

# Comment

During an interview on a BBC news programme recently concerning his private member's Bill to make the parents of vandals financially responsible for the damage caused by their wayward progeny, a Tory M.P. observed, with all the well-rehearsed sincere tone of moral outrage and public concern that is part of the Tory M.P. identikit, that those people who inflict damage on society must be made to pay. Vandals, he confidently opined, are the product of indifferent, irresponsible or lazy parents. He must surely have been directing his windy words to the lower orders, for it is unthinkable that he could have had in mind those eminent members of English society who gave life, nourishment and education to the crop of vandals who now constitute the British Government. Who will pay for the damage, misery and pain that they have already inflicted on our people? Alas, only their victims – the unemployed and their families, the school-leavers, the slum-dwellers, the sick and the aged. That is bad enough. But who will pay for the damage and horror that they, (and of course previous official vandals), seem to be preparing us for – the almost certain extinction of humanity in nuclear war?

The second Vatican Council was engagingly eirenic in all its utterances save one, that on nuclear warfare. "Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas, along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation." (*Gaudium et Spes*, section 80.) Of course protagonists of deterrence will argue that condemnation of nuclear warfare is not the same as condemnation of stockpiling for purposes of deterrence. We hope that condemnation will be extended as soon as possible because it is becoming horrifyingly clear that the longer the Balance of Terror continues the more likely will its conclusion be human extinction. The odds against nuclear war happening in this decade are very high.

The Balance of Terror, we have been told, makes nuclear warfare unthinkable, that is what gives it any moral credibility. The grim fact is that we *are* thinking about it. A mad mood of fatalism is creeping over us like a winter fog. The propaganda machine is now urging us to swallow that all would not be lost were we to be 'nuked' – perhaps *only* 30 million would die! No protection is being planned and nuclear fallout shelters will be only for those who can afford them. But for the rest of us . . . ? Well, thus spoke with seeming seriousness William Whitelaw to Parliament: "Most houses offer reasonable protection against radioactive fallout from nuclear explosions. Protection can be substantially improved by a series of quite simple do-it-yourself measures" – including, presumably, such simple measures as the now famous whitewashed windows, upturned tables, hastily improvised sandbags, kindly advised to us in the Home Office's outrageous *Protect and Survive* pamphlet. (Needless to say our establishment vandals, having inaugurated the cataclysm, will not require the services of a nuclear handyman; they will be sitting it out in air-conditioned underground hideouts).

There is not the space in an editorial comment to argue the moral case for disarmament; that has been well done already, notably by the Christian C.N.D.\* and E. P. Thompson in his *Protest and Survive*\*\* and in debate with Peter Jenkins in *The Guardian*. In any case, does it need arguing any more? Have we the *time*? Mustn't we all, if we have any care for our world, any love for humanity, do all in our power to stop our mad rulers *now*? We may not have very long. *New Blackfriars* offers its columns and its support (such as it is) to those campaigning for nuclear disarmament, and respectfully urges our church leaders to encourage Christians to join those struggling for the future of humanity.

Alban Weston O P

\* See *Christians and Nuclear Disarmament* printed by Russell Press, Bertrand Russell House, Gamble Street, Nottingham.

\*\* Published by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, 29 Great James Street, London WC1N 3EY