of nuclear weapons, the development of chemical weapons or plans for satellite warfare.

For the humane politician who is simultaneously concerned both with keeping the peace and with the art of the possible, both meanings are very problematic. The political disadvantage of the positive concept of peace is that it seems to have existed so very rarely in human history. Some even declare it to be against 'human nature'.

Yet negative peace has an even more damning characteristic, especially in the nuclear age, not only for the humane politician but for the whole of humanity, for it has always been inherently unstable. The nation that prepares for war, whether in the cause of peace or not, ends up by going to war. It has always been only a matter of time before negative peace has degenerated into positive war. With the weapons of today, that means destruction on an unimaginable scale, perhaps even of all life on earth.

PUTTING THE PEACES TOGETHER

It is considerations such as these that lead the peace-seeking politician to two main conclusions. First we must move towards creating the conditions for positive peace as speedily as political realities allow - and faster even than that. If ever a crisis demanded acts of faith, vision and courage, that caused by the unbridled arms race cries out for them. We must be prepared to leap in the dark again and again for peace. Secondly, we must do whatever we can immediately to reduce the stockpiles so that, should we fail in the future to gain positive peace, at least an ensuing war will not be as all-annihilating as at present. This means nuclear disarmament now, without getting embroiled in the irrelevant and misleading arguments as to whether such disarmament should be unilateral or multilateral. The UK decision to accept Cruise and Pershing missiles was a unilateral decision (some NATO governments equally unilaterally refused them.) It is both unreasonable and unrealistic to expect disarmament to proceed by a different process from that which put the weapons there in the first place. If we want nuclear disarmament now, we had better work out a few unilateral initiatives to get rid of nuclear weapons, initiatives which build trust and confidence, and encourage other states in the nuclear arena to indulge in some unilateralism themselves, which, of course, all make for multilateral disarmament.

STEPPING-STONE TO POSITIVE PEACE

With deterrence discredited, any strategy for peace, of even for defence, must first of all dispense with nuclear weapons. Their only conceivable role was defined by deterrence, for they are quite incapable of defending their possessor, in the usual sense of stopping an invader or protecting and preserving the possessor's homeland and population when attacked. All that nuclear weapons can do, if used, is ensure mutual suicide. Current military strategies envisage such use. Both peace and defence, and survival itself, depend on dispensing with such strategies and with such weapons.

The first stepping-stone is thus the rejection by the UK of the NATO Cruise and Pershing missiles, and the cancellation of the Trident programme. That at least stops our nuclear stockpile getting any bigger. To actually reduce it, we must scrap Polaris and close all nuclear bases in this country - small enough initiatives, it is true, given the size of the stockpiles, but the least we can do if we are really interested in putting the nuclear arms race into reverse.

But nuclear weapons are by no means the whole story, for it is the non-nuclear arms-race that accounts for the bulk of the threefold increase in military expenditure over the last decade (now running at more than 1 million US dollars a minute) and we need look no further for the primary reason why world-development has not left the drawing-board and the destitute die by the million each year. As far as slowing this arms-race is concerned, the UK is well placed to contribute. Successive British Governments have worked hard to increase the UK's share of arms exports, so that Britain is now among the top arms traders, encouraging other governments, sometimes repressive governments, sometimes those of very poor countries, to exchange for weapons the resources that are absolutely crucial for their development. Britain should withdraw from this arms-trade, this market in human misery, refusing to sell abroad both weapons and technology of repression, and converting these industries to production for life rather than destruction.

Britain would then be in a strong position to promote and support diplomatic initiatives for disarmament. That there is no shortage of such initiatives already is shown by the fact that in the past four years no less than 27 motions from non-aligned countries were debated in the United Nations, motions which sought in various ways to break the deadlock on disarmament.

But it is in Europe that our peace initiatives could make their greatest impact. Europe is where the Superpowers most confront each other, and so it is in Europe that the task of prising the Superpowers apart must begin. The ultimate aim must be to bring about the demise of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, to banish from Europe the military presence of both the US and the USSR, to explode the myth that any part of Europe outside their own borders belongs within the legitimate sphere of military influence of either of the Superpowers. Just as with the endless, fruitless disarmament talks, so it is useless to hope that NATO and the Warsaw Pact will one day mutually negotiate themselves out of existence. Progress depends on unilateral initiatives within each block to diminish that block's power and, for the UK, that means withdrawing from NATO and seeking to establish much

closer defensive European links with likeminded European countries, on an exclusively European basis and employing non-nuclear, purely defensive weaponry. Such a European Alliance would be a unique development in post-war Europe: the first initiative since 1945 increase the security of one part of Europe without **threatening** another part of it. For the first time, the USSR would not have the excuse of needing to match a perceived NATO 'threat'. It would not be able to use such a 'threat' as an argument to keep its more or less disaffected European partners in line. The development of a non defensive European Alliance, open to countries in Eastern and Western Europe alike, would do no more to raise the Iron Curtain than all the military hardware of fifty NATOs and their Warsaw Pact counterparts, It is an initiative which a non-nuclear Britain, having withdrawn from Nato, would be in an almost uniquely favourable position to take.

THE USSR: A THREAT, OR THREATENED?

All of these first three stepping-stones to peace - nuclear disarmament, disengagement from the arms trade, withdrawal from NATO - involve Britain reducing its military strength, and it is at this stage that such questions as 'what about the Russians?' are normally put. The whole political process of persuading the British people to move towards peace in this way depends on the conviction carried by the answers to such questions.

There is no denying that the Russians do not help our case by many of their actions. We find their society intolerably repressive. Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan have shown the USSR ready in the past to resort to force to compel other nations to comply with Russian interests, and there is no evidence that the Kremlin has become more tolerant in this respect. The USSR has a formidable arsenal of weapons of all sorts, many of them specifically deployed against Western Europe, which could destroy the continent many times over. Moreover, the Soviet Union has always proclaimed an ideology of world domination and has not hesitated to supply weapons and expertise where these could further its cause.

All the same, however unpalatable these facts may be, they do not by themselves prove that the USSR would invade Western Europe if it thought it could get away with it. It should be remembered that, to Russian eyes, NATO is every bit as aggressive and threatening as the Warsaw Pact is to ours, and Western international capitalism every bit as set on world domination as we take the Soviets to be; that every major new weapons system was invented and deployed by the West first; that one reason why Russia tends to go for greater

numbers of weapons is that it is aware that the West always has the edge in technology; that Russia lost 20 million lives in World War II and is determined never to lay itself open to invasion again. Above all, Russia has consistently claimed to want peace with the West. It negotiated and ratified Salt II (on which the USA defaulted) and has put forward many proposals to curb the arms-race. Though these proposals are dismissed as mere propaganda by the West or, worse, as proposals that would guarantee Russian military superiority, exactly similar accusations are made by the Russian when the West makes any such proposals.

The fact is that, such is the mistrust between the two sides, neither will agree to the other's proposals on principle, for each is convinced that the other would only make an offer that was to its advantage. So we can't know at present whether either side is sincere in its claims to want peace and disarmament. The only way out of this situation is for one side to make a sizeable unilateral gesture, which cannot possibly be misinterpreted, in the hope that this will elicit a similar response. There is very little danger in this course for either side, for the margins of overkill are such that half the arsenals of any one side could be disposed of without reducing the deterrence value of the remaining weapons. Nuclear disarmament by the UK would be much less significant than this but we should do it to test the worth of Russian protestations of a desire to live in peace.

THE BEST FORM OF DEFENCE IS DEFENCE

But it is no good asking the people of this country to move towards peace on the basis of trust alone. The present popular perception of Russia as 'the enemy', unscrupulously cultivated over the years by governments needing to justify increasingly distasteful and expensive weapons systems, demands that, for the time being at least, measures to build trust should be matched by a sound military defensive capability. Nuclear weapons cannot fulfil such a role as we have seen. But there are other weapons that can, weapons made possible by the enormous advance in electronic systems and guidance techniques, weapons that could stop any Russian invasion in its tracks, were they deployed in sufficient numbers. Moreover, such weapons could be exclusively defensive. Because they need have no aggressive potential enemy, so that strong military defence of this sort could proceed hand-in-hand with trust creation and confidence-building measures.

Examples of such weapons are the ground-to-air missile, for use against attacking aircraft, or anti-tank weapons, which are solely designed to stop advancing tanks, or anti-missile systems. Vigorous development

of these could render obsolete most of Russia's mighty conventional arsenal, of which we stand in such great awe at present, yet render it obsolete in such a way that Russia could not imagine us wanting conquest ourselves. An arms-race in defensive weaponry would soon peter out, for lack of offensive weapons to be deployed against. There is no better indication of the basically aggressive motives of the so-called 'defence' polices of East and West than the way in which the defensive possibilities of the new technology have been ignored. It is now time for the UK, and Europe, to exploit this rich potential for peace-making to the full.

WHERE POLITICS BECOMES ECOLOGY

Our stepping-stones - nuclear disarmament, withdrawal from NATO and the arms trade, initiation of a European Defensive alliance, support for international disarmament initiatives, exclusive reliance on defensive weaponry - have now taken us as close to peace as military measures can. It is not close enough, and to take us the rest of the way, nothing less than the arguments of political ecology will do.

War is not rooted solely in the quest for power and domination. It thrives too on injustice, exploitation, poverty, fear and insecurity. Only considerations of ecology can dry up these sources of countless future wars, by working not only for justice and freedom for all peoples, but relating these to the physical capabilities of the planet that must support us all. A culture that despoils the Earth and squanders its resources, as our industrialism does, can never lead to peace. International financial arrangements that give to one third of the world's people more than two thirds of its wealth can never lead to peace. These are the root issues to which ecological politics addresses itself. These are the questions to which it alone, of all political systems, has answers. In an age when weapons of mass destruction have effectively ruled out war as an option for the resolution of human conflict, achieving positive peace is an imperative for our very survival. Braking the arms race can give us the time and create the conditions for positive peace. But only the whole vision and unity of purpose of a new creative ecologically based world philosophy will actually take us there.
