

Disarmament
In Perspective
1983

Last June an estimated 800,000 marchers jammed the streets and parks of New York City to call for an end to the proliferation nuclear weapons. Crowd watchers claim that, for every demonstrator, there are probably twenty others who share the sentiments of the marchers. Sixteen million people represent a sizable portion of the adult population of this country. In western Europe and Asia the peace movement is growing rapidly, and hardly a week goes by without a major news story concerning efforts to effect a nuclear freeze. At the same time the military establishment calls for an ever-increasing share of our gross national product.

The issues are not simple. To call members of the peace movement naive dupes of communism is a dangerous over-reaction. It is equally dangerous to assume that our adversaries are to be blindly trusted. Most Americans would probably support a genuine effort to slow down or eliminate the arms race while calling for adequate safeguards such as on-site inspections. Two seismologists, writing in the October 1982 issue of *Scientific American*, claim that we now have technology so sophisticated that we can determine with almost complete accuracy whether an underground blast is the result of an earthquake or a nuclear reaction, so that we are now in a position to monitor at least the testing of new nuclear weapons.

Another question raised by some observers is that of the effects on our own civilian population of large concentrations of weaponry. Philosophers and theologians question the morality of a first-strike stance, while some political scientists point out that, in order to maintain an effective deterrent to nuclear war, we must be willing to let the world know that we are prepared to use our nuclear stockpile and to push the button first, if necessary. These are complex concerns, and the solutions are far from obvious. Are the only choices to freeze or burn?