

Inga Thorsson &

A NEW CONCEPT OF SECURITY

Ken Burke talks to the Swedish disarmament expert and speaker at the 1986 Killam Lectures.

The Gazette: What are some of the topics you will be touching on at the Killam lecture series?

Thorsson: I'm going to try and make an analysis of the problems, the world problems, which at present stand in the way of our surge for peace - which means very much more than the absence of armed conflicts. It means progress, development and cooperation between peoples and countries.

I do that from my vantage point as coming from a small neutral country in Europe belonging to what is generally called the first world but certainly not belonging to any thing such as a military alliance which ties our hands.

As an old time politician in Sweden, I'm trying to explain to the people how I see the present situation in the world and what problems we must attack in order to solve all the difficult obstacles in the way of peace - real, genuine peace.

The Gazette: It seems as if there are two different views of security: one is that security is freedom and protection from all kinds of weapons and there is the other which sees a different way to get security. I believe one of the things you're interested in is a view which doesn't involve arming to be protected.

Thorsson: It's my very firm conviction that there is an urgent, almost desperate need for political leaders to think through the concept of security in terms of military security against attacks or threats of attacks by military force.

This is a very outdated concept in our age because we are trying to learn how much all the world-wide problems are linked together and form what are called non-military threats to security. They cannot be met by military means. They must be met by international cooperation and compromise instead of conflict.

The serious problem is that the mighty military powers, the dominant military powers, not only still define security in the old way which was done before the nuclear age, but they also feel that they are entitled use military force to solve all other problems which they feel affect their interests. When President Carter established the Rapid Deployment Force in the late 1970s, he said explicitly that it was done to safeguard American interests wherever they were threatened in the world.

This is an idea which is so hopelessly outdated, it cannot really be fulfilled in our

age. What I think is necessary is to have a complete redefinition of security in terms of international security, common security, as our former Prime Minister Olaf Palme called it in his Palme Commission - then to derive from that what establishes national security.

It has been said many times that at present, with the extreme military buildup which is without exception in peacetime, we are just buying insecurity at increasingly higher cost. This is, in my view, if I may use a strong term, sheer madness.

The Gazette: When many people think of security, they think of security in purely military terms. You've done some work about the need for security also in terms of the need for development in order for peace to come about. What are some of the things you have found when you looked at this issue?

Thorsson: I have worked at different levels, both at the international level at the United Nations and at the national level in my own country, Sweden, looking at the economic effects of the arms race and at what economic benefits could be derived from a process of disarmament which could lead to a changeover in product use and resource use from military to civilian purposes.

"We need a redefinition of security. . ."

It is my very, very definite conviction that the world finds itself today at a crossroads. We cannot continue both the arms race at its present stage and to really promote a more stable economic and political order in the world. (This is) because we cannot use resources two times, both for development and for military purposes. We must make a choice.

Another conclusion that I have arrived at is that every country in the world, independent of the level of its economic development and independent of the economic system they have established, would benefit economically from disarmament. So there is a mutual and enlightened self interest among nations for disarmament.

The third conclusion that I have arrived at, both at the international and the national level, is that (planning is essential) if we really (are to) arrive in a genuine disarmament situation. To take a very sim-



Photo by Ariella Pahlke/Dal Photo

ple example: if there is a general international agreement to ban a certain weapon system and this agreement is universally adhered to, then the governments in every country in which that certain weapon system had been produced will have to find another way to use the resources used.

If they have no plans for transferring or converting the resources used for that particular weapons system into peaceful use, then they will need the demand of the workers, of the managers, of the voters in that particular constituency to substitute a new type of military production for the one they had to abolish.

This is what we must avoid. There will be certain economic and social problems in such situations, but what we have found out, both nationally and internationally, is that if we really try seriously to plan and prepare for the solution of these problems, it is both technically and economically possible. It will not cause very difficult and impossible problems to solve.

The Gazette: You have done work with your country, Sweden, looking at conversion of the country's munitions and arms industries into peaceful uses.

What have you found with regards to the practical use of disarmament at this point?

Thorsson: The Swedish study, which the Swedish government asked me to undertake some years ago, was the result of a resolution which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1982.

The Swedish government was the first, and unfortunately so far the only one, to abide by that assembly resolution when they asked me in September 1983 to undertake such a study.

Last year, I finished my work by publishing and delivering to the government the second part with a more detailed report, particularly on the main defence industries in Sweden, but also some educa-

tional and informational material. This is very interesting, I think.

The government had asked me when they gave me the mandate, to try to see to it that the report was in such a shape that it could be used for information purposes: for discussions, for debates, for studies.

Now the government has set up a working group with representatives from the various ministries involved to continue the study to see what practical action can be taken.

"Defence industries . . . don't know anything about marketing."

What I did, in terms of recommendations to the government, was to start with what the UN study found to be so essential: namely, the process of planning and preparation for conversion.

What we found out is that this will take quite some time. I always make a comparison between the time needed to develop a new weapons system in our sophisticated age - which is estimated to be about eight to ten years - and the time it would take a defence industry to find a product for the civilian market which they could produce and which they could sell.

This difficulty of the time lag is due to the fact that the defence industries are characterized by certain very special features which make it difficult for them to compete in the open market.

Because of that, there must be some research, some findings, some examinations of what kind of products because defence industries are not used to marketing. They make their production based on orders from the government for the defence forces. They just have to work to fulfill that order and when they have done so, they just

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