

**DISCUSSION***Is Neutrality Necessary ?**From Roddy Barry*

'What is more difficult and far more important is to work out a foreign policy which can be imposed on the government of a capitalist Britain, and, under approximately the world conditions we have to-day, can work.' This seems to me to be the most significant sentence in your discussion on 'NATO and Neutrality'.

The discussion in the *New Reasoner* so far is too clouded with irrelevant political considerations, and insufficiently concentrated on the bare bones of our situation. There is a nuclear skeleton which has an outline all of its own and we see it dimly if we allow the mists of our ideologies to get in front of our eyes. We are not here concerned with Socialism, Toryism, Liberalism, our various brands of Communism, dissident, orthodox or what-in fact not with any social doctrine as such. The skeleton represents the destruction of life, and life is not an ism. Life is life. *This* is what is at stake-not a way of life, not your life, not my life, nor Joe's for that matter-but the existence of the lot of us. Any policy designed to preserve that existence must have that end, and essentially that end alone, in view. That is why it must work 'under approximately the world conditions we have to-day', and that is why it must be capable of operation by the Bevans of this world, and conceivably the R. A. Butlers-if not the MacMillans. It seems to me that often these crude facts are appreciated better by the politically unsophisticated, people whose brains are not wound round with political memories which in most cases have no relevance to our situation now, and even cause a distorted sight of it.

The danger of nuclear war breaking out does not exist because of the *kind* of political conflicts which exist, but, in the last analysis, simply because those conflicts *do* exist. This has never been true in this sense before, and it has become true only because of the nature of nuclear weapons: so great is their destructive power that the concept of war as a furtherance of national policy is being beaten into a retreat and can only advance again dressed up as suicide (or death before dishonour). The framework of 'preparedness'-is not dangerous because its participants (in this case America and the Soviet Union) are planning to attack each other. They are not. It is defensive. But equally it is not *less* dangerous because the Soviet Union has a socialist economy, or immediately *more* dangerous because America has a capitalist one. The danger arises from the mechanics of the situation and not because of the ideologies involved. And it has arisen because of a technical factor, quite

neutral politically, namely the destructive power of nuclear weapons.

This situation is entirely new. For example, Fascism grew in the thirties because of political, social and economic factors, and it was a threat to peace by its very ideological nature. Opposition to it was political opposition, opposed to the ideology of fascism, and finally, willing to fight it by military means. But to use this situation to guide us to-day is madness-for the Left or the Right. A policy for opposition to nuclear arms and their use must be separated from the political ideologies of the Left and the Right. It must be shown that the threat which arises from them is not only neutral in its effect-should it become a reality-but also neutral in the sense that no one ideology has given rise to it: it has become what it is in spite of the self-interest of both the main ideologies-communism and capitalism (though less true of the latter)-and is the threat that it is to-day because of a mechanical set-up which neither is prepared to dismantle and which is triggered to go off at the sight of a flight of starlings on a radar screen. Recognition of this threat and acceptance of a policy to reduce it is NOT dependent on one's political position. Indeed, it has almost nothing to do with it.

Within the framework of 'preparedness', which is dominated by America and the Soviet Union, British possession of the bomb is not in itself much of a threat to peace-since the threat to peace arises from the framework, the object of Britain giving up the bomb is to help to dismantle that framework. There is no good argument for British retention of the bomb under the heading of 'the Deterrent' or 'Defence'-no matter from which political quarter it may be advanced. And in this, of course, Britain is in quite a different position from both America and the Soviet Union, where the arguments under those headings and against unilateral action, are much stronger. There remains only the argument which Bevan, among others, advances, which is that somehow Britain's negotiating power is strengthened by possession of the bomb. It is hard to believe this is true as far as America or the Soviet Union is concerned. Is it the technical ability to make it that impresses them?-if so we retain that even if we renounce manufacture. The only other possibility would seem to be a threat to use it on one or both-hardly conceivable. As for the countries which do not yet possess the bomb, the main effect of our possession of it would seem to be an encouragement for them to get it too.

Bevan might reply that possession should be used as a bargaining counter to get these countries to renounce manufacture in return for our renouncement. If Bevan would stick to this theme he might have a case, though not a very powerful one, but he does not. He jumps about so much and so often with such an array of contradic-

tory statements, that one is forced to the conclusion that the political game is more important to him than the nuclear issue. On balance, however, the idea of using the bomb to negotiate a refusal by other countries to manufacture seems less likely to succeed than unilateral renunciation. They are likely to say (e.g., France) 'Sure, we'll renounce ... when you do'. What happens then? Do we keep the bomb and continue to wave it about? Even Bevan can hardly threaten them with instant retaliation.

Suppose, then, that Britain renounced unilaterally the testing, manufacture, storing and basing on her soil, of all nuclear weapons? She would be in a position to ask every nation-except the U.S. and U.S.S.R.-to do likewise. To sign a pact to that effect. It would be a demand difficult for any government to resist. Even Western Germany, in the person of Herr Strauss, pleaded recently that it was only out of loyalty to NATO that his government was accepting nuclear weapons, and that, of course, they would much rather not have them. Curiously enough, this may well be true. For what conceivable advantage do these weapons give to any country that accepts them now? The principal reason they will spread if things go on as they are, is precisely that nobody sees any alternative. And that is exactly what action by Britain could provide. Moreover, a dynamic non-nuclear policy could have an explosive effect on the monolithic structure inside each power block. If, for example, Britain made an approach to Yugoslavia, is it likely that Yugoslavia would turn down the offer? And would not this have an effect on Poland? And Poland on China? Its appeal would not be-as we are so often told-based simply on morality, but much more on naked self-interest. Not only would this be true of the countries appealed to, but also in certain respects to the two Giants as well, who have no real interest in the spread of nuclear weapons. However, in one respect it would touch what at present they conceive to be their self-interest: they would be unable, if the appeal was successful, to station nuclear weapons in other people's countries, and they would, we hope, begin to feel disaffection in their respective 'camps'. The logical next step for the signing nations to take would be to exert pressure on the Soviet Union and the United States to negotiate, negotiate, negotiate. This seems to me to be the only ray of hope in the years to come: that every nation not possessing nuclear weapons should see where their self-interest lies, and bend themselves to the task of getting America and Russia to negotiate a disarmament agreement. And in terms of political possibilities, it seems a perfectly justifiable hope. But it needs initiative to start it, and only Britain is in a position to give that lead.

It seems to me that the question whether Britain would still remain a member of NATO in these circumstances is not, in itself.

of itself, of **crucial importance**. If Britain were committed to a non-nuclear policy it obviously would transform her position in NATO, as well as implying that the other W. European nations would adopt that policy too, but it would not automatically mean her withdrawal from NATO at once; it would be preferable if that is what she did, but is it a condition which should be attached to a policy advocating renunciation by Britain of nuclear weapons? I am not myself sure that it is.

The movement against nuclear weapons in this country is likely to assume massive proportions within the next twelve months. So far it has grown up largely outside the political parties, and mostly opposed by them and though there are reasons inside the campaign itself why this is so, the primary reason is that people, particularly young people, see that here is something that cannot be booted about the political arena as just another 'issue'. Moreover, all the political parties have miserably failed to state the position clearly and give a lead. It is not a non-political issue, of course, and the expression of it within the campaign will take increasingly political forms. One thing, however, is certain: the movement will not be bogged down by political considerations which are irrelevant to the single purpose of getting a British government to adopt a non-nuclear policy. It has to be a policy which a capitalist government can operate, and it has to work. We have not much time left to decide what we think it should be.