

Soviet General Secretary should meet early in 1985. Their dual purpose should be to revive nuclear arms control negotiations in a single forum; stop the nuclear arms race by a selective freeze."

And Raymond Garthoff pleads that a last chance to control antisatellite weapons not be missed: "It is not yet too late to serve our true security interests by negotiating a ban, or at least sharp limitations, on testing and deployment of antisatellite (ASAT) systems. But time is running out. And although the Soviet leaders appear ready to discuss such an agreement, the Reagan Administration is at best highly reluctant." Knowing how many other "last chances" have been lost, it is difficult to be optimistic about this one.

Negotiations are one thing, trust is another, and it seems unlikely that an NWSM carrying a zero will appear before some repair work is done on US-Soviet relations. The best article in this *Bulletin* is by George Ball (1961-6 Undersecretary of State) who in effect concludes that the US first needs to do some repair work on itself. Two excerpts from his particularly colourful article follow:

"...we are stultifying ourselves when we base our policy on President Reagan's expressed assumption that, if the Soviet Union did not exist, the world could live in relative tranquility without "hot spots". The facts emphatically deny this. During the whole of the past decade, the developments that have most critically jeopardized and harmed Western interests have resulted from movements, actions and policies with which Moscow has had nothing to do." (Ball presents 11 examples, including OPEC's oil price increases, the Iran-Iraq war, religious feuding in Northern Ireland, and the comic opera conflict in the Falklands), and:

"Today we are not only pursuing a Brezhnev Doctrine of our own, but, driven by our habitual hatred of the Soviet Union and all its works, we are even imitating Soviet methods. There is no way we can reconcile our avowed national principles with such outrageous conduct as mining harbours and interrupting international traffic into Nicaragua - a clear act of war against a government with which we maintain formal diplomatic relations. We are behaving even more odiously when we reject the arbitrament of the World Court - again an action slavishly imitating the nation we habitually hate."

Habitual hate will never help. The alternative is provided in an Editorial on page 2 by the distinguished physicist Victor Weisskopf, commenting on the shadow of the Andrei Sakharov affair: "In my view intellectuals should denounce the infringement of civil liberties wherever they see it, but they must build bridges. We must live and let live."

I for one, for prefer bridges to bombs.

Grahame Kelly

NEWS FROM THE BRANCHES

SANA (SA)

At our meeting of 23 August, we were treated to an entertaining talk by Dr. David Blair (Physics Dept., Uni of W.A.) titled "Extraterrestrial Intelligence, Nuclear War and the Arms Race". This wide ranging talk looked at the evolution of intelligent civilizations on our own and other planets in our galaxy, the lifetimes of these civilizations, and the possible reason for their extinction. This followed on to a survey of the effects of past catastrophic events on the earth, (such as the impact of asteroids and explosion of volcanoes), and in the light of this evidence, the possibility that a limited or full scale nuclear war would result in the extinction of our civilization. We were left looking out into space (for little green men?) with the message of hope that the longer it is until we contact extraterrestrial intelligence the longer the lifetime of our civilization may be.

We are at present in the middle of organising a conference in conjunction with MAPW to be held on 24th November 1984. This conference will be titled "South Australians and the Arms Race" and will be split into four sessions that will look at (1) The Arms Race in the Pacific, (2) Nuclear Winter and other effects of nuclear war in the Northern Hemisphere, (3) Nuclear Politics;

Australia and New Zealand - why the difference? (4) What do you tell the Children about Nuclear War? We expect this one to evoke much interest.

For more details please contact Lindsay Frost, 1/2 Davenport Terrace, South Brighton, 5042.

The S.A. Branch currently has eight research projects in progress. The Convenors would welcome any correspondence.

- (1) **SANA'S PLAN FOR DISARMAMENT**
CONVENOR: ANDY EBERHARD
360 Carrington Street,
South Adelaide, S.A. 5000.
- (2) **STAR WARS AND THE ARMS RACE IN SPACE**
CONVENOR: IAN MCNICOL
13 Desaumarez Street,
Kensington Park, S.A. 5068.
- (3) **NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND URANIUM MINING**
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- (4) **BIOLOGICAL AND CHEMICAL WARFARE**
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- (5) **IMPLICATIONS OF FOREIGN MILITARY BASES IN AUSTRALIA**
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- (6) **INDIRECT EFFECTS ON S.A. OF A NUCLEAR WAR IN THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE**
CONVENOR: LEE TOROP
18 Cumming Street,
Blackwood, S.A. 5051.
- (7) **EDUCATING THE PUBLIC**
CONVENOR: LINDSAY FROST
1/2 Davenport Terrace,
South Brighton, S.A. 5042.
- (8) **HEALTH HAZARDS AT MARALINGA**
CONVENOR: LINDSAY FROST

Extinction Politics revisited

Brian Martin

Barrie Pittock¹ has criticised my views on the potential dangers of beliefs in nuclear doomsday for peace movement strategy². His criticism is most welcome, since one of my aims has been to generate thought and discussion about issues which are mostly taken for granted within the peace movement³. Here I will address some of the themes raised by Barrie by looking first at the strategy of the peace movement and then at the bias of science.

At the outset I would like to emphasise that I greatly respect Barrie's sincerity, commitment and efforts towards the cause of peace. But that does not mean we have to agree about strategy.

Peace movement strategy. How precisely do members of the peace movement expect to prevent or abolish war, or restrict its occurrence or consequences? Many people do not sit down to analyse this. They simply assume that when more and more people are concerned and speak up for peace, then somehow it will come about.

In Australia some of the principal goals of the peace movement are removal of US military bases, stopping uranium mining, establishing a nuclear-free zone in the region, and moving to a neutral and independent foreign policy. But how are these goals to be achieved? As I have analysed it⁴, most peace movement activities towards such goals are based on influencing elites, either by the power of rationality, by political pressure or by taking direct action.

My argument is that it is futile to expect appeals to elites to have any significant effect. For many decades the efforts of peace movements around the world have been oriented towards elites. They have consistently failed. For example, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s built its strategy around influencing the Labour Party. This had no lasting effect on the Labour Party defence policy, but had disastrous effects on CND.

Will the argument that nuclear war may cause human extinction have any significant effect on elite decision-making on these issues? There is no solid evidence that it will. After all, state elites believe that what they are doing is the best thing to do to preserve world order and peace. They are sincere, just as peace activists are sincere. Why then should an argument about the dangers of nuclear war change the minds of elites? They already know it is dangerous.

This conclusion is supported by the document Uranium, the joint facilities, disarmament and peace, authorised by the Minister for Foreign Affairs². In it the Australian government accepts the possibility that the world may be destroyed by nuclear war. It concludes that it should continue to mine uranium and host the US military bases. Indeed, it uses the nuclear winter arguments to justify maintaining the US bases. This shows that acceptance of the possibility or likelihood of nuclear extinction does not of itself lead to any specific conclusion about what to do about it.

Barrie writes that the possibility of extinction "makes the risks inherent in nuclear deterrence unacceptable to rational human beings"³. I disagree. 'Rationality' does not lead to a particular political conclusion, since there is no universal agreement about the appropriate means to achieve even those ends which are agreed upon.

My view is that elite-oriented approaches need to be supplemented by grassroots campaigns which challenge the institutional roots of war and create alternatives. Some promising campaign focuses are social defence, peace conversion and self-management. Some of the institutions which need to be challenged are the state, bureaucracy, the military and patriarchy⁴.

Those who believe that a nuclear war in the northern hemisphere would almost inevitably lead to nuclear winter extending to Australia, leading to death of most or all the world's population, might well conclude that nothing done in Australia to remove bases or ban visiting vessels would have any real effect. Australians would be totally at the mercy of state and military elites in the United States and the Soviet Union. The most obvious way to intervene would be diplomatically via the Australian government. This leads then to a policy of influencing Australian elites, who then in turn are expected to influence foreign elites. But as I have argued before, depending on the elites is a prescription for failure.

There are other ill effects of dependence on arguments that nuclear war may lead to extinction. Because of the complexity of the physical processes involved in nuclear winter, the debate over extinction is put at the level of experts. Secondly, there is the danger that the case against nuclear war may come to depend too much on extinction, the possibility of which might later be found to have been overestimated. It is politically sounder to rely on the unassailable claim that nuclear war would be a major human disaster with many millions of people killed.

The bias of science. It is straightforward to apply my analysis of the bias of science⁷ to disputes about the effects of nuclear war. Barrie assumes that it is sufficient to show that extinction cannot be excluded as a significant possibility. He then draws the political conclusion from this that "Even the most politically conservative person must be brought to realize that no cause and no ideal can be served by clinging to reliance on nuclear weapons"⁸.

In contrast, I am concerned about the preparedness of peace movements for the political consequences of nuclear crisis or nuclear war. Therefore for my purposes it is sufficient to show that extinction is not a necessary consequence of nuclear war.

Most of Barrie's comments on my views do not address our fundamental political disagreement, but focus on technical points about the effects of nuclear war. These are secondary in my opinion.

Barrie proceeds in the normal scientific pattern of presenting what he considers to be the 'objective' facts, and then drawing political conclusions from them. Apparently he does not consider that my analysis of scientific objectivity⁷ -- in which I argue that claims to objectivity can be a way of masking underlying value assumptions -- applies to his own arguments.

The political values underlying claims by scientists about the 'objective' facts about doomsdays have been nicely spelled out by Alan Roberts⁹. The political implications of doomsdayism for the peace movement in the late 1950s were spelled out at the time by Vernon Richards¹⁰.

By contrast to Barrie, I proceed by spelling out a political concern, namely that peace movement strategies do not take into account the possibility of social action during or after a nuclear crisis or war. Even without a nuclear war, a nuclear crisis could result in the imposition of repressive military or civilian rule in many parts of the world, with disastrous effects for the peace and other social movements³. I then muster evidence to show that nuclear crisis, limited nuclear war, or major nuclear war well short of causing extinction cannot be excluded by the evidence.

Conclusion. Nuclear war would be a terrible disaster, but the political implications of this are by no means so clear. Emphasising the possibility of human extinction from nuclear war -- whatever is one's assessment of the likelihood of that happening -- is not necessarily the most productive path for antiwar activists. Indeed, I argue that nuclear doomsdayism has many negative consequences. Appeals to scientific fact to back the case for nuclear extinction miss the point that different value assumptions underlie the political conclusions reached¹¹.

References

- 1 A. Barrie Pittock, 'Comment on Brian Martin's "Extinction politics"', SANA Update, number 20, September 1984, pages 13-14.
- 2 Brian Martin, 'Extinction politics', SANA Update, number 16, May 1984, pages 5-6.
- 3 On my views see also Brian Martin, 'Critique of nuclear extinction', Journal of Peace Research, volume 19, number 4, 1982, pages 287-300; Brian Martin, 'How the peace movement should be preparing for nuclear war', Bulletin of Peace Proposals, volume 13, number 2, June 1982, pages 149-159.
- 4 Brian Martin, 'Mobilising against nuclear war: the insufficiency of knowledge and logic', Social Alternatives, volume 1, numbers 6/7, June 1980, pages 6-11.
- 5 Uranium, the Joint Facilities, Disarmament and Peace (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1984).
- 6 Brian Martin, Uprooting War (London: Freedom Press, 1984).
- 7 Brian Martin, The Bias of Science (Canberra: Society for Social Responsibility in Science (ACT), 1979).
- 8 Barrie Pittock, 'Nuclear winter: its basis & implications', SANA Update, number 16, May 1984, pages 2-4. See also A. Barrie Pittock, 'Nuclear winter and its implications for Australia' (Submission to the Subcommittee on Disarmament and Arms Control, Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence), 1984. A similar view is presented by Paul Ehrlich, earlier a prominent prophet of doom from overpopulation: 'Nuclear winter: the inside story', CoEvolution Quarterly, number 42, Summer 1984, pages 88-94 (see page 94).
- 9 Alan Roberts, The Self-managing Environment (London: Allison and Busby, 1979), chapter 1.
- 10 Vernon Richards, Protest Without Illusions (London: Freedom Press, 1981), especially pages 7-11.
- 11 My thanks to Mark Diesendorf for useful comments on a draft of this reply.

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SANA Update aims to provide a balanced forum for news and views on matters of concern to SANA members.

Shortage of time and space, and problems of availability of material may lead occasionally to apparent partisanship in a particular issue; however, in these circumstances the editor(s) will attempt to provide a balancing viewpoint in future editions.

Opinions expressed in *Update* do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor(s), nor that of SANA.

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