



MICHAEL RUSTIN
Flexing Europe's muscles



Jon Bloomfield's discussion of the growing pressure for a strengthened European identity is valuable and timely. It contributes to the shift of opinion currently taking place on the Left towards a more European view. While some Labour leaders still try to out-patriot Mrs Thatcher when they need something to say in a hurry, there are at least some signs of a more international outlook.

Bloomfield, however, underestimates the importance of decisions yet to be made on European coordination. He overstates the case to see Europeanisation as 'an irresistible process'. Putting it that way obscures the need to decide whether and how to support integration, when the Left's commitment may be crucial. In the chapter in my book to which Bloomfield refers, I argue that there is a European dimension to the strategy of 'class alliances'. There is a more favourable balance of class forces in Western Europe than in the United States, and thus something to be gained from greater European cooperation. Also, the support of working class movements may be needed by more progressive sections of capital to achieve the European scale of organisation that is now a precondition of competitiveness. The dim prospects of go-it-alone reflation have been amply exposed by the Mitterrand experiment. There may be grounds for progressive class compromises on a European plane whose closest precedent is the various national reconstructions after 1945.

Unfortunately various hard decisions have to be made if this is to come about. It means strengthening the powers of the European parliament, and binding European legislation on civil, social and ecological rights. (As John Palmer has pointed out, EEC provisions in many of these areas are now in advance of Britain's.) This would undoubtedly mean some loss of British sovereignty, just as the enforcement of civil rights in the USA meant limiting the powers of the states. But Bloomfield resists these implications, instead wanting to have it both ways. He says

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the 'need is for a national perspective to be "harmonised" with a wider European perspective. While the necessity for various types of European cooperation is accepted, the power to undertake effective national action needs to be retained.' If each nation retains its existing powers, joint action will remain blocked.

There are reasons for being hopeful about better relations between West and East Europe. The economic opportunities of greater trade with the Eastern bloc are indeed one of the main material grounds of a more 'European' and less 'Atlanticist' orientation. There is reasonable hope of some economic and perhaps cultural liberalisation in the Soviet Union, which would also have beneficial effects in the West.

But on these issues too, Bloomfield underestimates the difficulties. Essential to disarmament on a European plane is some recognition of military balance, albeit at a much lower level of forces. Bloomfield's broad formulation of 'a nuclear-free Europe' hardly acknowledges this. It is probably better to start with the idea of smaller zones of disengagement than with Utopian ideas of continent-wide disarmament. A similar unrealism slips out in his reference to 'democratic dialogue with all forces in Eastern Europe - detente from above and below'. There should be as much dialogue as possible, but 'democratic dialogue' is merely a slogan.

Finally let me turn to the difficult issues of European defence and nuclear policy. I've argued that Western Europe will only become more independent of the US if the Europeans' own anxieties about security are allayed. This might happen should Soviet-American relations improve. It might also be helped by greater European military cooperation. In the field of defensive conventional weapons, there is good reason to support this.

On nuclear weapons, there is no doubt about the need for major reductions of forces. The problem is that large majorities want to retain some form of last-resort nuclear deterrent. While unilateral initiatives can gain support, it seems unlikely that total British or West European disarmament will do so short of a nuclear catastrophe occurring. What then should we practically aim for? One option is

removal of American bases and the independent deterrent, within NATO, while the Americans agree to maintain an unconditional guarantee of West European security. There are problems in winning majority support for this view. It also seems inconsistent with the aim of greater European independence.

Another option now being canvassed is to increase European control of nuclear weapons, by transfer of British and French systems to European command, and perhaps by veto powers on the use of NATO systems. If this were combined with a large overall reduction of NATO weapons it *might* add up to a significant disarmament. Nor need it amount to proliferation considering that there are already British and French nuclear systems. There could be benefits from this in terms of greater West European independence and willingness to seek independent security arrangements with the East.

The peace movement has to explore possible lines of accord with such mainstream groups as have a real interest in disarmament. It must also take care lest discussions of compromise positions don't merely demoralise the movement and thus lessen its power to influence events. I raise these difficult issues of nuclear policy not as a decided advocate of a particular line, but rather to assist in their clarification.