The Profits of War and the Politics of Peace

DONALD WELLS


Products of their authors' active involvement in the peace movement, both of these books are written in a clear style which makes them accessible to a broad readership not only within the peace movement and academe but among that growing sector of the reading public which is concerned about peace issues. Indeed, the thirteen wide-ranging essays in Roots of Peace: The Movement Against Militarism in Canada constitute the most comprehensive introduction to the Canadian peace movement of the 1980s that is currently available. The first part of Roots of Peace deals with the international context: prospects for Canada's withdrawal from NATO, the history of the Cold War, the connections between peace movements in Eastern and Western Europe, the relationship between peace issues and struggles for national liberation in the Third World, and the impact of Western peace initiatives on Soviet and American military policy. The second section concerns strategic and ideological issues that define much of the politics of the Canadian peace movement.

Left libertarian in their overall perspective, the editors of Roots of Peace, together with many of the contributors, argue that international peace is predicated on the transformation of
capitalism and patriarchy, as well as the dismantling of both military blocs, East and West. Critical of state-centred peace strategies, they advocate extra-parliamentary direct action and the formation of popular coalitions to push for unilateral disarmament initiatives along with a policy of non-alignment. They also endorse popular, non-governmental internationalism based on “alliances from below” among Western peace activists and on “detente from below” among independent (not the official, government-sponsored) peace activists and groups in the Warsaw Pact nations.

One of the more significant contributions is the essay by retired major-general Leonard Johnson, the New Democratic Party’s unofficial defence spokesperson. Johnson argues that the Soviet Union has neither the intention nor the ability to invade Canada, and thus that Canadian security depends neither on the U.S. nor on NATO. He further contends that “there are no military threats to Canada that justify armed forces,” that there is no relation between the size of Canada’s security forces and this country’s vulnerability to military attack, and consequently that Canadian military forces “could safely be abolished.” Calling the nuclear arms race itself “the paramount threat,” Johnson concludes that prevention of nuclear war requires a “progressive abandonment” of both military blocs.

While such prescriptions for changes in Canada’s defence policy are in line with the goals of much of the Canadian peace movement, the analysis on which Johnson bases these prescriptions is less radical than that of other contributors to *Roots of Peace*. As the editors state, “Canada’s role in the arms race cannot be separated from the basic relations of power in our society.” Johnson’s definition of militarism, the “dominance of military preparedness over politics,” is somewhat more narrow. In his view, the chief causes of American militarism are the Committee on the Present Danger (a “small elite of U.S. citizens” that has “gained power in the United States”) and the military-industrial complex which is “running the United States without effective opposition.” While these are significant manifestations, the history of U.S. militarism indicates that it has deeper and more enduring roots in the need to define external enemies in order to bolster domestic political cohesion and in the need to shape a global order supportive of the international interests of U.S.-based firms. The narrowness of Johnson’s analysis of militarism also implies an underestimation of the political and economic benefits that the arms race offers to *Canadian elites*, and it neglects the
economic dependencies that continental militarism has fostered among defence sector workers and their communities on both sides of the border.

Another important contribution is “Fuelling the Arms Race —Canada’s Nuclear Trade,” by Gordon Edwards. The author provides a cogent indictment of Canadian governments and the Canadian nuclear industry for their role in the proliferation of nuclear weapons. He notes that since amateurs require only about $2000 worth of material from a hardware store, in addition to some plutonium, in order to construct a nuclear weapon, the crucial element in nuclear proliferation is the plutonium. Yet Canadian governments have supplied plutonium-producing nuclear reactors to India, Taiwan, Pakistan, Argentina and South Korea, and attempted to sell one to Turkey. The Canadian state has also sold uranium to South Africa, France and Iraq. To defend participation in this trade, Canadian governments and the nuclear industry point to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and to bilateral “safeguards.” Yet most purchasers refuse to ratify the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the safeguards cannot be enforced. This is not an instance in which U.S. military considerations dominate, but one in which short-term domestic economic interests are allowed to shape Canadian national policy.

Phyllis Aronoff’s exposé of sexism in the peace movement, “A Feminist Approach to Militarism and Peace,” is also instructive. The peace movement, she writes, is “as much marked by patriarchal values as any institution in our society.” While a majority of peace movement members are female, “its acknowledged leaders and experts are predominantly male.” At a workshop on “Women and Peace” in 1985, two of three speakers were male. She adds that “perhaps this should be taken as an indication of the enormous importance accorded to this subject by the conference organizers.” Aronoff also criticizes the maternal feminist view of Helen Caldicott, Petra Kelly (of the West German Green Party) and others, that women are less violent, by nature, than men.

Another notable contribution is the insightful examination, by Eric Shragge and David Mandel, of the main political divisions undermining trade union mobilization around peace issues in Quebec. Noting that metalworkers were particularly reluctant to support peace issues, the authors argue that “until workers feel there is a concrete alternative, peace activists cannot expect them to put the ideal of disarmament before jobs.” Shragge and Mandel
conclude that since "arms production will remain attractive to capital as long as the profit is there," a viable program for the economic conversion of military production will require government support.

Ernie Regehr’s *Arms Canada: the Deadly Business of Military Exports* is less directly concerned with the peace movement and focuses instead on the dangers of Canadian military production and trade. Regehr’s thesis is that the political criteria which should determine Canadian defence policy have been subordinated to commercial criteria, trading national sovereignty for private profits. As a result, Canadian defence and foreign policies have been shaped by American interests and perceptions, and Canadian weapons have contributed both to aggressive and destabilizing American military strategies and to violence in the Third World.

Under the Defence Production Sharing Arrangements (DPSA) of 1959, Canadian arms producers obtained access to U.S. contracts. In return for these economic concessions, the U.S. state received “broad Canadian compliance with American defence policy.” Through the “rough balance” provision of the DPSA, Canada exports about 85 percent of its military goods to the U.S., and the U.S. sells an equivalent dollar value of American military goods to Canada. In the process, the Pentagon has influenced Canadian defence procurement, tying Canada to policies such as U.S. Presidential Directive 59, which identifies Soviet missile silos targeted for a nuclear first strike. Because Ottawa subsidizes the production of components for weapons to carry out such first strikes, PD-59 has become, in effect, the Canadian government’s “nuclear weapons employment policy.”

While the political costs to Canada of the continental integration of military production have been substantial, Regehr debunks the myth that these have been offset by the economic benefits. Since under the terms of the DPSA, Canadian military exports to the U.S. must be roughly balanced by an equivalent value of military goods imported from the U.S., there can be no long-term foreign exchange advantage for Canada. Indeed, since 1975, the cumulative balance of military trade under the DPSA has favoured the U.S. by almost $2 billion. Regehr goes further and argues that the so-called rough balance may, in fact, signify “a permanent trade deficit” because up to 20 per cent of secondary imports (imports of American components and goods used to produce Canadian military exports) are not counted in the trade balance.
Regehr also argues (against conventional views) that there have been no significant spillovers from military research and development expenditures into non-military production. He also contends that from the point of view of foregone opportunities in the form of civilian jobs, services and goods, Canada's military expenditures are an overall economic burden for most Canadians (if not for Canadian military contractors). Government support for the military producers has added to this burden. He notes, for example, that through Ottawa's Defence Industry Productivity program, Canadian taxpayers have subsidized between 9.3 percent and 38.3 percent of the value of annual military sales to the United States since 1969.

Finally, *Arms Canada* contains a strong denunciation of the Canadian government's complicity in the sale of arms for use in war and political repression in the Third World. According to Regehr, 60 percent of the Third World countries receiving Canadian military goods (including Chile, El Salvador, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Taiwan, Honduras, Indonesia, and Guatemala) have been cited for carrying out systematic human rights violations.

In order for the Canadian government to gain control over military exports, Regehr makes thirteen suggestions, including the need to scrap the DPSA in favour of an export permit system, and the need to carry out the economic conversion of military production under government auspices. These suggestions are tied to an exploration of alternatives to current Canadian military policy. In addition to the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Europe, Regehr considers the possibility of Canada becoming a "non-nuclear security zone." This would require the ability to "assure both of this country's neighbours, north and south, that neither is surreptitiously using Canadian territory as a platform from which to threaten the other," and this ability would depend on a "demonstrable capacity to carry out necessary air and sea surveillance." Regehr observes that this would mean considerable investment: "This is not a proposal designed to reduce Canadian military expenditures."

Regehr's critique of Canadian arms exports is compelling, and his brief discussion of alternative defence policy for Canada is consistent with a great deal of current thinking among peace activists and some strategic studies experts. The difficulty is that he appears to assume an unrealistic degree of autonomy for the Canadian state within the continental economy, while at the same time exaggerating the differences of interest that exist between
Canadian and American political elites. What Regehr sees as the subordination of Canadian political interests to economic interests and the domination of American over Canadian interests does not acknowledge the extent to which these interests, as they are understood by economic and political elites in both nations, are mutually reinforcing. Regehr proposes that the Canadian state’s elite regulate military exports, yet most of the members of this elite subscribe to the very Cold War consensus which made Canadian military production an adjunct of *Pax Americana* in the first place. It is not surprising, therefore, that the “arms merchants” have captured their regulators.

Regehr’s proposal to reorganize the Canadian arms industry around a national defence industrial base also underestimates the extent to which Canadian military production is already integral to a continental defense industrial base. His rationale for a national defence industrial base centres, again, on exaggerated differences of interest between Canadian and American elites. He predicts that the “conflict between the Canadian interest in access to the U.S. market and the interests of the U.S. military industry will very soon become sharper.” As an illustration, he maintains that it is impractical for Canadian defence contractors to aspire to become the producers of major defence systems for the Pentagon because he believes that the U.S. would not buy such systems from a foreign supplier — “unless of course Canada was willing to give up sufficient independence so that it would not be considered a foreign supplier.” Yet this is exactly what the Mulroney Trade Agreement is about, and Canadian suppliers already produce systems such as the Oerlikon Low Level Air Defence System and the Grizzly armoured car for the U.S. market. Regehr himself quotes the Pentagon’s director of industrial resources who stated, “[W]e consider Canada as part of the U.S. domestic industrial base.”

Despite these criticisms, *Arms Canada* is a very important, useful book, a major contribution to the literature on Canadian defence policy and military production. Its timely publication fulfills a need for knowledge about the roles that Canadian defence producers play in Canada and around the world. While both *Arms Canada* and *Roots of Peace* may be overly optimistic — the one about conflicts of interest between Canadian elites and their American partners, the other about the prospects for mass mobilization through the Canadian peace movement — the need to separate Canada from “the permanent war economy” must
surely be placed at the top of the national political agenda. These books are valuable contributions to that end.