

## Book Reviews

The stresses and strains in the Alliance created by the increasing tendency of the US to initiate unilateral out-of-area military actions are strongly attacked by the authors. The US tendency to expect NATO allies to support such actions as Grenada and the Libya bombing are very divisive. The Alliance does however, exercise some restraining influence on such unilateral activities.

The philosophy of the New Right that the Reagan administration followed, with the trend towards military coercion rather than diplomacy, is criticized. This is deemed to be a departure from the high-minded internationalist foreign policies of earlier US governments.

This book presents a strong argument for NATO and for Canada's continued active participation. Two statements from the concluding chapter are worth quoting: "NATO helps to guarantee the security that the West requires to explore and expand the opportunities for cooperation that Gorbachev's Russia may provide," and "Europe must remain at peace if Canada is to prosper."

The message of this book is that Canada needs NATO and NATO needs Canada.

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The second volume — a slim one — is a record of the proceedings of a conference held in Halifax three years ago. The aim of the conference was to provide a public forum to complement the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Halifax, May 29-30, 1986.

The presentations were generally orthodox NATO military doctrine and strategy. They stressed the continuing validity of the strategy of flexible response and forward defence; the need for stronger conventional forces; more efficient use of resources; and retention of the option for first use of nuclear weapons.

Unfortunately this book has already been overtaken by events such as the decision to remove medium range Soviet and US missiles from Europe and by the changed East-West climate resulting from Gorbachev's initiatives.

It is perhaps a useful record of the Halifax Conference, but it is more a reiteration of cold war orthodoxy than a thinking through of the problems of NATO to the year 2000.

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## The chill of nuclear disorder

by Joan DeBardeleben

*The Social Impact of the Chernobyl Disaster* by David R. Marples. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1988, 313 pages, \$29.95 cloth, \$10.95 paper.

Nuclear power is on the defensive in most of the Western world. Countries such as Sweden and Austria have rejected the nuclear option, and in numerous other nations orders for new plants have come to a virtual halt, as increased safety demands have raised serious questions about the economic viability of the technology and as popular protests have sprung up in many localities. Now, in the wake of the Chernobyl accident of April 1986, the Soviet authorities also confront an increasingly visible and at times efficacious anti-nuclear "movement" of their own. In the final pages of his book David Marples acknowledges that Gorbachev's *glasnost* has created an atmosphere "that permitted the public to deal a devastating blow to the Soviet nuclear energy program." While the official commitment to nuclear power has not waned, public criticism has begun to plague all new nuclear construction projects and some Ukrainian plans have actually been canceled.

This book, a follow-up to Marples's earlier book *Chernobyl and Nuclear Power in the USSR*, seeks to explore some of the most important effects of the Chernobyl disaster. It is based on a painstaking analysis of available Soviet materials, which are considerable in the era of *glasnost*. The introductory chapter by Victor G. Snell of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited provides the lay reader with an understandable technical discussion of the causes of the accident. The remainder of the chapters by Marples stun the reader with the dramatic impact of the disaster on individual lives, human communities and social attitudes. While international repercussions of the accident did impose stresses far beyond Soviet borders, the reader may well be grateful that the confluence of unfortunate circumstances occurred "over there," not in one of our close-to-home Canadian nuclear complexes.

Overall Marples is critical of many dimensions of the Soviet response to Chernobyl, even as he acknowledges that the accident produced a serious reexamination

of Soviet nuclear technology (including a long-term abandonment of new Chernobyl-type RBMK reactors, new training procedures for operators, and technological changes in existing RBMK reactors). In Marples's view, there was precipitous resettlement of areas affected by radioactive contamination, the premature restarting of Chernobyl 3 (the twin to the damaged reactor) and a lack of candor on the part of official spokespersons in advising the population of the region of the dangers. In other words, *glasnost* functioned only in a restricted manner in the aftermath of the accident, even as some outspoken critics were able to air their views in leading "reform" journals.

Marples's assessment raises two questions. First, were inadequacies in the Soviet response a product of the peculiarities of the Soviet system or might they well have occurred in any major industrial nation following a major environmental disaster? Second, how have both the accident and the Soviet response to it affected the prospects for Gorbachev's overall program of reform? Marples does not address either question directly, but at least implies an answer to the first. In his view, deficiencies in the Soviet response resulted from efforts to minimize economic repercussions of the disaster, the strong leadership commitment to a nuclear strategy, and a relatively compliant scientific community. Presumably the more critical public lobby in most Western countries, supported by scientific expertise, would have produced a more cautious response. Nonetheless, if one compares the Soviet response to this disaster with previous Soviet actions (e.g., the complete silence about the accident at a nuclear waste disposal site in the 1950s, documented by Soviet dissident scientist Zhores Medvedev in his book *Nuclear Disaster in the Urals*), one should certainly give the reform leadership high marks for improvement.

Marples has little if anything to say about the impact of Chernobyl on the fate of *perestroika*. During his relatively brief tenure in office, Soviet party leader Mikhail Gorbachev has seen the occurrence of two of the worst human tragedies his country has experienced in recent times — the Chernobyl nuclear accident and the Armenian earthquake. Neither was in any sense an effect of *perestroika*, but both may well have a significant impact on its viability. Apart from the immediate economic costs and loss of face in the international sphere, Chernobyl also imposed psycho-