

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROLIFERATION may be just around the corner. The Third Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to be held in Geneva next month is expected to resound with complaints from the 121 countries that, by signing the 1970 treaty, agreed not to acquire or develop their own nuclear weapons, that the superpowers have done nothing to fulfill their commitment to halt their own nuclear arms race. Unending "vertical proliferation," the piling up of American and Soviet nuclear arsenals, may finally open the floodgates of "horizontal proliferation."

If this happens, the two avowed nuclear powers that have refused to sign the NPT, France and China, may become role models...or scapegoats.

In word and deed, France and China are the only countries that in the past have openly favored horizontal nuclear proliferation. In the '60s, there seemed to be a certain convergence between the Gaullist and Maoist defense of nuclear weapons as instruments of independence from the superpowers. Since then, their positions have evolved and, especially in the last couple of years, China has become much more critical of nuclear weapons than in the past.

A Chinese delegation provided the main novelty at July's European Nuclear Disarmament (END) conference in Amsterdam. Shi Zhongben, Chen Fei and Wang Jianhao of the newly formed Chinese People's Association for Peace and Disarmament explained to curious European peace activists how nuclear disarmament corresponds to the new direction taken by Chinese government policy. The Chinese people need a peaceful world environment to meet their goal of quadrupling gross national product by the end of this century, they stressed.

The Chinese now argue that the primary cause of worldwide "turbulence and instability" (which formerly they attributed to the impetuous revolutionary advance of the world's oppressed peoples) is the "escalating arms race by the two superpowers in search of hegemony." In contrast, China has recently cut back conventional forces, demobilizing a million soldiers, and claims to be converting production from military to civilian purposes.

The present Chinese interest in disarmament is a recent development. Two years ago Peking said that if the two nuclear superpowers stopped testing, developing and producing nuclear weapons and cut their nuclear arsenals in half, then China would be ready to negotiate a corresponding commitment with the other nuclear powers.

Chinese spokespersons stress that since the Chinese people are going all out for "socialist modernization," their country is a stable force for world peace. Additional motives for the peace campaign could be the desire to sweep away suspicions and objections standing in the way of Chinese participation in international nuclear power technology trade and, above all, uneasiness at the Japanese rearmament being encouraged by the Reagan administration (see cover story, *In These Times*, Aug. 7).

In contrast to the days when the expansion of "Soviet hegemonism" was singled out as number-one world threat, the Chinese have shifted to a more even-handed nonalignment, condemning both Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and American action against Nicaragua. In Amsterdam, Chen Fei said the two superpowers' military spending would in the long run have an adverse effect on their own economic welfare. But meanwhile, they are involving their allies and slowing economic development in the developed countries. Her emphasis on the importance of "South-South" as well as "North-South" development suggested that China is counting on expanding trade with Third World countries.

At a recent colloquium on "nuclear war, nuclear proliferation and their consequences," sponsored by Prince Sadrudin Aga Khan, Jiadong Qian of China empha-

sized that China was in favor of nuclear disarmament and against proliferation. In 1964, he recalled, China "unilaterally declared that at no time and under no circumstances would it be the first to use nuclear weapons. It also pledged unconditionally never to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states and nuclear weapon free zones. It respects and supports the establishment of nuclear weapon free zones wherever possible on the basis of the free will of the countries concerned.

Moreover, China has in recent years reiterated that it "neither advocates nor encourages nuclear proliferation and that its cooperation with other countries in the nuclear field is only for peaceful purposes."

Why then does China refuse to accede to the NPT? "The reason is simple," said Jiadong Qian. "China considers the Treaty discriminatory and as a matter of principle must be critical of it." The non-nuclear states get nothing in return for renouncing nuclear weapons besides vague promises on the part of the nuclear powers to negotiate toward ending the nuclear arms race, not even a guarantee that nuclear weapons will not be used against them.

The Chinese representative said that developing countries "wish that they could be provided with more assistance for their peaceful nuclear energy programs, but their demand has not been given serious consideration. Some people complain that the developing countries are still under the rule of a sort of colonial system—nuclear colonialism, in the present instance. In a way, this is not entirely unjustified."

It seems that the Chinese share the belief widespread in the Third World that nuclear power is a modern benefit. And the Chinese are prepared to export the technology to Third World customers, starting with Pakistan. The Chinese who attend European peace movement conferences get to hear arguments about the drawbacks of nuclear power and its fundamental link to nuclear weapons.

Jiadong Qian said China could be counted on to take corresponding action once the superpowers took the lead in meaningful disarmament. Their failure to do so was "the most serious threat" to the NPT. But should the superpowers begin the process of reversing vertical proliferation, then "the likelihood of horizontal proliferation would only diminish and not grow and countries that are considered problematic would find it all the more difficult to have any rationale to go nuclear, even if they wanted to do so."

All this adds up to a position more favorable to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation than either China's past attitude or the current French position, expressed at the Bellerive colloquium by none other than Régis Debray, erstwhile theoretician of *The Revolution in the Revolution*.

Debray introduced himself as a "simple French citizen" who "just happens to agree" with his country's policy. Earlier this year, Debray left his post as special adviser to President Mitterrand for the State Council, a sort of supreme court. Debray fervently defended Gaullist nuclear doctrine, according to which the "equalizing power of the atom" enables the weaker nation to deter the stronger by threatening retaliatory damage greater than the gains at stake for an aggressor. In so far as this doctrine makes sense (a highly debatable assumption), it is by its nature an argument for universal nuclear proliferation.

Debray extolled nuclear technology as the essence of modernity, and nuclear deterrence as "like political democracy, the worst system except for all the others." Nuclear proliferation is less dangerous than proliferation of non-nuclear weapons, he said.

"The world map of war for the last 40 years coincides with denuclearized zones, or zones not covered by nuclear deterrence," Debray told the Bellerive colloquium. "It's a fact that the nuclear powers do not make war among themselves, and for a reason: they have 'sanctuarized' themselves," he said. "If Vietnam had the bomb in 1965 or Afghanistan in 1979, one can doubt that they would have been subjected to what they were subjected to.... Stopped in the North by deterrence, East and West shift their confrontation to the South...."

Debray claimed that the nuclear weapon is "by essence anti-militarist" because it "civilizes and intellectualizes" the possession of arms, inhibiting violence, "submitting muscle to brain," and giving all power to the civilian commander in chief.

"The nuclear weapon, the only one that cannot be shared, that no country can transfer to any other, is the ambiguous weapon of nationalism—the major force of our era—both liberating and ethnocentric, democratic and anarchic, able to stabilize a regional order while destabilizing world order," Debray said.

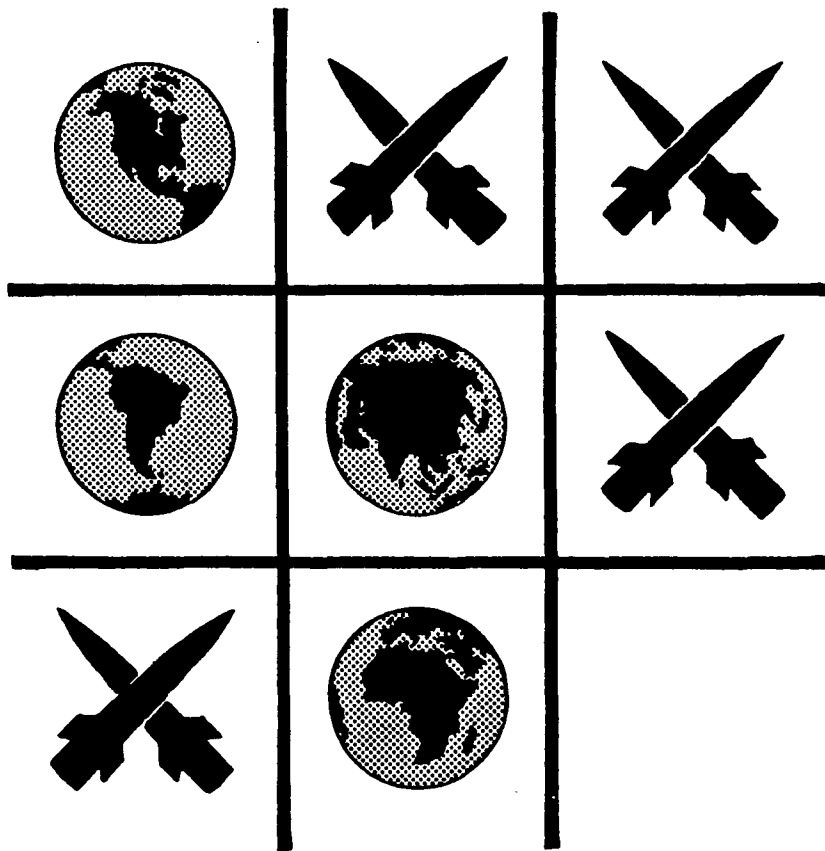
"The atom has not killed anyone since Hiroshima. The most frightful death machine functions in reverse as an arm of peace," Debray went on. "If the pacifist movement were consistent, shouldn't it be converted into a vast pro-nuclear move-

ment? With for slogans: 'To save peace, save the bomb,' 'To each his bomb, but each at home'? You can't both make war against war and ban the bomb that bans war."

Yet for all his rigorous French Cartesian logic, Debray stopped short of drawing the conclusion that what is good for France is good for everyone. "Horizontal proliferation, especially in the Third World, would set off fresh vertical proliferation, notably the race...for antiballistic defensive weapons, always harmful to deterrence. By contributing to banalize nuclear weapons, it could lower the threshold of use in the short range, and it would become politically difficult for certain industrial countries who have renounced nuclear weapons...like Germany and Japan, or...Sweden and Italy, not to join the pack." Besides: "Taking into account population and the unequal value attached to human life, stronger religious impulses and repulsions, the notorious weakness of civilian authorities, the lesser technical and political safety of chains of command, it is neither neo-colonialism nor arrogance to infer from all these factors that military use of nuclear power is riskier in the Third World than in the big industrial countries."

The French position is thus that nuclear weapons are a great boon to humanity, but that only elite nations are fit to have them. Speaking at Bellerive, Professor Joseph Rotblat of London University proceeded from the opposite premise, that the possession of nuclear weapons decreases rather than increases the security of a nation. "The nuclear-weapon states, far from being privileged, are in fact victims of their own folly: they become entangled in a web of their own making from which they are unable to extricate themselves." He called for a campaign, coinciding with the Third Review of the NPT, to get France and the U.K. to give up their independent deterrents. They are defended by NATO and don't need them. Rotblat suggested this as the second step, after a comprehensive test ban treaty, that non-nuclear states should demand of the others.

Despite their own misgivings about proliferation, the French feel on the defensive about it. China, like France, wants to export nuclear technology. But unlike France, China criticizes the double standard that tolerates Israeli and South African nuclear development (helped by France) and supports nuclear-free zones. The big difference is that China, after all, does not need nuclear weapons to qualify as a great power. ■



NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

China and France: role models?

by David Moberg

GREENFIELD, IA

HERE'S A SIGN IN THE ENTRANCE-way to John and Wanda's Korner Cafe, one of the few eating places in this small county seat of rolling corn country: "We Need Parity Now, Not Charity." Scribbled beneath is the desperate comment: "Too late for parity. We need charity."

For tens of thousands of farmers throughout the Midwest, and in many other parts of the country, it is too late. Higher prices—the heart of the "parity" demand—will not save them. Rains have revived many of the fields that earlier this summer seemed threatened with another year of devastating drought, but that seemingly good news brings in its wake more bad news: expectations of a bumper crop are driving prices downward.

Farm experts and farmers alike are predicting that this will mark a fifth straight year of deep economic depression for farming. The drama from last winter—widespread foreclosure, bank and business failures, farm protests—is likely to be intensified in the months after harvest.

Meanwhile, Congress has been deliberating over a four-year renewal of the basic farm legislation that was initiated during the New Deal and has been repeatedly modified since then. With the headlines of crisis only a few months old, one might expect this legislation to address the plight of agriculture that threatens not only the directly related farm economy—elevators, implement manufacturers, rural retailers and small-town agricultural banks—but also the general economy and banking system. Yet the legislation coming out of Congress this fall will most likely worsen the agricultural economy and at best string farmers along in their current economic trough, leading more of them to financial ruin.

Although the farm bill is a complex, forbidding maze of programs, many of which are tailored to parochial interests, the heart of the bill concerns mechanisms for maintaining a floor beneath the price of certain basic commodities, such as wheat, corn, rice and cotton, and for supplementing depressed farm income.

Congress has been considering essentially three major approaches, although each has many arcane permutations. The first, proposed by the Reagan administration, would speedily phase out all farm price support and income supplements in favor of a "free market" approach to agriculture. Experts generally acknowledged that this would lead to plummeting prices and greatly accelerated farm failure and financial catastrophe. But its defenders said that such a "shake-out" was necessary and that eventually whoever survived would prosper under a free market. As a result, even conservative organizations like the Farm Bureau favored a more gradual transition toward the same end.

The second major approach would preserve yet modify the current system. Under this plan, farmers can borrow money from the Commodity Credit Corporation, using their grain as collateral. If the price in the

market falls below the "loan rate" set by law, the farmer may turn over the grain instead of repaying the loan in full. If enough producers participate.

A second program, first instituted in 1973, offers farmers a chance to receive income supplements if they set aside and do not use a portion of their land. It sets a "target price" above the loan rate. If the crops sell for less than the target price, the federal government pays the difference between the higher of either the market price or loan rate, up to a specified limit (\$50,000 currently).

Each adjustment upward or downward of these price supports or income protections can make a world of difference. For example, in 1984, the loan rate for corn was set at \$2.55 a bushel and the target price at \$3.03. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the total cost of production averaged around \$2.71 per bushel, although critics point out that this figure does not include long-term costs of soil erosion. Also, a Minnesota study claimed that total costs came close to \$4.22 per bushel. Thus many farmers lost money on each bushel raised. Also, since the average cash price received by farmers was \$2.65 per bushel, corn was sold to overseas buyers for less than it cost to produce. Without the loan rate as a floor, prices would have been far lower. Several studies have estimated that under Reagan's original plan corn prices would fall to around \$2.00 a bushel.

The third major, "populist" alternative was in large part the product of the new farm movement, although its roots are in the original New Deal ideas. Over the past year many leaders of the emerging state and local farm groups, like organic dairy farmer Dixon Terry who lives a few miles northeast of Greenfield, have worked with a few political figures—such as Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Texas Commissioner of Agriculture Jim Hightower—to draft the Farm Policy Reform Act.

It has received backing from many labor groups as well as farm organizations such as the American Agricultural Movement. The act would conduct a referendum of producers of different commodities to determine if they want to require all producers of corn, for example, to take out of production a certain portion of their cropland. The set-aside would be determined so that prices would be raised sharply in the marketplace (starting with a figure that they say roughly represents the average cost of production and is thus well above the going market price). Farmers would be issued marketing certificates entitling them to sell a quantity of grain or other commodities that reflects their eligible acres and the historic yield of their land. With higher prices, there would be no need for income supplements—or "charity"—and the cost of the farm programs to the government would plummet dramatically.

The first and third alternatives—from Reagan and the farm movement—represent striking polar opposites: low prices and no government regulation of price or production versus high prices and mandatory government regulation of production. The current program represents a hodge-podge at-

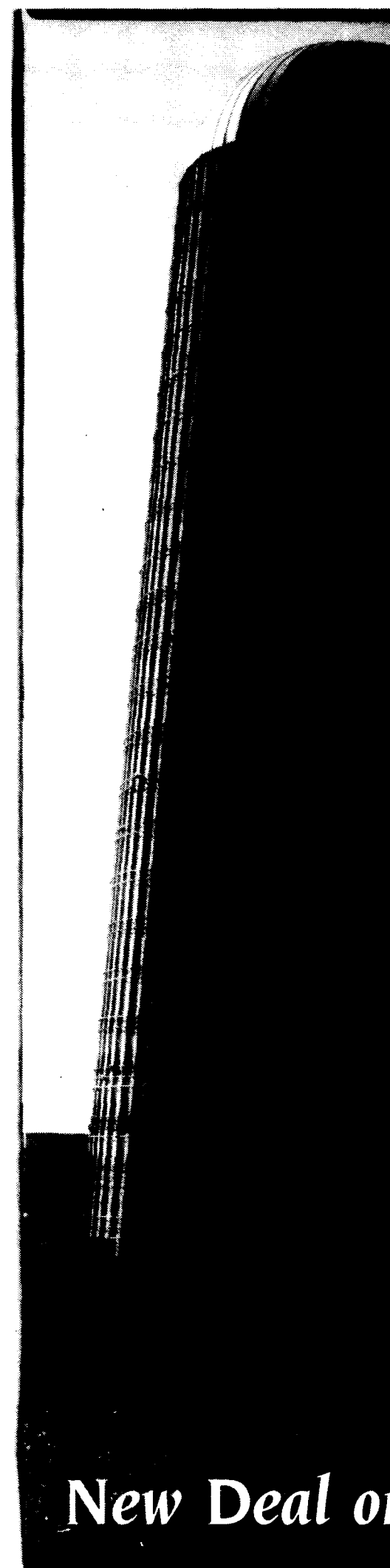
tempt at some compromise that rarely satisfies anyone very much and is now often viewed as simply a bridge to eventual "free market" agriculture.

Drafting a bill to cover the conditions of such a large and varied part of the economy as agriculture is never easy. But new pressures at work make it even more difficult today. In the '30s farmers were fairly similar throughout the country: they were small family farm producers who were making next to nothing and had been living well below urban standards even before the Depression. The original farm legislation was intended not only to bring them out of depression but to bring their incomes closer to "parity" with urban industrial workers. The standard taken was the period of 1914-1918, the last period of relative prosperity on the farm. Through price supports and production controls, the federal government sought to control chronic overproduction and depression of prices.

The agricultural economy faces some special problems that justify its separate treatment: it is extremely subject to vagaries of weather; demand changes little in response to price (so a slight increase in production can drive down prices disproportionately); and agricultural production of crops or livestock requires long-term, inflexible schedules (the farmer can't cut back on the wheat crop in mid-summer the way a factory manager can lay off workers). Yet farm policy has also always been guided at least in theory by two other considerations: that the country has a stake in, first, a social policy that supports widespread ownership and worker-owner control of production and, second, in the conservation of land as a resource of irreplaceable value for future generations.

But in the past 50 years farming has lost much of its independent, self-reliant character and become enmeshed in the web of agribusiness. Farmers themselves are divided among a large number of marginal farmers who make most of their income from non-farm sources, a tiny number of superfarms (typified by California produce fields and Texas ranches) and roughly 600,000 moderate-sized "family farms" that rely heavily—and now with little success—on their farms for income. Those in even the lower ranges of this middle category tend to be as technically efficient as any of their bigger neighbors, but they are more economically vulnerable. Bigger farms often get breaks on credit, on buying supplies in bulk and in marketing, and they usually have more resources to weather the storm. They can more profitably exploit tax breaks. Even within this range of medium to huge commercial farms, farmers often have quite disparate interests.

Yet even if farmers were less differentiated, farm policy would have become more complex. Farm programs always have reflected regional coalitions, with aid for peanut farmers winning Southern votes and wheat aid bringing along the Great Plains. Increasingly the most influential lobbyists are not just old-line general farm groups—from the agribusiness-dominated Farm Bureau to liberal National Union or National Farmers Organization. There are also



New Deal or

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the specialized commodity groups (such as the National Corn Growers), big grain traders (like Cargill, which is also a super-farmer and food processor), suppliers of farm equipment, fertilizer and other "inputs" and the big commercial users of food products. This year, then, a representative of Pizza Hut or Burger King, looking for the lowest possible price for farm-produced raw materials, could be seen alongside a lobbyist for the American Agricultural Movement, looking for the highest price.

Despite the family farm rhetoric, farm legislation has increasingly abandoned its social goals of maintaining widespread owner-operated farming. The cost of farm programs has increased dramatically in recent years as a result of low market prices, and budget concerns have become as important as effects on farmers. This year with record deficits, the budget pressures