

WRI

OPEN FORUM

THE MYTHS OF ALTERNATIVE DEFENCE

CIVILIAN DEFENCE

Time and again, during discussions at information stands or during disarmament events, I hear the idea of civilian defence regularly being put forward when - and only when - some reference is made to the threat posed by the actual military power of the USSR, or to people's feelings of being threatened. When this happens, it is often the case that those who point to the protection afforded by non-violent resistance themselves believe it improbable that the USSR would take complete unilateral disarmament by the Federal Republic as a cue for military action or political blackmail. They believe this not because they regard the USSR as a peace power - those who do don't normally make proposals for non-violent defence - but because they consider the Soviet leadership realistic enough not to expect too much in the way of gains from this, and to realise that the USA would 'get involved' even without a cry for help from Germany.

CIVILIAN DEFENCE AS A TRANQUILLIZER?

A similar attitude is to be found amongst many peace researchers who develop alternative defence concepts as some sort of response to the anxieties and desire for defence of the broad mass of the population, who otherwise would not be willing to support any disarmament or re-conversion strategy.

When civilian defence or similar ideas are regarded in this way as 'tranquillizers' to calm people's feelings of being threatened, rather than as an essential constituent of a demilitarization strategy, there lurks at the back of this notion a certain picture of how disarmament would work and what the obstacles are. According to this picture, the reason why one's own army cannot be disarmed immediately is that there exists a rival military power which may present some threat. This applies both to 'defensive concepts' of a military kind, such as Horst Afheldt's "Technocommandos", and to more or less antimilitary concepts such as those of Andreas Buro and Hanne Birckenbach and Christian Wellmann...which I here quote as an example. "The peace movement's attempt to push through the idea of complete unilateral disarmament working from the bottom up is doomed to failure because of the hardened attitudes regarding the need for security, and because of the growing feeling the population has of being under threat.

This is all the more so since these are not fears which one could somehow calm. The difficulty is that these fears have acquired a basis in reality. The stockpiles of arms may have come about as a result of some distorted picture of the enemy, but the actual armaments capacity is no ghost - it is a reality. By projecting our paranoid image onto the enemy, we have created real conditions which can no longer be removed simply by rectifying the image. The existing instruments of destruction - our own and those of the enemy - constitute a threat. Those who take a radical unilateral line (explained by Graswurzel editors as 'complete, unilateral disarmament) overlook this situation." (ami 3/81 III-40)

ARMAMENTS - AGAINST AN OVER-EMPHASIS OF EXTERNAL FACTORS

There is a further important aspect the peace researchers and army reformers overlook - a distorted paranoid image of the enemy has hardly ever been the reason for the development of arms potential. (Whose image would it be? the government's? the people's? the army's?) The decisive factors in the acquisition of arms and the process of militarisation have nothing to do with any rival military power. They arise from the economic and political interests of the national and multinational elites in the power blocs in question, and these are only too pleased to manipulate the 'desire for security' amongst the population. This motive has been clearly present in the military policy of the USA since at least the nineteen-forties. The USA's aim was to secure or to safeguard imperialist objectives, access to markets, raw materials, trade routes and the strategic positions necessary to protect these - especially in the Third World. The military power of the USSR is too great to be explained merely in terms of a defensive function 'forced upon them by the West'; here too, the military plays an important role in stabilising the power structure, and has done so on the domestic political scene since the foundation of the USSR. Yet it is not only the super powers who pursue economic and political objectives with military methods; smaller European countries have waged - and continue to wage - wars of subjugation, as witnessed by the examples of Belgium (the Congo), Portugal (Africa), France (Africa), Britain (Northern Ireland). Here too, the military acts as emergency back-up against any social movements, and this role, because it has nothing to do with spectacular new (atomic) arms systems, has been

almost completely ignored by the German peace movement. In the final analysis, there can be no state without an army or some such armed force, because if the state should give up its ability to intervene in conflicts, then it would be giving up that which, by definition, makes it a state - ie the capacity, if necessary, to impose on its citizens the 'common will', however that will came about (by parliamentary democracy, 'centralised democracy' or open dictatorship).

In making these observations, I do not intend to say that an army presents no threat to the population of a rival bloc; neither do I wish to maintain that the forces which wish to remove the military completely and set to work to do this in a radical way in their own country, that these forces should not take seriously the anxieties of the population. However, I do wish to raise the question as to why alternative concepts of defence are not eagerly seized upon by those in power and by the military, if these concepts offer so many political advantages (it would be a purely defensive, democratic system) and financial and defence advantages (in case of actual war, it would not destroy that which it sought to defend), and provide a realistic form of protection for the population against the threat posed by the other side.

REVOLUTION A PREREQUISITE?

One answer comes to mind immediately: the internal (endogenous) causes of the arms situation play a much greater role (compared to the external ones) than many peace researchers engaged in formulating concrete demilitarisation plans realise or are prepared to realise. Governments, economic elites - and above all the military - have only a very limited interest in a system of civilian defence for society. Theodor Ebert, Egbert Jahn and other peace researchers are quite right when they point out that one must not expect any commitment to the development of a civilian defence capacity from these groups, and that others must be found to sponsor the idea. They believe this role should go principally to grass roots groups. The question we must ask ourselves is whether the government and the military will tolerate the development of a defence capability by certain groups within society - especially when it goes hand in hand with criticism of, and resistance to, the armed agents of power of the state. I am quite convinced that the economic, political and military elites (of each and every state) will bring all the forces at their disposal into play in order to defend their interests and to prevent the disarming of the last means they have of exercising their power - ie the armed forces. In a state which is functioning normally and still has its armed forces intact, the attempt to carry out 'reconversion' to civilian defence or even just to a 'defensive' system of defence, will, if it implies a change in the military status quo, come up against the bitter resistance of the government and must, in the long run, give rise to the fear that the country's own armed forces or those of their allies will be deployed against it.

To introduce a non-violent defence strategy, and thus also to deprive the military of its powers and to disarm it is therefore (and not

just in the Federal Republic) a revolutionary act which oversteps the bounds of what will be tolerated by the state - whether the peace movement likes it or not. In the light of these observations, one aspect put forward by a few advocates of civilian defence, namely, that civilian defence can be used as much against those responsible for coups in one's own country as against foreign aggressors, becomes of paramount importance: the very attempt to bring about civilian defence probably requires that it (civilian defence) be used against one's own armed forces or those of one's military allies: and the assumption by most theorists that the established 'legal' government, in its capacity as defender of the people's interests, will head society's resistance movement, is not valid in this case.

DEFENDING THE REVOLUTION

Other political forces are confronted with a similar problem from a different quarter: groups fighting for social and economic self-determination or for an ecological, free, socialist society, and associating these objectives with social revolution - ie a fundamental change in social conditions, removing power from the state and military rulers and the capitalist and bureaucratic elites now ruling society, and placing it in the hands of those at present without any power, the exploited and the oppressed. War resisters who are 'determined not to support any kind of war and to strive for the removal of all causes of war' (Declaration of the WRI), and who consider that the main causes of war cannot be removed without social revolution, represent the point at which these groups overlap with those who are striving to achieve non-violent defence and, alongside this, to disarm the armed forces and deprive them of their power.

When such groups are successful, ie when their objectives and struggle win some broad base in society, when the government is so discredited and weakened that it has to make substantial concessions, and when real power is transferred to new groups and institutions - ie when the old order is on the decline - then the revolutionaries will be faced with the problem of defending their gains and the new society now slowly developing against the representatives of the old order who will have recourse to their last weapon - military oppression. There have been examples of this in quite recent times, and currently we have the experience of El Salvador, where a spent regime is being bolstered by the military; with every new day we are once again faced with the possibility that the military will intervene and put back the clock on the hard-won concessions of the Polish workers and the rapid disintegration of the conservative/bureaucratic powers within the Polish Workers' Party.

CIVILIAN DEFENCE IN THE PERIOD OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Any system for defending the achievements of the revolution should not itself put those achievements at risk. In the situation under discussion, free socialists cannot depend upon military methods of defence since these would necessarily lead to the militarisation of the revolutionaries and thus put their objectives at

risk. It is also probably beyond the capacity of any society to perform the great constructive task of setting up a free society, and at the same time to make the efforts and sacrifices necessitated by modern warfare. (This was the experience of the Spanish anarchists in 1936-38.) If the revolutionaries want to start preparing now for the defence of the revolution, they must plan non-violent methods of struggle and resistance - ie begin applying civilian defence during the period of social change. Their position is similar to that of the anti-militarists who must apply civilian defence methods if they wish to get civilian defence adopted.

If these two different currents wish to succeed, they can only do so together, and the aim they have in common will be to get rid of the military (beginning with their own), and to build up a system of non-violent defence for society, working from the grass roots up. Our society is not such as to allow 'reconversion' from military to civilian defence simply because a majority of the population desires it; it requires a powerful 'social attack' on the military in order to topple it. The methods used in the course of this 'social attack' - ie the whole range of methods of exercising power non-violently, from non-cooperation to civilian take-overs - are also the foundations of a system of civilian defence for the new society. The attack of the military is the best 'manoeuvre' there could be for civilian defence, and the non-violent revolutionaries must therefore see to it that as many people as possible take an active part in it.

PROSPECTS AND TASKS

When one looks at the present situation in the Federal Republic and the prospects for a radical, revolutionary, non-violent, anti-militarist movement, then two things emerge:

- 1 We are not in a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation. Governments can rely on the support of a more or less favourably disposed majority of the population. Despite the massive criticisms of certain minorities in regard to central questions such as energy, traffic, arms, economic and social policies, only a tiny minority find the conditions so oppressive that they consider revolution necessary.
- 2 As far as the question of nuclear energy and nuclear weapons is concerned, the current decade promises some bitter conflicts between those in power and an increasingly widespread opposition. In an overall situation of economic stagnation, of revived imperialist tendencies on the part of the USA, of an expected weakening of NATO in European countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Britain, the government's room for manoeuvre as far as concessions to the anti-nuclear movement are concerned could become tight, and at the same time, its ability to achieve integration and to put through its measures in the face of social opposition could be drastically reduced. This means the revolutionary non-violent forces have no reason to sit back and wait for something to happen. Within the next ten years, a situation could come about in

which an increased opposition would have to defend the concessions it had obtained against massive pressure - even to the point where paramilitary and military forces would be used (something in the style of Plogoff). Then everything would depend on whether a 'non-violent defence potential' had been created by then which would be able to cope with the escalating situation.

NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE MUST BECOME THE 'NORM'

In conclusion, I wish to outline briefly what follows from these observations in the way of tasks for the revolutionary non-violent movement for the next ten years.

- 1 For many people, the most difficult feature of non-violent methods of struggle - especially when they are illegal - is that they are unfamiliar and overstep the limits of everyday thinking. It is therefore important that as many people as possible gain experience of direct non-violent action, civil disobedience, encounters with the police and the law, before social conflicts come to a head and the risks involved in resistance increase. Direct action with as broad a participation as possible can help to make resistance a normal everyday phenomenon - even if the actual objectives of the action are not attained - and to reduce the deterrent effect of the machinery of repression in many people's minds.

CIVILIAN DEFENCE EVEN WITHOUT 'LEADERSHIP'

- 2 In the concepts they have outlined to date, peace researchers have worked on the assumption that an established order would defend itself against attack and that the legally appointed government would head the resistance to it. Current theories have not dealt adequately with the question as to what the correct reaction of the protagonists of civilian defence would be in a case where the 'legal' institutions did not set themselves on the side of the resistance movement by the people, but on the side of the aggressor. The theorists of civilian defence should deal with the problem of how a resistance movement can prevent resistance collapsing if the leadership abandons it. They should not, for example, be satisfied with drawing the conclusions that the Czech leadership in 1968 brought the resistance to the Warsaw Pact occupation to a standstill against the wishes of the people. They should look for answers to the question of what conditions would have been needed, and what methods society could have used to maintain resistance even without the government.

INTERNATIONALISM THROUGH NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE

- 3 One important feature of civilian defence is international support for resistance. This carries the struggle against the aggressor into the territories of his trading partners and allies - even into his own country. It is conceivable that civilian defence could have some prospect of success even in situations where it is faced with an aggressor who is economically and numerically far superior, simply because there is strong

international solidarity with the defenders. The same is true for other liberation struggles and social struggles. This international solidarity holds the promise of reciprocity and it, too, must become a 'normal' attitude, whilst lack of interest in unintentional and often veiled support for oppression and exploitation in other countries must become an 'abnormal' attitude. Nowadays we are asked mainly to support struggles taking place on the periphery of industrial society - against the economic exploitation and military repression of the people in El Salvador, for example, or against the rape of the land and the genocide menacing the Indians because of the natural resources lying beneath their land, against the expulsion of the Sami people and the destruction of their sources of food by the building of a dam on the Alta River (northern Norway)- all 'projects' in which German companies and politicians are involved either directly or indirectly - we are asked, as usual, to organise resistance, to mobilise public opinion and above all, to carry out economic and political boycotts. We are not always asked to do these things by those affected, and even more rarely do

those affected themselves have any comprehensive economic strategy which would make our boycott an important, perhaps decisive, contribution to their victory, as was the case, for example, in the struggle of the American agricultural workers' union (UFW) for humane working and living conditions and the freedom to organise themselves. Yet it is always important to develop our strongest weapon - our economic power as consumers and producers - and to acquire a feel for this weapon. Just as important is the strengthening of our alliances all over the world, and the building up of international cooperation between citizens against companies, governments and armed forces, thus creating a basis for the international support which we should urgently need should the conflicts in our country reach a critical point.

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