EDITORIAL

The second issue of *Higher Education Policy* has as its special theme the role of universities in conflict resolution and education for peace. The topic of itself is not new. Since the end of the first great European conflict, various movements have come together with the aim of ensuring that education in general and, in some instances, the universities in particular, have as one of their prime responsibilities the cultivation of international understanding. There are, not surprisingly, many interpretations that lie behind that general term; not least of them that understanding between peoples is a sure check against adventurism. This has not always been overly successful. One has only to remember that the famous Oxford Union debate of 1936 on the motion “That this house will not fight for king and country”, preceded the second European conflict by three short years.

To be sure, one may argue that there are various species of war and that defence against an aggressor constitutes a legitimate form of self-defence. But few wars are presented to those who must fight them as anything but “just” wars for the simple reason that no sane man, even of the most patriotic hue, would give his effort, let alone his blood or that of his friends, children or relatives, to an “unjust” war. So it is that protagonists in any conflict will seek by all the means at their disposal — whether historical, legal, geographical or ideological or religious — to prove to the best of their ability that their cause is just, if not before history — which is often a severe judge on the basis of hindsight — then at least before their people.

That the outcome of high threshold warfare between the superpowers and those on the edge of nuclear capability will very likely result in the destruction of mankind may give added force to the drive towards education for peace, for, as Dr Thorens’s article points out, mutually assured destruction as a defence posture nevertheless contains precisely that. There are no victors in high threshold warfare. But this pragmatic approach to the problem seems to suggest there are victors in low threshold warfare, and it is only the degree of damage or threatened damage to the planet Earth that makes this issue more pressing. In other words, were atomic weapons not to exist, the problem would be of a different order. Such pragmatism may be eminently reasonable. But it does undermine somewhat the argument against war as a means of resolving intractable conflicts or for the persuading by different means — which is the classic definition of war by Clausewitz — of the seriousness of one’s intentions. As a matter of principle, it makes little difference whether a nation imposes its will on another by bows and arrows or by employing intercontinental ballistic missiles. For what is at stake is the resolution of conflict by the use of violence or by threat of its use.

Education for peace cannot be interpreted unilaterally, if only because that is to deprive a nation of its potential to resist aggression. What it ought to mean is an appreciation of how wars start, and the means whereby nations acting collectively can bring moral pressure to bear in order to resolve the issue other than by feats of arms. The paradox of education for peace is that it requires a thorough understanding of how wars start, why they start and why diplomacy fails to prevent them starting. There is little point to marching for peace unless one understands fully the ways by which it may be preserved and the interests at stake that threaten it. It is here that the university has now, as it has had in the past, a major role in the study of conflict, whether this is called “Peace Studies”, “Conflict Resolution” or the analysis of past episodes that have led to war or to its avoidance, whether these are called “International Relations”, “Diplomatic History”, the “Sociology of Conflict” or, perhaps more controversially, “Military Studies”.

Some may see this issue as standing a little outside the more usual range of subjects which are associated with policy developments in higher education. But if the sociologist of higher education, the policy analyst or the historian of that enterprise were to pause for a moment, he would realize that the pursuit of his field is intimately dependent on maintaining an acceptable degree of stability in the environment of that institution. War tends not to guarantee such stability. The study of conflict in academia, just like the study of the university itself, relies on the preservation of peace. It is on these grounds that we thought it reasonable to devote this issue to such a topic.

One of the main objects of *Higher Education Policy* is to stimulate discussion and not, of course, to provide final answers on any topic. It is therefore interesting to note that we have already received a response to the material published in Issue No. 1, under the title “Higher Education and Development: A Reappraisal.” This is an article written by Professor Goldemberg, Rector of the University of São Paulo, which is published in the Forum section of this issue. We would hope to include similar contributions, where appropriate, in the future.

Guy Neave