

THE INSANITY OF UNILATERAL DISARMAMENT

ROGER SCRUTON



I have frequently tried to argue with people who advocate unilateral disarmament, many of whom are of my own age and who seem, in every other respect, able and willing to engage in rational discussion. As I hope to show, the unilateralist case is a tissue of sophistry. But I am not at all sure that I shall be able to persuade anybody who does not already agree with me. Invariably I have been met with a blank hostility, indeed a positively threatening opposition, which would rather prevent me from uttering my arguments than offer cogent arguments in return. There is no real disagreement, but simply a breakdown in rationality.

This immediately raises the question, at least in my mind, of the nature of the so-called “peace movement”, the movement for unilateral disarmament. Given that it is so hostile to rational argument, what are its true motives?

POWERLESSNESS AND ENTHUSIASM

I'm sure I'm not the only one who discerns in this movement a kind of emotional abandon of the sort that was seen in Europe between the wars. When people are perplexed by a problem which they don't understand but which nevertheless terrifies them with a sense of their own powerlessness there is something reassuring in gathering together in a crowd. Enthusiasm then takes over from thought. This sense of a collective identity, of being taken up in a common purpose, is a

comforting thing. It overcomes the fear which otherwise dominates one's outlook, it dispels anxiety, dispels the sense of loneliness and helplessness.

We saw this spirit in Germany before the war exemplified at the Nuremberg rallies. Then young people, spiritually lost, without a sense of future, without a sense of where they were going, and wherefrom they were coming, gathered with a mystical enthusiasm around a cause which they did not understand. Later their enthusiasm was channelled into political ends of the greatest possible destructiveness.

It may sound unfair to compare the enthusiasms of Nuremberg with those of Greenham Common. But I think they have a structural similarity. They are similar also to enthusiasms which swept across Europe during the late middle ages and subsequently - the millenarian religions, inspired by hellfire rhetoric designed to heighten man's natural fear of death. People subjected to this rhetoric were so perplexed as to look anywhere they could for a force which would save them. Such people gathered themselves together into crowds and swept all before them in their apocalyptic longing to be rid of their predicament.

If we look at the nature of CND propaganda, we will see that a great deal of it consists in dwelling on the fact of death, on the fact of horrible death through nuclear devastation. No real arguments are given for or against any particular course of action. We are simply meant to contemplate these horrors in something like the way we are meant to contemplate the horrors of hell. The technique is exactly that of a the hellfire sermon. Having whipped our emotions up to the point where our fear and anxiety are almost unbearable, CND then proposes its ludicrous and irrational solution, which is to join together into a crowd of similar enthusiasts, and destroy the only armaments that can protect us from the destruction that we fear.

AN IDEOLOGY OF UNIVERSAL CONQUEST

To see just how irrational unilateral disarmament is, we must begin with a clear statement of the premises.

I believe that the major premise lies in recent history, in what has happened to the situation in Europe since the end of the last war. Although some people compare the Soviet interest in Eastern Europe to the Ameri-

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