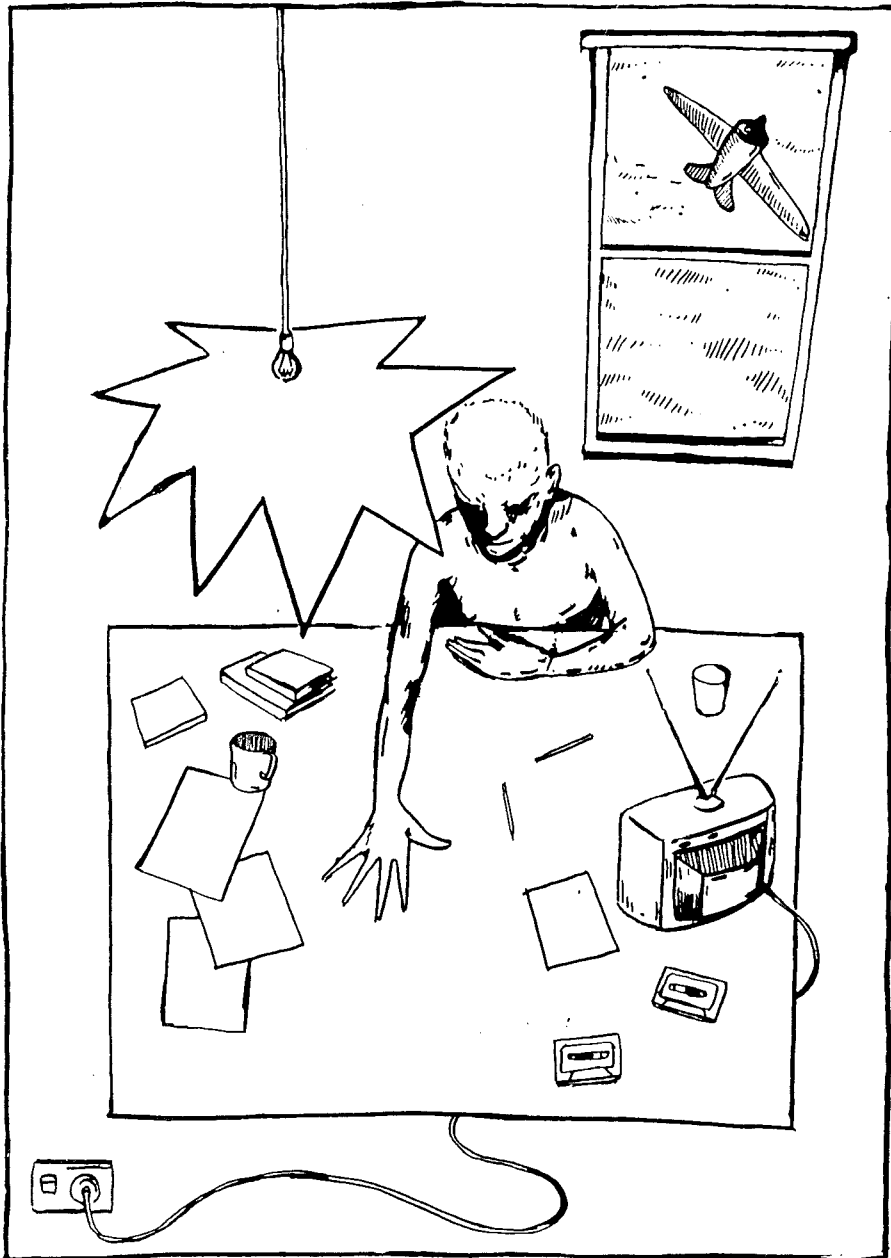


Students and the Nuclear Arms Race:



The common finding of all of these studies is that the youth of these countries have a considerable awareness of nuclear weapons, gained mainly from the media. They also show understandable concern about the possible uses of these weapons and the likely consequences of a nuclear war. Even primary school and pre-school children show some awareness of the nuclear issue. Amongst older children and adolescents a substantial number indicate that the fear of nuclear war affects their lifestyle, specifically in their attitudes to choosing a possible career and to having a family. Many students express a sense of impending nuclear doom and a feeling of despair and frustration about the direction of the arms race.

We have recently completed a study of Western Australian students to determine their knowledge of nuclear issues, their opinions about the arms race, their expectations about nuclear war and their anxieties about the future. This study was part of a cross-cultural survey coordinated by Richard Zweigenhaft in which a questionnaire containing 38 questions was administered to selected groups of year 11 and first year tertiary students in WA, USA and the UK. A full report of this study is available from the authors.

Observations

The results of the WA survey are:

1. **knowledge:** the students have a satisfactory level of knowledge of general nuclear issues such as those countries which have nuclear weapons and the places where they have been used. However, there is a notable lack of knowledge about technical aspects of the arms race such as the types of missiles and their effects.
2. **opinions:** nearly 60% of the students expect a nuclear war to occur in their lifetime and 76% expect it to occur with little or no warning. Many students are worried about nuclear prolifera-

In recent years there have been a number of studies carried out overseas to determine the psychological impact of the nuclear arms race on children and adolescents. Most of these studies have been undertaken in the USA where it has been found that the effects are widespread and significant. Similar studies have recently been reported from the USSR, Finland, Canada and Sweden.

tion and 52% expect a nuclear war to be initiated by a country other than the USA or USSR.

Most students think that neither the USA nor the USSR could win a nuclear war and a majority of students think that nuclear weapons are not an effective deterrent to war.

There is strong opposition to small-scale, tactical nuclear weapons and an overwhelming proportion of the students favour an immediate freeze to the arms race.

3. **expectations:** the majority of students express pessimistic views about the availability of basic services following a nuclear war in which 10% of the superpowers' arsenals are used. Most think it unlikely or highly unlikely that food, medical help, police or government will be available after a nuclear attack.

4. **survival:** few students support the idea of space weapons as a protection against nuclear attack. However, about half of the students believe that fallout shelters could improve their prospects of survival. Two-thirds of the students think it is unlikely that they would wish to survive a nuclear war.

5. **impact of the arms race:** two-thirds of the students indicate that they are personally worried or very worried about the nuclear arms race. However only about half of the students think that other Australians are worried about the arms race. Overseas studies have also shown this discrepancy and it appears to be related to the reluctance of many parents to discuss nuclear war with their children. These studies indicate that these children often believe that their parents are less concerned than they are due to the lack of discussion at home.

Most students (94%) express a desire for more information about the effects of nuclear war. This is an interesting result because we find no correlation between knowledge and anxiety about nuclear war. Overseas studies show that the best-informed students are often the most determined to ensure that something is done to prevent nuclear war.

A significant minority of students

state that the threat of nuclear war has affected their career plans (24%) or their plans for a family (29%). This is obviously a significant social problem and similar results have been reported in many of the overseas studies.

Differences between Males and Females

We find significant differences between the responses of males and females on many of the items in the questionnaire. In particular, males score significantly higher on the knowledge items. Females think it more likely that nuclear war will occur in their lifetime and they are significantly more worried than males about the use of nuclear weapons. Females are also significantly more pessimistic than males about the survival of our society after a nuclear war and they are more strongly opposed than males to space weapons and to small-scale nuclear weapons.

There is however no significant difference between males and females in their strong support for a nuclear freeze.

These differences in concern between the sexes have also been found in most of the previous surveys and some authors speculate that they are due to differences in upbringing and conditioning in which boys are desensitized to the negative aspects of war.

Differences between High School and University Students

We find that university students are significantly better-informed about nuclear weapons than high school students. However both groups express a similar degree of concern that nuclear war will occur in their lifetime. The tertiary students are personally more worried about the prospects of nuclear war and they express greater opposition to small-scale nuclear weapons and space weapons.

These results differ from those reported in the USA where 18-22 year olds show less concern about nuclear war than high school or post-graduate students.

Differences between Socio-economic Groups

We compared the answers from students at schools in affluent and less affluent areas. Most of the responses

are similar except for the knowledge questions and the expectations. The affluent group score higher on the knowledge questions and are more pessimistic about the prospects of surviving a nuclear war. However both groups show similar concerns about the arms race and the psychological impact appears to be similar in both cases. Similar results have been reported in the American studies where it is concluded that concern about nuclear war transcends both class and ethnic boundaries.

Cross-cultural Comparisons

Similar questionnaires were also administered during October 1984 in Greensboro (North Carolina), Stockton (California), London (UK) and Bath (UK). There are some significant differences in the student responses.

The English and WA students demonstrate a much higher level of knowledge about the nuclear arms race than their American counterparts. This is surprising because the USA is directly involved in the nuclear arms race and we would have expected greater awareness amongst American students.

Similarly, the English and Australian students are more pessimistic about surviving a nuclear attack. However the tertiary students from all three countries hold very similar views and the wide disparities are present only amongst the high school students. A similar pattern of differences is observed in the students' attitudes to nuclear deterrence and disarmament in their anxiety about nuclear war.

These results are consistent with our observations on the Australian data that there is no correlation between knowledge and anxiety. The American college students are just as worried as their British and Australian counterparts yet their level of knowledge about nuclear issues is much lower.

We are concerned that many American students are ill-informed about the nuclear arms race and its implications. This is probably attributable to the lack of any formal coverage of nuclear issues in the high school curriculum in many parts of the USA.

The Need for Peace Education

Our results indicate that the nuclear

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Maltese people (which St. Paul noted when he was shipwrecked there in AD60!);

4. the Catholicism of the masses, which can lend itself to the quest for peace and social justice; and
5. the enormous suffering endured by the little island during the second world war.

Space prohibits an adequate discussion of these points, but readers of *Peace Studies* will be specially interested in the latter. Malta was so severely bombarded by the Italians and Germans, and the people so heroic, that the entire island was awarded the George Cross, the highest award for civilian gallantry. The legendary legless Wing Commander, Douglas Bader, remarked that the 'Battle of Britain' was "child's play" compared to the 'Battle of Malta'. During 1942, Malta suffered more than two thousand air raids. In one month alone, 2,000 tons of bombs were dropped. The island was blockaded and isolated by Italian and German submarines, and the Maltese people reduced to virtual starvation. Medical supplies, along with fuel and ammunition, had to be rationed. During the hot months of June to September, a typhoid epidemic and scabies added to the difficulties. It was

round-the-clock terror, killing 1,440 people, and injuring more than 3,500. More than 100,000 buildings were destroyed or damaged, among them the Royal Opera House. Located in the capital city of Valletta, the Opera House is still a shell of rubble — a reminder of the destructiveness of war. But Malta also has its share of reminders that peace can triumph.

At the village of Ta'Qali, for example, one sees row upon row of old Royal Air Force 'nissan huts'. Today, the former base has become an art and craft centre, catering to the tourists. Similarly, a former British Army dance hall has become the "Pope John XXIII Peace Laboratory". Situated at Hal Far, and administered by Father Dionysius Mintofoff, the Laboratory's aims are: to promote and preserve peace through justice; to foster better understanding among all people, irrespective of creed, colour or nationality; and to combat all theories and practices which have as their basis the superiority of one group over another. Established in 1971, the Laboratory has various departments, including a Peace Academy. The former dance hall area is now used for seminars, political con-

ferences, and as a 'neutral ground' for resolving disputes. The Laboratory is in touch with peace movements around the world, and hosted an international conference of peace and alternative movements in 1984.

Needless to say, the radical changes in Malta have not been without difficulties in the political and economic realms. Readmission of NATO forces would be an economic boon, but would not serve the cause of peace in the region.

There are some obvious lessons for Australia:

— Big powers will pay high rental for military bases in other countries (there is no reason for the host government to assume a position of subservience);

— If a tiny resource-poor island like Malta, situated between the main centres of superpower rivalry, can stand up for peace, then so too can resource-rich Australia, located at a comparatively 'safe' distance from the present hot-points;

— There is a dignified alternative to superpower politics.

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Students and the Nuclear Arms Race

arms race is having a significant social and psychological impact on the youth of today. They are anxious about the future and this anxiety is affecting the career and family plans of many of them.

A very high proportion of the students indicate a need for more information about nuclear weapons and our study shows little evidence to suggest that such knowledge increases their level of anxiety. In fact other studies show that better-informed students are more determined and more optimistic about their prospects of halting the arms race. It seems likely that increased knowledge about nuclear weapons and arms control can help to dispel the hopelessness and fear which many of our youth experience in the face of these enormous problems. This knowledge provides a basis from which they can work

for peace and disarmament. Involvement with these causes helps them to overcome their initial feelings of impotence and despair. These results are good news for peace educators as they indicate that peace studies in schools and universities could meet an expressed psychological need of our youth and could contribute to the movement for universal nuclear disarmament.

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Footnote

Philip Jennings and Dianne Storey are from Murdoch University, WA and Richard Zweigenhaft is from Guildford College, Greensboro, NY, USA.