

CORRESPONDENCE:

The Battle for Detente Goes On

It is important for socialists to know the facts, and the article by Quaestor (*LM*, March 1975) has given some information on the expenditure on armaments by the US and the USSR. It would be of interest to see figures not only in terms of proportionality of budgets but as against GNP and national income.

If detente equals 'prevention of unilateral military advantage', then we might assume that the volume of armaments would be approximately the same in both countries, and this is to some extent borne out by the agreement for equivalence of 1,320 MIRVs. If equivalence in other areas of armaments is the same and there is a considerable differential in the GNP (and it has been stated elsewhere that the US has twice that of the USSR), then the burden on the USSR may well be greater.

Questions arise such as: Has the USSR as much military hardware as the US? Does the burden fall as heavily on both countries? Does a diminishing budgetary percentage of expenditure reveal the full facts? USSR 1973-75 reduction in expenditure from 17,900 million roubles to 17,400 equals 2.8 per cent, or 1.4 per cent per annum. With an increase in productivity this could still mean the same, or more, armaments; certainly the USSR will need also to increase MIRVs to 1,320 as the US.

The figures for our own expenditure (p 103) are not presented proportionately to budget or GNP or national income, but in terms of £s not reduced to real terms in relation to inflation, so again we cannot get comparisons. The 22 per cent increase in cost may conceal a reduc-

tion in actual hardware.

The problem for socialists is to be able to put clearly what the burden of armaments is, and whether it arises from one policy or another, from detente or otherwise. There is no mistake: the arms race between the US and USSR continues and intensifies. Detente there may be but the burdens are enormous.

We need to look at the figures in relation to a common base figure so that we can explain the cost of the world divisions and contradictions. We should not shirk an explanation that the burden on the USSR can be intolerable too, that the weight of accumulation of terror weapons is enormous. And there is the distortion of the economy—not less in the USSR than elsewhere where vast internal debts have been accumulated—and the distortion of internal political situations caused by the need to administer large military establishments.

Perhaps you have references to the figures, but, better still, could we have an appraisal of what it is doing to the economies of the USSR and US? It is not enough to say that more or less profit is made by armaments in the US or USSR: from the point of view of the US the figures (paragraph 2, p 102) give them (the US) a comparison they understand—just as it reveals the vast profit on-cost. It would show the relevance of the 'policy of equivalence' in hardware—the same number of MIRVs, submarines, bombs, etc. An overcalculation of 13 per cent is quibbling in terms of the method of estimating profit on-cost, inflation allowance, etc. The facts appear to be that the US spends \$94,000 million and the USSR (?) \$70-80,000 million plus or minus \$10,000 million or \$20,000 million. These are vast sums in any event. How does

the expenditure follow from the policy of detente? Would it be greater or less in some other policy? Should socialists hope that the USSR does keep up with the US? If not, what per cent of US expenditure would be 'safe'?

In some future article perhaps some of these points could be raised: we must have figures which can be clearly used to demonstrate just how much working people have to pay for these armaments, and this can best be done if we can have some statistics which express—in terms of wages or production or taxation—costs in human terms.

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Quaestor replies:

The year books of the Central Statistical Board of the USSR—which, it is worth reminding readers, are based on the needs of Soviet planned economy and are published (in Russian only) in order to help in that planning, not for external propaganda purposes—enable me to reply in *essentials* to Mr Turner's questions. Not to all: the Soviet Union does not publish details of its armaments for very good reasons. But the questions which he puts at the end of his letter can be answered.

Before doing so, three observations on phrases used in that letter. First, detente is not *equal* to 'prevention of unilateral military advantage': that was the condition agreed in principle at the outset for the disarmament discussions at Vienna, and so far has not been kept by the capitalist countries. Such a reduction will of course help detente enormously: but it is not all of detente.

Secondly, the arms race between the US and the USSR does con-

tinue, but only because the Soviet Union has for years been proposing drastic reductions in nuclear and conventional armaments and armies, whereas the US (with British support) has been resisting such reductions. Or, put another way, the burden of armaments does not and cannot 'arise from detente' (using Mr Turner's words), but does follow from resistance to detente and disarmament.

Thirdly, it is not a 'fact' that the USSR spends '\$70-80,000 million, plus or minus' etc, on armaments. Mr Turner seems to have been taken in by another Pentagon lie. Even 17,900 million roubles are less than \$24,000 million—one quarter of the Pentagon's fairy story which he quotes—and the latest Soviet defence bill of 17,400 million roubles is still less.

Now for his questions: In Table 1 opposite are the actual comparative expenditures by the Soviet Union in the fields he asks for: not just of 'production', a vague term, but (1) of the *gross* yearly social product of the means of creating wealth, which are all owned by the Soviet people; and (2) of the national income, which is the total *net* new material values created in one year, i.e. after wear and tear, materials used up in production, etc, are deducted; and (3) not just of 'wages', because a large part of the Soviet people—the collective farmers—get their remuneration not as wages but as a share of the produce they have created on their collective or co-operative farms: hence the amount shown is of *consumption* by the whole people. Table 2 shows the *proportion* which defence expenditure (item 4) represents, compared with each of the other items, 1, 2 and 3.

Thus readers will see, *first* that

Table 1: Annual Soviet Expenditure in Billiards of Roubles

	1970	1971	1972	1973
(1) Gross social product (industry, agriculture, transport, etc) ..	643.5	685.3	717.4	769.8
(2) National income (net social product)	289.9	305.0	313.6	337.2
(3) Personal consumption by the Soviet people	177.9	187.8	198.1	207.5
(4) Defence expenditure	17.9	17.9	17.9	17.9

the national production and income of the USSR are steadily rising from year to year; *secondly*, that the amount available for consumption by the people (wages and other remuneration) is also going up steadily—while, as has often been pointed out, prices for all staple commodities which the household requires, plus rents, fares, etc, all remain constant or actually fall, and health, education, cultural services, etc, constantly expand; *thirdly*, that as a result the proportion of what the working people produce which they have to pay for these armaments—‘the cost in human terms’, as Mr Turner puts it—is falling from year to year, which, judging from the newspapers, does not seem to apply to the US.

This does not mean that armaments are not a heavy burden. It is only tolerated by the Soviet people because they know that they lost 1½ million dead when invaded by the Western democracies and Japan in 1917-22, and 20 million dead when invaded by Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and other fascist satellites in 1941-45; while the devastation in lives and wealth caused by the US in China, Cuba, Korea and Vietnam after the second world war, is almost as fresh in their memories. Moral force is not enough in such circumstances.

But those armaments are *of course* a heavy burden. That is precisely why the Soviet Union for decades has been pressing for real disarmament.

**Table 2: Defence Expenditure as a percentage of items
(1), (2) and (3) in Table 1**

	1970	1971	1972	1973
Per cent of (1)	2.8	2.6	2.5	2.3
Per cent of (2)	6.2	5.9	5.7	5.3
Per cent of (3)	10.1	9.5	9.0	8.6

National Union of Mineworkers

(Yorkshire Area)

extends May Day greetings to
all fellow trade unionists and
calls for—

THE IMMEDIATE
NATIONALISATION OF ALL
MEANS OF PRODUCTION,
DISTRIBUTION AND
EXCHANGE AS A FIRST STEP
TOWARDS A SOCIALIST
BRITAIN

A. Scargill, *President*

J. T. Leigh, *Vice-President*

O. Briscoe, *General Secretary*

R. Horbury, *Financial Secretary*

THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

*sends May Day
greetings to trade
unionists everywhere*

Enoch Humphries

President

Terence Parry

General Secretary

SOCIETY OF GRAPHICAL AND ALLIED TRADES

The National Executive Council of SOGAT extends
to all friends its sincere wishes for a successful 1975,
and a continued advance towards a democratic
socialist society.

W. H. KEYS

General Secretary

A May Day message from William Morris

IF I were a non-socialist and were interested in the preservation of the society of privilege, I would conceive a hope from the present situation of hoodwinking the working men into accepting what I should name (to them) a kind of semi-, or demi-semi-socialism, which would do no sort of harm to the society of privilege. I should condescend to socialism and pat it on the back. I should say, as indeed I have heard such worthies say, 'Socialism, my friends, cannot give you what it promises, but I am pleased to see you socialists because all this labour agitation will call people's attention to the condition of the working classes and will improve it. You will find that you must work *with* the capitalists and *not against* them, so that you may *extend markets, contend successfully with other nations, and improve business*. By that means, though this socialist agitation is founded on principles which are wrong, and which cannot be carried out in practice, yet it will have given you enhanced wages, reduction of the hours of labour, more permanency of employment, better housing, gas and water galore, and an extended franchise. And then (but I don't know when) you will be happy and contented—and, which is more to the point, so shall we.'

That, I say, will be the sort of line to take for those who wish to keep labour—i.e. usefulness—out of its heritage. And I think it will be taken, I fear not unsuccessfully. For the present necessities of working people are so great that they must take what they can get . . . they can scarcely, the average of them, turn their hopes to a future which they may never see. And yet, if that future is not to be indefinitely postponed, they must repudiate this demi-semi-socialism. They must say: '£2 a week instead of £1; eight hours work instead of nine, ten, twelve; out-of-door relief galore to supplement the out-of-work periods; comfortable (Lord help us) lodgings found by the municipality—all these are fine things indeed. But we will not even think of them unless we can use them for getting all the benefits which we *know* will follow upon the abolition of privilege and the realisation of equality.'

(William Morris, writing eighty years ago in a special May Day number of *Justice*, the organ of the Social-Democratic Federation.)