

NATIONAL SECURITY WITHOUT ARMAMENTSExcerpt from a Memorandum to the Austrian Peopleby Hans Thirring

THE NEW SITUATION

The radical revolution of weaponry caused by the advent of thermo-nuclear bombs and intercontinental missiles during the last decade, and, moreover, the ensuing shift of military and political thinking, have created an entirely new situation. The time is ripe for an experiment which could

- a) help to reduce international tensions;
- b) serve to enhance the welfare of the very state that performs the experiment.

Consider a small or middle-sized country like some of the European neutrals that are surrounded by frontiers which are not a subject of dispute with their neighbours. What will happen to this country if it disarms unilaterally and proclaims itself to be a test case of the possibility of peaceful coexistence?

The answer to this question will be different according to place and time of the experiment. In 1955 the responsible people in Austria felt that their country would become an easy prey of communism soon after the withdrawal of the occupation forces unless they were replaced by a national army. In other places the threat of conquest and humiliation persists even today for a country that would dare to disarm; Israel for instance would commit national suicide by disarming unilaterally.

The case is quite different, however, in the present situation of Austria and other European countries if they disarm, and proclaim their position among heavily armed neighbours a crucial test of peaceful coexistence. By doing so they would gain more security than in their present state of being armed with rather inadequate conventional forces.

The reason for this apparent paradox is the top priority attributed today to disarmament and peaceful coexistence. The big powers on either side, both USA and USSR are absolutely sincere in stressing their enormous interest in general and complete disarmament for three realistic reasons:

a) No war between them would make any sense, except one for world hegemony and total defeat of the other system. Such a total war, however, though possibly begun with conventional forces, could never end without the use of the strongest weapons with their annihilating consequences. The threat of total destruction is therefore impending as long as the armaments race continues.

b) Abolition of the gigantic military expenditure would be a decisive relief for the national economy of both sides.

c) Both sides are convinced that after terminating the cold war and switching over to peaceful competition, and also particularly after the release of an enormous amount of capital and manpower for productive purposes, the superiority of their own economic and political system would manifest itself more clearly.

Apart from these purely realistic arguments for disarmament, the moral aspect of the problem begins to be recognized by an increasing number of people outside the Chinese wall. The terrible threat of total destruction of our civilisation helped to a realisation of what in former times was grasped only by a small minority: It is a crime, and moreover a proof of the immaturity of our civilisation, that today, two millennia after Christ's crucifixion, at a time when we are probing deeply into the secrets of atomic nuclei and even attempting to conquer space, we have not yet succeeded in abolishing the primitive barbarous method of settling inextricable international conflicts by organized mass slaughter. The term modern times has been used prematurely in history denoting the era beginning with the 15th century. But in spite of the conspicuous progress of science, technology and social conditions, the entire epoch up to now was essentially a dark age. A radical transition from barbarism to an enlightened age that really would deserve the proud title of modern times, will occur only when general and complete disarmament is carried out.

There are cynics who scoff at the idea that moral feelings could influence political decisions. But in the nuclear age the moral abhorrence of the monstrosity of war is supported by a dawning recognition of the fact that neither gain of unlimited power nor wealth could make life worth living in a world destroyed by a nuclear holocaust. Both for moral and realistic reasons therefore, disarmament and peaceful co-existence have come to the forefront of international issues. The radical shift from pre-war political philosophy manifested itself very clearly in the Moscow negotiations of July 1963 in which a first step towards disarmament was made against the protest of China on the one hand and the U.S. right wing Republicans on the other.

GAIN IN SECURITY THROUGH DISARMAMENT

In view of recent developments we may reconsider the question whether a country like Austria, which by disarming becomes a test case of peaceful coexistence, would achieve gains or losses in its security. We may put the question thus: Is it thinkable that Khrushchev who boldly defied the opposition of giant China to his policy of peaceful coexistence would permit any of his smaller allies to attack a neutral country that might become the proof and a test-case of the realisation of his pet idea? Or would any of Austria's immediate neighbours such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary or Yugoslavia, feel inclined to cause trouble in Europe by a violation of the Austrian frontiers? In the situation that has arisen in 1963, the Moscow line of Marxism-Leninism is immensely more interested in a solid proof of the basic possibility of peaceful coexistence than for instance in the expansion of communism into a small country like Austria that would only serve to turn a peaceful neighbour into an obstinate satellite.

Sceptical opponents of unilateral disarmament argue that the present trend towards coexistence may be a transitory whim of Khrushchev which might soon be swept away like the spirit of Geneva by the Hungarian revolution and the spirit of Camp David by the U-2 incident. Therefore they feel it would be premature to make an irrevocable step like total disarmament today. For it could cost us our freedom and national sovereignty as soon as the drive for communist world domination became more urgent than the will for peaceful coexistence. This argument would be sound if a depreciation of the importance of disarmament like that of other political issues could be

expected. As a matter of fact, however, the vital importance of disarmament, far from fading out, will remain permanent for very serious reasons: It can be foreseen very clearly that further technical progress will widen the gap between the means of destruction and defence. Certainly the military are playing with the idea of an anti-missile missile that would reduce the danger of nuclear annihilation. But this expectation is as naive as Goering's hope in 1939 that his FLAK could effectively prevent enemy planes from bombing German cities. Every sober technical expert will agree that a defense system built for destroying approaching missiles in flight would cost more than the present total annual defense budget and would succeed only in reducing the damage by a tiny percentage. Therefore the danger of worldwide annihilation by total war can be averted only by preventing its outbreak. The menace of nuclear annihilation on the one hand and the heavy burden of armament expenditure on the other, will therefore never cease to be a strong incentive for disarmament.

Considering all these facts there is good reason to expect that any expert with sufficient insight into the feelings of the people in the European communist states and the intentions of their leaders will agree with my main thesis:

The desire of the Soviets and their allies to prove the possibility of peaceful coexistence is so much stronger than their actual need of power expansion over small areas that a disarmed European country like Austria will be absolutely secure from interference by its Eastern neighbours.

THE COMMUNIST IDEA OF WORLD DOMINATION

My thesis may sound incredible to those numerous people who have failed so far to comprehend clearly enough the basic difference between communist and fascist dictatorship. The communists have never denied their intention to extend their system over the world. But, unlike Hitler's campaigns, this conquest is not meant to be achieved by military operations. For according to Marxist doctrines the exploited proletariat would rise one day and seize power. Marxism-Leninism teaches that such a development is a historical necessity and will occur like any natural event following the eternal laws of nature. Most of us citizens of Western and also neutral countries do not agree at all with these doctrines.

But though disagreeing we should be well aware of this theory in order to understand Khrushchev's and his allies' motives and intentions. Their opposition to the views of the Chinese comrades reveals clearly that they refuse to risk military operations to achieve an aim which they expect to reach sooner or later through assisting a natural development by suitable propaganda.

In a speech made in Vienna on July 2 1960 Khrushchev declared: "In the same way as we cannot drive men into paradise with cudgels we cannot drive people into communism by war. As soon as people realise clearly the superiority of the communist system they will come by themselves."

Answering a question which I put to him Khrushchev repeated this thesis in an open letter to me which was broadcast by TASS Agency on December 30 1961 and subsequently printed in nearly all papers of the European communist states. The same idea of competition with-

out military pressure pervades also the recent "spirit of Moscow" with his success in the test ban negotiations and the failure to come to terms with the Chinese communists on ideological questions. The Moscow test ban agreement is neither a capitulation of communism to capitalism, as Mao may feel, nor a capitulation of the West to the East, as the US Goldwater group will contend, nor is it a reconciliation between the two entirely different economic and political systems. It is rather the first step to a new departure in the continued contest between the two systems, that is competition in a businesslike civilian way to demonstrate one's own superiority, instead of the obsolete method of mass murder which is as foolish as a duel but a million times more fateful. According to the 1963 spirit of Moscow, disarmament to secure the removal of the threat of annihilation should precede the final round between the two big systems, while according to Mao the liquidation of capitalism, or according to Goldwater the liquidation of communism, should precede disarmament. It can be foreseen very clearly that the Kennedy-Khrushchev course and not the Mao or Goldwater course will find the full approval of the vast majority of the United Nations.

THE BOGEY IMAGE OF KHRUSHCHEV

On the other hand, there may be some difficulties in achieving whole-hearted Western co-operation in the campaign for peaceful competition along the lines now opened up at Moscow. Zealous anticommunist propaganda has created a bogey image of Khrushchev in the minds of many Western people, and the features of this image have darkened consistently with every setback to peace efforts like the 1956 events in Hungary, the U-2 incident in 1960 or the Berlin wall in 1961. The result of the widespread aversion against Khrushchev is the attitude of certain journalists who, reporting on the Russian-Chinese ideological strife, almost undisguisedly took sides with Mao basing their perverse sympathy apparently on the primitive rule: the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

THE FALLACY OF A BETTER POST-WAR NEW WORLD

What Khrushchev's enemies fail to understand is the immense catastrophe threatening humanity by the fanatic zeal of extremists on either side who, like Mao and some of his American counterparts, believe that it might be worth the sacrifice of several hundred million people killed in a thermonuclear war in order to eradicate the other system and to liberate the rest of mankind for building up a better new world. The fatal mistake of this expectation is the illusion that the would-be pioneers of the new world could progress in a similar way as the 17th Century Pilgrim Fathers and their offspring in the virgin land of America. Contrary to the situation of that time a post-war world of tomorrow, right after the delivery of a bomb load a million times stronger than the sum-total of all explosives used in 1939-1945, would present the survivors with insurmountable difficulties. Just as any single member of our society, exposed in a desert or primeval forest without clothes, food, tools, or indeed anything would perish hopelessly unless he were saved by better equipped human beings - thus in the same way the remains of a civilised nation surviving in an utterly destroyed moonlike landscape, bereft of all necessities of life like food and water, housing, clothing, heating, lighting, sanitation, medical care, communication, means of transport, tools and machines, could never afford the energy and organisation necessary for recovery and reconstruction. The total thermonuclear showdown between communism and capitalism would, therefore, lead to utter destruction of all civilisation without leaving means and manpower to build up a

new life. Khrushchev is completely right in rejecting Mao's thesis of the inevitability of war, persisting on his own thesis of the necessity of peaceful coexistence, and maintaining bravely his position even at the risk of breaking the communist solidarity and losing the friendship of the big brother. And we on the Western side who care for the survival of our offspring have every reason to support the Kennedy-Khrushchev line instead of following the Goldwater course based on the vain hope that communism would collapse under its internal strife.

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY AND ITS POSSIBLE USERS

The unprecedented situation of today, in which a militarily powerful state would deliberately avoid making cheap conquests by simply penetrating into a military vacuum, has created the unique opportunity to which I referred at the beginning of this article: Certain neutrals can by unilateral disarmament improve their security, alleviate their financial situation, and at the same time even do a most valuable service to mankind by demonstrating the possibility of peaceful competition. Who will be the first to use this opportunity?

Setting aside a few dwarf states we have five European neutrals: Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland. Neither of the two last-named will be the first to disarm because of a serious psychological bias. For the Swiss the idea of being a soldierly nation is a kind of ersatz for the missed occasion to have fought glorious wars in the last few centuries. They feel moreover that their well trained and expensive army frightened away Hitler and kept him from attacking their country like all his other neighbours. Therefore national defense is a kind of holy duty in Switzerland, and a heretic like myself who dare to call the Federal Army an obsolete and useless instrument would risk being accused of blasphemy and betrayal of military secrets. The situation is rather similar in Sweden where the psychological bias may gain weight by the financial interest of quite a significant armament industry. In this way, the wealthiest two of the European neutrals will take the position of wait and see, closely observing what happens to the others.

In these other three states some remainders of the psychological bias are left too. In Finland many of the generation are still alive who fought the 1939-40 war against Russia; in Ireland some people might believe that unilateral disarmament would become too strong a temptation for England to re-capture Her Majesty's former province; and in Austria many people have still in mind the argument which in 1955 led to the introduction of general conscription: "The expansion of communist rule was stopped in Austria by the presence of the occupation forces. After their withdrawal Austria would share the fate of her communist-turned neighbours unless the occupation forces were replaced by an adequate national army."

Some education and enlightenment will be necessary to explain to the people the basic change in the international situation. We have also to correct the obsolete idea that military strength is a yardstick of manhood and grandeur of a nation. Men walk unarmed in the streets of our cities because the conditions of life of our age superseded their use, and not because our contemporaries have less courage than their armoured forefathers. The same development of cultural progress led to pulling down the fortifications of the city of Vienna a century ago and will in the near future cause voluntary disarmament of those states which can safely do so. Lessons

of that kind might be taught more easily to the Austrians who are not frustrated by lack of recent military glory having fought bravely dozens of big battles and lost all wars in the last two and a half centuries.

It seems to be reasonable, therefore, that Austria, along with Finland and Ireland, should examine the correctness of my main thesis and in case of an affirmative result take the necessary steps. Austria in particular might convene a new Wiener Congress, a century and half after the first historical one which ended Napoleon's era, where the six neighbour states, Switzerland, Federal Republic of Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Italy should be invited to give an answer to the question: What measures can you provide in order to convince the Austrians that a non-aggression treaty with a disarmed neutral state, apart from all moral aspects, would be strictly observed by you from purely realistic considerations of your own national interests?

In other words it should be proved convincingly that keeping correct relations with a disarmed state is not merely a matter of goodwill in the nuclear age but an obligation of sober prudent statemanship.

Considering the importance and urgency of disarmament it might be expected that Austria's neighbours would give satisfactory answers. The next and final step would then be to make the necessary amendments in the Austrian legislation. Instead of simply abolishing general conscription one could contemplate also the transformation of the armed forces into a labour service. The armed police force of the usual strength, like in other countries, would of course be kept.

One can foresee that Finland and Ireland would soon follow, while Sweden and Switzerland would do so after some period of hesitation. At any rate the success of the experiment which cannot be doubted will help to solve the far greater problem of general disarmament.
