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IS PEACE ON EARTH POSSIBLE?

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MAN IN THE NUCLEAR AGE

Twenty-five years ago the decisive issues were economic. Either our industrialised societies would surmount their economic problems or they would fall into decay. Today the threat of nuclear war is the decisive issue. A failure to surmount this new crisis would lead not to decay but to summary destruction. So much will perhaps be readily agreed.

But the prevention of war, as distinct from its occasional avoidance or postponement, is a far more difficult matter than is even now realised. Many people, it is true, are tireless in reiterating that with the development of nuclear arms, peace has become

indispensable. But those who best appreciate this truth are apt to overlook the fact that war is one of the most deeply rooted of all human institutions. They do not realise that in asking mankind to do without war, they are making a wholly unprecedented demand.

On the other hand those of a more realistic temperament — as they consider themselves — who have noted the historical record, are apt to ignore the new fact that to settle disputes between nation-States by the time-honoured method of war has become impossibly destructive. No one can blame mankind for failing, initially at least, to face the dilemma upon the horns of which the progress of physical science has impaled us. But the fact is that for a world of fully sovereign States, war

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remains inevitable but has become intolerable.

This dilemma of the nuclear age casts its shadow over every aspect of contemporary life. It will not be resolved without diagnostic studies of the nature of war, sustained by many workers and over many years. To suppose anything else would be as wishful as to suppose that cancer could be overcome without achieving an ever-increasing comprehension of the morbid condition of the affected tissue.

THE ROLE OF MILITARY FACTORS

I do not take the view sometimes expressed by persons of my political persuasion, that the military characteristics of the "delicate balance of terror" are unimportant. On the contrary, *in the short run* what is called "the stability of the balance," which depends to a marked extent upon military factors, is of primary importance. Here I can only assert two conclusions.

The stability of the nuclear balance, and so the probability of avoiding the early

outbreak of nuclear war, is dependent, first, on both sides rendering their respective strategic nuclear forces as "invulnerable" as possible to a surprise attack by the other. There would be little hope of peace if both sides maintained strategic nuclear forces which could obliterate, or be obliterated by, the opposing force. For in that case the premium upon striking first would be overwhelmingly high.

The second conclusion is that the stability of the balance, and so peace, will be gravely endangered if either side neglects its non-nuclear or "conventional" forces. For in that case the other side can seize some limited, but important, local advantage without the use of nuclear weapons, and so confront its opponent with the intolerable dilemma of submitting or of blowing up the world for the sake of what appears to be an issue of limited importance. Perhaps the side which has neglected its conventional forces will yield once or twice on such limited issues. But it is easy to see that a series of such issues could and would confront the neglectful

side with the stark choice of surrender or full-scale nuclear war.

These military considerations will be greeted by many readers with impatience. If, it will be said, the consequences of nuclear war are as black as they are painted (and they are), ought we not to demand immediate and all-embracing measures to abolish this nightmare? Either unilateral disarmament or the quick establishment of a world government is often demanded by those who have suddenly realised the peril in which they stand.

It is true that no suggestions for improving "the stability of the balance" can do more than procure us a stay of execution by nuclear war. But how much that is! The inhabitant of the condemned cell is ill-advised to despise a reprieve, even though only a full pardon will set him free again. In the same way it would be particularly rash for us to neglect "the stability of the balance" on the grounds that it is undeniable that far more than this will be necessary to release us from that world-wide con-

demned cell which the human race to-day inhabits.

DISARMAMENT:

(1) UNILATERAL

We must conclude, then, that defense policy is a highly important matter, but only in order to gain time for more fundamental measures. What are such measures? It is disarmament that has principally attracted the enthusiasm of what may be called "the men of peace."

Disarmament, however, can be of two kinds. The kind that principally occupies public attention to-day is unilateral disarmament. It is proposed that either this country, or the alliance to which it belongs, should lay down its nuclear weapons without reference to what the other side may do.

I have only one thing to say on this: if one is prepared to accept its consequences, namely, compliance with the will, whatever it may be, of any State, or alliance of States, which does not lay down its nuclear arms, it is the obvious thing to do.

For those men and women who have faced these consequences, and accept them, I

have considerable respect. I cannot agree with them that this is either the right or the relevant approach to the matter. But it is certainly possible to argue that anything at all is better than to incur even the risk of nuclear war, and that risk can be wholly avoided only by inducing the alliance of which we are members unilaterally to disarm itself.

Nevertheless I cannot find much interest in this proposal. It is, no doubt, conceptually possible that the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament might succeed not merely in disarming and neutralising Britain, which could not possibly eliminate the risk of nuclear war, but also in inducing America, or even Russia, unilaterally to disarm herself. But the possibility of doing so appears too remote to be relevant. Moreover, I am fortified in this view by discovering that it is fully, if unexpectedly, shared by the most eminent figure, by far, of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Bertrand Russell writes in his new book, "Has Man a Future?": —

...there is a slogan invented by West German friends of peace: "Better Red than dead." One may guess that in some sections of Russian public opinion, there is an opposite slogan: "Better capitalists than corpses." I do not think it is necessary to inquire into the theoretical validity of either slogan since I think it out of the question that the one should be adopted by Western Governments or the other by the Governments of the East. Neither slogan presents justly the problem which East and West, alike, have to face. Given that military victory by either side is impossible, it follows logically that a negotiated *detente* cannot be based on the complete subjection of either side to the other but must preserve the existing balance while transforming it from a balance of terror to a balance of hope.

Exactly. If "Better Red than dead" is a false issue, what is there left except to go back to the familiar, often frustrating, but indispensable path of disarmament and *detente* by negotiation — of negotiations moreover which, as Russell writes specifically "cannot be based on the complete subjection of either side to the other."

DISARMAMENT:

(II) MULTILATERAL

We cannot, therefore, escape by any sort of heroic

short cut from a consideration of the whole complex and interlocked subjects of multilateral disarmament, and with that, of the interrelations and intentions towards each other of the Communist and "Western" alliance respectively.

I do not see how anyone can study the course of the disarmament negotiations since the nuclear age began without being forced to the conclusion that whenever these negotiations have been serious, they have raised the issue of the establishment of a world authority. True, they have not often been serious, in the sense that both sides, or even either side, have actually contemplated the implementation of the measures under discussion. Usually they have been mere exercises in "political warfare," which may be defined as the gentle art of putting the other fellow in the wrong.

On at least two occasions, however, disarmament negotiations in the nuclear age have been serious, in the above sense that the negotiating Governments did consider the possibility of imple-

menting the proposals under discussion. The first of these occasions was in 1946 when America proposed the Baruch plan for establishing an International Atomic Development Authority which was to have a world-wide monopoly of the production of atomic energy.

The second serious disarmament negotiations of the nuclear age were the long-drawn-out test ban negotiations at Geneva. The negotiators on both sides would agree, I think, that at various stages of these negotiations the implementation of the proposals under discussion was actually being considered. Here again this was because they, too, at least pointed in the direction of a world authority. A test ban treaty was at once a far more difficult thing to achieve, and would have been of far greater importance, than was widely realised. For its essence would have been that America and Russia should co-operate for the purpose of preventing the acquisition of a nuclear capacity by any other State — and consequentially, I fancy, of the abandonment of their exist-

ing, minor, nuclear capacities by Britain and France.

Thus each of the disarmament negotiations which have turned out to be serious have been those which pointed towards the goal of a world authority. This is because the alternative goal, which may perhaps be defined as a world of "generally and completely" disarmed, but still fully sovereign, States, is close to being a contradiction in terms.

THE GOAL OF A WORLD AUTHORITY

There is, indeed, a growing consensus — at least in words — from the present Prime Minister, through Mr. Duncan Sandys and Lord Attlee to Bertrand Russell, that the creation of some sort of world authority, possessing a monopoly of nuclear capacity, is the sole salvation for the human race in the nuclear age. Russell, as usual, puts the issue with incomparable clarity and force. He writes: —

...it seems indubitable that scientific man cannot long survive unless all the major weapons of war, and all the means of mass determination [destruction? J.S.] are in the hands of a single Authority, which, in consequence of its monopoly, would have ir-

resistible power, and if challenged to war, could wipe out any rebellion within a few days without much damage except to the rebels. This, it seems plain, is an absolutely indispensable condition of the continued existence of a world possessed of scientific skill.

Again the reader may be startled to find that Russell, and presumably the more extreme wing of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which he leads, are not agitating for the abolition of nuclear weapons after all. They are on the contrary proposing the establishment of one central arsenal of nuclear weapons in the hands of "a single Authority" which "could wipe out any rebellion within a few days without much damage except to the rebels."

A DOCTRINE OF TOTAL DESPAIR

However, verbal tributes to the goal of world government do not take us very far. They may be — indeed they are — brushed off by the practical, able, overworked men who run the "establishments" of the contemporary nation-States as the lucubrations of elderly philosophers or the perorations of parliamentarians. Nor do these

practical men lack able spokesmen for their scepticism. Their view was put by, for example, Mr. Hedley Bull in his recent work: "The Control of the Arms Race: Disarmament and Arms Control in the Missile Age." He wrote: —

We cannot expect that the establishment of a universal Government by contract amongst the nations rather than by conquest will be brought about by governments incapable of the most modest forms of co-operation.

Accordingly he stigmatises any discussion, even, of the possibility of a world authority as "a fantasy" and "a confusion of thinking about international relations and a distraction from its proper concerns." Again Sir William Hayter, writing in these columns on February 12, 1961, comes to the same emphatic conclusion: "Aiming at world government is now in my opinion actually wrong. It distracts our attention from what we ought really to be doing, which is to search for ways of living safely in an inevitably divided world."

These are not opinions that can be shrugged off: more especially as they are tacitly shared by, at a guess, 90 per

cent of all well-informed men. Indeed, were it not for one consideration, we should be forced to accept them. That consideration is that they are a doctrine of total despair. The more closely we study the state of the nuclear balance, the course of the disarmament negotiations, the intentions of the principal nation-States of the present-day world, or indeed the inherent nature of sovereign nation-States, the more surely we shall be forced to the following conclusion: though the avoidance of this or that potential war is a by no means impossible task, yet the abolition of war as a recurrent phenomenon in the relations of sovereign nation-States remains, as it always has been, impossible. Therefore in the nuclear age to accept the conclusion that the world must remain indefinitely a world of sovereign States is, in very truth, "to shut the gates of mercy on mankind." We can only conclude that the practical men have not even yet imaginatively assimilated the probable consequences of full-scale war in the nuclear age. — *The Sunday Observer*, London, December 24, 1961.