

A message for Aldermaston Marchers

When your house is on fire you drop everything until you have put out the flames: and if your neighbours come into help, you are glad to see them, without asking questions whether they are vegetarians or teetotallers or anything else. So might the campaign for Nuclear Disarmament argue, to justify the political diversity of their membership, united as it is only in the desire to abolish nuclear weapons.

We can all agree that these weapons are monstrous. The two Japanese cities were terrible enough: since then, the bombs have been made many times more destructive. The Home Office publication *Nuclear Weapons* estimated that a bomb a little smaller than that exploded by the Americans at Bikini in 1954 would cause total or irreparable damage for a radius of six miles and would certainly kill everybody within half a mile, by burns if not from other cause. A Chief Inspector of Fire Brigades has said that a hydrogen bomb on London could cause 100,000 fires--and might temporarily alter the course of the Thames. These forebodings are several years old. Now we have even bigger bombs, and rockets which can deliver them over thousands of miles. Yes, nuclear weapons must be abolished. How can it be done?

What if the governments yielded to the pressure of the nuclear disarmers and agreed to scrap their bombs? This would be worth no more than all the other solemn vows to disarm, or to refrain from taking up arms, or to be non-aggressive, which governments, when it suited them, have broken in the past. The fact that Germany in 1919 signed an agreement not to arm did not prevent her becoming a powerful military nation a few years later. The non-aggression pact of 1939 between Germany and Russia did not prevent the conflict of 1941-45. But let us suppose that governments, strangely, kept their promise to forego their nuclear weapons. That would only take us back to 1945, when wars were fought with blockbusters and flame throwers and Napalm bombs. There is nothing desirable about that. Or we could make a really good job of it and go back to the weapons of 1914-18. Or 1870 or 1415 or 1066.

Of course, it is foolish to expect a modern government to run an army of longbowmen. It seems too obvious to say that as one country develops a weapon, so the others must find one similar or better. That is how the military aircraft and the nuclear bomb, for example, were born. Nowadays, no foreign minister has much of a say unless he has a fistful of H-bombs. In the last election campaign, Sir Winston Churchill said, ". . . you are more likely to obtain a hearing for your views if you have some substantial stake in the balance of world power. And these stakes . . . are still much measured in military terms". To win a stake in world power, the French and Chinese are working up their atom bombs--and the established nuclear powers, to keep their stake, have to make rockets and missiles with Hydrogen bomb war heads.

When the French atom bomb was exploded a few weeks back, General de Gaulle exclaimed, "Hurrah for France!" He knew that he was really saying hurrah for destruction and death, because that is what military power means. But military power is only necessary to modern states because in peace and war, they are struggling for economic advantage. This is a world where everything is produced with the intention of selling it profitably, which means that sellers compete for markets, manufacturers for plentiful raw material sources and transporters for trading routes. These are the

disputes which, when everything else fails, are settled by force--by war. So France hangs on to Algeria for, among other things, the oil that is there. So Britain fought for years in Cyprus, because it is a base near the strategically important Suez Canal and the vital Middle East oilfields. So the last two world wars were started--and so a third could start if, for example, Russian economic influence in the Middle East or the Caribbean became too great a threat to British and American interests.

In these conditions, national states are bound to maintain a military machine to fight for the interests of their ruling classes and to equip that machine with the most powerful—and most deadly—weapons possible. It is futile to expect them to do otherwise. In 1917, it would have been suicidal for them to have thrown away their tanks, or in 1944 their bombers. In 1960 they are similarly reluctant to give up their nuclear bombs. There is only one way to deal effectively with this problem. Go to the roots. The capitalist system is the cause, from beginning to end, of modern war and the horrifying methods of prosecuting it.

Marching from Aldermaston, sitting in the mud in Swaffham, or lying in jail, the nuclear disarmers deserve our respect for their concern with one of the horrors of modern society. But we can only regret that so much energy is wasted in such a topsy-turvy movement. If it is desirable to abolish one weapon of war, how much more so is it to get rid of them all? Or to get rid of war itself? Our house is burning because it is made of inflammable materials--and people will keep dropping matches. It is useless to tackle each fire as it breaks out. We must build ourselves a new house.

(April 1960)