

## Glimmers on arms control

*The ending of the arms control season is not as depressing as it seems. Geneva has been unproductive, Madrid a pleasant surprise.*

ARMS control is indeed a fitful process: who would have thought that the best news, or at least the most tangible development, to emerge from the past six months of confusion should have come from the apparently endless negotiations within the framework of the Helsinki treaty of 1975 (called the Helsinki Final Act because it is not binding)? That, however, is what happened last week when, after more than two years of negotiations consisting more often than not of recriminations, the two power blocks with interests in West-Central Europe appear to have agreed at Madrid on a number of sensible compromises with each other.

The document that the states concerned will sign later in the summer contains some high-sounding principles about the freedom of individuals to make choices for themselves — declarations so general that only the most boorish would find it hard to subscribe to them — but which have been accompanied by a few exit visas for a number of Soviet citizens who have not hidden their unwillingness to stay (and who camped out in the United States Embassy in Moscow to make their point). Similarly, it seems to have been agreed that there are sensible things that can be done to reduce the risk of surprise attack, or conventional war without forethought, in Central Europe. There is to be a conference in Stockholm next year to carry further the provisions of the Helsinki Act (which requires each side to tell the other of manoeuvres within 150 km of the European border). This is not much to boast about but it is much better than nothing.

By comparison, the negotiations at Geneva from which much was expected at the beginning of this year have so far produced very little. The negotiation on missiles of intermediate range in Europe, which last week went into recess for the summer, appears to have degenerated into a bilateral restatement of conflicting positions. The Soviet Union's insistence that British and French nuclear weapons must be counted in any balance sheet is known to be unacceptable not merely to the governments concerned but also to the council of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (to which France does not even belong). This does not imply that there is no framework within which these nuclear weapons will be counted; indeed, the Soviet Union must know that, with a little guile, it could persuade the United States to allow for them numerically without mentioning them explicitly, in the Salt II treaty (still unratified).

Inevitably, the Soviet Union can also complain that the United States position, based on the argument that the capacity of the Soviet SS20 force must be matched by the "modernization" of nuclear weapons in Western Europe, is similarly inflexible. The error in that argument is that the SS20s are a new element (whose number has been increasing even while the argument has raged) which present novel problems for the defence of Western Europe. It is not the Cuban missile crisis of twenty years ago all over again, but there are elements of similarity. When the negotiations began, it was widely thought in the United States that they would drag on until the first United States missiles were about to be deployed in Europe. As events have turned out, the Soviet Union probably has more to gain by waiting until the process has been under way for some months before softening its negotiating line, counting on the political discomfort that will be caused by those opposed to nuclear weapons in any guise. The difficulty is that negotiating partners who have restated their position for the umpteenth time cannot then easily retreat into flexibility. The solution, for both

sides, is to recognize what has been apparent from the start — that the distinction between intermediate and strategic missiles is artificial, and should promptly be abandoned.

There, curiously enough, the past six months appear to have seen some progress. The two sides are at least talking about numbers, and have not abandoned the principle declared at the outset that the objective is to find some way of reducing the numbers of strategic weapons deployed on each side. (Each side's numbers is for the time being unacceptable to the other, but that gap could be bridged.) What seems, however, still to be lacking is a clear agreement on the functions of different kinds of weapons systems — aircraft (the most vulnerable), land-based missiles (accurate and less vulnerable) and submarine-based missiles (less accurate, even less vulnerable). Since the objective of the whole exercise is to find some way of regulating for stability, there is much to be said for relying on submarines rather than on land-based missiles (a proposition rejected by the Soviet Union some months ago, but which could be dusted off and tried again). But the best hope for these negotiations is that there should be a planned programme of reductions, with opportunities at pre-determined stages for reconsidering what happens next. Why not settle now for a one per cent reduction of existing forces and decide where to go next a year from now? Purists would say that such a process would never yield a final result, something to enable everybody to sleep easily at nights. But that is an illusory objective. Nuclear weapons will not go away. The best hope is that those who possess them will keep talking to each other.

This is not mere whistling to keep one's spirits up. That, as it happens, is how most existing arms control agreements have been reached. Apparently endless talk and the frustration that it engenders have eventually made agreement not merely possible but plainly prudent. This, it must be hoped, will be the outcome of the technical studies of a chemical weapons treaty and a test-ban treaty supervised by the Committee on Disarmament (also at Geneva), which plans to keep on working until mid-August. It would be too much to hope that both these projects will succeed in the near future. That either one or other might should be enough to keep the momentum going — and to offset last week's ambiguous decision by the US Senate that there should be a little more money for the production of chemical munitions. □

## Paying for pollution

*Environmental protection is not an absolute good but unavoidably an economic cost.*

WHERE should the costs of environmental pollution lie? In the week in which Mr William Ruckelshaus, administrator of the US Environmental Protection Agency, has presented those living near a metal smelter in the state of Washington with the stark choice between their jobs and (possibly) their health (see page 200), in Britain the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities has published a sensible if inconclusive study of the "polluter pays" principle on which, in theory, most European pollution law is founded. Each case illustrates that there is a long way to go before pollution policy will be properly informed by rationality.

Ruckelshaus's conundrum has an old-fashioned quality,