

The battle of the labs

"Arm at home and promote disarmament abroad," said Stalin, adding that "useful fools" in the Western democracies would rush to perform the latter task.

The latest addition to the seemingly inexhaustible supply of "useful fools" is our very own NDP MP Jim Fulton who recently issued a grave warning about Canada's development of chemical test simulators.

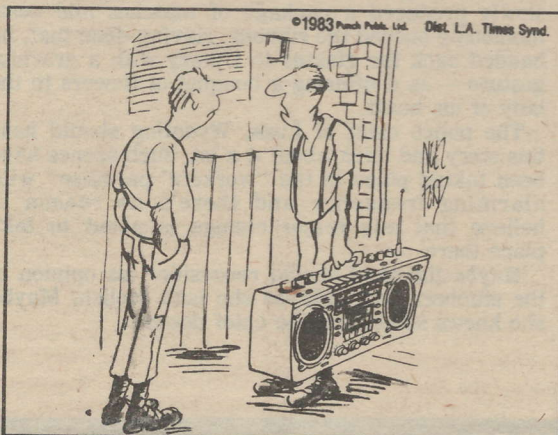
According to Fulton, the production of airborne chemical spray dispensers by the armed forces — devices meant to duplicate the effect of Russian nerve and blistering agents against NATO troops — is "even more insidious and horrific (than the cruise missile) and I don't think the government should be involved in these kinds of developments." Fulton added that he believed that Canada might be making chemical agents primarily for use against civilian targets.

Besides making the ghost of Stalin smile, Fulton demonstrates, like most of his fellow NDP members, striking ignorance of military affairs. The Soviet Union is the world's leader in the development and field use of chemical and biological weapons. Today, Russia has stockpiled some 1,050,000 tons of offensive chemical weapons: Nerve gasses, blistering agents, cyanide, choking agents and some chemicals at present unknown to NATO such as Blue-X and "freezing gas."

By contrast, the United States, the only NATO member with any chemical capability, has about 100,000 tons of such agents, at least 50% of which are obsolescent and must soon be destroyed. Liberals in the U.S. Congress recently blocked the president from producing a much-needed new generation of binary chemical munitions.

The Russians deploy 90,000 special chemical troops with decontamination equipment who are organic to each Soviet military formation down to the company level, while NATO has only a handful of such units. Western military intelligence and defectors have long reported that the Russians made the decision to use chemical weapons as part of a surprise attack on the West in the mid-1960s and have been training accordingly in all field exercises.

Punch



"Can't go out tonight—my battery's dead."

ERIC MARGOLIS



The Russians have extensively tested chemical and biological agents — mycotoxins such as "yellow rain" — in Indochina. Now, Russian units in Afghanistan regularly use chemical agents in routine combat operations, not only to kill their guerrilla enemies, but also to perfect field tactics and optional methods of employment.

Contrary to what the misinformed Fulton believes, chemical weapons are designed for use against enemy airfields, supply depots, ports, command centres and heavily dug-in positions — not against civilians. The primary function of such agents is to force the enemy to don heavy, cumbersome, protective gear that can degrade the effectiveness of combat, supply and maintenance personnel by 70%. Used in a surprise attack, particularly against troops who lack adequate protective shelters and clothing, a chemical attack can be almost as effective as a nuclear strike.

While the Russians were feverishly training for chemical warfare, NATO did almost nothing until two years ago when it embarked on a crash program to implement some basic defensive measures that included better protective equipment and more training. The recent Canadian efforts are part of this belated catch-up program, though our forces in Europe are still deficient in many areas.

The most effective way to prevent a chemical attack by the Russians is for NATO to be able to respond effectively in kind. Even Soviet military literature admits that chemical attacks should only be made against an enemy that cannot retaliate efficiently. Otherwise, the Russians, whose strategy is based on lightning movement, would be faced by the same problems of degraded performance and massive casualties that now threaten NATO.

No one, not the least the military, favor chemical weapons, but to be without them and suitable protective systems is to invite disaster. Yet the efforts of NATO to upgrade its chemical defences have been seriously hampered by a host of "useful fools" such as Fulton who appear to care more for the votes of their left-wing constituents than the safety of our soldiers. Chemical weapons, like cruise missiles, evoke an emotional response from the legions of uninformed housewives, clerics and academics whose various "peace" movements are so useful to the Soviet Union.

Fulton may think that building simulated chemical spray dispensers is "horrific," but we would be interested to see his response were he at a Canadian airbase in Europe during a Russian attack. As he watched our troops choking to death or covered with burning blisters perhaps he, and his NDP colleagues, might reconsider their views.

(Eric Margolis, a member of the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies writes frequently on international affairs)

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