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# THEME

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*War is essentially the health of the state.*

—Randolph Bourne

**T**he Reagan administration's cuts in the service areas of the federal budget and simultaneous expansion in defense spending should now make it obvious to all who care to see that ours has become a war economy. The Keynesian use of defense spending for economic stimulation has given way to state redistribution through the federal budget, with guaranteed portions of the expanding pie going to each of the established defense contractors and the interests they represent. The adjustments in defense appropriations announced by the administration this past fall demonstrate the ad hoc character of the military profile that results when everyone has to get their allowance—the decision to station one hundred MX missiles in stationary hardened silos, for example, can only be understood as the spreading around of wealth to include the contractors who will benefit from even an absurd MX deployment.

The new weapons systems that absorb this investment—the MX, the B1 bomber, the Trident missiles and submarines—are weapons systems whose only rationale is all-out nuclear war, and their military viability lies not in defense but in the capacity to destroy the Soviet Union before it can launch an attack on us. Whether American military planners intend to initiate a first strike or not—and a first-strike intention is the only possible one from a purely strategic standpoint for the stationary MX deployment—pouring money into these systems is the fastest way to distribute tax dollars among the defense industries. In this sense, the huge interlocking structure of American industrial, chemical, and electronic corporations that are dependent on this redistribution of public wealth are dependent upon the instruments and strategy of total war.

The results of this arrangement for the national economy are disastrous: chronic inflation resulting from cost overruns that are built into the system of defense contracting and the production of nonconsumable products; and “de-industrialization” as a consequence of the technological drag these weapons systems impose on the economy as a whole. War is fast becoming the only thing our economy can make.

The war economy produces instruments of total war, and the only possible user of these instruments is the locus of concentrated power, the state. Nuclear weapons systems are both the means by which the state's power can be most fiercely exercised and the symbols of that power. Both aspects illustrate the nature of the contemporary state: removed from the arena of public discussion, safeguarded by the dogmas of national security, and firmly in the hands of powerful private interests, the state lords it over its domain. The population, which has now be-

come the target of war rather than the means by which it is fought, is rendered dependent upon the state for its life and death, knowing that it can all be over before it gets a chance to ask what it was supposed to be about. The contemporary state is the collective power of the nation alienated from its people and turned not toward the enrichment of life but toward arrogance and death.

The British historian E.P. Thompson has summed up the logic of nuclear war in the term "exterminism". It is a mistake to think that exterminism can be reversed from the top, at the level of the state, because exterminism is the state's ideology. Nuclear disarmament means an end to the power structure of the state and its war economy, and that means the creation of genuinely political alternatives. That is why the European Nuclear Disarmament (END) movement that is spreading throughout Europe is so important: it challenges state power by bringing people together outside the bureaucratic institutions of the state. William Appleman Williams, in the October 1981 issue of *democracy*, called for the creation of similar political forms here, where the task before us is more daunting than that facing Europeans. An American Nuclear Disarmament movement, which is already taking shape, will be a movement to initiate change through the active participation of citizens—to recapture political power and turn it toward the good life it is meant to ensure.

**T**he decline of U.S. economic power in the world economy has given rise to the assertion of American military power as a substitute. END activist Mary Kaldor shows us that the decision to place cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe, which would turn that continent into the scene of a Panglossian "limited" nuclear war, is one of the outcomes of this new assertion of domination. The imposition of American military might requires an inflation in anti-Soviet rhetoric as a means of legitimating it, but, as Arno J. Mayer warns, the Soviet Union is becoming increasingly less stable, and a renewal of cold war confrontationism could result in a desperate bid to hold on to what power is left in the Kremlin, where the military has become an important force since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The American military, too, has sought a bigger role in the planning of national policy. Frank A. Burdick shows us how the military has tried to turn the Vietnam defeat into a political victory. And, finally, Ivan Illich reminds us that peace need not mean only the absence of war, but can and must mean a relationship among people and between human society and the earth. This is the peace of the community and not of the state, and it is the true objective of a genuine peace movement.

—N.X.