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Nuclear disarmament

"You have the choice, you only need the will"

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Article by Delphine Lamy, Sud Ouest, 14/01/2013

At Barbezieux Saint-Hilaire the local group of the ATTAC association resumes its normal lecture series with a talk by Jean-Marie Matagne, on Monday 15 January, about nuclear disarmament. Interview.
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During his Hunger-strike

Jean-Marie Matagne, Ph.D, 68, is the founding president of Action des citoyens pour le désarmement nucléaire (ACDN), created 16 years ago. Recently he undertook a hunger-strike for the purpose of getting President François Hollande to set up a referendum on France's participation in the process of abolishing nuclear weapons.

Why did you undertake this struggle against nuclear weapons in 1986 ?

Jean-Marie Matagne: In January 1986, Mr Gorbachev launched the challenge : «Zero nuclear weapons by 2000 ! » That call intrigued me. Did the head of one of the two superpowers really want to renounce his nuclear arsenal? Why? Being familiar with Russian history, I concluded that Gorbachev was unexpectedly sincere, and I plunged into a study of the history of the atom bomb.

At the time, I was preparing a State Doctorate in philosophy. I changed my subject. After the Chernobyl disaster, it seemed to me that nuclear technology, both military and civilian, was far too dangerous to be maintained, especially the military component. In 1991 I defended my thesis on « Power and Strength », concluding that the only way for humanity to avoid self-destruction was to abolish these weapons. In 2002, pursuing this objective, I stood as a candidate for the presidency of France in order to be able to talk about this. ACDN was founded in 1996 and has been active ever since then.

Twenty-seven years later, what are the achievements of your struggle?

We are not alone in this struggle. There is increasing consciousness of the issues. The international « Abolition 2 000 » network links numerous NGOs and municipalities, the « Mayors for Peace » are a federation of over 6 000 cities and towns ! Disarmament is progressing too. In the mid-80s there were about 70 000 « nuclear warheads » on the planet, now the figure is about 20 000. But that's still enough to annihilate humanity ten times over. France alone could kill a billion people with her warheads. The system is still unstable, and several times we have come very close to catastrophe. The only way to avoid it is to eliminate all the existing arsenals, as is required by the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Do you think you can still impose your referendum idea on the President of the Republic in spite of the failure of your hunger-strike in May-June?

Yes, through a massive mobilisation of citizens. According to General Lee Butler, former head of the US Strategic Air Command, nuclear weapons are "fundamentally dangerous, extraordinarily expensive, militarily ineffective and morally indefensible". The French people have a sense of this: according to two polls (World Public Opinion 2008,

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IFOP 2012), more than 80% want them abolished. But the people have never been consulted, and during election campaigns the major candidates avoid debating the issue. The question that we want to put in a referendum is simple: *« Are you in favour of France participating with the other states concerned in the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, under a system of mutual and international monitoring that is strict and effective ? »*

What are the other means of pressure envisaged by ACDN?

Since our hunger-strike, ACDN and the Rahan collective (pour un Référendum et l'abolition historique des armes nucléaires) have set up a rolling fast across France, which anyone who wishes can join. There are other means of action: for example sending the President an Open Letter, which has already been signed by 100 personalities including one Nobel laureate, bishops, artists, some former ministers... You can write to your MP, or senator, or ask to meet with them. You can propose that your Mayor or City Council should join "Abolition 2 000" and "Mayors for Peace". You can disseminate information and analyses on social networks... You have the choice, you only need the will.

What weight can France have, given that the USA and Russia still hold over 90% of the world's nuclear arsenals?

Despite appearances, considerable, perhaps even decisive weight. If your readers want to know more, they would be welcome to attend my talk on Tuesday 15 January in Barbezieux, or to visit ACDN's website (www.acdn.net), Facebook ou Internet (contact@acdn.net).

Lecture-discussion [15 Jan], 8.30 pm, Plaisance Lodge, salle des Alambics, by Jean-Marie Matagne : « Disarm to live, for a referendum on nuclear disarmament". Admission free.

Delphine Lamy

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