

SCIENTISTS AND THE PEACE MOVEMENT
Some notes on the relationship^{*}

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1. The democratic injunction

We have recently witnessed a considerable increase in the size and the impact of the peace movement; even if the peace movement as anti-missile movement in Western Europe has suffered a certain decrease, certainly to be expected when the deployment of the missiles nevertheless took place fall 1983. We have for a long time had a rate of increase in the production of scientists (of all kinds, natural science, social sciences, humanities); possibly sooner or later approaching a saturation point. Naturally, there has been a spill-over from one to the other: scientists as such, physicists, physicians and engineers, social scientists of all kinds, historians, lawyers, theologians are making statements and aligning themselves in various ways with that broad popular movement to avert nuclear war. The interesting point is that they no longer do so as committed individuals only, accepting some very general principles, but try to bring their scientific expertise to bear on their position in favour of the peace movement and its causes. This is my point of departure.

I think there is a basic problem here that needs some exploration: what does it mean to the democratic character of a political process when scientists in great numbers join a popular movement, presumably as experts? Will they try to be in command of the movement, legitimising a leadership position by reference to superior knowledge? Will they be experts on top, in other words, or be satisfied to remain experts "on tap", counting one vote only if elections and votes are on the agenda; but at the same time making their knowledge-based insights available?

In a sense the answer is easy: in a democracy, as opposed to an expertocracy, people should have the final say, not the experts. It is pressure from the people rather than from the experts that should lead to course corrections, whether these corrections are carried out by the executive power directly or mediated through the pressures exercised by a popular assembly, a parliament. Experts may err, and so may people. In war-peace issues the parliaments and governments of aligned member countries

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certainly err, if the experience from the past century is a valid guide: offensive weaponry leads to arms races in offensive weapons; arms races tend to lead to wars. And the consequences of all these errors in the course charted for the society as a whole, are visited upon the people and not only on military, experts, parliamentarians and governmental bureaucrats. Hence the responsibility should also rest with the people. Societies are not constructed in such a way that only people high up pay the consequences, usually they get better off than the people in general. Nor should people abdicate from responsibility. Democracy is based on the principle of and by the people, simply because what happens may not only be for, but also against, the people.

The peace movement is an expression of this sentiment. It is the obvious outcome of a situation where it is possible, like in the Federal Republic of Germany, to make a decision with extremely serious potential consequences such as the deployment of the Euromissiles November 1983, with only a 55% majority in the parliament and probably with not more than 5% of the population at that time really supporting the decision. The peace movement not only stands for, or rather against, a certain course of action; it is also an expression of the democratic urge in large sections of the population to step in where they feel that experts, parliamentarians and bureaucrats fail. In other fields there may be discontent, but nevertheless a feeling that by and large the self-correcting mechanisms of the establishment are sufficient. In the field of security politics this is no longer the case, and the peace movement is one answer to the gap in credibility, even legitimacy.

From this it should follow that it would be very unwise for the peace movement to abdicate to its own experts, the scientists who join. The peace movement should not become an exercise in liberation from one set of experts only to end up in the arms of another set, certainly with a position closer to that of the peace movement at some place, at some time,

but otherwise not differing much from experts in general. The peace movement should keep its distance, listen to all experts carefully (including those from the Establishment), sift the chaff from the wheat, use the experts, really squeeze them. But there should be no abdication; any leadership should be democratically elected, not selected because of some status in the knowledge hierarchy. It should be remembered that democracy is based on the faith that the insights of everybody concerned can be added up in some meaningful manner, particularly provided a dialogue has taken place, and that the expert's deep insight at some points in the spectrum of knowledge is compensated by the non-expert's intuitions over a wider range. Partnership is the way to democracy, which is neither parliamentocracy, nor expertocracy, nor "populocracy."

2. What the scientists can contribute to the peace movement

It seems to me that in a popular movement like the peace movement the scientists have three quite clear tasks, based on data, values and theories respectively:*

(1) Empirically, to give the data, the facts, in connection with policies chosen or recommended. This, however, they should above all do within their range of competence, not trying to step outside that range, often quite narrow.

It is equally painful to listen to a social scientist trying to behave like a nuclear scientist as to a nuclear scientist believing that he is a social scientist, pontificating on peace and war. As a regular peace movement member, he is of course, free to do so - but then it should not necessarily be assumed automatically that his insights are particularly deep or valid. They may be, but that will have to be tested. The Pugwash movement, at some time dominated by the super powers and the nuclear scientists, and particularly by super power nuclear scientists, had some of this faith built into it, particularly in the first twenty years.

* See my Methodology and Ideology, Ejlers, Copenhagen 1977, Ch. 3 for an exploration of this theme.

To this it may be objected that scientists are surrounded by an aura anyhow, and this can be utilised and capitalised upon by the peace movement. I doubt it. I think physicians are particularly effective when they pronounce themselves qua physicians and end up with conclusions underpinning positions taken by the peace movement; not when they pronounce themselves on any and all matters outside their field of competence. On the contrary, others would not fail to pay attention to such mannerisms, and may even make use of such pronouncements in order to illegitimise the specialists even when they are clearly within their field of competence. Of course, that kind of debating trick will probably be made use of anyhow, and should not be taken too seriously. But the difficulty remains that when the scientists are inside their field of competence the novelty of what they say may not be acknowledged, because people are so used to their positions, usually of a pessimistic kind, even apocalyptic, anyhow. "Nuclear winter" may be an example here.

(2) Critically, being explicit in their evaluation of courses of action, again within their field of competence. But at this point a new element enters: the scientists not only say what the consequences will be but also deplore them, speak out against them, utter clear warnings. To do so there has to be an element of value commitment, not only good data or reasonable predictions about the empirical consequences of a course of action. Some scientists are better trained in combining empirical projections with a value commitment than others: physicians bring in the supreme value of health, engineers the supreme value of (scientific and economic) rationality. Both commitments are much heralded in our civilization and bring in their wake no particular difficulties to the members of these professions. The same could be the case for peace, particularly when coupled with such other honor words as "security" and "freedom" - but we are not yet quite at that stage. However, some scientists have reached that point more than others and do criticise; they do engage in criticism.

It should be pointed out that when they do so they are not outside their realm of competence as scientists, provided they make the value-orientation they use reasonably explicit. The value to which they are committed is trivial, at least

as long as we stay within the examples quoted above. What they do is simply to read off the consequences on which they are presumably experts on a screen with a value dimension on it. Actually, it is not even required of them that they believe in health, rationality or peace: all they do is spell out the consequences in these terms. If they want to make this very clear, all that is needed is to preface their statements with an "if": "If peace is what you want, then this course of action will probably rather bring you the opposite for the following reasons...." Very simple, and doing so in no way interferes with their qualities as scientists. It is only unusual in the sense that many of them are trained in the university to believe that values and facts do not mix at all, in which case medical science and engineering would be impossible. Staying within their empirical field of competence, there should be no problem in this connection; explicitness being compatible with competence.

(3) Constructively, contributing new ideas, suggesting new policies. Here a new element is brought in as there is no longer any solid empirical base. The new courses of action would be located in the interface between theory and value, the values indicating the ends and the theories the means (of course a simplification since the two are rather interrelated). But physicians and engineers, like architects and medical people, are doing this every day, as an obvious part of their professional activities. Lawyers are doing so, often more with a view to preventing wrong courses of action than encouraging the right ones. Hence, this is not so revolutionary either and could safely be engaged in by many more people. Whether one does it well or badly is another matter.

In the three points just mentioned, there is a clear past-present-future dimension. The empirical approach would obviously have to be based on data from the past, since only the past yields data - although projections into the future may be entertained. A critical approach will usually be about current politics, and the scientist will become an actor in the political field. And the constructive activity would be with a view to preparing blue-prints for tomorrow, inspiring the

peace movement to new vistas*.

It goes without saying that some scientists are better at documentation, others at criticism, and still others at proposal-making. It also goes without saying that the three activities do not exclude each other. It can be found in the same person, at least two of them if not all three (that would demand much experience from one individual scientist; and for that reason better obtained through dialogue processes in groups collectively). The peace movement is in need of all three types of activities, singly and combined, which is just another way of saying that scientists are indispensable to the peace movement. Usually the peace movement is good at criticism, not bad on empiricism, but very poor on constructivism, on designing desirable and viable alternatives.

However, from this it does not follow that the peace movement will necessarily make more headway the more scientists there are. In fact, this might be an occasion to warn against two sources of excessive optimism,

- that in an open society rational arguments, and people's movements, will eventually lead to course corrections
- that strong, warning, statements by scientists will eventually lead to course corrections, or at least be heeded.

As to the first assumption: we have reasonably open societies in Western Europe; there has been no scarcity of warning voices, nor any absence of movements and demonstrations. It has even been clearly brought to the attention of everybody that the majority of the population in the five Euromissile countries are against deployment. Yet, it happens, for the simple reason that however important peace issues are to many people, the peace movement has not yet succeeded in making peace the priority number one issue for the majority of the population. The moment that is the case, people would vote in favour of a peace party even if that means choosing a party that does not favour the economic policy they themselves would like to see implemented. But that kind of voting does hardly take place to any significant extent today. To the contrary, I think Eastern European countries in general and the Soviet Union in particular could learn from the West that they have nothing to fear from the open society: just

* My own book There are Alternatives! (German, English, Dutch, Spanish editions 1984; Norwegian, Swedish, Italian, Japanese editions 1985) is actually a mix of all three; how successful is another matter.

let people organized, write petitions and thick books, walk any number of kilometers in a straight line or in a circle, with or without torches. All one has to do is not to pay too much attention unless it shows up in parliament. And there, as the last resort, there is always the possibility of exercising strong idea power, exchange power, or threat power - convincing, buying, cajoling recalcitrant "dissidents," Last resort: a military coup.

As to the second assumption: I am not convinced that science based stern warnings, and pessimistic predictions, will really bring about change. Rather, I think there are reasons to believe that political establishments accept criticism the moment they see a constructive alternative that is acceptable to them for other reasons. In other words, criticism alone, however well it is backed up by empirical data, will not change the course of action, only marginally modify that course, as I can easily imagine in connection with the "nuclear winter". If the prediction is that a certain megatonnage will whirl so much dust into the atmosphere that sunshine will be blocked out, with disastrous consequences, then one alternative would not be to ban nuclear war, but to go in for smaller bombs with lower yields, more dispersed, and precise enough to hit targets that do not generate too much dust in the atmosphere. But that was hardly what those emitting those warnings had in mind, nor the peace movement.

Just to the contrary: it is the constructive alternative, coupled to a critical assessment of the current course of action, pronounced forcefully and with a tinge of optimism that probably will win out if not in the shorter, at least in the longer run. And this also has something to do with the way in which policies are criticised and proposed. That negativism, criticism and pessimism do not necessarily attract more votes than a positive attitude, constructivism and optimism, can be clearly seen from some recent elections: Mondale vs Reagan in the United States, November 1984 (and November 1980 against Carter also, for that matter). Or Kohl vs Vogel in the Federal Republic of Germany in March 1983 (another example would be the elections of the mayor of West Berlin, May 1985). What holds

for such elections probably holds for politics in general, and may be one very important reason why the peace movement does not make a more significant breakthrough. When proposals are put forward these are usually in terms of limitation, cuts, "freeze", disarmament and control - not about something new and expansive, even if it also has to be expensive. Which is just another way of saying that criticism has to be combined with constructivism, with new horizons - not only stopping action, back to status quo ante. At least in change and progress oriented societies like ours. Most people want visions, hope; not to be told that they are doomed.

What has just been said are some reasons why the fault may not necessarily be with the society if the peace movement is not sufficiently listened to and its proposals are not accepted: there may also be something wrong with the whole style of the peace movement. Similarly, if the peace experts find that the peace movement does not accept their way of thinking in general, and their specific advice in particular, it may not necessarily be the fault of the peace movement. In a democracy scientists should never be arrogant relative to a popular movement, but they should not be submissive either. We have more than enough of submissive intelligentsia who for a salary/honorarium offer the "advice" the heavy institutions in society want to hear anyhow. Similarly, nobody is served by "scientists" who give up their precious capacity always to continue asking "But is that really so?", and instead become the call girls of the tiny peace movement commissariate - differing from those kept by the establishment mainly in not even being paid. And, since the scientist can never predict where unceasing questioning will lead him there may be conflicts of loyalty.

3. What the scientists can learn from the peace movement

The other side of the coin of the scientist/peace movement relationship is often forgotten: what the scientists get out of that relationship. I would like to mention three particular points, all of them from my own experience.

First, a scientist is exposed, through the peace movement, to new data, to combinations of events in the past, the present, and possibly also the future

that he would hardly have come up against had he just been engaged in conventional library research. Of course, this is the case whenever a scientist enters some kind of consultancy relationship: the "client" presents him with situations that are new, if not to the "client", at least to the scientist. I can only mention the example that gave rise to my own book There are alternatives: I was questioned by one particular peace-minded person (my own son), "where in Europe is it safest to live in case an atomic war should break out?" In all academic settings, such general, but basic questions are overshadowed by a plethora of specialised, less basic problems.

Second, the scientist is exposed to a more intense level of value commitment than he usually has himself. Also, he may be exposed to conflicting value commitments, at least if the movement is diverse enough. These values are held with an intensity that makes the problems much more pressing, particularly as there are demands for answers, rewards for good answers and some punishment for the scientist who hedges, who never comes out with anything like a clear answer. Suddenly the scientist realises not only that an answer is requested of him, and

if he cannot come up with one, it is not necessarily because he is "scientific" in the sense of not jumping to conclusions, but simply because he has not done his homework, so that he becomes able to jump to valid conclusions, if jump he must!

Third, the scientist is exposed to the need to be constructive, to propose some alternative and not only to use his knowledge to present and project data, possibly in a critical manner. Only parts of the peace movement will demand this constructive activity of him; most of the moment will be more than satisfied if he can help the movement buttress their essentially critical argumentation against establishment politics engaged in or proposed. The scientist can solve the problem by keeping away from such movements or parts of movements, or demand of them in advance that such pressures are not exercised. But he will also find himself rejuvenated as a scientist by

accepting the pressures, and perhaps become more humble, facing his inability to supply the goods demanded, trying to do something about it. What a challenge to face people who ask difficult, precisely because not "academic", questions where knowledge of literature and quotations will get you nowhere!

These are heavy rewards for the scientist although they are not in monetary terms. Of course, they are only rewards for a scientist who feels some kind of basic alignment with the peace movement, its ideas and ideals. He cannot do as the establishment scientist who even is repelled, feels aversion in connection with establishment goals and comforts himself that at least he is well paid, his family well fed and clad and sheltered, and that "such is life", and "if I don't do it, somebody else will".

The peace movement might do well to understand that they can keep their scientists particularly happy, and also filter out the scientists less valuable to the movement, by maintaining a certain pressure on them to deliver intellectual goods and services. It is not a bad idea to have a scientist introduce a working group, but only if the questions have been relatively precise and well-formulated, and sufficiently difficult. If a general talk is needed, then a generalist rather than a specialist might be asked to deliver it; in fact, the opposite would be not only abuse but also bad utilisation of the specific talents of a scientist.

4. Conclusion: a happy marriage?

Not necessarily. To assume so is far too optimistic. There are plenty of scientists who feel hurt, even insulted, when "common people" fail to accept their advice; there are very many "common people" who much too easily accept what is said by a "famous" expert. Much of this comes from a lack of inner faith in democratic ideas and ideals, a search for authority and the authority's search for somebody who accepts them in a more unquestioning manner than their colleagues are likely to do.

Further, scientists used to performing brilliantly when relating data to theories and vice versa, may become very inadequate when asked just to present the data, relate the data to values critically, or relate the values to theories, constructively. They are simply not trained in these activities and often do not even realise that something new is going on. They stick to their old ways, insensitive to the signals of apathy, incomprehension or protestations of irrelevance.

When, even in an open society, the critical prophesies pronounced by scientists and carried into every nook and cranny of society, on the backs of a broad-shouldered popular movement, is not sufficiently paid attention to, scientists might be inclined to blame the peace movement. The movement was not quantitatively big or qualitatively deep enough, or something like that. It may not occur to the scientists that their message was only half of what people want to hear and that the constructive half was missing. Moreover, however brilliant the scientists, they may not be very good at the game of politics and power play: the political establishment will pick those scientists, and that from any scientist, that they can use, that which is consistent with their policies. Whatever is incompatible will not even be listened to, or if listened to not understood, or if understood not paid attention to, or if paid attention to used in the wrong way. Except for the very, very rare occasion.

Finally, the scientist - more likely than not - will view the relationship as a one-way relationship where the scientist is "giving" something to the movement, for instance his valuable time - and he may be reflecting on the opportunity costs, articles not written, books not produced, lectures not given (honoraria not received). It may not occur to him that he perhaps receives more from the thousands or even millions in the movement than he is able or even willing to give, because he has been trained only to perceive experts as real people, and the rest as "masses". Listening too much to colleagues may have made him deaf to what others have to say. Hence, a unique training in basic values of democracy - and isn't that also what the peace movement is about?