Editorial

At the time this issue goes to press the results of the current discussions in Geneva on disarmament are not yet known. They have been viewed with a mixture of hope and scepticism around the world. But whatever the results, the “let-down”, if there is failure, will be very much less than in the case of the infamous U2 Summit meeting two years ago.

This is both a good and a bad sign. Good because the raising and dashing of hopes is bad in every way and in particular for humanity’s psychological morale. It is better and more realistic in the present state of world affairs to moderate hope with caution, and to recognise that if the talks themselves fail there are many other opportunities for positive and constructive steps towards world peace. It is bad, however, because there is a danger that the mass of the people will be driven to a sense of futility and hopelessness by the failure of the politicians to agree. Above all, this condition must be avoided if we are to stand a chance of coming successfully through the next few years.

This issue includes a special focus on the theme of peace, and from a variety of points of view. Erich Fromm’s article is one of the most intelligently argued cases for a form of unilateral disarmament that has ever been presented. Later in a section on Notes and Comments we have outlined some of the main growing points of a tendency among scientists to make a systematic and objective study of peace, and human conflict, and of the conditions in which they may be achieved. We also include an article in which the very concept of peace itself is questioned. For many, peace is a rather passive condition and is hardly the handmaid of progress. Must we choose in fact between peace and quietude on the one hand and tension, conflict and growth on the other?

War in particular, and human conflict in general, provide a major threat to the life of the race, and threaten to disrupt the fast moving tendency towards human interdependence and unity. And disruption there will be unless we can discover a true and sound basis for our unity.

Whether we are inclined to adopt what may be called a spiritual world view, or a material world view, we can, most of us, probably accept as a reasonable hypothesis, the statement that peace on earth cannot be established until an understanding of peace and the conditions in which it can be established are securely built into human consciousness.

Wars indeed begin in the minds of men and it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed. This calls for tolerance, understanding, goodwill, and a willingness to accept as valid, within its own context, a view with which one does not necessarily oneself agree. The most urgent necessity today is to strengthen these values, whether we call them human or spiritual, for here, is the true and only foundation for peace and world unity.

In a technological and scientific age it is often easy to denigrate and undervalue the contributions of the thinker, and in so doing to denigrate and de-value education, philosophy, culture and all higher fruits of human achievement. But all great achievement has its origins in the recesses of the spirit. All technology is merely the outworking of fundamental thought. Peace will be established just as soon as there is a more widespread recognition and acceptance of these truths, which will create the conditions in which leadership can function in a positive and creative way.