

David Marquand

Is There New Hope for the Social Democrats?

Difficulties of "Breaking the Mould" in Britain

IN APRIL 1980, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was little more than a gleam in the eyes of Roy Jenkins and a handful of supporters. He had delivered the Dimpleby Lecture in London a few months before, and his offices in Brussels had been swamped by enthusiastic letters of support. A small band of non-parliamentary social democrats had begun meeting privately to prepare the ground for a breakaway party when he returned to this country. Bill Rodgers, the toughest and shrewdest of the old "Jenkinsites" (and "Gaitskellites") still in the House of Commons, had made a belligerent speech in South Wales, giving the Labour Party a year to put its house in order. One or two less prominent Labour MPs (Tom Ellis, John Horam, Robert MacLennan, Neville Sandelson) had let it be known that they despaired of the Labour Party and that they agreed, at any rate in principle, with the "Dimpleby" call for a realignment of the "radical centre."

But these swallows were far from making a summer. No one with eyes to see could doubt that the Labour Party was mortally sick, or that its sickness had created a vacuum on the Centre Left of British politics. It was clear that an explicitly social-democratic party, working in alliance with the Liberals, would have a better chance of filling that vacuum and of mobilising the growing army of alienated radicals who felt themselves disfranchised by the existing party system than the Liberals had on their own. It was clear too that the beleaguered social democrats who remained in the Labour Party could continue to remain in it only at the cost of endless concessions, endless equivocation, and an endless erosion of self-respect. But all this proved only that a new party of British social democrats had at last become possible. It did not prove that it was probable, still less that it was certain.

Certainty was a long time in coming. The Labour

Right lost the battle over the compulsory re-selection of sitting Labour MPs and was systematically out-generalled in the much more important battle over the method of electing the Party leader. Tony Benn's Left won battle after battle over policy, often without encountering serious resistance. By the autumn of 1980, the Labour Party had become unapologetically unilateralist on the issue of disarmament, and was well on the way to being neutralist. It was also committed to unconditional withdrawal from the European Community and, in effect even if not in intention, to a "siege economy" on the home front. No sooner was the Party conference over than Michael Foot—old "Bevanite", old CND marcher, fundamentalist Clause-Four socialist—was elected as Party leader in succession to James Callaghan. Even more alarming from the social-democratic point of view, the preceding election campaign had shown that Denis Healey—the last, frail barrier to further left-wing advances in the Labour Party—was now running scared. Yet even after Michael Foot's election, it was still not absolutely certain that enough Labour Members of Parliament would join a new social-democratic party to make it credible in the House of Commons.

By now, the non-parliamentary social democrats in the country had lost patience. We had made up our minds to raise the standard when Roy Jenkins came back from Brussels, whether we had parliamentary support or not. Meanwhile, David Owen—originally a scornful and damaging critic of the whole "Dimpleby" argument—had become convinced that there was no future for his brand of decentralist democratic socialism in an increasingly statist Labour Party, and had drawn the conclusion that a new party was needed after all. With characteristic courage and drive, he had begun to work actively for a split in the Labour Party; and after Michael Foot's election, his parliamentary colleagues began to give him a much better hearing

than would have seemed conceivable a few months before. As late as December 1980, however, firm commitments from the House of Commons were still hard to come by; and it was not until Labour's ill-fated conference in Wembley in January 1981 that a significant level of parliamentary support was assured.

ALL THIS IS NOW ancient history, of course. Yet it is of more than antiquarian interest. Novelty fades so fast in an age of mass communications and instant commentary that it is easy to forget that, as recently as three years ago, the SDP did not exist: that the triumphs, disappointments, excitements and *longueurs* through which it has passed since its foundation have been squeezed into only twenty-four months. That, however, is the most important single fact about it. It has done in two years what the Labour Party took eighteen years to do, and what no other new party in the last 100 years of British history has done at all. It now has a leadership, elected by nationwide secret ballot of its members; a Party Council and National Committee (also elected by secret ballot); a constitution so impeccably democratic that it is fully comprehensible only to the Chancery barristers who drew it up; a small but well-organised national headquarters, backed by offices in most of the regions; an average of 100 members per parliamentary constituency; and a range of detailed policies, covering most of the important issues facing the country. Before long, it will also have around 300 prospective parliamentary candidates, fighting constituencies in all parts of mainland Britain. It is, in short, a fully-fledged national party, in a sense which was not true of the Labour Party until 1918 and was never true of the SDF, the ILP, the New Party, Common Wealth, the Communist Party, or the nationalist parties in Wales and Scotland.

NOT ONLY IS IT a national party, it—or, rather, it and its Liberal allies together—has presented the first serious challenge to the electoral hegemony of the two big parties since the interlocking orthodoxies of Left and Right defeated Lloyd George's campaign to conquer unemployment in 1929.

As was to be expected, the Alliance's popularity has fluctuated wildly since it came into existence in the summer of 1981. For some months, it ran ahead of the big parties. Then it ran behind. But in good and bad times alike, it has done a whole dimension better than the Liberals used to do on their own. Its peaks have been far higher than pre-

vious Liberal peaks; more important still, its troughs have been far less low than previous Liberal troughs. In January this year, it registered "only" 23% in the Gallup poll. In January 1979—three months before a general election in which they took 14% of the popular vote—the Liberals registered 4½%. The Liberals' best post-War performance in the Gallup poll was in August 1973, when they scored 22½%. At the Alliance's highest point in December 1981 Gallup gave it 50½%. After the February defeat in London's Bermondsey constituency (a safe Labour seat for 60 years) of the Left-Wing Peter Tatchell, the astonishing Liberal victory for the Alliance produced a new surge in public-opinion readings. The SDP-Liberal Alliance was recorded by MORI to be a strong second (34%), pursuing the Tories (39%), ahead of Labour (26%).

OF COURSE, THIS DOES NOT prove that the Alliance will gain ground in the next election. The only sure conclusion to be drawn from the last fifteen years of British electoral history is that no sane man would try to predict the results of a forthcoming general election months—or even weeks—before the event.

There is no doubt that the "Falklands effect" which sustained Mrs Thatcher for most of last year is now wearing off; but there is no way of telling how far or how fast the process will go. Equally, there is no doubt that the Labour Party is set firmly on a downward path, but no way of telling if it will strike one of the occasional upward stretches between now and polling day. It is clear that if the Conservatives do win the next election, they will be the first British governing party since 1959 to have won a general election after holding office throughout a normal length Parliament; and that, since the United Kingdom is much harder to govern today than it was in 1959, this would be a remarkable feat. But although all this provides plenty of material for psephological parlour games, it distracts attention from the long-term significance of the Alliance's performance.

The real point about the next election is that it is the most open for more than fifty years; and it is open because, in the constituencies even if not in the House of Commons, the two-party system has been replaced by a three-party system. By any reckoning, that is a historic achievement. It is one for which the SDP can claim most of the credit; and it too was the work of, at most, eighteen months. It is only against that background—against the back-

ground, in other words, of headlong, almost disorienting growth—that the present position and future prospects of either the SDP or the Alliance can fruitfully be assessed.

No party member—certainly, no party member who remembers the long, anxious months between the Dimpleby Lecture and the Wembley conference, when the press mocked and parliamentary social democrats wrestled with their consciences—could complain about the speed with which the SDP has grown. It has grown fast because it was needed: because it struck a chord which no one else had managed to strike since the War: because those of us who had thought for some time that there was a vacuum to be filled on the Centre-Left of British politics turned out to be correct. Besides, the alternative to fast growth would have been no growth at all. The enthusiastic novices who flooded into the SDP in the early months grumbled because they were given too little to do, not because they were given too much. They were eager for battle, not the following year or the year after, but straight away. They wanted policies, structures, leaders. They were hungry for action; and they also seemed to have an inexhaustible appetite for conferences, committees, day schools, working parties, pamphlets, books, leaflets, and discussion papers. Their enthusiasm was our most precious asset, and it would have evaporated if we had grown more slowly.

ALL THE SAME, we have paid a price for growing fast; and it is a higher price than most of our parliamentary leaders appear to realise. The most important single reason for the SDP's early success, both in winning votes and in attracting members, was that it was new: that it offered a break from an increasingly grey and dismal recent past, and from the squalid politics of that past. The British people knew that they had been badly governed. They also knew, or at any rate sensed, that the reason lay less in the particular defects of particular policies than in "the system": in the weary defeatism of the great Whitehall departments; in the narrow sectionalism of the great producer groups; in the introversion and unrepresentativeness of the two great parties; and, most of all, in the way in which their governing institutions related to each other and to the society around them. The SDP seemed to promise a change in that system. It looked reassuringly competent, sensible and down-to-earth, but it also looked adventurous, idealistic and, above all, *different*.

There were dangers in all this, of course, as well

as opportunities. The popular revulsion against the drab, immobile politics of the last twenty years was, in part, a revulsion against politics as such. That the SDP could never have accommodated. It certainly wished to be different, but it was not—could not have been, would have been wrong to be—as different as some of its early supporters hoped and expected. It was, after all, a political party, not a church fête. Its purpose was to win and exercise power, not to save souls. Its leaders were politicians like any other, engaged in the sweaty, painful business of aggregating interests and determining priorities: they were not missionaries. Those who welcomed it because they saw it as a way to escape from that business, because they saw Shirley Williams and Roy Jenkins as super-Mary Poppinses, painlessly solving the country's problems with a mixture of magic, goodness and wholesomeness, were bound to be disillusioned. There is no doubt that we lost ground in 1982 partly because too many of those who had welcomed us in 1981 had done so for that reason.

YET THE OPPORTUNITIES outweighed the dangers. For the public were right to want to break away from the failures and recriminations of the recent past, right to sense that this would require a change of system as well as changes of policy, and right to see that no such change could come from the old parties which were inextricably enmeshed in the existing system.

For the best part of a generation, Britain has been trapped in a downward spiral of economic decline, political failure, and public disaffection. Because the economy declined, the public became disaffected. Because the public were disaffected, Governments lost authority. Because Governments lost authority, they could not halt the decline of the economy.

But although the spiral manifested itself most obviously and most painfully in the economic sphere, its origins were cultural and political rather than narrowly economic. The economy declined, not so much because Governments pursued the wrong policies (though they sometimes did) as because they could not make the right policies stick. Again and again, they were "blown off course"—by the trade unions, by the financiers of the City, by the nationalised industries, by the industrialists of the CBI, by the professionals of the permanent Civil Service, by the local authorities, by the Armed Forces, by the doctors, by the universities, in short

by the whole huge regiment of organised groups which dominated the post-War polity as Bolingbroke's "caterpillars of the Commonwealth" had dominated the polity of the late 15th century. Part of the reason, no doubt, was that they lacked the will to stay on course. But their lack of will was itself a political phenomenon; and in any case it was not the main reason. A much more important one was that when they tried to appeal to the general public over the heads of the groups, the public did not respond—that, as Samuel Beer argues in his penetrating and sensitive new study of what he calls the "contradictions of collectivism",¹ they had lost the capacity to mobilise consent. And they had lost it because the system over which they presided, and by which they were thrown up, had lost legitimacy: because the people and the system had drifted apart.

HERE WAS the Social Democratic opportunity. The system had not exactly broken down. Its institutions were still there; the machinery was still intact. Judges still judged, Ministers still took decisions, Civil Servants still administered, Members of Parliament still legislated. But the machinery no longer moved. The fuel had evaporated. Trust—trust between governors and governed; trust between representatives and represented; trust, for that matter, between ordinary citizen and ordinary citizen—had disappeared, or was disappearing. The solutions on offer from the old parties had failed, or were doomed to failure. A new approach was needed, and it could be provided only by a new force.

The pragmatists' solution, the solution of the Conservative "wets" and the traditional, Callaghan-Healey Labour right, was to pretend that nothing had happened and to plough on, in the hope that something would turn up. But that solution had been tried again and again in the 1970s, and it had never worked. What might be called the ideologues' alternative—the alternative offered by the neo-liberal Conservative Right and neo-Marxist Labour Left—was to abandon the search for consent: to use the vast panoply of power available to a British Government in possession of a temporary majority in the House of Commons to force through irreversible changes in the economy, and thus make consent unnecessary.

¹ *Britain Against Itself: The Political Contradictions of Collectivism*. By SAMUEL BEER. Faber, £9.50.

The Conservative version of that alternative differs radically from the Labour version, of course. Mrs Thatcher is trying to eliminate the need for consent by restoring the disciplines of the unreconstructed 19th-century market, above all the discipline of endemic high unemployment. Mr Tony Benn and his supporters on the Left hope to eliminate it by establishing a command economy on the model of Castro's Cuba or on one "people's democracy" or another in Eastern Europe. But the differences are much less striking than the similarities. The neo-liberal Right and the neo-Marxist Left both hope to resolve Britain's politico-economic crisis by using the polity as a steamroller to force changes on the economy, to bring system and people together again by compelling the people to accommodate themselves to the system. As Professor Beer points out, both are the beneficiaries and, to some extent, even the products of the "populist revolt" which has helped to make the system unworkable. Both claim to be and no doubt believe themselves to be the true embodiments of the popular will. Partly because of that, both have been extraordinarily adept at appealing to popular emotions and at harnessing those emotions to their own purposes.

The fact remains that their purposes are neither popular nor populist. They are anti-popular. For both, the needs of the system are paramount. The people are to be hectored, bullied, or coerced into adapting themselves to it.

ON ONE LEVEL, it must be admitted, the ideologues' alternative looks more promising than might have been expected.

Mrs Thatcher's version of it has made the country harder, crueller, and less tolerant. It has widened the gulfs between rich and poor, successful and unsuccessful, suburb and city centre, South and North, white and black, employed and unemployed. It has inflicted much avoidable suffering on many innocent people. Despite the moral objections to it, however, it appears at first sight to have worked in its own terms. The trade unions have been humbled. The nationalised industries have been trimmed. Even the Whitehall mandarin, the toughest and proudest of the power centres of post-War collectivism, has had to bow the knee to the Prime Minister's belief in her star. There have been no hunger marches and remarkably little rioting. Since Hillhead, there have not even been any lost by-elections. To judge from the opinion polls—and, for that matter, from my own experience of

canvassing in working-class districts—rising unemployment has bred a sense of fatalistic apathy among its victims and a kind of solipsistic indifference, not of outrage among those who have escaped it.

As in the 1930s, expectations have fallen and horizons narrowed; as in the '30s, the beneficiaries have been on the Right, not on the Left. The polity has, in other words, turned out to be much more pliable than the conventional wisdom of ten or fifteen years ago held it to be. A Government which manages to dispense with the need for consent and which therefore requires only passive acquiescence to remain on course can, it appears, force much more and much nastier medicine down the throats of the British people than anyone expected. And although the present Government's success in doing this does not prove that a neo-Marxist Government would be equally successful, it would be rash to assume the contrary. The lesson of the last three years is that acquiescence has a much higher threshold than *bien-pensant* liberals generally realise. There is no reason of principle why it should prove lower for the militant Left than it has for the impassioned Right.

BY A STRANGE IRONY, however, all this has applied only to the polity. The economy is a different matter. It has proved surprisingly easy to restore the disciplines of the 19th-century market. Unfortunately, they have failed to produce the vigorous results which they produced in the 19th century.

For, in 20th-century conditions at any rate, by far the most important of these disciplines is the discipline of high unemployment. It is that which has humbled the unions, not some mysterious sea change of popular perception or preference. If it ceased to operate, they would cease to be humble. All the familiar consequences of British trade-union power and pride would return—a strong, built-in propensity to wage-inflation at the head of the list. So long as unemployment remains high, inflation can be kept on a tolerable level, without trade-union cooperation. Consent is then unnecessary; and Britain's Thatcherite counter-revolution can proceed on its way. If unemployment fell, however, trade-union cooperation would once again be a necessary condition of price stability, and the problem of consent would be posed anew. The counter-revolution has thus been made possible only by high unemployment; and although high un-

employment has not brought hunger marches or violence in the streets, the policies responsible for it have brought accelerating de-industrialisation and falling competitiveness. So far, these consequences have been masked—at any rate, for those in work—by the buoyant British living standards paid for by North Sea oil. But, to put it at its lowest, it is curious that a Government dedicated to the ethic of thrift and self-denial should have been obliged to fritter away a non-renewable asset on consumption in the present, instead of investing it for the future. The fact is that Thatcherism has worked politically only because it has failed economically.

As for the likely consequences of a similar neo-Marxist experiment, these can be ascertained much less laboriously. All that is needed is to spend a short time in the queue-ridden economies of near-bankrupt Eastern Europe. The practical objections to the ideologues' alternative are, in short, as powerful as the moral ones. Despite appearances to the contrary, it can only speed up the spiral of decline. If we are to break out, acquiescence is not enough. Consent is indispensable, after all.

THIS IS THE REAL justification for the Alliance in general and the SDP in particular. It is also, however, a formidable challenge to them. If the pragmatists' solution and the ideologues' alternative are both excluded, only one course remains. The gap between system and people must be closed by changing the system to suit the people, instead of the other way around.

Despite the strains of the last fifteen years, the people are still unmistakably descended from the kindly, gentle, nobbly-faced crowds whose tolerance and good nature George Orwell celebrated in *The Lion and the Unicorn*. Democracy is still in our blood; and we still know instinctively that a willingness to compromise, which both sets of ideologues see as evidence of weakness, is essential to democracy. The ethic of fair play and the associated values of generosity, decency, and respect for others have not been driven out, either by the sullen proletarianism which has captured most of the Labour Party, or by the hard, self-regarding acquisitiveness which the neo-liberal Conservatives put at the centre of their picture of social man. We are still instinctively suspicious of ideology, and we can see that the models of our future offered by the far Right and the far Left are the products of ideology, not of life. They seem to us gimcrack, mean, and somehow bloodless; perhaps not always consciously, we hunger for something richer, more

solid and more human. We do not want to be regimented by commissars or ordered about by bullying shop-stewards. Nor do we want to be kept in our places by fear of the sack, or treated as items in a balance sheet by some brisk young investment analyst or merchant banker. We want to break out of the spiral of decline, and we are slowly beginning to realise that we cannot do so without changing our ways, sometimes painfully. But we want the pains—and the eventual rewards—to be shared among us according to some generally accepted criterion of equity or reasonableness, not distributed randomly by a political or economic juggernaut we cannot control. The values of the British people are, in short, the values of the broad-based social-democratic tradition which the SDP came into existence to reassert; and if the system is to be remade to suit the people, it will have to be tailored to a social-democratic pattern.

TO “A” SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC PATTERN, however, not to the pattern which most British social democrats have favoured for most of the last thirty years. The values embodied in the social-democratic tradition are as compelling today as they were half-a-century ago. The means through which they have been pursued for most of that half-century in Britain are no longer appropriate to the end. The now-collapsing “collectivist polity” whose contradictions Professor Beer explores was, after all, in part a social-democratic polity as well. The system from which the people have drifted was shaped, if again only in part, by social-democratic measures, framed by social-democratic Ministers to achieve social-democratic objectives.

Professor Beer’s collectivist contradictions are nearly all, in one way or another, contradictions of “overload.” The collectivist polity started to collapse, he shows, because it could not bear the weight of the demands which it had itself helped to generate. As class lines blurred, class-based political loyalties fragmented. To win the battle for votes, politicians promised higher living standards, financed by faster economic growth. In doing so they encouraged a “scramble for pay” on the part of the unions, a “scramble for subsidies” on the part of public and private industry, and a “scramble for benefits” on the part of a growing army of consumer groups, each looking to the public sector to satisfy its claims. All this wrecked the delicate mechanism of post-Keynesian economic management, and choked the springs on the free flow of which the possibility of faster growth depended.

The demands which overloaded the collectivist polity were not in themselves social-democratic, but they grew out of social-democratic soil. Common to them all was what Samuel Beer calls “hubristic Keynesianism”—the notion that there was no inherent limit to the resources available to Government, since the rate of growth could perfectly well be raised, if only Ministers and officials in Whitehall had the wit to pull the appropriate Keynesian levers in the appropriate Keynesian manner. Though that notion was not confined to social democrats, its most persuasive exponent was the high priest of “revisionist” social democracy, Anthony Crosland; and it was fundamental to the whole Croslandite doctrine that growth held the key to redistribution.

MUCH THE SAME is true of the “populist revolt” which has made it impossible for Governments to mobilise consent. Professor Beer thinks that the people have turned against the system because they no longer accept the deferential norms on which it was based. I agree with him, but I suspect that the process has been even more complex than he suggests.

Deference did not evaporate of its own accord. It evaporated because more and more people came to see that the system no longer worked as it was supposed to work: that its rules were being bent, if not broken. The system stopped working as it was supposed to work because it was twisted out of shape by the remorseless growth of the modern, centralist state—and by the accompanying growth of the great public and private corporations which make demands of the state and respond to demands from the state. Chief among the forces which have caused the state to grow is the assumption that social ills can most readily be treated and social progress most easily achieved by acting through the state. Like “hubristic Keynesianism”, that assumption was not exclusively social-democratic; but it too was fundamental to the “revisionist” social democracy of the last generation. For Tony Crosland and his followers, “socialism” was “about equality”; and equality was to be pursued by redistributing resources away from private consumption and towards public consumption.

In effect, even if not in intention, “revisionist” social democracy was thus almost as statist as the “fundamentalist” socialism it fought; and it can fairly be seen as an unwitting part-architect of the top-heavy, over-centralised state, against which the populist revolt is a cry of protest.

HENCE THE CHALLENGE to the Alliance and the SDP. Hence also the price which the latter has paid for growing so fast. Almost by definition, statism offers no solutions to the crisis of the state in which we are at present engulfed. If that crisis is to be resolved, and the gap between system and people closed, the values which the present generation of social democrats shares with the last will have to be realised through different instruments, used in a different way. The statist social democracy of the 1950s and '60s will have to be abandoned; and, with it, the statist assumptions and statist instincts which most social democrats over the age of thirty absorbed at the political equivalents of their mothers' knees. Social democracy will have to develop a theory of the state and—still more important—a theory of the proper limits of the state. It will also have to develop a theory of non-statist political change, and a strategy based on that theory.

That, in fact, is the real reason why the SDP came into existence in the first place. Its founders were mostly Croslandite "revisionists" who had discovered from experience that "revisionism" now needed revising, and who saw that they had no chance of revising it so long as they were trapped in the mouldering corpse of the Labour Party. They sought a new kind of social democracy as well as a new kind of politics: indeed, they saw that a new kind of politics was impossible without a new kind of social democracy. Where the social democracy of the 1950s and '60s had been centralist, paternalist, and "top-down", theirs was to be decentralist, participatory, and "bottom-up." Where the social democrats of the '50s and '60s had concentrated power in order to redistribute income, they suspected that income could not be redistributed successfully unless power were redistributed first. Where Tony Crosland and his followers had, in practice, given most weight to the Fabian strand in the social-democratic tradition, they drew on an

older strand of popular radicalism going back to the Rochdale pioneers and the moral-force Chartists, to Cobbett and Wilkes, to Cromwell's regicides, perhaps even to Wyclif and the Lollards. They stood for Dissent against the Establishment, for the individual against the collective, for the raw and creative against the smooth and smug, for the provinces against the metropolis, for untidy recalcitrant humanity against the bureaucrat, the planner, and the nosy parker. In doing so, they also stood for political change, as against economic tinkering: for a different kind of policy, as against a different set of policies.

ALL THIS, however, was a mood, not a theory. Because it was a popular mood, the SDP grew fast, but because it grew fast it has so far lacked the time to give the mood a hard, theoretical cutting edge. It has produced policies in rich, perhaps by now excessive, profusion. In my view these policies are enlightened, intelligent, and humane. If they were put into practice, this country would be a better and a happier place, and it would have at least a chance of making the rest of the world a little better and happier too. But, with one or two exceptions, they are Fabian policies, not radical ones. The emphasis is on using power for beneficent ends, not on sharing or dispersing it. Here and there, the reader notices intimations of the decentralist social democracy of the future, like gleams of gold-dust in a prospector's pan. But, so far, these are only intimations. The decentralist theory we need if we are to be true to our original vocation—and, still more, a decentralist strategy based on that theory—is still waiting to be developed.

During the last two years, we have come much further than I, at any rate, thought possible. We are still moving in the right direction. But we have only reached the foothills. The summit remains to be scaled.

Alun Chalfont

The Great Unilateralist Illusion

“Ignorance is Strength”

THE “great nuclear debate” is not a great debate at all; it is not even a debate. Nor, in present circumstances, can it be. There is a massive and inevitable failure of communication between one side which has so far seemed reluctant to raise its voice above a whisper and another which would not listen even if it did. Debate presupposes rational argument, a process which the unilateralist movement rejects as irrelevant. Radical activism has always relied for its effect more on drama than on discussion.

The purpose of this article, therefore, is not to persuade those who belong to the “peace movements” that they are wrong. To engage in discourse with people who show every sign of being impervious to reason is an unsatisfactory activity. It is rather an attempt to reassure those who disagree with the unilateralists that there is a respectable argument to be deployed; to alert those who may be attracted by the word “peace”, which has been kidnapped from the English language by CND in much the same way as “gay” has been pilfered by others; and to assert that fear of nuclear war need not, and indeed should not on any account, lead to the unilateralist position.

If, on the way, this brief study does anything to persuade any of the decent, confused and anxious men and women who have joined the “peace movements” that they are being duped and used by political activists, it will have succeeded beyond my expectations.

1. *An Introduction to Newspeak*

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH is one of the definitive Older examples of Newspeak. It may be necessary, especially for those born since the end of World War II, to explain that Newspeak was the sinister and corrupt language used in George

Orwell’s classic novel of the totalitarian nightmare—entitled, with uncanny foresight, *1984*. It was the official language devised to meet the ideological needs of *Ingsoc*, or English Socialism. It was intended that, when Newspeak eventually superseded standard English (somewhere around the year 2050), a heretical thought—namely one which diverged from the principles of *Ingsoc*—would be literally unthinkable. Newspeak consisted partly of new words and partly of old words to which new meanings had been given. The department responsible for the prosecution of permanent aggressive war was known as the Ministry of Peace; and on the white façade of the Ministry of Truth (responsible for the dissemination of official lies) were inscribed the three slogans of the Party:

WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

It may not have occurred to many of those who describe themselves as members of “peace movements” that they are using Newspeak; and that the ritual incantations which accompany their demonstrations are disturbingly reminiscent of what were known as the Hate Sessions in *1984*, during which the people assembled before a large television screen to scream abuse at the image of Emmanuel Goldstein, the “enemy of the people.” It is necessary only to substitute Reagan or Thatcher for Goldstein to bring Orwell’s “proles” to life. The invention of Newspeak was a dramatic device designed to underline a simple truth, which is that the degradation and debasement of language is a routine instrument of indoctrination and deception; and that one of the unmistakable symptoms of a demoralised society is the ready acceptance of Newspeak as a form of communication. In the Germany of the 1930s the phrase “National Socialism” was used to describe the policies of an organisation which, far from being either nationalist or