

Disarming Choice

“An Approach to Peace and Other Essays,” by H. Stuart Hughes (Atheneum. 204 pp. \$4.50), proposes that the West unilaterally abandon nuclear weapons. Frank Altschul is chairman of the Committee on International Policy of the National Planning Association.

By FRANK ALTSCHUL

IT IS somewhat difficult to come to grips with this book, in which chapter headings have been assigned to a number of essays unrelated in the main to the theme of the first and most searching half of the volume. Maybe the best way out of the difficulty is to focus attention on the title essay, “An Approach to Peace,” in which H. Stuart Hughes suggests a “new start” in foreign policy aimed at arresting and hopefully turning down the fateful spiral of the thermonuclear arms race.

In the light of recent developments, few would question the desirability of seeking an escape from the sterility of the bitter and dangerous exchanges in which we and our Soviet adversary are increasingly engaged. The author finds little hope of such an escape in the fruitless and interminable negotiations in respect to a ban on nuclear tests or general and complete disarmament. And he is prompted by a sense of urgency, feeling that “our country’s situation is even more precarious than it appears to be and that it is time to cut our losses and to make the best bargain we can—in several parts of the world—before it is too late.”

However, the manner in which it is suggested that we cut our losses will strike many as frightening in the extreme. In essence, it amounts to the unilateral abandonment of nuclear weapons by the West. Mr. Hughes is aware of “the awful risks that such a decision would involve. Every conscientious unilateralist has spent countless hours of worry over the implications of what he recommends. . . . We face a choice of evils—a choice of risks. All we can say is that to us the risks involved in depriving our country of nuclear weapons loom less threateningly than the dangers of going on with the arms race.”

This is a conclusion that may in some measure have been prompted by Mr. Hughes’s disposition to put “the physical

preservation of humanity ahead of loyalty to one’s nation or to any particular economic or social system.” Yet to those who have observed the manner in which the Soviet Union brandishes its nuclear weapons at a time when it is faced with an adversary possessing at least equivalent power, unilateralism opens up an appalling prospect. With the danger of a thermonuclear response removed, can anyone doubt that the Soviet Union would proceed “peacefully” to accomplish its avowed purpose of achieving world dominion? This would inevitably mean the end of all those values to which we attach supreme importance: justice under law, individual freedom, and national independence.

BUT if this proposal of Mr. Hughes can be dismissed out of hand as running violently counter to our traditions and instincts, he develops another line of thought which seems visionary at the moment, but which should not be too lightly cast aside. “If only we can preserve the peace for a few more years, the United States and the Soviet Union may come to recognize the interests and aspirations they have in common.”

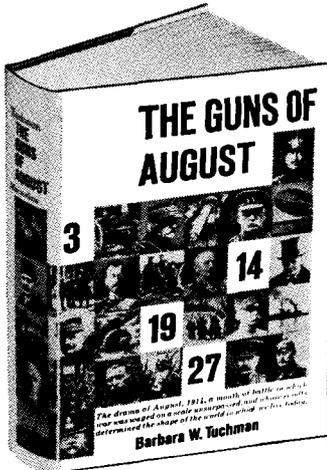
These “interests and aspirations” held in common are very real and with any return to sanity in international affairs it is not too much to hope that they may prove to be determining. First and foremost among them is the interest that the Kremlin must share with us in avoiding the unparalleled disaster that thermonuclear war would inflict on all humanity. Beyond this is the aspiration we both have in common to preserve and in an atmosphere of peace to extend the advances in the well-being of mankind which modern technology has brought within reach.

There are forces at work that may drive the Soviet Union in this direction sooner than we now anticipate. There is the emerging power of Communist China, the growing desire within the Soviet Union for a more rapid improvement in the standard of living and an awakening disposition to see the area more widely extended in which freedom of thought and inquiry is permitted. And so the time may come when with some hope of a favorable reply we may be able to say to Mr. Khrushchev: “We stand at the crossroads of history. One path leads to utter destruction, the other to the brightest prospect ever open to the human race. ‘A Soviet-American understanding for the preservation of the peace,’ in Mr. Hughes’s words, ‘offers the most realistic, indeed the only hope of forestalling the very worst that our future may hold.’ The choice is yours to make.”



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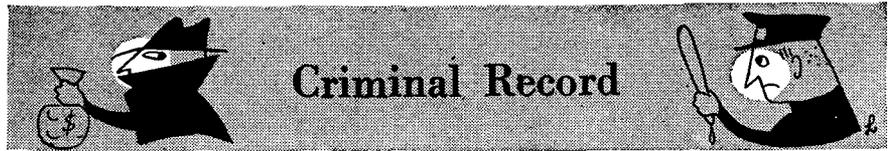
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