

A Course For The Disarmament Movement



by **JOE CAMILLERI**

After four years of frenetic activity, a sense of malaise has descended over the disarmament movement in Australia as in much of the Western World. During these years much has been achieved:

nuclear disarmament is once again on the political agenda; the darkening nuclear clouds loom larger than before in our newspapers, on our television and cinema screens, indeed in everyday discussion.

Yet the failures are equally obvious: Cruise and Pershing missiles are being deployed in Western Europe; in the United States, Congress has voted funds for the MX, a new first strike weapon, and the Reagan Administration is rapidly developing its Strategic Defence Initiative, more commonly known as Star Wars, which may cost as much as a trillion dollars and may destroy any prospect of arms control; in the meantime the militarisation of the Indian and Pacific Oceans has reached unprecedented levels.

Nor does our local situation give cause for satisfaction. The New Zealand Government has given an inspiring lead with its stand on nuclear ships, but it remains firmly committed to the ANZUS alliance, is doing all in its power to maintain the defence relationship with the United States and to support U.S. military and diplomatic objectives in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.

As for Australia, our nuclear ties remain intact: the bases, visiting warships, B52s, combined military exercises. The Labor Government's proposal for a South Pacific nuclear free zone has been specifically drafted to safeguard U.S. strategic interests in the region. The Foreign Minister and the Disarmament Ambassador take the high moral ground at international forums, safe in the knowledge that the positions they advocate, whether on nuclear testing, nuclear proliferation or chemical and biological weapons, will do nothing to undermine the strategic connection with the United States.

Several factors no doubt account for the difficulties of the disarmament movement. Foremost among these is the pervasiveness of the war system. The great powers have created military machines that reach out literally to every corner of the globe and influence almost every aspect of human activity. Australia's economic and political institutions, not to speak of her defence establishment, are much more sympathetically disposed to the interests of the American military-industrial

complex than to the wishes and aspirations of the disarmament movement.

The extraordinary sway of the war system over public opinion and policy-making processes cannot conceal, however, the movement's own inadequacies, at least as it is presently constituted. For all the progress made in recent years, it cannot be said that those who actively support nuclear disarmament are sufficiently numerous, well-informed, or adequately equipped in communications and political skills to grapple with the enormity of the task. The lack of sharpness and imagination in many PND campaigns, and their limited success in reaching out to the community, the dismal performance of the Labor Party, and the recent problems and divisions that have surfaced in the NDP are evidence of the problem.

Yet for all these obstacles and shortcomings, we must not be deflected from the historic journey on which we have embarked. Several now widely accepted propositions are worth restating here. First, the goal of nuclear disarmament is more urgent than ever before. Despite reassuring claims periodically made about the stability of the central balance, the inescapable fact is that the United States and the Soviet Union, with more than 40,000 nuclear weapons aimed and ready to fire at any moment, can, whether through madness, miscalculation or accident, end the human experiment in a matter of hours.

Secondly, the ground for the continued growth of the disarmament movement remains fertile. People everywhere, the young in particular, have a strong sense of impending crisis. While they may refuse to be fully informed about it or to discuss its implications, they are nevertheless increasingly disillusioned with the status quo and to that extent less hostile to those who would wish to challenge it.

Thirdly, Australia's part in the disarmament process could be as significant as is its current contribution to the arms race. Let there be no doubt as to the value U.S. military planners attach to the strategic connection with Australia.

Fourth, we now have the possibility of creating a truly international movement that not

only provides mutual support and legitimation for the various campaigns in each country, but acts as a catalyst for fashioning an alternative vision of the future.

The Battle of Ideas

In Australia, as elsewhere, success will ultimately depend on our ability to gain widespread acceptance for certain fundamental ideas. The argument is relatively simple and may be briefly summarised.

First, that the major struggle in the world today is not between East and West, that salvation does not lie in the preservation of either alliance system. On the contrary, both blocs represent an unacceptable concentration of power and wealth, they are both harnessing the destructive potential of human technology, they are both ethically deficient. Only the dissolution of the two blocs and the creation of a third force offer any hope for the future. To this extent our most critical objective is to shift the terms of the public debate away from Cold War stereotypes and towards a new conception of world order and civic responsibility. It cannot be said often enough that criticism of the American government in no way implies hostility to the American people or support for Soviet policies and actions.

Secondly, that deterrence is dead. A stable system of mutual deterrence is not compatible with the existing framework of superpower relations or with the accelerating competition in nuclear armaments. Developments over the last twenty years in both strategic doctrine and weapons systems have focussed on the extremely accurate targeting of enemy military facilities as part of a nuclear warfighting scenario. It is doubtful whether the ideological, institutional or technological underpinnings of the two opposing military-industrial complexes can be reconciled with the cessation the arms race, let alone substantial arms reductions.

Thirdly, that at this historical juncture the initiative for nuclear disarmament lies mainly with the allies of the two superpowers. Their institutions and culture are not so dominated by the Soviet or American military establishment as to preclude them from challenging reliance on the nuclear weapon as

the basis of their security. On the other hand, their strategic and diplomatic relationship with the Soviet Union or the United States is sufficiently close to make the challenge especially significant. In other words, allies can play a major part in breaking down the Cold War system and in encouraging a more pluralistic world order.

Fourth, that a policy of nuclear disengagement is the only viable option for those who wish to promote nuclear disarmament. It is only by refusing to co-operate with any activity that involves the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons that allied countries can make a significant moral statement and at the same time curb the trend towards vertical and horizontal proliferation.

Fifth, that the time has come to devise a new code of international conduct that outlaws all nuclear weapons and related military systems, establishes principles of non-intervention in the Third World, and ultimately decreases the role of military power in world affairs. A policy of nuclear disengagement can contribute to the implementation of such a code.

The foregoing ideas and proposals will not be easily or quickly accepted, but the level of community support they enjoy even now may be greater than many would care to imagine. The real test, however, is to translate abstract principle into concrete policy. The critical task of the Australian movement is to facilitate a major public debate about alternative foreign and defence policies that enshrine the concept of nuclear disengagement. The overriding aim must be to establish a regional security framework that excludes, or at least restricts, great power rivalry and promotes the non-military resolution of conflicts.

A National Campaign

Placed in this context, the National Conference to be held in Melbourne at the end of August represents a unique opportunity. The first task is to articulate with greater clarity and precision the requirements of nuclear disengagement. How can Australia implement such a strategy? What will be the implications for our foreign and defence policies? What obstacles will lie in the way? How can they be

overcome?

The Conference should go further and consider what might be the main outline of a national campaign over the next couple of years. Several criteria for assessing any proposal immediately come to mind: Are the demands of the campaign based on the principle of nuclear disengagement? Do they radically question the spirit and the letter of our nuclear alliance with the United States? Are they readily understandable by a wide cross-section of the community? Will the campaign achieve a high public profile? Will it generate a much better informed public debate?

A campaign to stop visits by nuclear warships would seem to fulfil most if not all of these conditions. Such a campaign can be used to highlight opposition to the deployment of Cruise and Trident missiles in the Pacific; it reinforces the New Zealand initiative; it neatly dovetails with the larger campaign for a nuclear free and independent Pacific. A carefully organised national campaign around the issue, supported by an intensive educational programme, can be expected to receive widespread public support and apply maximum pressure on the Labor Government in the lead-up to the 1986 ALP National Conference and the 1987 federal election.

But, as we all know, visiting nuclear ships are but the tip of the iceberg, one strand in an intricate web of entanglements that tie Australia to America's nuclear warfighting doctrines and weapons systems. For this reason a national campaign that goes to the heart of the problem must also focus on U.S. installations in Australia.

Much has recently been made by conservative politicians and academics of the allegedly stabilising functions of these installations. Particular attention has been drawn to the monitoring and verifying functions performed by the Pine Gap and Nurrungar satellite systems. Quite apart from the serious flaws in the arms control argument, especially in the current international climate, it is doubtful whether Pine Gap or Nurrungar are indispensable to the verification function, or, more to the point, whether the verification function is the principal purpose of these

facilities.

On the other hand, there is little doubt that their target acquisition and spying functions are, by definition, outside Australia's control or that they involve her in the development of highly destabilising nuclear strategies. A call, therefore, to bring these facilities under national or even international control is unlikely to achieve a great deal, except at best to encourage a protracted process of negotiation that will confuse the central issue and defuse the controversy.

The only honest and realistic option is to press for a complete break in the nexus that links Australia with the U.S. strategic command, control and communications network. Opposition should no doubt extend to all facilities that constitute this nexus. By the same token, an effective nationwide campaign may need to single out one or two targets for special attention. Given all that we know about Pine Gap and North West Cape, a campaign to terminate the relevant agreements, which are due to be renewed in 1987 and 1988 respectively, would seem particularly appropriate. The contribution we could make to the establishment of an international monitoring and verification agency is a separate and secondary consideration.

But these strategic choices, well founded though they may be, are in themselves insufficient to bring about the necessary shift in community attitudes. No campaign will succeed which does not respond to the deeply felt fears and insecurities of many white Australians. I am referring here not only to the fear of external attack or the colonial mentality which identifies national security with dependence on great and powerful friends, but to the innermost experience of despair, powerlessness and alienation in an increasingly atomised society that equates personal security with moral conformism, political passivity and retreat to a privatised world of immediate gratification.

A national campaign for nuclear disarmament requires, then, a cultural as much as a political strategy. It must become a melting pot of ideas, temperaments, social and ethnic backgrounds, a vehicle for

dialogue and action open not only to seasoned activists but to the presently depoliticised sections of our society, a bridge to the 'silent majority'. Care must be taken to ensure that the language used is not threatening but sensitive to deeply felt anxieties, that the symbolism of any action is widely understood, and that emphasis is placed on the neighbourhood and the workplace where word of mouth and face to face encounter are the most appropriate forms of communication.

In this connection, it is worth considering the revival and reconstruction of the Nuclear Free Zone Campaign, precisely because it fosters dialogue and community involvement. Such a campaign could be a powerful instrument in propounding the illegality of nuclear weapons and translating at the local level the national demand for nuclear disengagement. Nor is there any reason why the campaign should be confined to municipalities. It may be usefully extended to churches, schools, colleges, factories, hospitals and even households. The intention must be to combine moral statement, educational process and political campaign.

Finally, a word about the need to make connections. E.P. Thompson's concept of 'exterminism', whatever its weaknesses, does have the merit of relating the nuclear war machines to the economic, political and technological foundations of the two superstates. In other words, it is not possible to divorce nuclear violence from the psychological, economic, institutional and ecological disorders which afflict contemporary society.

While it would be inappropriate for the disarmament movement to adopt policy positions on many of these questions, it would certainly be in its interest to promote the widest possible understanding of the interconnection between different aspects of the present crisis. A key objective of any national or local campaign must be to encourage a coming-together of diverse movements, groups and individuals in order to discover the hitherto hidden potentiality of men and women, society and nature, and to explore more effective responses to the institutions and policies that threaten our common future.

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