

## Rethinking Unilateralism

Jon Bloomfield's ill-titled piece on re-thinking unilateralism (*MT* Dec 87) is a thoughtful and incisive contribution to an urgent and necessary debate.

Jon's analysis of the way in which the dramatic breakthrough in superpower disarmament negotiations, and the revolutionary new Soviet approach to the problem of peace has altered the terrain of political debate about nuclear weapons is indisputable.

But this does not mean an 'abandonment' of unilateralism, as the introduction to Jon's article suggests. There are two flaws in his argument.

First, there is no strategic view of the role of the peace movement. The defining aspects of the peace movement are its protest, its lobbying, and its mass character which cuts across all political boundaries. Moral revulsion from nuclear weapons on our soil, or for which we are responsible, forms one basis for the movement. Another is the desire to break Britain's 'special relationship' with the US.

Unilateral nuclear disarmament by Britain has always been a unifying demand which has held a very disparate movement together. Any analysis of the way forward for British defence policy must look at the strategic relationship of the peace movement to public opinion.

The second, related, problem

### Challenging Deterrence

On what basis does Jon Bloomfield (*MT* Dec) describe the demand for unilateral nuclear disarmament by Britain as insular?

Any policy that does not oppose possession of nuclear weapons and refuses to countenance British use of nuclear weapons is likely to cause confusion. Jon's claim that British unilateralism is less influential today because this country is now just a medium-sized power is quite extraordinary. Moves by Britain towards rejection of nuclear weapons would have an enormous impact, in Europe and the world.

The tragedy of Labour's position is that it does not argue and campaign for unilateral nuclear disarmament or unilateral steps in a convincing way, and

with Jon's analysis concerns the way a future Labour government would seek to remove Trident. There is only a semantic distinction, he says, between independently scrapping Trident and urging the Soviet Union to make reciprocal reductions, and negotiating it away in bilateral talks.

But to agree to *negotiate* on Trident would have two very serious consequences. It would mean relinquishing control over the outcome of the talks and the timetable for removal, making the policy a hostage to complex international forces. Worse, it would acknowledge, or be seen to acknowledge, the strategic value of the independent deterrent - for you can't do a deal if you've nothing of value to give away - and thus draw maximum attention to the disparity between what the two sides are giving up.

In setting the debate about British nuclear weapons firmly in the context of the exhilarating new possibilities for arms reductions and detente, it is vital that we do not relegate nuclear disarmament to the level of global politics, depriving the peace movement of the purchase it needs to change political boundaries. The trick is to avoid either fetishising unilateralism, or 'retreating' from it - but to make it a credible part of a radically new foreign policy for Britain. •

*Elena Lieven, Manchester*

by omission gives credence to the arguments underlying British policy for the last 30 years.

It also seems unable to respond in any effective and imaginative way to Soviet initiatives. Both Chernenko and Gorbachev have stated clearly that disarmament steps by Britain would get an immediate reciprocal response from the Soviet Union.

Unilateral nuclear disarmament is a widespread phenomenon. It is enshrined in the non-proliferation treaty, agreed on the understanding that the nuclear powers would move quickly to disarmament. The non-nuclear countries supporting this are a daily rejection of the deterrent argument. British peace policy must challenge the deterrent theory. •

*Gerry Pocock, London*

### Violent Screen Play

Rosalind Coward's article on tv violence (*MT* Dec) was a valuable attempt to rationalise an increasingly eccentric debate. But I hope that some of her analysis was not based on a misreading. Some in the BBC welcomed the chance to take advantage of Hungerford to subvert attitudes to the portrayal of violence, and undoubtedly the BBC confused the issue by its inept handling of the situation. But the original decision to cancel or delay certain programmes had at its heart something more basic - tact. As was pointed out at the time, *The Poseidon Adventure* would not have been broadcast on the night of the Zeebrugge

disaster.

What television shows will always be a problem. Unless an anti-censorship line is taken there must be choices and limits; these ultimately will be based on a mixture of analysis and gut feeling. The obscenity bill supporters who would allow *The A-Team* while outlawing bare bums in *The Singing Detective* are informed by their own political perspective and prejudices.

The Left must take the debate about broadcasting seriously. But we must not be seduced by an agenda which we did not initiate, and have no control over, simply to avoid feeling left behind. •

*Mike Campbell, London*

### Marxist Recipes

'Feast without Flesh', (*MT* Dec), very good. But ... a green salad, give your average

reader a bit of credit, you'll be giving recipes for beans on toast next!

*Gaius Powell, Hull*

### Dear Stuart. ..

I was very pleased to get your letter saying you won't be coming home for Christmas (*MT* Dec). Actually I was just trying to pluck up courage to tell you not to come. I've sold the video and the tv - and the spare bed -

to pay for two weeks cross country skiing in Switzerland over Christmas, with sessions of transcendental meditation in the evening. I think it sounds a lot more fun than our traditional Christmas. O

*Your loving mum*

### Personal Politics

Two articles (*MT* Dec) stand out, Rosalind Brunt's 'The Left's Hallelujah Chorus' and Stuart Cosgrove's 'Dear Mum'. Both display wit and charm in a direct and realistic manner that points the way forward for

the stricken Left. By addressing 'personal politics' they allow an intimacy that attaches itself to the 'private politics' of Thatcherism and at the same time undermines it.

Keep up the good work. •

*Robert Watson, London*

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