

# Signs of Change in the War Machine

*An inexorable and hopeful shift is underway*

by Marjorie Kelly

**Q.** *When war becomes obsolete, what do you do with 45,000 corporations that make military products?*

*A. Gee, I don't know.*

Take Les Arnold for example. He's a thoughtful, intelligent, peace-loving man who after his father's death found himself inheriting a defense company. Over the years, Les experienced a profound spiritual awakening—yet there he was with this profitable company, keeping a hundred people in jobs, manufacturing devices used in ground support for fighter aircraft. It was a contradiction that troubled this gentle man a great deal. And in his predicament, we can see a striking metaphor for where the Baby Boom in general finds itself: inheriting the world our parents built, with all its power and tragedy, and bringing to it new humanistic values—but finding things a great deal harder to change than we thought at age eighteen.

Les resolved his personal contradiction by finding opportunity within crisis. He decided that to quit and sell off his company would be to disempower himself, and that a more effective path was to work for peace from within the defense industry. He started a support group called Defense Executives for Human Success, where businesspeople like himself could talk about the human issues in their work. And he's making plans for an April trip to the Soviet Union, taking defense executives from the US to meet their counterparts in the USSR.

But the story doesn't end there. It's not exactly time to ride off into the sunset. There's still the question of what Les can really *do* with all his war-making machinery, and there isn't an easy answer. He funded a study to explore new applications for his products (electronic power-supply devices), and found a civilian market *less than one-tenth the size of*

his current military market. Les has found there's no quick way out of the defense business. He's a man talking peace while he makes war, and that's not likely to change soon.

The conversion movement (*page 6*) has encountered similar obstacles—trying to retool military factories to produce other products, and finding it surprisingly difficult. Grumann made some buses, Boeing had a disastrous run at making subway cars, and—bizarrely—Kaman Corporation diversified from making helicopters to guitars. But most companies that have traditionally made military hardware are still making military hardware, in large part because it's *extraordinarily profitable*.

All of which doesn't mean that change is impossible, only that it's hard. Fortunately for us and for the planet, there are inexorable forces pushing us toward change. One such force, of course, is the incinerating power of nuclear weapons, which makes war less and less practical. A second is the lure of international trade, which makes war less effective as a way to get what we want in the global market. A third is the budget deficit, which makes military spending less viable in economic terms. Add to these the growing voice of the business community itself, calling for more sensible defense spending, and change begins to appear not only likely but inevitable.

**M**illionaire businessman Harold Willens was one of the first to speak out, as a leader of the nuclear freeze movement in the early 1980s. In 1984 he published *The Trimtab Factor*, which argues that our defense policies don't make sense in business terms, and that businesspeople can be the central force for change (*page 18*). Businesspeople, Willens says, can be a "trimtab": that tiny

*There is a growing voice within the business community today, calling for more sensible defense spending.*

lever that turns the rudder of a giant ship.

Another outspoken business leader is Stanley Weiss, founder of Business Executives for National Security, a 5,000-member group which includes such notables as Peter Grace, chairman of Grace & Company, Tom Watson, chairman emeritus of IBM, and Felix Rohatyn, senior partner at Lazard Freres (page 7). It was Weiss who coined the phrase, "Being dead is bad for business." His organization lobbies for businesslike management of the Department of Defense—deciding what we want to accomplish, and using the least amount of resources to accomplish it.

These are promising stirrings of change. And there are other stirrings—less visible, less vocal—within the military itself. In 1980 the Army began a most unlikely project called Delta Force, which explored potential new styles of leadership, and ways in which the human potential movement might apply to the military. It was directed by Frank Burns, who at that time was a lieutenant colonel and today is a leader in the organizational transformation movement. Among the innovations to come out of Delta Force was the concept of the First Earth Battalion, which called for soldiers trained not only in combat but in the meditative arts, who during peacetime could work on projects in conservation or feeding the poor, and in wartime would know when to use reason rather than violence. When the Earth Battalion concept paper circulated, Burns recalls, "People came out of the woodwork for it." While that particular concept was never adopted, Burns did continue to push the idea of a holistic soldier, the idea that the Army should think not of obedient automatons but of whole persons. It was Burns, in fact, who invented the slogan, "Be all you can be."

Burns left the Army in 1982, and his organizational effectiveness program was disbanded, though similar concepts are still being pursued by a computer network of 1,500 Army people. In the Reagan era, the forces for change within the military have been pushed underground for a time—at least until there's a shift in the political wind—but Burns insists they are still there. "There's a much greater openness to new ideas in the military than people on the outside would expect," he told me in a recent phone conversation. "There has been a general



Poor France—the trunk is broken, but the roots are good. Honoré Daumier, lithograph, 1871.

consciousness-raising in the post-Vietnam era that has escaped the attention of the public. It's hard for the public to hear those voices inside, but they're there."

It's heartening news indeed, for what is at work here are not only profound historical forces, but profound *human* forces as well. In these diverse people—from Les Arnold in the defense industry, to Stanley Weiss in the business community, to Frank Burns in the military—one can see the remarkable power of wise and intelligent people working for change.

Forty years ago the visionary priest and scientist Teilhard de Chardin wrote an essay about how the atom bomb would inevitably change our lives for the *better*, because it demonstrated the awesome power of human minds working together on a compelling project. Today there is no more compelling project than to turn aside our vast war machine, and there are remarkable and intelligent minds devoted to that task. I am hopeful of success, for what de Chardin wrote in 1947 is even more true today: "Nothing in the universe can resist the converging energies of a sufficient number of minds sufficiently grouped and organized." ✞

*"There's a much greater openness to new ideas in the military than people on the outside would expect," says retired lieutenant colonel Frank Burns.*