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THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE

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(Ed. Note: The author of this article is Secretary for the Northern California Labor Committee for the Bilateral Nuclear Weapons Freeze. References on which this article is based include (1) Council on Economic Priorities, "The Costs and Consequences of Reagan's Military Buildup," a Report to the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO, and the Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy (New York, 1982); (2) Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy, (a) "What a Trillion and a Half Dollars for the Pentagon Will Mean for You," and (b) "First Strike Nuclear Warfare" (Washington, D.C., 1982). Copies of these materials are available to LCR readers who request them, for the prepaid cost of \$3.00.

1. The Reagan Budget: Bigger Government, and Bigger Deficits

Local 29 of OPEIU and the Central Labor Council of Alameda County recently published a concise cartoon of the Reagan Administration's basic program. A messenger comes to the President and says "Sir, the poor are outside protesting the budget cuts." The President says, "It's time they learned to help themselves." The messenger says, "And the Pentagon needs another \$30 billion." The President says, "Tell them to help themselves."

The Administration is implementing the largest peace-time military build-up in our nation's history. In the drier terms of economic analysis, its program will increase defense spending and veteran's benefits from 54.2% of the total budget in 1981, to 78.8% in 1986 (a 45% increase). Its program will reduce all other domestic spending from 45.8% of the total budget in 1981 to 21.2% in 1986 (a 56% reduction).

In the process, an Administration which boasts of reducing government spending and "bureaucracy" will vastly increase both. Military outlays are budgeted to reach 356 billion by 1987--well over twice the 1981 level. This a far larger increase than that which occurred during the biggest years of the Vietnam buildup. The military budget requires an enormous sacrifice of social programs, and has already led to the greatest budget deficits in the nation's history.

2. The Nuclear Arsenal Modernization Program

The accelerating nuclear arms race is the focal point of the military build-up. Over the next six years, the Pentagon plans to spend between \$180 and \$220 billion to support a new strategy designed to fight a relatively long-lasting, slowly escalating, "limited" nuclear war. The strategy behind this build-up rests on the notion that "a good offense makes the best defense." The strategy is driving the U.S. and the Soviet Union into a dangerous new phase of the nuclear arms race. Both superpowers are building weapons that make nuclear war more likely, and are revising their war plans accordingly.

Both sides are building long and medium range "first-strike" weapons which could tempt the owners, or frighten the adversary, into launching first in a crisis. At the very least, these weapons would guarantee rapid escalation once a war starts. Both sides are also building short range "first-use" weapons that could turn a conventional war into a nuclear nightmare. Perhaps in recognition of the suicidal

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nature of full-scale nuclear war, implausible "limited" nuclear war doctrines are being devised to justify these new weapons.

Richard N. Perle, Reagan's Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, has praised the "prompt hard target kill capability" of the new weapons. He asserts, without explanation, that these weapons increase the "strategic utility" of the deterrent force. The mutual ability to retaliate may have some short-term utility in inhibiting nuclear war. But the current nuclear arsenal modernization program is new in two important respects. First, highly accurate, short flight-time missiles are dramatically increasing the likelihood of hasty decisions made in panic. Second, the threat of a preemptive first-strike attack is becoming a mutual threat for the first time.

If the way to get meaningful arms control agreements is to frighten the Soviets with overwhelming force, the arms race would have ended twenty years ago. But Soviet response to American nuclear superiority in the 1950s was to imitate the U.S. arsenal. The first-strike force now on order by the Pentagon will also be imitated, leading both sides into a trap which appears to offer an advantage to the side that starts the next war, but which offers survival to neither.

A reversal of the nuclear arms race, leading to eventual abolition of nuclear weapons, must be the primary long-term goal of all national security activity. No system of threats and counter-threats can possibly be stable enough or last long enough to be a permanent solution to the problem of nuclear war. Just as there is no possibility of "winning" a nuclear war, there is no longer any meaningful way to be ahead in the arms race. "Prompt hard target kill capability" does not confer an advantage to either side; it merely makes the balance of terror more dangerous.

3. Proposition 12: The Nuclear Weapons Freeze

A rapidly growing movement in America is now calling for a halt to the nuclear arms race before these new weapons are built. A comprehensive ban on explosive testing of nuclear warheads has been negotiated for several years. Public pressure could force its ratification. Physicians are calling nuclear war the final epidemic, preventable but not treatable. Hundreds of thousands of European demonstrators are demanding a nuclear-free Europe. Concerned people all over the world are looking into the future and seeing a thermonuclear holocaust--unless we work together to change our present course.

In the November election, California voters will be able to express their opinion on the most important survival issue which has ever confronted our nation. Proposition 12 gives them the opportunity to vote for a fundamental change in military and war policy (and in budget policy).

The Bilateral Nuclear Weapons Freeze Initiative (Proposition 12) is a simple, clear statement calling on both the United States and the Soviet Union to stop the testing, production and installation of nuclear weapons in a way that can be checked by both sides. It is part of a growing national effort to restore sanity to our defense policies. It is the first step towards preventing nuclear disaster--and insuring a future for us and our children.

About 20 major labor organizations in California and more than 60 local unions have filed their endorsements of the Bilateral Nuclear Weapons Freeze Initiative. Many labor organizations have also sent contributions to support the media campaign on behalf of Proposition 12 (including CWA, SEIU, IAM, OPEIU, and others). The Northern California headquarters of the Freeze Campaign (at 330 Jackson Street, San Francisco 94111) has indicated that contributions are still needed to help inform California voters of the significance of their opportunity to vote against continuation of the nuclear arms race.

-Bruce Poyer

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