

WILL THERE BE WAR?

by D. N. PRITT, Q.C.

I hold the prospects of the peace struggle in 1958 to be good. They are good in spite of the present lunacy of endlessly growing armaments, of the day-and-night patrols of British-based U.S. aeroplanes carrying live nuclear bombs, and of the plans to set up more and more launching bases all over Europe for 'ballistic missiles' — in ordinary English, nuclear rockets — and in spite above all of the rejections of any and every offer to negotiate for a *détente*. In fact, the very intensity of the lunacy is a demonstration of the progress that the peace forces are making; if this were not so great, the 'brinkmen' would not be so hysterical.

But why, in the face of this lunacy, do I hold the prospects to be good? And am I not alarmed by the risk that some paranoiac high commander, some mistaken code message, or some misinformed or bewildered commander of a patrol, may bring about some irrevocable step to war?

I do regard the risk of the outbreak of an undesigned or unintended war as greater at the moment than that of the deliberate launching of a war; but this is largely because I think the danger of a deliberate war is now much smaller. And I think that at present even the most bellicose of Pentagon or State Department managers must be taking every precaution against the danger of an unintended war.

Let me state realistically my reasons for optimism, provided that it be vigilant. I start my reasoning on the basis that the U.S.S.R. has no intention of beginning war. I do not need to develop this point, which is conceded by nearly every anti-Soviet politician and commentator in both the U.S.A. and Great Britain, and is indeed the basis of much of the patent confusion of N.A.T.O. I only add, for myself, that the U.S.S.R. not only does not want war but is not in the least likely to be provoked or misguided into starting one. It is thus safe and correct to base our thinking on the thesis that whatever danger there is comes only from the 'brinkmen' at the head of the American ruling class. The evidence that some of them actually want war, and that virtually all of them want to maintain the armaments race and the cold war which make war more likely to come, is again in need of no elaboration; it is provided both by their public statements and by their lunatic activities just described. So, the answer to the question whether peace can be maintained is to be reached by analysing the forces operating on the minds of the 'brinkmen', whether in favour of peace or in favour of war and of their reactions to those forces; and it will be safe to assume that, hysterical though they be, a substantial number is still able to estimate the strength of these forces, and act in response to them.

Let me consider these forces and their probable effects one by one. I take first the force of public opinion in Western Europe and in Britain,

with which of course the rulers in Washington have to reckon. It is growing in strength, in clarity, and in anger. It started too slowly; it accepted, for example, the installation, under fraudulent misrepresentation, of an American army of occupation in England, and the construction of air bases for U.S. bombers; for a time, it accepted as inevitable the appalling burden of the armaments race, and the ostentatious fixing of Britain's arms budget by a foreign power; and it was very slow to see the direct connection between that burden and the long string of financial crises that bedevils its life. But it began to grow restless when it realised that the bombers would soon carry nuclear bombs; it grew really angry when it learned that bombers had in fact been cruising over England for many months, without any notice or warning, let alone consent, on a war basis, twenty-four hours a day, with nuclear weapons ready to be dropped. And more angry still at the proposal that the Americans should have launching bases, for nuclear rockets directed against the U.S.S.R., constructed in Britain, for which the British taxpayer will pay with his money when they are under construction and with his life when they are finished.

Public opinion is sick and tired of armaments races, scares, tensions and crises. It is beginning to hate not just the American ruling-class but the whole U.S.A. and all that therein is. It is swinging around once again to respect and admiration for the U.S.S.R. It hates war; it wants peace; and it believes that peace can be got and that its rulers are not trying to get it. More important still, it is itself now prepared to insist actively on its government taking steps to negotiate for peaceful co-existence.

This public opinion is a formidable force for Washington to take into account.

Nor is it only for that reason that the 'brinkmen' must regard their prospects of winning a war as small. In addition to the hopes of having allies at their side vanishing in this way, the new developments which they regard as necessary — the building of rocket sites all over Europe, the main topic of the N.A.T.O. meeting — was regarded by most countries invited to take part in thus qualifying their peoples for instant destruction at the outbreak of war, as unacceptable. The meeting served to emphasise to us that N.A.T.O. has in truth long been a ridiculous failure; most of its members welch on their obligations to maintain troops in Germany, finding 'better' uses for them in colonial wars; and its original dual purpose, of pretending to be a line of defence against a Soviet invasion which everyone knew and many confessed would never take place, whilst really designed for attack against the U.S.S.R., becomes increasingly unreal from month to month as military science develops.

Its difficulties do not of course end there. Its notions of 'push button' war, on which it spends hundreds of thousands of millions, and based its whole strategy for itself and its satellites, have not just dwindled; they have in effect been turned round 180 degrees; the buttons are in other hands, and the targets are American overseas bases and American home ports. The Sputnik is no weapon of war; but it is a quiet and cogent demonstration, by inference, that in any war that anyone starts Science will be on the side of the Really New World.

POINT OF DANGER

The main danger is not that the United States leaders would under present conditions be likely to embark deliberately on the gamble of a full-scale nuclear war. This is not how world wars arise. World wars arise from the extension of local and regional conflicts when the world is divided into opposing armed camps. That is why the refusal of negotiation, of a summit meeting, of peaceful co-existence, and the insistence instead on the theory of 'massive retaliation', 'nuclear deterrents' and 'limited nuclear wars', leads inevitably to the ever present danger of major war arising from any one of a thousand particular incidents or moments of tension. The vast machine for launching nuclear war with bases spread over the world, and with H-bomb-loaded planes in the air day and night, stands ready to come into action at a moment's notice. Only, we are told, in the event of 'Soviet aggression.' But what is 'Soviet aggression'? Past experience has shown that any uprising of the people anywhere in the world, although not a single Soviet soldier has been moved, has been described as 'Soviet aggression.' Therefore any such local or regional development, any tense situation, without any question of military action by the Soviet Union, may give rise to a position when the United States government may decide that the crisis calls for an immediate firm response, for a demonstration of strength, for the use of nuclear weapons.

Then, Washington must also reckon that, at the very best from its point of view, any such war would bring incalculable devastation to its own property and citizens, and it must reckon, too, that the various forms of political development towards popular power which it labels 'Communism' would advance by great strides in and after the war.

In short, they must reckon that the game is as good as lost. Today, they cannot risk a war, for they cannot win it; it is too late even to accept the advice of some of their loud-mouthed extremists to start it at once because they might win if they start now but will certainly lose if they wait. They

ist renounce it, and they must take every step to see that it does not start by accident.

Those are the forces against war in America; what are the forces working in its favour? They are not small, but they are obviously not enough. The vast anti-Communist obsession that has been built up at a terrible price in human decency, freedom, and intelligence, cannot really be counted as a force for war; it can prepare the public mind for war, of course, but it cannot help the rulers to win a war; it is no more than a propaganda weapon, and is genuine only to the extent that its authors are genuinely terrified of the advance of the socialist world and of their own working-class.

The forces still tending to support a war policy in the U.S.A. are two. Firstly, the fact that the ruling class is determined to resist all socialist and working-class advances, if it can; secondly — and more important — the supposed need to maintain the armaments race, for the double purpose of enriching the powerful rulers of heavy industry and of postponing for a time the slump which has to no small degree been held off in the past years by arms expenditure.

These forces, I say, are not enough; they cannot outweigh the fact that the U.S.A. cannot hope to win a war. And everyone now realises that the armament races constitute no sort of defence or security, and are no more than a costly short-term means of putting off another kind of evil day; everyone who runs such a race knows that his race-horse is really a tiger, and that he will have to let go of its tail one day.

Thus, Washington is in a great and growing quandary; it must be asking itself: How do I get out of this? There is a practicable alternative: negotiation — sincere, and not sabotaged in advance by Dulles's orders — for peaceful co-existence. If it embarks on this and succeeds, it will be out of many horrors, and the only loss it will suffer is that it will have to find some less wasteful work for its heavy industry, and abandon its witch-hunt against 'World Communism' which it cannot in any case win. That is why the continued and logical requests of the U.S.S.R. for a summit meeting are so difficult to side-track. Sooner or later Washington will be forced to accept such an offer. If it is stubborn enough to refuse this time, it will be faced by another, in a situation still more difficult for refusal. And so, peace will prevail. But not automatically. It will prevail when world opinion has successfully forced a real summit meeting of East and West to ease international tension and prepare concrete steps for disarmament and peace.