

Europeans Say "NO" to NATO Nuclear Weapons

The European Nuclear Disarmament movement (END) is an inspiration to those of us in the United States working for a nuclear-weapon freeze. The goals of the movement are--in the short term--halting the deployment of new US cruise and Pershing II missiles and Soviet SS-20 missiles, and--in the long term--establishing a nuclear-free zone throughout Europe. There is substantial public support for these goals. Many Europeans remain unconvinced by US arguments for stationing more nuclear weapons in Europe. They recognize that this increases the possibility that Europe will become the battlefield of a "limited" nuclear war. The END movement represents a growing concern in Europe over the threat of nuclear war, and a concrete effort to reduce this threat.

The decision to deploy 572 cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe was made at a NATO meeting in December 1979, and was justified as a necessary reaction to Soviet deployment of SS-20 missiles and Backfire bombers. These were claimed to have tipped the balance of European "theater nuclear forces" in favor of the Soviets. In the bizarre jargon of Pentagon experts, this created "a gap in the escalation spectrum." However, as Leonid Brezhnev has asserted, and RAND Corporation analyst Raymond Garthoff has confirmed, the Soviets have not increased the number of medium-range nuclear missiles or bombers in Europe in 10 years.

In assessing the European nuclear balance, the Pentagon has neglected to consider several Western weapons systems which are specifically intended for use in Europe. Among these are NATO carrier-based and land-based aircraft, armed with nuclear weapons; NATO submarine-based missiles; and French aircraft, submarine, and ballistic missiles. All told these represent about 2800 nuclear warheads, without even considering US strategic weapons targeted on Europe. The Soviet systems, including the SS-20 and Backfire, represent a comparable amount. Thus it is the new US missiles, not the Soviet ones, which threaten to disturb the European nuclear balance.

A prominent British END activist, historian E.P. Thompson, has called the new US cruise and Pershing II deployments a "Cuban missile crisis in reverse". These missiles constitute a major escalation and pose a new threat to the Soviet Union. Because of their high accuracy and long range, both new missile systems are able to strike targets deep within the Soviet Union, far beyond the "European theater". In the Soviets' view, these weapons present a credible first-strike threat. This is why Brezhnev has offered to negotiate to limit European nuclear weapons.

Arms control is central to the European nuclear debate. Even at the NATO meeting of December 1979, the importance of arms control and detente were emphasized. The decision to deploy

the new weapons was linked to a commitment to seek negotiations to limit nuclear weapons in Europe. The ruling Social Democratic Party (SPD) in West Germany backed the NATO decision only on the condition that SALT II be "immediately" ratified and that "political priority" be given to disarmament negotiations. Neither of these conditions have been met.

The NATO plan to deploy new missiles in Europe met strong opposition from the start. Denmark and Norway refused to consider it. The Dutch government which had favored it was voted out of power the day before the NATO decision. Belgium has reneged on its approval of deployment and has postponed the decision for six months. In Britain, the decision was made to accept the new missiles without any discussion in Parliament. The public opposition has been overwhelming.

A rally in support of nuclear disarmament held in London's Trafalgar Square last October drew 80,000. Polls of British public opinion indicate that 42% favor unilateral nuclear disarmament for Britain. "The War Game," a film depicting the consequences of a nuclear attack on Great Britain, was banned when it first came out in 1965. Today, it is in such great demand throughout England that it is nearly impossible to find a town where it has not been shown recently.

The social democratic governments and parties of Europe are reacting to popular pressure by actively supporting disarmament measures. The British Labour Party recently elected as its leader Michael Foot, a proponent of unilateral nuclear disarmament for Britain. He has promised, if elected Prime Minister, to "send back" any US missiles already on British soil. Norway has recently presented a plan for a Scandinavian nuclear-free zone. In West Germany, the Social Democrats continue to demand arms control negotiations.

The Soviets appear to earnestly favor arms control in Europe. They have demonstrated their seriousness by proposing "a freeze on the buildup of nuclear weapons in Europe". Since the cruise and Pershing II missiles are not slated for deployment until 1983, a freeze would mean unilateral Soviet restraint until then.

The European nuclear disarmament movement is strong and growing. Even Helmut Schmidt, long considered to be the major European proponent of the new missiles, has recently been quoted as saying that he did not believe deployment was inevitable. Now is the time for the United States to respond to Soviet and European initiatives for arms control talks. Americans should support these initiatives, for the notion of a bilateral freeze on nuclear weapons in Europe is an essential part of an over-all freeze.