longer cares, or even knows, whether the dike is about to be breached again or not.

Small wonder then that within the government faith in persuasion and reason as weapons for wage restraint have taken a sharp knock. Increasingly Treasury talk turns to the alternative of a straight, no-nonsense wage freeze as the best way, the only way, to tackle inflation. The fudged exercise of the seamen's strike will, despite the ingenuities of the exporters, leave Britain £20 million a month worse off on its balance-of-payments account, and has put an end to any lingering hopes of getting into the black this year. The reserves too have slipped another £38 million in a month as a result of nervous reaction to the strike. The government will be hard put to find joy anywhere: the economic drain they knew the strike would mean has been less than they feared, but still considerable; the counter-balancing advantage of an income policy seen to be effective is as far off as ever.

Critics of the government, both within and without the Labour Party, are ready to see in this exercise yet one more example of a non-event, to set alongside the lack of a clear policy over Rhodesia, over the Common Market, over Britain's role East of Suez, over Britain's nuclear force, over steel nationalization. There is a growing hunger within the Labour ranks to know just what sort of government and what sort of policies they are meant to be supporting. This pressure for government decision, and declared decision at that, is not echoed by their leader. He prefers to duck and weave in and around the issues, one month sanctions against Rhodesia, the next subdued negotiations; one month a tough line on Europe, the next insistent probing; one month the incomes policy to the death, the next. . . .

But the public are not disillusioned by Wilson's style. They take evident relish in seeing how he "will get out of this one," the more so because experience tells them he will do it in the way that offends the smallest number. The Cassandras say this cannot go on forever, that the day must come when he has to make the public feel the urgency of what he says is urgent, and that that day is brought nearer by a compromise outcome to the seamen's strike. The public, however, having lived quite happily with one state of emergency, will not be unduly put out by another. They trust Wilson to see to it that any chickens are an unconscionably long time coming home to roost.

BRIAN WENHAM

Nike-X: Who Needs It?

The United States has never tried to build a defense against missiles to add to its anti-bomber defenses. In the current debate over whether it should try to build one (Nike-X), a host of arguments – some for and some against – that are actually of little or no significance, have gained surprisingly great credence. It is argued, for example, that a ballistic missile defense would be worth $10 billion just to protect against accidental missile firings. But the chance of accident is virtually zero. Unimportant also is the argument that missile defenses would discourage potential adversaries from becoming a nuclear power. Is this supposed to refer to Indonesia, South Africa or whom? Nobody seems to know. Anyway, countries now thinking of building a nuclear weapon are not concerned with their capacity to penetrate a missile defense of *ours;* they want to threaten or deter their neighbors, or just to have a bomb. Moreover, they would be peculiar indeed, when beginning to work on a bomb, to be discouraged by problems of penetration destined to arise a decade or more hence.

Another unreal argument for missile defense suggests that it would, at least, discourage the Chinese from building ballistic missiles. But ballistic missiles are a standard status symbol and a very effective weapon for threatening the rest of the world. And why would the Chinese fear that our defense would be literally airtight against their missiles? Even we are not that optimistic.

Still another argument proposes that our missile defense might help persuade the Indians to forego a nuclear weapon of their own, by enhancing their confidence in our willingness to defend them. But this is the line which we now systematically deny in Europe – that our willingness to defend others should be equated to our capacity to defend ourselves. To accept its premises, by building missile defenses for this purpose, is only to give a false argument greater persuasiveness. In any case, much of Indian motivation to become a nuclear power is quite independent of the problem of "guarantees": some of it is based on fear of major power differences which a spiraling arms race, induced by missile defenses, would encourage.

Finally, some would suggest that Nike-X is necessary because the Chinese are irrational, or incapable of calculating the effects of an attack upon us. They assume that Mao's estimate of 300 million Chinese dead in a nuclear war was said boastfully, rather than sober-

ly. And, unfamiliar with Chinese propaganda, they naïvely accept statements minimizing our nuclear capability as a realistic indication of Chinese intentions. The argument is part of a widespread hysteria concerning China, based ultimately on tong-war movies and inscrutable laundrymen. It is noteworthy also that this argument is premature by a few to several years and possibly more; Defense Secretary Robert McNamara recently testified that there was no evidence of Chinese work on intercontinental ballistic missiles, and the decade or more required by the Chinese to build them is about twice the period required to build our defense.

There are also some very misleading arguments *against* missile defenses – for example, that the Russians might be so frightened by Nike-X as to attack us. The defenses are not effective enough to generate such fear since tens of millions of US casualties and a hundred million in Europe would still be hostage to Soviet weapons – and for all anyone will ever know in advance, the missile defenses might not work at all. Moreover, the Russians are even more sympathetic to defenses of this kind than we; a Russian spokesman, General Talensky, has specifically derided the argument that missile defenses on either side might themselves induce a war.

A second quite incorrect argument against defenses asserts that they are impractical because the fallout from interceptors might be worse than suffering the attack. But the much larger incoming warheads would otherwise impact on the ground, with enormous blast and heat effects and heavy local fallout, whereas the missile interceptors' blast effects might only rattle windows, and their fallout would be dispersed through the atmosphere around the world.

The important and real present arguments concerning missile defense are these. In its favor, there is the fact that it would save many lives if a very unlikely nuclear war occurred with the Soviet Union. How many lives, only those bemused by calculations would dare to guess; it might work quite well and it might work quite badly – in either case, for reasons largely beyond mathematical analysis.

The important arguments against a missile defense are simple also: it is very unlikely to be needed; it is very expensive to build and maintain; it will induce eventually still further increases in Soviet weapons – thereby initiating a new round in a competition that might otherwise die down; its attendant fallout-shelter program will be divisive in its impact upon us; and a purchase so far-reaching in its implications can give rise to unanticipated issues – and be mishandled in unexpected ways – that would be far better avoided.

It is noteworthy and relevant that none of the arguments stated so far depend in any way on whether the Soviet Union builds a small missile defense or a large one or none at all. US preparations to ensure our capacity to penetrate a Soviet defense go on all the time in either case. And, whatever the Soviet Union decides, we will, can, ought and must argue that their defense is useless against our missiles. For these reasons, it should be politically feasible for the Administration to argue that we need not match a Soviet defense – that one mistake does not deserve another. It is, after all, time to stop playing games of psychological warfare with tens of billions of dollars. We should buy, as Secretary McNamara is so fond of saying, "only what we need," and, in this use of the injunction, the emphasis should be on "we." As he put it this year, Nike-X would not "add measurably to our safety." This is no less likely to be true next year; certainly it is independent of the existence of any Soviet defensive efforts – the answer to defense is offense.

It would be ironic if, after being satisfied through 20 years of cold war with no civil defense and with ineffective bomber defenses, we greeted the thawing of confrontation with many billions for Nike-X. By the time we built it – as was the case with our air defense system – we would already be wondering why we had done it. And, again as with air defenses, we would have become unwilling to pay for those improvements required to combat on-going changes in Soviet offensive technology and tactics.

It is not only the course of the confrontation and McNamara's statements, but also Lyndon Johnson's programs, that lend themselves to continued deferment of Nike-X. Johnson's Great Society can ill-afford it. The bill for Vietnam is in the $10-billion to $15-billion range annually; missile defenses and their attendant programs might absorb $5 billion to $10 billion more for each of five initial years. Time and money can run out on President Johnson's bid to remake the nation.

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