

## ARMS RACE: 40,000 STEPS TO SANITY



MY feet are killing me and my leg muscles moan in sympathy. I must have been crazy to agree to run in this weekend's London Marathon. My brain must have been half asleep when I was asked to do it — either that or senility is setting in early.

There was a time when I would have said that running marathons was quite fun ... but that was a long time ago. Now I'm only conscious of the miles and miles of street running that you have to undertake just to stand a chance of completing the 26-mile course. There are, though, things you discover about yourself in the course of this masochistic process. You find that your last ten miles are driven on by willpower rather than fitness; that the notion of "bliss" finds fresh meaning in a long, hot bath afterwards, when the body has neither the will nor the ability to move; and that you are capable of aching in parts of the body that you normally don't give a second thought to.

So why, you might ask, am I doing all this? The answer is simple. It is to raise money for a campaign which will affect all of our lives and futures.

In exactly a year to the day of the marathon, the United Nations will begin a conference in New York to persuade the I world to halt the spread of nuclear weapons.

You only have to think back to the fear generated about Saddam Hussain developing his own nuclear stockpile to know how important this agreement is. But the risk of failure is both wider and greater. There is now a growing list of countries who see considerable advantage (in terms of regional power and influence) in being able to join the elite ranks of "the nuclear club". Unfortunately many of these aspiring club members are in regions of serious instability. In some cases they are the cause of the instability. To open up a new wave of nuclear weapons building would dramatically increase the risk that they would be used. Would we know how to deal with the consequences that would follow - environmental fall-out, enormous waste of human life, mass population migrations? I doubt it.

The good news is that there is a growing recognition about getting agreement on this issue. A lot of countries, both large and small, are rooting for it. But there is a catch. A large number of the non-nuclear states also want something in return from those countries who are part of the nuclear elite. They want a halt to nuclear testing - a comprehensive test ban treaty.

It is hard to dispute their logic. Why should we stop the spread of nuclear weapons when you continue to improve the ones you've got? A credible "standstill" cannot be based on a promise that the weak will remain weak while the strong become stronger. You just couldn't sell it.

So that's why I'm running this foolish race - to raise money for the campaign to get a nuclear test ban treaty signed in the one year we have left before the world gathers in New York. It is also to try to press Britain to give the lead that it has so far refused to give. Our leaders and negotiators seem to pretend that they can "cut a deal" for Britain that would leave us untouched by any such treaty. This is dangerous

bluff and nonsense.

America already has (and has extended) its ban on nuclear testing. This has put a stop to Britain's testing on their Nevada sites. Even if America allowed future testing, Britain would have to bring back its nuclear waste and pay for the decontamination of the American land. It is a bill that would suddenly loom over us, like the monster in your dreams. Yet again, Britain could end up looking like the drag-anchor of the international community - having to be hauled, moaning and grumbling, into an international treaty that must be a key part of any common security framework for the century ahead.

The current campaign is to push Britain to be among the world leaders in getting a test ban treaty signed in the next year, rather than being in with the laggards who would block it.

This is what I remind myself of when I wake up early each morning. When my head is saying "get up and get running", and my body is saying "just send the Zimmer frame out on its own for a change", this is what makes me get up.

Some friends have helpfully (?) told me that the run is just about taking 40,000 steps towards a nuclear free world. Now 40,000 steps is a long way beyond my idea; of a "fun run". It is a long way beyond my feet's idea of a relaxing Sunday morning. But perhaps that is the point.

What I am doing may be crazy, but it's a lot less crazy than a world caught up in a new nuclear arms race. It may be painful, but it will be a lot less painful than picking up the pieces of a nuclear exchange from which there are only ever losers. My blisters will heal in a matter of weeks, but the planet would remain scarred for decades. Maybe there is a place for my small act of insanity after all. You don't have to join me ... but if you feel like it, your cash and your conscience can. Have a nice day!

- Any support should be sent to Alan Simpson MP, Sponsored Marathon, c/o House of Commons, London.