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Next Steps in British Foreign Policy

What are the essentials of a Socialist foreign policy for Great Britain to-day? First and foremost that we recognise absolutely the sheer futility of piling up armaments for the purpose of defence; for to-day all armed force is essentially aggressive and can serve no defensive purpose. A single power, in exclusive possession of nuclear weapons, would have all the world at its mercy, if it could bring itself to use them, or even to threaten plausibly so to do. But in a world in which more than one country possesses the means of destroying its adversaries, war becomes suicide as well as mass-murder; and there is no good reason for wishing to destroy one's enemy when one is certain to be destroyed oneself.

Nuclear weapons, then, serve no purpose at all, except the suicidal impulse of aggression. If we suffer from no such impulse, there is no reason why we should wish to possess them and every reason for keeping our country free of them, whether they belong to ourselves or to others. It follows that we must get rid of American bases on British soil and cease to form part of NATO or of any other military alliance, and that we must renounce our present subordination to American military policy, which is still based on the belief that war can serve significant human purposes.

This, we are told, would mean leaving all Western Europe at the mercy of Soviet attack. But does anyone seriously suppose that the Soviet Union's leaders contemplate a military attack on Western Europe? As matters stand, such an attack would undoubtedly bring in the Americans and involve total nuclear war, in which the combatants would fatally destroy each other; and the Soviet Union's leaders are certainly not mad enough to provoke such a war. Moreover, even if it is argued that, should the Americans too renounce nuclear weapons, there will be nothing to stop the Soviet Union from pursuing objects of conquest free from all restraining force, it remains true, I feel sure, that wars of conquest play no part in the plans of the Soviet leaders, who mean to pursue their campaign of ideological unity not by conquest in arms but by demonstrating their own capacity to overtake and surpass the accomplishments of the countries subject to capitalism, and hope also to witness the collapse of such countries' economies under the contradictions of their profit-seeking methods. I can feel no doubt that the Soviet leaders are

G. D. H. Cole : British Foreign Policy

9

genuine in this, and do not mean to seek victory by armed force, even if they could hope to do so without paying the penalty of self-destruction. I admit, however, that this proposition is not, like the other, self-evident, and that it is conceivable that the Soviet Union could be tempted into armed aggression by the prospect of immunity. I do not think this likely, but I admit the bare possibility of it. Even so, the danger would not be a whit greater if Great Britain were to leave NATO and to declare its neutrality in the cold war; for the nuclear deterrent, once it has reached the point of being a deterrent, does not become any more so by increasing the force behind it. When two potential combatants are in a position to destroy each other if they go to war, there is no addition to the deterrence through rendering them able to destroy each other twice over; and the power for mutual destruction of both the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. is already amply enough for this. Great Britain and other lesser countries, by providing bases closer to the homeland of the Soviet Union, doubtless add to the power of the U.S.A. for aggressive action and for retaliation too; but this value is much greater for aggression than for defence or counter-attack because they could probably be put out of action by an aggressor before there would be time to launch a counter-attack from them. What such bases do is primarily to make certain the destruction of the countries which harbour them, if war breaks out. It is fantastic to suggest that they make any except a negative contribution to the security of the countries in which they are placed.

What is needed, however, is not merely a cessation of the cold war-at least of British participation in it but in addition a real and sincere attempt to arrive at terms of friendship, and not merely of peaceful co-existence, with the Soviet Union, China, and the Communist satellites. Such a situation is clearly not attainable in a state of mind in which each affected country insists on regarding itself and its institutions as all-wise and all-just and those of the other as all-evil and wrongly based. It is necessary to recognise that on each side of the iron curtain there are some good things present and others missing that where we in the West enjoy to a considerable extent personal and group freedoms that are sadly lacking in the Communist countries, they on their side have shown their ability, on a foundation of public ownership, to mobilise the resources of production and to advance in scientific and technological research at a pace beyond any that has ever been achieved before in history, and to establish the most comprehensive and the most democratic educational system in the world, while confining the expression of social thought-thought itself can be confined only to a limited extent -within the framework of a dogmatic orthodoxy that seems to us to be quite appallingly misleading and restrictive of personal free-

dom. This restrictiveness has undoubtedly become less oppressive to the ordinary Soviet citizen during the past two or three years; but it still presses heavily on the writers and artists, as well as on anyone who holds and wishes to express even mildly unorthodox opinions on economic or political questions. For it is still assumed that there is only one correct opinion on any such matter, and that this is in the guardianship of the Communist Party; so that deviation can at any time be denounced as treason; whereas in the Western countries there is a tradition of unrestricted debate and no assumption is made that a particular party is always in the right. As against all this, in the Western countries most of the instruments of production are still privately owned and most labour is exploited for private profit-though in recent years there has been a considerable amount of socialisation in the fields of transport, mining, and the public utility services: so that public and private enterprise now exist side by side. The Communist countries take the lead in socialisation; whereas the Western democracies, albeit still mainly capitalist, give greater scope for individual freedom of action and organisation. Each is right to be proud of its achievement and critical of the other's shortcomings; but it is wrong for either to be complacent about what it has done and to fail to recognise the limitations of its own success. Co-existence can no doubt be arrived at by sheer common-sense. Without such mutual recognition of merits and shortcomings; but as long as it continues to rest on such a basis it will necessarily be precarious. Only real freedom of travel, such that people from each area can see how those from the other actually live and appreciate the good points of each other's way of life, can bring about the friendly intercourse which goes far beyond mere co-existence and makes it out of the question to pursue differences to the suicidal point of war.

For such friendly intercourse to come about it is necessary to establish a basis of mutual trust. Each party must be prepared to believe that the other will keep its promises, and must cease to dismiss every utterance of the other as 'mere propaganda'. Each side must learn to believe in the genuineness of the other's desire for peace and in the other's recognition that war is no longer even a possible method of realising its objective. Given this, talks can fruitfully start at the highest level: short of this, no amount of talking is likely to have any useful result.

Accordingly, what British statesmanship-and Labour statesmanship in particular-should press for at once can be summed up as follows: (i) absolute renunciation of the hydrogen bomb and of all nuclear weapons, as a first step towards total disarmament; (ii) withdrawal of Great Britain from NATO, SEATO and all cold war commitments, including removal of British forces from Germany

and of U.S.A. bases from Great Britain; (iii) admittance of the Chinese Republic to the United Nations and the Security Council and removal of all restrictions on trade between Great Britain and the Communist states, including China; (iv) immediate reduction of spending on armaments and application of a large proportion of the resources saved to assistance to the underdeveloped countries, both in the Commonwealth and elsewhere.