

inducing the federal government to play a more active role. In general, however, most initiatives in support of NWFZs and conversion have originated in factories or in regional and municipal governments. The time is not yet ripe for any major advance nationally. It is easier at present to arouse public opinion at the local level regarding the negative effects of military expenditures on jobs and social services.

At first, nuclear weapon-free zones were mainly symbolic, in that they were designed to make the public aware of the dangers of nuclear escalation and to put pressure on national governments to support disarmament. As time went on, however, municipal councils and local populations made greater efforts to set up practical obstacles to opening or developing factories making nuclear weapons or components. Certain American cities, such as Chicago and Oakland, have chosen to pass laws forbidding the production, stockpiling, development or deployment of nuclear weapons. Other cities have adopted purchasing and investment policies which exclude firms manufacturing nuclear weapons. They have also banned the transport of any nuclear weapons across city limits and laid down provisions for the eventual conversion of the firms which make such weapons. Despite many mistakes and some back-tracking, and regardless of the difficulty of putting such provisions into effect, the movement to establish NWFZs in the United States is growing rapidly. Several peace organizations have made this the central point of their platforms and are convinced that the pressure they are putting on both industry and government will eventually bear fruit.

Since 1982, about 175 Canadian municipalities, including most of the largest cities, have adopted resolutions in favour of NWFZs. As a result, almost two-thirds of the Canadian population now lives in nuclear weapon-free zones. Apart from Vancouver, however, which has taken a few timid steps, none of the municipalities concerned have introduced any detailed plans, so the

initiatives remain symbolic. Why is this the case? Part of the reason, no doubt, is that Canadian cities have much more limited powers than their American counterparts. It is also possible that the political groups in favour of disarmament are better represented at the national level in Canada and that individual Canadians feel less affected by rising military expenditures.

It is worth adding that since proposals for NWFZs focus on the abolition of nuclear weapons they are of limited use as far as general

disarmament is concerned. Since, in the strict sense of the term – and putting cruise missile tests aside – there are no nuclear weapons in Canada, the whole question of NWFZs seems somewhat abstract. Moreover, a study of the various resolutions which have been adopted throughout North America leads to the conclusion that the more regulations a municipality imposes the narrower the area to which these apply. It is also possible that setting up NWFZs distracts attention from the need to reduce the manufacture of conventional arms, and yet the latter place the heaviest strain on resources and are hardly inoffensive from a military point of view.

THE MOVEMENT IN FAVOUR OF conversion has developed around the reality that fears about full employment and economic prosperity constitute some of the main

obstacles in the way of disarmament and reduced military spending. Conversion is seen, therefore, as a way of bolstering workers' feeling of security by enabling them to participate in the plans for converting their factories, particularly those factories which are already in financial difficulty because of reduced demand or changed requirements for military goods.

Many workers are well aware that a cut in military spending would enable more money to be spent on social services but they

are nonetheless alarmed at the prospect of losing their jobs and being unable to find new ones. From the point of view of the trade unions, conversion achieves two objectives: keeping peace and maintaining full employment. The dilemma is how to reconcile cuts in the national defence budget with protecting jobs in the arms industry.

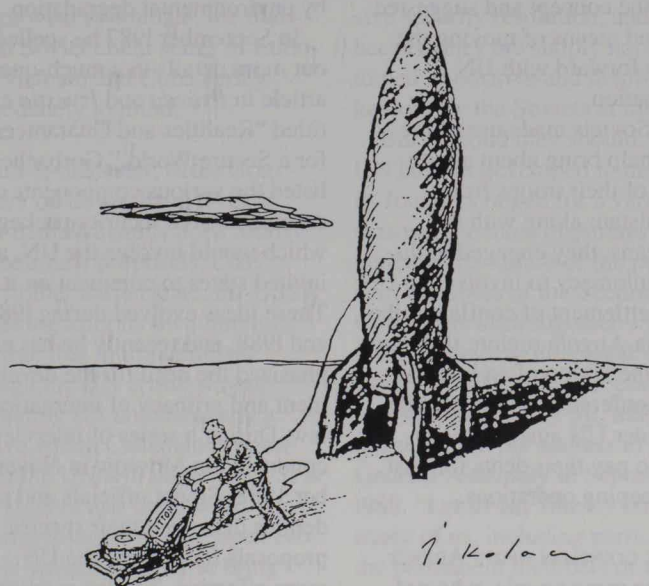
Experience in Europe demonstrates that conversion programmes are possible. On the other hand, several attempts have met with failure. Too often the firms concerned are already in economic difficulty; they have been abandoned by their owners and have little further potential. In several cases, owners have tried to unload their problems onto the state. For there to be any chance of success, conversion cannot rely on government intervention alone. It is essential to have the support of all those concerned in order to make full use of the resources of the

company. Conversion may well involve more than just a change in the type of goods being produced or in the customers who buy them. It may also require profound changes in the structure of the company and in the relationships among all those associated with it.

ONE OF THE MAIN DIFFICULTIES FOR conversion in Canada is the lack of practical experience – the whole notion engenders incredulity. It is largely to overcome this obstacle that several groups have suggested undertaking pilot projects in order to show that conversion is indeed feasible; however, dealing with individual cases has advantages and disadvantages. Limiting the procedure to a single firm greatly simplifies the problem and makes it easier to reach a consensus as to the economic principles involved. On the other hand, the infrastructure required for one successful experience involves setting up mechanisms to prevent the military production in question from being simply transferred to rival firms. This requires government assistance on a large scale and the high cost makes it unlikely that the process will spread to other firms in a given industrial sector.

One drawback to this whole approach is that it reduces issues of disarmament to purely economic questions rather than beginning with a clear political message. It is, therefore, just as difficult to formulate a strategy which copes with all the problems that arise from the arms industry as it is to get all those involved to agree on a solution. What is important, however, is to get the debate off the ground, and the best way of doing this is to put forward concrete proposals. The current discussions in Quebec, concerning Montreal's decision to ask its voters to support the establishment of a NWFZ, are relevant, as is growing interest in conversion on the part of trade unions, and will probably lead to some practical steps in the not too distant future. Such initiatives could imbue the disarmament movement with the energy it currently lacks. □

(Translation by Mary Taylor)



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