

nership in this country between the political parties and campaigning organisations; the relationship between electoral and pressure or protest politics is often misunderstood and abused. Politicians neglect their responsibilities and leave the campaigners to do their work for them and seem to believe that by the simple act of declaring their support or opposition to an organisation they are making a complete political statement. The campaigners on the other hand are tempted into thinking that their activities are a substitute for party and electoral politics, not a compliment to it, and thus often leave themselves isolated when important battles are being played out.

There is another and more dangerous trap. Frequently it is assumed, quite wrongly, that there is only one party in a position to be influenced by campaigning politics and that it is the duty of, say, CND activists to rally behind a particular electoral position when CND itself has derived what political success it has from the very fact that it is a broad coalition that welcomes support from all political parties. The result is cynicism and divisions; one lesson of 1983 is that the Labour Party did the cause of disarmament no good when it 'adopted' CND and left it at that. Neither did the peace movement when it did so little to correct the impression that it and Labour were as one and, often, that it could see only minor differences between Tory and Alliance candidates.

The disaster of the 1983 campaign for those of us interested in peace was exactly the result of this failure to maintain the broadest possible support for disarmament and detente and the inability of either the party politicians or the peace movement to see the need to negotiate a workable arrangement that would see us through the stress and examinations of an election campaign. We will have to get it right next time.

PADDY ASHDOWN **A new partnership**

The rise of the peace movement, which we are still experiencing, represents the biggest challenge for our political parties. So far they have largely responded with typical caution and a lack of imagination. This was illustrated no better than at the last general election when, as James Hinton reminds us (*MT* April), popular opposition to specific new weapons failed to translate into support for a new defence policy.

In large part this was predictable. We have rarely constructed a convincing part-

From this already weak base the peace argument was more than vulnerable to the divisions within Labour (itself a relatively new and hesitant supporter of disarmament) which undermined the case for peace and weakened those in all parties who were trying to challenge the government position. The debate was conducted as an exchange of slogans when hope lay in exposing the logical bankruptcy of the Government's case. Too many sought new 'litmus tests' of commitment to the cause when they should have been combining around steps towards peace. The range of alternative defence policies were never even discussed leaving the electorate rightly sceptical about the extent to which opposition parties had thought any of them through.

Hinton is quite right to suggest that we must now be more thorough and convincing about those alternatives but we will have to go into more detail than he suggests. Indeed, while the idea of his Defence Charter seems sensible, there is nothing in the small print that takes us beyond 1983.

The campaign to reassemble a coalition for peace is now underway in the Liberal Party and the Alliance. The motion passed at the 1984 Liberal Assembly, and supported on the final vote by David Steel, provides as good a basis as any for such a process.

Part of our task, of course, is to put aside the often academic and unhelpful distinction between unilateralists and multilateralists. We have to operate in the international context; there is no such thing as 'security in one country': the nuclear winter has put paid to that. We have to say that cruise missiles are just as dangerous in Belgium and Germany as they are here and that we wish to see greater European collaboration to alter NATO strategy. We have to say that the

crucial divide is that between those who are serious about disarmament (however confused or imperfect they might be in their commitment) and those who are not.

The Liberal Party is committed, as it has been since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to a series of unilateral steps that it would take within a strategy of multilateral negotiations. It is beginning to think strategically about the processes of disarmament and has thus also begun to confront the old multilateralists with the need to think through their position as well. In short, the Party has begun, albeit imperfectly, to politicise the defence debate, seeing it in a political and strategic context and seeking policy positions that will unite those who work for peace.

Perhaps this explains James Hinton's passing interest in Liberal defence thinking. If he is serious, however, about building bridges through a Defence Charter he ought not to work to build splits within the Alliance. We make no apology for our dialogue with the SDP on defence. Don't forget that there was a unanimous vote of Alliance MPs against the deployment of cruise missiles and that this was in itself an important stage in the isolating of government thinking and a tribute amongst others to the work of the peace movement. Don't forget that David Owen, as co-signatory and one of the chief architects of the Palme report, supports the idea of a European Battlefield Nuclear Weapon free zone. There are many, indeed, within the SDP who entered politics precisely because of the failure of the conventional parties to break the log-jam of escalation and arms race. They need to be encouraged and sustained through a difficult period.

Our political work needs to aim at bringing people with us, at winning and coaxing them to more progressive positions through discussion and debate and

not constantly at challenging and alienating all those who do not immediately signify their willingness to journey all the way with us. In the crucial journey and back from what Lord Mountbatten referred to as 'the final abyss', it is the first steps which are the vital ones. The Liberal Party has always opposed Britain's independent nuclear deterrent for instance, but it would be wrong to throw overboard those who say that they would rather negotiate it away. The recent experience of New Zealand ought to have convinced us of just how strong and deep must be the public support for any process of disarmament if it is to survive pressure from the US.

James Hinton is right to suggest that we ought to be doing more to establish the ground on which defence could be debated at the next election. A Defence Charter could certainly go some way in helping to define what is politically achievable. Some of the necessary work is also being done in the mounting attack on the decision to purchase Trident. The anti-cruise campaign, too, is still strong and can mobilise wide support aided by the extraordinary behaviour of Michael Heseltine. We must all monitor events in Geneva closely and critically.

But there is no alternative to the hard political work of mapping out an alternative defence policy for the future and winning a consensus to it. To do so will require a new partnership between the peace movement and the political parties in which each acknowledges and respects the role of the other. They both need each other if another disaster on the scale of 1983 is to be avoided.

We welcome your contributions to the Viewpoint section subject to available space. Please write not more than 600 words and send it to the Editorial Office by 3 June. Please enclose a description of yourself for our Notes on Contributors.

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