Negotiations about nuclear missiles in Europe take place behind closed doors in Geneva. As the deadline approaches for the new generation of missiles to be deployed, the movement is growing and debating its options.

One of the most active centres for disarmament is the Dutch Interchurch Peace Council (IKV). It discusses the issues, describes the movement and offers a solution towards nuclear disarmament.

In recent years the European peace movement has grown tremendously. In 1981 it organised the largest anti-nuclear weapons demonstrations ever held in Europe. It has won massive support from all layers of the population. It has succeeded in winning some important political parties to its views or to positions close to it. In several countries it is very close to the churches. And it has forced two NATO governments to postpone a decision to deploy new nuclear missiles on their territory. Nevertheless, the aim to begin a process of nuclear disarmament, through independent first steps by European countries, has not yet come about.

Increasingly, energy is absorbed by efforts to stop a new generation of nuclear weapons from coming into Europe rather than getting the existing ones out. This struggle is heading for a climax at the end of 1983.

A new and hopeful factor is that the peace movement now realises that it is part of a worldwide mass movement that is operating on an international scale to halt the madness of the nuclear arms race. Two important examples are the churches in the GDR (East Germany) which have taken new initiatives, and the growing movement in the Pacific to stop French nuclear tests.

In Europe, the rapid rise of the US Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign has been welcomed with particular enthusiasm. From its very beginning we have been in close contact with it. We have been impressed to see how it found massive support among the American people in a very short time, irrespective of social and political differences. Fear of nuclear war, concern about new weapon developments in both East and West, which signal the trend toward nuclear warfighting, uneasiness about bellicose rhetoric and disenchantment with arms control-as-usual are common elements of our movements.

Deadlines in Europe: 1983

We see the ‘Freeze’ as a time-urgent proposal. Its immediate goal is to stop the new generation of nuclear weapons which is in the making in both East and West, and which will put a hair-trigger on nuclear war. We in Europe feel the pressure of time very directly. In December 1983 NATO wants to begin the deployment of the first US Pershing II and cruise missiles. For the first time in history, Western Europe will serve as a launching platform for extremely accurate US strategic missiles targeted at the Soviet Union.

Should these missiles be deployed, the prospects of achieving a US-Soviet freeze on all new nuclear weapons will be seriously undermined.

In December 1979, NATO made its so-called double track decision: to deploy 572 US missiles in five Western European countries and to offer negotiations to the Soviet Union. This led to a series of protests in many European countries, which climaxed in the unprecedented mass demonstrations in the autumn of 1981, when three million people marched the streets of Western European cities.

Since then, opposition has continued to grow. Some examples: peace camps were organised at many nuclear weapons storage sites. In Sicily, where the first cruise missiles are due to arrive by the end of 1983, more than a million signatures (more than half of the adult population) were collected within two months in 1982.
Women from the Greenham Common Peace Camp stage a 'die-in' outside the London Stock Exchange on 7 June 1982 during President Reagan's visit.
December 1982, in a symbolic action involving non-violent civil disobedience, some 30,000 women ‘embraced’ the cruise missile base near Greenham Common in England to protect the world from its evil.

In West Germany, the Social Democratic Party has gradually shifted to a much more critical position with respect to the Euromissiles question and ‘the Greens’, who reject deployment unconditionally, won a number of seats in Parliament in the recent elections. In Belgium also the peace movement keeps growing, and in the Netherlands, government leaders have publicly stated their doubt that a deployment decision could be implemented without lasting damage to the cohesion of society.

In those NATO countries where no missiles are to be deployed, opposition also has grown. In Canada, the plan to test US cruise missiles are strongly protested. In Denmark and Norway, the public unrest about the missiles became evident in their parliaments; Denmark voted to withhold the payment of their share of infrastructure costs of the NATO program, in Norway the same proposal lost by only one vote. Greece refuses to agree to the deployment paragraphs in NATO communiques and promotes initiatives for a nuclear-free zone in the Balkans.

In Denmark, parliament forced the government to step out of line when all NATO countries were supposed to vote no to a Freeze resolution in the United Nations. (In the Netherlands a similar resolution failed to pass in parliament by only the smallest margin.) Moreover, the Danish parliament recently voted not to agree with deployment as long as the Geneva negotiations are still under way.

Permanent testimony of the public resistance in Europe appears in the various opinion polls. Opposition in the various European countries to the NATO decision was substantial from the beginning and has been growing considerably ever since.

Why is it that these figures are so little reflected in the official politics of the European governments? In only one of the five NATO countries where, according to the December 1979 decision, new nuclear missiles were to be deployed, this decision was subjected to proper parliamentary debate prior to the decision. This was the Netherlands, and there parliament voted against it. However, in NATO unanimity is traditionally considered a political imperative of the utmost importance. For instance, late in 1982, Western European governments even had to officially endorse President Reagan’s newest MX missile deployment plan because not to do so would be seen in Moscow as a sign of division within NATO and — more importantly — the Reagan administration needed European support against growing opposition within the US. Virtually no European government really liked the Reagan plan, but none dared to say so.

The NATO double track decision has gradually become the main test case for demonstrating the unity and resolve of the alliance and thus serves a political rather than a military purpose. Many Western European politicians who were in power in 1979 and are no longer today, now admit that the NATO decision was a mistake. But these governments cannot afford this luxury and will be most reluctant to drop the commitments of 1979 to deploy new missiles, despite the inevitable high political costs. The people in Europe will become more and more alienated from the political process as leaders continue to disregard sincere convictions and concerns.

The peace movement believes in democracy. But what else is there to do other than demonstrate again and again .... that the majority of people do not want these new missiles?"

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In the Netherlands, a poll which was taken in November 1979, before the NATO decision, showed some 37 percent of the population in favour and 25 percent against deployment of the new US missiles in Europe. When the nature and implications of the decision became better known to the public, opposition against deployment increased dramatically. In all the polls there now appears a hard core of 40-50 percent of the population which rejects deployment unconditionally. About 30 percent prefer to make their answer dependent on the arms control negotiations in Geneva. Faced with a direct question (yes or no to deployment), half of these reject deployment as well. This means that about two-thirds of the Dutch population (more than 60 percent) oppose deployment.

In the other four deployment countries the opposition has also grown considerably in the past two to three years. In Great Britain, according to Marplan (The Guardian, January 21, 1983), 61 percent of the population disapprove of deployment of cruise missiles and 27 percent are in favour.

Unconditional opposition in that country doubled in the course of 1981 (from 23 percent to 46 percent). A similar process can be seen in the Federal Republic of Germany. Unconditional opposition increased from 29 percent in July 1981 to 47 percent in January 1982.

According to Der Spiegel magazine, the Bonn government has an unpublished study by the Sinus Institute in Munich in which 61 percent of those polled favour postponement of deployment if, by October 1983, there is still no agreement in Geneva. In June 1983, a poll by ZDF television showed that the percentage favouring postponement had increased to 72 percent. In Italy, in October 1981, 60 percent opposed the new missiles on the basis of a simple yes or no question. A poll in July 1983 again showed 60 percent against. In Belgium, (L’Evenement, 1 October 1982) in 1981, 50.2 percent were against deployment of new missiles on their territory, whereas in 1980 this figure was only 41.7 percent.

As to other NATO countries: in Norway (December 1982), 69 percent opposed deployment in Europe. In Denmark, despite very biased and misguided phrasing of the questions in the poll (Gallup, January 17, 1983, Berlingske Tidende), 51 percent thought it wrong to deploy new US missiles as an answer to a Soviet threat.

In the November 1981 poll of the Dutch opposition united in the Socialist Democratic Party has gradually shifted 25 percent against deployment of the newest MX missile deployment plan
again, in the polls and on the streets, that the majority of the people do not want these new missiles? The talks in Geneva cannot stop them. Governments are paralysed by the demand of unanimity in NATO. The movement must now count on the help of the American people to make democracy work. The Freeze movement in the USA supports the European struggle to stop the new missiles; while also calling on the Soviet Union to reduce its intermediate-range missiles aimed at Europe.

The movement appeals to the American people to urge Congress to oppose the funding of testing, production and deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles and to halt all efforts to begin deployment of the missiles in December 1983.

The argument

Originally, the reason for NATO's modernisation plan was not the growing offensive force of the Soviet Union (particularly the SS-20 missile) but its increased defensive potential, in particular its air defence. NATO said its aging bombers could no longer penetrate. By 1979, the official arguments underlying NATO's 'double track' decision had shifted. At that time the most prominent argument was that there had grown a substantial asymmetry in Europe with respect to land-based systems for the intermediate range.

Because of the parity between the Soviet Union and the USA in strategic systems, to be codified in Salt II, this regional imbalance was seen as undercutting the credibility of the West's nuclear deterrent and as a potential cause of political blackmail by Moscow. This argument focused on the replacement of the almost 20-year old Soviet SS-4 and SS-5 missiles by the SS-20, a multiple warhead (MIRV) missile of greater range and accuracy. NATO claimed to have no 'answer' to this threat, although already, before the first SS-20 appeared, the US sea-launched missiles so far 'countering' the SS-4 and SS-5 had been 'Mirved'.

Later, when public resistance to deployment grew, the official argument changed again. Originally, the negotiation 'track' had been added to the deployment 'track' to make deployment acceptable by public opinion. Now this was reversed. Going on with deployment was called necessary for the success of the negotiations. (The outcome would, of course, be the same: deployment.)

The peace movement in Europe has consistently expressed its opposition.
to the SS-20 program. It also opposes the current and equally impressive modernisation plans of French and British nuclear weapons. All current nuclear weapons modernisation in Europe (Soviet, American, French and British) point towards nuclear warfighting and the SS-20 is clearly one of the most threatening of today’s missiles. But “response” to this new Soviet modernisation round makes the situation even more dangerous, for a number of reasons.

- It is again one more step in the nuclear arms race between the superpowers that has been going on for too long already. It will not bring more security in Europe. If American cruise missiles and Pershing IIs will be deployed, the Soviet Union will respond again with new weapons on its side. Such reasoning reflects a dangerous fixation on comparisons between various weapon systems and playing the ‘numbers game’, although there are already far more nuclear warheads than conceivable targets.

- Qualitatively, this new step is even more dangerous. This new generation of nuclear weapons of extreme accuracy changes the strategic situation of Europe and feeds Soviet anxieties about the trends towards a US first strike capability. The Pershing II, once deployed, will be the most accurate missile in the world, the first ballistic missile of the coming generation of ‘first strike’ nuclear weapons. The trend towards nuclear warfighting postures, which is the guideline of the current modernisation both in East and West, is a special cause of great uneasiness in Europe.

- That the deployment of US Euromissiles is a response to European concerns is only partly true. Long before such concerns were expressed (for instance late in 1977 by Chancellor Schmidt), the US Air Force was already planning to deploy ground-launched cruise missiles at three NATO bases. Today, the issue of the Euromissiles must be seen as part of the overall strategy of the US administration to develop a position of military superiority towards the Soviet Union. The peace movement in Europe is certainly not anti-American. But it is very concerned about the ideological, moral, even religious rhetoric which the Reagan administration uses to underline its foreign policy and its relation to the Soviet Union in particular. Whatever the movement may think of the socio-political system of the Soviet Union and the policies of its leaders — and the peace movement in Western Europe expresses its criticism in this respect quite frankly, which has led some Soviet officials to call us CIA agents — defining the relations with the Soviet Union in terms of “a struggle between right and wrong, good and evil”, talking of the Soviet Union as “an evil empire”, and considering a continuation of a forced arms race and economic sanctions as appropriate means to get the Soviet Union on its knees, is endangering world peace. New efforts for detente are of vital interest for Europe. The deployment, for the first time in history, of such extremely accurate US missiles in Europe targeted at the Soviet Union means further escalation of tension and confrontation.

- In strictly military terms there have always been doubts about the real need for deployment of cruise missiles and Pershing IIs in Europe. Since, after the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, the US replaced its land-based missiles with bombers and missiles on submarines, the Soviet Union has had a virtual monopoly in Europe with respect to land-based intermediate range missiles. NATO did not find reason at that time to ‘match’ this threat with land-based missiles of its own. Its potential in submarine and air-based systems was considered an adequate compensation; this potential has continuously been, and is continuously being, modernised and expanded.

- From the beginning, the political arguments were the most important: NATO’s desire to show resolve and cohesion after some nasty conflicts between President Carter and Chancellor Schmidt. But, in fact, the NATO decision has proved to be one of the most divisive issues in its history.

- Deployment of Euromissiles as scheduled for 1983 will also be a serious setback for the American peace movement because of the qualitative dimensions and the fact that verification will be much more difficult to achieve. Cruise missiles are difficult to count and can’t be used with either conventional or nuclear warheads.

**Geneva**

For a number of reasons, the peace movement in Western Europe has been, and still is, very critical and sceptical about the possible outcomes of the Geneva talks.

- It is acknowledged in many (semi) official reports that in 1979 the negotiation ‘track’ was added to the deployment ‘track’ to pacify public opinion and to legitimise deployment.

- Contents and timing of the various proposals that have been made (zero-option, interim-proposal) all suggest that their purpose continues to be to appease European public opinion rather than to achieve real results. The outcome will be deployment, full or partial.

In reality, these talks do not aim at controlling the arms race but at controlling public protest against the arms race.”

**Australian Left Review** 85

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**Australian Left Review** 85
targeted at Europe. This approach was purely propagandistic; it was certain that Moscow would reject it because it now added the Soviet missiles targeted at China to the equation and continued to exclude all French and British missiles targeted at the Soviet Union.

In December 1982, Andropov responded in kind with what he called "a really honest zero-option": no new US missiles, no Soviet missiles to counter them, only (!) 162 Soviet missiles to counter the 162 British and French missiles. Although this proposal entailed the dismantling of several dozen SS-20s, its acceptance was equally unlikely because of its explicit link with the British and French nuclear forces, thereby (politically) trying clearly to uncouple Western European security from US security.

For the peace movement, both approaches are unacceptable. Both kinds of a separate 'Eurostrategic balance' would mean a new, separate Eurostrategic arms race. The one would introduce a new generation of US missiles, the other would legitimise both the SS-20 and the British and French nuclear programs. Britain and France are even planning to have more warheads on their missiles in the nineties than the total Soviet SS-4, SS-5 and SS-20 force of today. Andropov clearly had this in mind when, in May 1983, he offered to count not only missiles but warheads as well, thereby hardening his position; to match the French and British modernisation programs, Moscow will need more than 162 3-warhead SS-20s.

Reagan's 'interim offer' (March 1983) does not change the basic position at all. It means: the US will deploy as many new weapons as the Soviet Union wants to keep. So, the US will go up (in land-based missiles) to the level where the Soviet Union will go down. The only thing worth noting about Reagan's newest 'offer' is that it should finally end the illusion, so cherished by governments and many political parties in Europe, that Geneva can produce 'zero' (no deployment). Already, since 1979, the framework agreed upon by NATO means that any outcome of Geneva will mean the coming of a new generation of missiles. Given this framework, to negotiate means to deploy. Only the numbers are negotiable. In December 1979, many supporters of the double track decision said that deploying 572 new missiles was, of course, too much, but the negotiation-track could bring the number down to some 300. Reagan's newest offer is widely understood as meaning: let's settle for some 300. The peace movement despairs of governments and many politicians who, for years, have been paralysed by 'Geneva'. They called for 'zero' and, at the same time, since 1979 they have agreed to a negotiation approach which makes certain that both without and with an agreement the deployment of new missiles will start in December 1983!

The fact that nothing has happened in Geneva so far, however, does not mean that nothing will happen in the coming months. Both parties have an interest in some kind of 'arms control' deal. NATO and the US to sell deployment to public opinion (which has been the purpose of the negotiations since 1979), and the Soviet Union to get things moving in the START talks and not to have to carry out its own threats, like suspending all negotiations (in any case, START and INF) after the first deployments, and deploying missiles in closer range of the US (though not in Cuba as in 1962), also deploying more missiles in East European countries, etc.

Suspension

Whatever the outcome of Geneva, the peace movement in Western Europe continues to reaffirm unconditional opposition to any new missile deployments, even as part of an 'interim solution'. Instead, it calls for a suspension or delay of any further implementation of the NATO decision (of both of its tracks because both lead to deployment) in order to create time for establishing a new negotiation framework in Geneva. Several leading politicians have suggested creative alternative approaches which, so far, could not be discussed at government level because of 'Geneva'. Any alternative proposal is seen as 'undermining' the US negotiation position. Moreover, the weapons issue should be discussed in a wide context of East-West problems in Europe. Detente and disarmament have to be linked.

The current framework in Geneva can only lead to further escalation (a separate Eurostrategic balance) and confrontation. The deployment of the first new missiles in December 1983 may even derail the whole East-West arms control process for at least several years. Geneva is speeding up the arms race because so many officials now say: the sooner we start deployment, the sooner Moscow will make concessions. In reality, these talks do not aim at controlling the arms race but at controlling public protest against the arms race.

Negotiations are needed, but their framework should be such that they can produce steps towards a solution. The movement is asking European governments to stop being paralysed by 'Geneva', to respond to the majority, and to finally take initiatives to prevent the crisis of 1983. The movement asks the Soviet Union to make a start with dismantling its missiles, both old and new. And we ask the US people to urge Congress to prevent the deployment of this new generation of US missiles.

Dutch posters against the neutron bomb.

The Dutch Interchurch Peace Council (IKV) is one of the most active centres working for disarmament in Western Europe.