

THE BOMB
Direct Action
and
THE STATE

DIRECT ACTION
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The Bomb—an isolated issue ?

THERE are three main currents of Unilateralist thinking. First, those who see the Bomb as evil and a danger, but do not consider any other factors and visualise a society very much as now, but with the threat of extinction removed by banning the Bomb. Second, those who believe the Bomb to be a mere symptom of class society—and are apt to deplore concentration on it as detracting from the real issues, or to use the Campaign merely as a recruiting ground for their own groups. And third, those who see the Bomb as a supreme symbol of violent and oppressive systems and, while approving CND's concentration on this one issue, do not see Unilateralism as a cure for the Bomb in isolation, but the essential pre-condition for any further social advance. Let us look at these three tendencies more closely.

Some of the first of the above groupings are Right-wing, or wish to return to a time when injustice and conflict abounded, but warfare was less completely destructive. One of these, Andrew Fountaine, chairman of the British National Party, stood for Parliament in Norfolk in 1959 and attempted to get CND support. He received none, for even those campaigners who have little or no political knowledge realised that fascism, with its race hatred and genocide, was as undesirable as nuclear genocide.

These tend to be people with ideals and, if they support one of the major political parties, they either ignore the contradictions between their party's policy and Unilateralism, or consider that supporting this policy will some day mean Parliamentary votes for Unilateralism.

The development of such people's thought, as their strongly-held conviction of the horror of nuclear war is faced with the progressively worsening arms race, leads to far wider understanding of the other factors involved in the Bomb. At first the strength of their arguments and the growth of support encouraged them to think that Governments would accept the idea of Unilateralism willingly, but now the failure to change Government policy and the long series of abortive peace conferences has led to disillusionment and, finally, deeper insight.

As these people's ideas mature they can join the hard core of the attempt to avert catastrophe. As more people and converts to Unilateralism come along, this process of disillusionment can go on continuously.

Symptom of political needs?

The second of the three currents are apt to deplore concentration on the Bomb as detracting from the issues of class-warfare, or use the CND for tactical reasons, such as recruiting, propaganda and as a means of weakening a capitalist government. This, besides being a complete over-simplification (as we shall show later), leads to many contradictions. Ritchie Calder, for instance, says:

“They cannot ‘sack’ CND as easily as they can a Labour Youth Group. Nor can anyone else. If the National Executive of the CND resigned tomorrow, the movement would still go on. If we disbanded the headquarters staff and removed the strong hand of Peggy Duff, the groups would still function, but without the moderation of a politically-responsible, constitutionally minded executive (a moderation which provoked Direct Action and the impatience of the Committee of 100). The supporters would ‘take to the maquis’. The greatest spontaneous political movement in this country since the days of the Spanish Civil War, with a head-force of decent concern about the biggest human and social issue of today, would break the dam. **It shall not happen, but if it did it would carry with it the debris of the Labour Party.**”

Donald Soper attacks CND supporters who will not support Labour candidates whose platform is against Unilateralism. The Trotskyist movement and the social-democratic weekly *Tribune* set up a howl of protest against INDEC, which aims to put up Unilateralist Parliamentary candidates. Stalinists claim to be Unilateralist under capitalism, but in favour of a ‘People’s Bomb’ should Britain become a socialist State. Even the Anarchist weekly *Freedom*, because it looked on the Bomb as an isolated issue, carried a front-page article in the issue sold on the 1961 Aldermaston March, in which it said that if the Campaign progressed further it would split the Labour Party and that this would be no gain.

In the political field, most of the roles advocated for CND are unrealistic.

When, at the end of the last century, the basis of the existing Labour Party was being laid, radicals had the choice of turning to the workers and saying that if they wanted a better society, the only way to get it was by mass action to bring in socialism—mass action that would, in the process, involve considerable hardship and never be easy, but which held infinite promise—or of saying “elect us and by piecemeal reforms we can improve your conditions.”

The majority took the easy way, as did the working class generally. Obviously they have made some marginal gains as a result, though it should be remembered that many of these, such as the National Health Service, were advocated by 19th Century Liberals for the more efficient running of capitalism.

But against this it was the Labour Party thus formed that sanctioned Hiroshima, it was the Labour Party that made Britain’s Uranium Bomb and prepared to make the H Bomb, while it formed the Government from 1945-51.*

The Labour Party of today is certainly well to the right of that of 1945 and it is absurd to suppose that it can advance the aims of CND. But hope springs eternal for some and it is necessary to examine further the arguments of those who tell us that the only way to achieve Nuclear Disarmament is through the Labour Party.

Ever since Herbert Morrison left the Social Democratic Federation, in order to convert the original ILP to socialism, socialists have been going into the Labour Party. All they have ever changed is themselves.

The Party exists to take power and therefore its whole nature is such that, in order to gain the widest possible suffrage, it will shape its policies to popular opinion, rather than try to win popular opinion for socialism. It has, therefore, steadily moved rightwards: each turn to the right and each entry in order to convert gives rise to a new bunch of rebels. But, since these are also playing the political game, they, too, must shape their demands to what the market will take and they, too, end up on the Front Bench, shorn of their socialist pretensions, or leave the Party.

Such “Leftists” will claim that the only way to change the Labour Party is for CND to get into it and work within it. All this would achieve is to deliver up the Campaign, bound hand and foot, to the Transport House bureaucrats. For, if the Campaign were in the LP, it would be forced to water down its policies at the risk of expulsion. In fact, Gaitskell was able to reverse the 1960 Scarborough Conference decision purely and simply by pointing to the number of Multilateralist Lib-Lab votes the Party would lose if it went Unilateralist.

He will be able to continue this, with no fear of again being beaten, until such time as large-scale Unilateralist abstentions at the polls make it quite plain that a multilateralist Labour Party stands no chance of being returned. As it is, the Labour leadership is in clover. The Liberal revival will put Gaitskell in power, possibly as a minority Government, but since Grimond is margin-

* c.f. Direct Action pamphlets “How Labour Governed, 1945-1951” and “Nationalisation and the New Boss Class”.

ally to the Left of Gaitskell (as Macleod is only marginally to the Right), such a minority Government would not face the insecurity of the 1924 and 1929 Labour administrations.

Anxious at all events to remain within the LP, these "Left" social-democrats seldom, when pushed to the pitch, actually vote for their beliefs. In opposition to the resumption of Tests by the West, when in theory the Unilateralists represented official Party policy, less than 30 MP's found the issue sufficiently important to turn up and vote. During the previous year, when Scarborough had not yet been reversed, only seven MP's voted against the Defence Estimates. Some years earlier, when German rearmament was the issue, Fenner Brockway wrote an article in *Peace News*, underlining the necessity for the Labour Party to oppose it—and the day the article was published, failed to be numbered among the six MP's who voted against, when German rearmament was the subject of a division.

Parallel to the cowardice of the social-democrats is the chameleon nature of the Stalinists, whether open card-holders in the Communist Party, fellow travellers or those who, ashamed to admit their Stalinism, pay lip-service to Trotskyism in the Socialist Labour League.

The fact that, at the end of 1959, CP members who had been attacking Unilateralism switched to its advocacy and the similar speed with which the SLL suddenly decided that it supported Russia's possession of the Bomb ("the Workers' Bomb"), immediately after it had been selling Peter Fryer's pamphlet attacking Soviet nuclear arms as seriously detracting from international solidarity, show that Unilateralism for these Bolsheviks is merely an opportunist gimmick that, at best, goes skin deep. The record of similar past twists is too long to recount, but a prime instance is that of contrasting Communist reaction to testing by East and West.

Besides the "Leftist" social-democrats, various groups, Trotskyist and otherwise, advocate work within the Labour Party, while at the same time agreeing with Libertarians that the Bomb can be abolished only by a revolutionary change in society and not as part of piecemeal reform. These usually have two entirely conflicting conceptions of the role of their work in the Labour Party. At one moment they will say that they hope to create a revolutionary party within the reformist one and that their presence in the Labour Party is merely to make converts and enlist others; at the next they put forward a series of left-reformist demands that they agree do not, even in sum, add up to socialism, and campaign to make these Party policy.

As a result of the latter tactic, such groups frequently move well to the Right. Once started in the game of power politics,

the revolutionary is as likely as anyone to become corrupt and seek power for himself rather than socialism, and so waters down the reformist demand to get wider support. Alternatively, having put forward such a "transitional" policy, the group then attracts recruits on a basis of those who equate the transition with the aim and, in turn, wish to put forward new transitional demands. Either way, those who remain true to the original aims are apt to find themselves forced out of the group—and, like the amoeba, start the process anew.

Those "revolutionaries" whose aim is to permeate the Labour Party with their ideas are, in fact, little different to "Left" social-democrats. If precedent is any guide, they are apt to be less courageous in the face of the Transport House whip, when it comes to the push. When *Socialist Outlook* was suppressed, a group who were expelled from the LP in Camberwell put out a leaflet protesting at their expulsion, stressing what loyal Party members they had been, that they had made no serious opposition to the Right Wing leadership—and that they had helped expel those members of their constituency Party who attended the Vienna Peace Conference.

Those, on the other hand, who are in the LP only to raid it, have a better case, whatever one may think of the morality of their actions and however much one may question if socialism can be built by capitalist ethics. Nevertheless, such groups, as they grow, often turn to permeation as the first step to reformism. What is more, if they grow without losing their revolutionary nature, they will sooner or later have to leave the LP anyway. It is then that they will have to answer how a revolutionary movement should act—and it is then that one will find many who have not forgotten their Bolshevism (like the Bourbons, they forget nothing of their past glories and learn nothing from their past mistakes).

For, should the revolutionary movement that is built set itself up as a leadership body, it will, if successful, of its very nature lead directly to a new class society. Such groups already exist outside the Labour Party and it is, perhaps, not surprising that one recently published an editorial justifying the fact that TU bureaucrats are highly paid, with the usual claptrap about getting the best men for the job.

There is, after all, little difference between the Leninist conception of the elite party of socialism and ordinary capitalist values.

Their present conspiratorial organisation can hardly, in a large group, lead to inner democracy and libertarian values. But some

