

JUN  
1982

DISARMAMENT

This month, and for a good part of the summer, while Georgists expound our remedy at conferences in California, New Hampshire, Pittsburgh and Holland, many other good and sincere people are meeting to demonstrate their concern with what is commonly regarded as the most terrifying prospect for the planet, a nuclear holocaust.

It is hard to take issue with such an outpouring of genuine belief in a noble cause by so many well-motivated people. Their cause, nuclear disarmament, specifically, or a general halt to the futile arms race world-wide, needs no iteration from those of us who have long understood the futility of production of non-goods, whose use we would all fear.

Yet before we are all swept up in the clamor of protest, let us examine its ultimate relevance. Is it possible that by banning nuclear weapons, we are legitimating the use of others? Are tanks and missiles, planes and ships in the South Atlantic and the Near East more acceptable because they kill more conventionally? Is it the efficiency or the wrongful use of a weapon that should engage our protest? There is indeed a Luddite tinge to the movement which sees its target as the technology of destruction rather than the fact of it. They are at one with the medieval opponents of the crossbow and some of the current critics of the computer, all railing against the excesses of which these newfangled instruments are capable, without seeking to eliminate the all-too-human cause of their misuse.

No rational argument can really be made for the increasing production and stockpiling of weapons, exotic or conventional, and we can, without a qualm, support efforts to halt, reduce or even eliminate such waste in favor of investment to meet human needs. Georgists can even add to the argument by pointing out the monopoly aspect of arms in which government is the only customer and producers compete, not against each other, but for markets regulated and controlled by national authority. Perhaps there is something of a free market in second-hand arms, the international grey or black market, which consumes the products so quickly made obsolete by technology. But the volume of arms production and sales is enough to distort whatever is left of a free economy, wherever it exists, including our own. Witness the shortage of engineers and technicians for military production employment and the massive unemployment in civilian goods and services.

Georgists should not confuse our own contribution to the disarmament protest with our more lasting concerns for peace, justice and freedom. We must be careful to distinguish between the causes of conflict in unjust distribution of access of the resources of earth, from the horrifying manifestations of conflict, either conventional or nuclear warfare. We must be careful too, not to mistake pacifism for passivity. There may well be some things worth fighting for, including life itself and the enhancement of human dignity. Those of us who enter the fight for disarmament should remember the underlying concerns that remain the true target.

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