

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



A response from Educators for Social Responsibility

I recently read Michael Bryans' article "Peace Education: Telling Jack and Jill the Facts of Life," (*Peace&Security*, Winter '87). As the coordinator of the ESR teaching guides, *Dialogue*, *Perspectives*, and the *Participation* series, I was interested in his comments. I feel, however, that Mr. Bryans fails to understand the intent and design of ESR's curriculum materials.

Mr. Bryans articulates a tension facing all of us in peace education. Clearly it is essential for our young people to grow up to an awareness of the complexities of the power dynamics of states and governments. Clearly these relationships are more intricate and far-reaching than any metaphor drawn from interpersonal relations can suggest. Nevertheless, we do need to create a bridge between the distant and confusing dynamics of nation-states and the daily lives of our students.

In our research on student attitudes, we found that, in contrast to their vivid and concrete concepts of war, students' concepts of peace were often vague and abstract. In addition, students often attributed stereotyped "images of the enemy" to countries with whom we have political differences. Even more disturbing, we found that students felt powerless, hopeless, and cynical about the possibility of creating change. Our educational efforts must provide the process and content to meet these challenges as well as providing information about vital international issues. Rather than defining peace as the absence of war or the preservation of international order, we viewed

it as the pursuit of justice on personal, social, national and international levels.

We feel it is as important for students to understand the nature of social and ecological interdependence, to develop conflict resolution and cooperation skills, and to participate in making the world a safer, more just, and peaceful place, as it is to understand intellectually the dynamics of international politics.

All of ESR's materials are written by classroom teachers. In the discussions they held during the creation of *Dialogue* and *Perspectives*, these teachers agreed that quality materials dealing with the content of international relations were readily available. But they noted, on the other hand, the relative scarcity of good teaching materials that look beyond the content at the importance of the *process* we use when we teach about vital contemporary issues.

In *Dialogue* the contributing teachers chose, at the elementary level, to look at developmentally-appropriate ways to listen and respond to young children's concerns about nuclear issues without adding to their fears; and, at the secondary level, to provide a variety of direct activities on developing and applying critical thinking skills to the content of the nuclear arms race and international issues.

In the *Participation* series ESR teachers provided activities to help students see the link between such content areas as math or science and the politics of public decision-making, as well as to experience their own ability to act to make a difference. They wanted the ESR teaching guides to be useful in many subjects and grades and to provide age-appropriate materials for elementary teachers who might find personal conflict resolution a much more teachable and appropriate concept than conflict on an international level.

Mr. Bryans simplifies ESR's materials by maintaining that we

equate the personal and the international. Although he is correct in recognizing our belief that we can learn some important lessons from our personal, community, and national conflicts, we do not "equate" these areas. We ask students to think about the similarities and the differences among four levels of conflict (personal, community, national and international). Although there are many activities that focus on personal conflict, there are also activities on international dynamics; in fact, the section on "Conflict Resolution" culminates in a simulated negotiation of the placement of cruise missiles in Europe.

Mr. Bryans also accuses ESR of overemphasizing personal perceptions and skills. We do indeed encourage reflection on our individual behaviour. Taking personal responsibility for the world we create means understanding the consequences of our actions on the people around us, on the environment, and on the larger society. Mr. Bryans seems to feel that this perspective ignores the factors of power, economics, and political socialization in international relations. We tried to explore the impact on international relations of ideology, ethnocentrism, propaganda, territoriality, aggression, and images of the enemy – especially in the "Obstacles to Peace" section of *Perspectives*. But we need to realize that this is a very political and sensitive area to deal with. We must conscientiously avoid propagandizing to students on these issues.

This is not to deny that more could be done to deal with the concerns Mr. Bryans has about ESR's treatment of a number of important issues. We do not consider our material complete: we are constantly rethinking and revising as our understanding grows.

I regret the labeling and simplifying of ESR's approach found in Mr. Bryans' article. He and I prob-

ably agree more than we disagree about what students need in order to make conscious and informed decisions about international issues.

*Shelley Berman, President
Educators for Social Responsibility
Cambridge, Mass.*

'Trident II' a lot more sombre for Canada

Mr. Sokolsky's article, "The US Navy and Canadian Security" (Spring '87), is interesting but it may miss the real drive behind the US Navy submarine program. This drive is to develop a most powerful first strike capability that, by itself, could devastate most of the USSR's strategic nuclear forces.

He states that: "... a fleet of ballistic missile submarines whose sea-launched ballistic missiles constitute America's secure second-strike capability." However, the upcoming (deployment starts 1988) Trident II system and its D-5 missile are not a second-strike weapon.

The Trident II submarine system, notwithstanding the US Navy's claims to the contrary, is designed to give the US the power to destroy, within less than fifteen minutes, most of the USSR's ICBM force and most other significant nuclear targets in the USSR. Moreover, the current Trident I submarine is designed to be easily converted to accommodate the powerful and highly accurate D-5 missile. The US Navy's plan is to convert these submarines to the D-5 during the next decade.

I suggest that when one realizes this development many of the arguments in the article regarding the new US Navy policy take on a considerably different meaning. And that meaning, the possible initiation of a first-strike, could have a considerably more sombre impact on Canada and its navy.
*Dr. Matania Ginosar, Director
Target Nuclear Disarmament
Sacramento, CA*