

OCT. 13, 78

Letter from a Bangor Worker

Ground Zero: Center for Nonviolent Action
Route 5 Box 5423
Poulsbo, Washington 98370

I write to you as one of the workers at Subase Bangor. When I pass you at the gate, I respect your right to offer me a leaflet which publicly questions whether society should sanction my work. I admire you for the personal sacrifice you are willing to make on behalf of your beliefs. However, I feel no guilt on driving on through the gate to do my job to help activate the TRIDENT weapons system. Quite simply, I believe the TRIDENT weapons system will be, like its predecessors POLARIS and POSEIDON, our most effective deterrent to a world-wide nuclear holocaust.

For years I have tried to find the merit in argument, advanced by organizations such as Ground Zero, for voluntary unilateral disarmament. I no longer try because I have finally come to realize there is no merit. Wistfulness, yes. Merit, no.

Ground Zero, like others, wears the blindfold of euphoria. Remove the blindfold and look at the real world. It's an unpleasant fact of life but a fact nevertheless - societal man will resort to warfare to assert his "rights." Although his moral self abhors this physical brutality, he is able to disguise his savage acts as acts in self-defense and acts in the best long range interests of mankind. Some of us see the day coming when the moral self will not easily be deceived. I think our national revulsion, finally, to what we were doing in Vietnam is an indication of that. I think our efforts to get Israel, Egypt and the Arab world to negotiate their differences are an indication of that. But we're not there yet and we need TRIDENT as a guarantee we'll have a chance to get there.

There are murdering nations abroad in the world. My existence means nothing to them. The USSR threatens the beliefs I hold. If we disarmed, do you honestly believe the Soviets would stay within their borders? Red China's masses are spring loaded automatons. If we disarmed, do you honestly believe Red China would stay within its borders? Our NATO allies: if we disarmed, do you think they would or could remain committed to democratic freedom in its various Old World and New World forms? Or would they fall, like so many dominoes before the tank treads of the Soviet army?

Our only hope to cross the time bridge leading from 1978 to safe disarmament, is to remain strong and visibly capable of destroying our aggressor in a single, colossal counter-attack. Poor America, it's a role that weighs heavily on her and one in which she is so uncomfortable. We not only must pour resources into systems of great destructive power but we must flaunt this power, to make certain our would-be aggressors know we're not kidding.

How long is this time bridge? How long will we have to spend our resources on this distasteful work of weaponeering? I don't know. I do know the evolution of weapons from stone spear to atomic bomb has brought us to this - man can now end life as we know it on this planet. And we must stop him from bringing this incredible nightmare to reality.

So that's why I work on TRIDENT. The world isn't safe for me yet. I have to buy time to cross the bridge. There are still societies, world neighbors of mine, which will not let me live undefended. For if I were defenseless they would rob me of my property, enslave me in toil for their state and eliminate me if I were to voice any criticism of the System. TRIDENT is one of my tickets across the time bridge. It's yours too, whether you know it or not.

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Ken Bremner

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And Ground Zero's Response:

Dear Ken:

We're grateful for your letter, and for your giving us permission to print it on this leaflet to share with other Bangor workers. What impressed us

most about your letter was its thoughtful character and the respect you have for leafletters with different views. We'd like to respond here to some of the points you make in your letter. But our most important response is simply, "Thanks." We deeply appreciate your sharing your ideas with us -- and allowing us to share them through this leaflet with other workers.

We agree with you that looking at the real world is a virtue. We think you describe the real world with insight when you say that the evolution of weapons has brought us to this -- humankind "can now end life as we know it on this planet." But for us your key insight into the real world lies in your statement: "Although his moral self abhors this physical brutality, societal man is able to disguise his savage acts as acts in self-defense and acts in the best long range interests of mankind."

Moral self-deception is, we agree, the key to the threat to all life on earth. It seems to us that your insight here into the nuclear arms race agrees with Jesus' question, "Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the plank in your own?" And we agree with you that the USSR and China have been guilty of a murderous moral self-deception, together with Israel, Egypt, the Arab world, and the U.S. in Vietnam.

But what makes the U.S. any different in our act of justifying Trident? What makes our act of building a potentially world-destructive weapon an exception to your insight that people "disguise savage acts as acts in self-defense and acts in the best long range interests of mankind"?

A former designer of the Trident missile system, Robert Aldridge, says that Trident has been designed specifically to launch a disarming first strike, not to deter nuclear war. Aldridge has documented this charge in a series of articles for The Nation. We passed out one of these articles last spring at Bangor and challenged Trident base authorities "to reply now to the specific information in Aldridge's argument that Trident is 'the ultimate first-strike weapon,' which would make it a crime under international law." Neither then, nor at any other time, has any government source refuted Robert Aldridge's detailed argument that Trident's design characteristics are for a weapon of aggression, not deterrence.

But even if it is granted that Trident is more murderous than deterring, what is our alternative way "to cross the time bridge leading from 1978 to safe disarmament"?

We think the American people demanding an end to Trident would be a first step across that bridge, and would give the bridge itself more permanence: A first-strike weapon like Trident threatens to blow it away. The strength of citizens acting together -- you and we in unity -- is necessary for such a step. The pressures of arms contractors and Pentagon ambitions are the real reasons for a first-strike weapon, not the Russians -- who will be more provoked by it than deterred. Our moral self-deception in justifying Trident means dollars to Lockheed and power to the Pentagon, while the real needs of people suffer. People acting together can turn those priorities around.

Stopping Trident, a weapon that is a major escalation in the arms race, isn't unilateral disarmament. It's common sense, and a practical first step toward peace. We grant there is a risk involved in refusing to escalate further with Trident, the risk of doing something different as a nation -- at a point where our nuclear capacity for overkilling the Russian population is estimated at 30 (compared to "only" 18 for the Russians' capacity to overkill us).

We think it's possible to begin to act as a nation in the same spirit of openness which seems to have moved you to write your letter to us -- recognizing real people on the other side of the fence (or world), and risking a move toward them. It seems to be happening between Egyptians and Israelis, as you point out. Why not between Americans and Russians in disarmament negotiations?

Thanks again for your letter, Ken, and peace to you.

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