

## Editorial

# Keep Space for Peace

This year's *Housmans Peace Diary* records that, on 2 July 1982, the first European Nuclear Disarmament Convention began in Brussels. That was when hundreds of activists from many, but mainly Western, corners of divided Europe descended on the Belgian capital, where limited translation facilities were available so that we could begin to understand each other. Some readers of *The Spokesman* will remember those heady days when Tony Benn debated the Cold War with Rudolf Bahro, who had just left the eastern part of divided Germany, and Mrs Thatcher had recently ordered the sinking of an ageing Argentine cruiser, *The General Belgrano*, with the loss of 323 lives, whilst threatening the use of *Polaris* nuclear weapons against Argentine naval installations. Old conflicts continue to simmer.

But END was in step, or even ahead, of the times. From Brussels, the caravan headed off to Berlin, via Moscow, where the Soviet Peace Committee launched a veritable broadside against the new 'non-aligned' European peace movement. This seemed to work wonders for the Berlin Convention of 1983, which attracted thousands more activists, some of whom, perhaps surprisingly, later became high NATO officials. Reunification of Germany formed part of the agenda, whilst a young Oskar Lafontaine, then in the SPD, opened proceedings with a passionate plea not to deploy Pershing Two and Cruise nuclear missiles in his country. 'Germany – A Nuclear-Free Zone?' was one of the Convention's seven 'Forums'.

Mikhail Gorbachev was coming to prominence in the Soviet Union as END travelled to Perugia, Amsterdam, Paris and onwards. He took note of the huge demonstrations across Western Europe against Cruise and Pershing during the early 1980s, just as he had heard the call of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto against the nuclear peril, during the 1950s, whilst studying in Prague. In due course, Presidents Gorbachev and Reagan agreed big reductions in nuclear arsenals, the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty was signed in 1987, removing a whole class of weapons from the European theatre and initiating on-site verification, which brought direct and constructive contact between military personnel of both sides. In 1989, people dismantled the Berlin Wall, as Edward Thompson had mischievously prophesied in one of his splendid epistles written years earlier.

Meanwhile, the United States under President Reagan had a new scheme for accelerating the arms race with the Soviet Union. 'Ballistic Missile

Defence' or BMD, was quickly dubbed 'Star Wars' in due recognition of its Hollywood associations. More than a decade earlier, in 1972, the Soviet Union and the United States had signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which barred both of them from deploying nationwide defences against strategic ballistic missiles. The Treaty envisaged this as a 'substantial factor in curbing the race in strategic offensive arms'. Hitherto, the logic had been to build more and more strategic nuclear missiles to overwhelm any such defences. So, if the defences were removed or considerably restricted, fewer strategic missiles would be required to destroy the enemy, should nuclear deterrence have failed! The United States withdrew from the ABM Treaty in 2002, disregarding loud and persistent Russian protests.

For 20 years or so, since the 1980s, Star Wars had a long record of test failures. The ambition to hit a bullet with a bullet was proving extremely difficult to achieve. Usually, they missed or crashed. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the global strategic balance shifted. The Cold War gave way to serial Western wars on Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, whilst expansion of NATO and the encirclement of Russia moved ahead. Opportunities for constructive co-operation with Russia were spurned by the US, as Stephen Cohen again points out in this issue. At the same time, the revised architecture of missile defence now appears more effective, as Bruce Gagnon argues. China's rise, and Obama's 'pivot' to the Pacific, complicate the picture, so that Russia's security interests are much more closely shared with China than during the long years of Cold War. For some historical perspective on nuclear confrontations, we revisit Bertrand Russell's personal role in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

\* \* \*

### **We are all Greeks**

SYRIZA and its inspiring young leader, Alexis Tsipras, have transformed the debate about austerity in Europe and turned it on its head with calls for growth, full employment and a comprehensive welfare state in Greece and more widely. Social Europe has a new champion on the Left. President Hollande's election triumphs in France also lend real public weight to this trend. At the same time, the so-called 'bail-outs' are exposed as subventions to the banks. Does the European Union's parlous response to the spreading crisis in the Eurozone indicate that the long-running tide of neoliberalism may, at last, be on the turn? As a timely contribution to this urgent debate, we print SYRIZA's bold and challenging 'Programmatic Commitments' to the Greek people in the recent election there.

*Tony Simpson*