



## BOOK REVIEW

### Disarmament — a feminist review

*Apocalypse No*, edited by Rachel Sharp. Sydney: Pluto, 1984, 294 pp.

The book is a collection from Sydney academics, medicos and others, setting out yet again the history of disarmament negotiations, costs of military expansion, medical effects of nuclear war, and so on. We've been exposed to plenty of this in recent years — Suter, Ball, Roberts, Denborough, Falk, Mack, Camilleri and Caldecott — so does *Apocalypse No* have something new to say?

Yes; it argues the link between western affluence, arms expenditure and Third World poverty; discusses how our macho culture reinforces the arms race; and looks briefly at the emerging field of peace education.

But the authors' stated aim — an in depth analysis of the nuclear crisis to guide the burgeoning peace movement — doesn't come off. Of course peace activism must break its self-defeating single issue focus; and to do this, needs a radical social critique. No comprehensive theoretical stand is offered here however. The book's low key Marxist emphasis does not produce 'an explanation' for the nuclear crisis — an analytic framework that

might help us to digest and integrate its assorted contributions. The relation between peace and ecological struggles is not perceived, nor how both ecology and peace connect integrally with 'the woman question'.

Given the international surge of women's peace activism since 1981, it's astonishing to find feminism treated to a dismissive half page. This seems schizophrenic, given the chapters detailing how television, boys' toys, sports and video games all manufacture masculine language and identity around competition, aggression and nationalism. To quote: 'The average Australian youngster has ... witnessed more than 14,000 violent deaths on TV by the time (quote) he enters his teens.' (p. 213)

*Apocalypse No* states that it is the pursuit of growth in a context of scarce global resources which leads to war: struggles between rich and poor nations for a share of the world product. But if, as UN Secretary General Waldheim has told us, women, half the world's population, get only one tenth its income, and own less than one per cent of all property ... then surely, by this same logic, the question must arise — Why is it not women, who are making war?

7

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*The Abolition*, by Jonathan Schell  
London: Picador, 1984, 170 pp.

If Sharp's book comes across as an academic quickie, Schell's *The Abolition* is tortuous argument, his passionate, evocative *Fate of the Earth* now matured into close reasoned strategy for disarmament. Schell envisages 'A nuclear-weapon-free but conventionally armed and nuclear *capable* world of sovereign states ... linked together under an abolition agreement' (p. 160). He maintains that the very *capacity* to build nuclear weapons is just as deterrent as their actual *existence*. And so, stability might just as well be arrived at by threat of 'mutually assured construction' (my phrase, not his). Given that we can dismantle arsenals, but will never lose the knowledge of how to build them, a stalemate based on *in principle* as opposed to *actual* threat does at least reduce the chance of nuclear annihilation by preemptive strike or accident. At the same time, Schell believes, the development of an antinuclear retaliatory force would cope with non-compliant nations.

Schell sees the peace movement paralysed, both by the contradictory nature of deterrence policy, and the belief of some sections in world government as essential for disarmament. He offers it a provocative challenge; but not one to please radicals. Social and economic aspects of the crisis are bypassed here, and he asserts: 'instead of asking ourselves how, in the light of the peril to all life, we must transform all life, we (should) ask what the best way is to keep everything the same' (p. 111).

The final question also remains the same, it seems: What is *The Abolition*, if not a multilateral treaty? And how are we to arrive at that? Is it yet another gentleman's agreement? History gives little cause for faith in the morality of gentlemen ...

Ariel Kay Salleh

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# SCIENTIFIC SNAKES AND LADDERS

Each player rolls one die each turn.  
 Before beginning, roll a die to determine your sex:  
 even, male; odd, female.

