

The justifiable but unrealistic anxiety that the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and its allies must have actual nuclear disarmament victories in Britain this year has been cooled off sharply by the Tory election water-cannon. The desperation for tangible results in 1983 had been questioned by some people for some time; the poor electoral pay off for CND's excellent campaigning has naturally accelerated a more realistic assessment of all the challenges facing nuclear disarmers. This article aims to describe polemically the difficulties which have been crystallising, to suggest why the public will still be anxious and sympathetic as CND gathers breath, and to speculate about the way forward in 1984.

Election problems

The independent intervention by CND during the general election itself was an amazing achievement for a single-issue campaign, particularly in the context of a snap election, and a first-past-the-post system which discourages single issue voting. In addition, because one particular political party, the Labour Party, had espoused, and even featured, so many of CND's policies, many activists, from that party especially, tended to work simply for the Labour candidate rather than for CND's policies; and media coverage for CND was minimised at British level, on the superficially reasonable ground that the CND voice seemed effectively pro-Labour.

CND itself was in a weak position to dispel this simple pro-Labour impression, because of the deadly mixture of CND purism and Labour sectarianism, which caused, for the period of the election, an impulsive reversal of CND's short term strategy of focusing public concentration on Cruise and Trident missiles. This strategy had made sense, to consolidate the growing public concern (indicated in opinion polls) about arms limitation, a concern which showed little sign of escalating quickly to actual disarmament demands, except among the activists themselves. Besides, this strategy had been successful in generating a mass disarmament movement supported in general by the people, and even by some media. CND also found itself crucified by conflicting desires; on the one hand to hang its immediate campaign on the topical and genuinely significant election peg, and on the other, to stay within the complex and very restrictive electoral laws. The resulting cautious generality of CND's publicity material at that time did nothing to disprove the notion that CND could be categorised as a Labour front.

**The election result was a setback for disarmament.
What are the prospects for CND?**

Ian Davison

Will Protest Survive?



However, CND's limitations seem mere rough edges compared with the woeful showing of Labour on many issues in the election, including disarmament. Much has been made, predictably and justifiably, of the tepid or treacherous performances of the labour right-wingers, and of the media

preoccupation with the precise disarmament topics on which the Tories chose to fight and embarrass Labour.

But the Labour Left also caused problems. They wanted to fight this election, only one year after the patriotic and 'successful' Falklands war, about a completely nuclear-free Britain (within five years!). They refused to recognise the uneven but undoubted popular response to military firmness which had converted Mrs Thatcher from a thoroughly unpopular character into a heroic figure, a transformation recognised by all opinion polls. Disarmament issues were abused by the Left as a litmus test of Labour/socialist sincerity, in their struggles with the Right and with SDP defectors — thus helping to divert public attention from the escalatory warmongering of the Conservative government. Sincere nuclear disarmers in the Labour Party were so fixated on how to make a right-wing Labour cabinet toe the line that they allowed the areas of doubt to become the *centre* of debate, instead of the simple question of which party was most likely to cause a nuclear war.

There are two dangers in this approach, both demonstrated in the election. One is tokenism, in the form of candidates equipped with only a CND badge and a few themes, who could neither defend the full nuclear disarmament package, nor mount an effective counter-attack on the indefensible Tory record of phoney 'multilateralism'. The other danger was that of a humiliating and lasting defeat for 'the nuclear disarmament party'. And Labour did allow the Cruise-Trident asset to be transformed by ideological inflation into a liability in the disarmament area (see table).

The Labour Left is obviously correct in arguing that any policy can be made into public opinion, given effective campaigning in the communities; but not at short notice, with an inadequate political movement. The head of Labour's research department is not merely 'fudging' when he argues, 'The essential backcloth to our work must in future be an understanding of public opinion rather than *only* party conference policy. The issue here is not the sacrifice of our principles: it is the pace at which we can as democratic socialists, introduce socialist measures' (emphasis added).¹

The actual result of the general election was not, of course, the product only of the disarmament/defence debate. However the outcome can only make disarmament work more painful — not only because of the determination of the re-elected government on the issue, but also because of the general social and political pessimism

which will be engendered. We may also see attempts at impositions on oppositional activities, such as demonstration, privacy, 'incitements', 'conspiracies', and even insitutional resistance by local authorities to the civil defence charade. An associated trend appears to be what CND have described as 'a deliberate media blackout on CND's activities'. This was spectacularly exemplified when there was an almost complete failure to report a 10,000 strong demonstration in July, with a human chain linking the US and Soviet embassies. As CND commented, the media now seem to be looking for a decline in the peace movement and they are ignoring the movements continuing strength and successes.

Tactical problems

There are several problems for the peace movement, which are not so directly related to the election, but which require some attention. The campaign needs to present an integrated view of its short term demands, as a popular political package or 'project'. An attempt was made in this direction with the hurried espousal in 1982 of the demand for a nuclear weapons 'Freeze' or halt, but this has so far lacked a clearly defined image among activists themselves. The Freeze demand was imported from the US, where it usually takes a merely bilateral form (a mutual freeze by the US and USSR) in that very conservative environment. This has led to confusion in Britain, where the mass disarmament movement is in favour of independent measures of nuclear disarmament. Thus the concept of freeze, ill defined as it is, contributes to incoherence, rather than otherwise.

The attempt to link with the US freeze campaign is only one of CND's problems in the field of international relations. There is considerable fallout from CND's attempts at principled and non-aligned dialogue, especially through public events like the Berlin Conference and the Prague World Peace Conference. Such exercises are expensive in time, energy, finance and political goodwill. There is now an increased danger of CND people seeking external refuge from depressing local and national campaigning challenges, by resort to superficial notions and projects of 'internationalism'. Some people put great store by 'international contacts' to moderate the chauvinism which partly motivates public caution about programmes of national nuclear disarmament. But there are great difficulties in the way of ensuring positive domestic return for the effort -

Q. Do you agree or disagree with the following . . .		PERCENTAGES			
		ALL ELECTORS	SUPPORTERS		
			CON	LAB	LIB/SOP
Britain should keep its own independent nuclear weapons	AGREE	74	88	62	73
	DISAGREE	20	8	30	22
	DON'T KNOW	6	4	8	4
Britain should not allow any new American nuclear arms like cruise to be based here	AGREE	55	37	71	68
	DISAGREE	32	46	22	23
	DON'T KNOW	13	17	7	9
Britain should close down all American nuclear bases in this country	AGREE	36	13	59	41
	DISAGREE	52	73	31	48
	DON'T KNOW	13	14	10	11
It would be dangerous for Britain to cut defence spending	AGREE	69	85	55	64
	DISAGREE	21	10	34	23
	DON'T KNOW	9	5	11	13

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irrespective of whether the exercises are 'non-aligned' or marginally pro-socialist/Soviet or marginally anti-socialist/Soviet. In the context of the British road to nuclear disarmament, the true challenge is the winning of popular government action to limit nuclear weapons in Britain, and then reduce them, and then eliminate them.

Most internationally canvassed peace proposals tend to be in any case 'arms control' initiatives, concerned with 'balance', 'first use' of nuclear weapons and the like — which have the flavour of disarmament but none of its nutritional value, tending in the long run to legitimise nuclear weapons and create public complacency.

cooled off sharply by the Tory election water cannon

But having discounted 'internationalism' as the major tool against British chauvinism and militarist assumptions, we nevertheless have to acknowledge that emotions and ideological habits are causes as well as effects of the level of military power in Britain. Our ability to deal with this aspect of ruling class hegemony will depend partly on the intellectual power with which we question and supplant these assumptions; but more crucially on our ability to translate new perceptions into a fine-meshed net of colloquial and popular epigrams and slogans. This process is at present made very difficult by habits of linguistic snobbery. The peace movement, like the Left is infected by the bourgeois and bureaucratic assumption that some social concepts actually require educated language and jargon. The other element in this problem is gentility — the inhibition about being combative and assertive, even in appropriate situations and modes. The

inhibition is reinforced, especially in the search for 'peace', by pacifist and libertarian ideas on non-violent personal lifestyles and political methods. CND has therefore laboured long and rather defensively with the militarist counter-attack during the past year. The assault has consisted of: key 'common sense' assumptions and false analogies, such as 'military/nuclear balance', 'negotiation from strength', 'nuclear blackmail' and 'deterrence'; blatant historical distortions, for example about appeasement; multiple misrepresentation of CND policy as for instance 'one sided disarmament'; and accusations of control, or unwarranted influence by, Communists, Labourites, feminists, or worse.

CND and its allies are well enough equipped to debunk the biased briefings and presentations of 'facts', but less comfortable altogether in coping directly and briefly with damaging and unscrupulous rough-housing by such exponents as Heseltine.

Gathering breath

However these largely internal problems among active nuclear disarmers do not preoccupy most citizens. Public concern is about the two key aspects of the nuclear arms race — tension and escalation. These conditions will continue and intensify, so that the movement will have a willing audience still, as it gets its act together again. For instance, the appalling UN record of the British government on multilateral arms control and limitation² will be better known. The chairman of NATO's military committee, Admiral Falls, admits 'We can't expect to go on gaining the support of the people of NATO if we rely too much on nuclear weapons

¹ Report to Labour Party general secretary, quoted in *Observer* 24 July 1983.

² See *Sanity* August 1983.

and don't explain what we are doing.³ The first strike potential of air-launched and sea-launched Cruise missiles will certainly soon worry people just as much as ground-launched Cruise and Pershing already have. Increasing computerisation, and consequent military rather than political control of NATO nuclear systems will comfort no-one, any more than renewed activity in Anti-Ballistic-Missile systems, and anti-submarine warfare. But above all it is the political tension which continues to produce anxiety, for example the Soviet perception that 'American policies must be understood as preparation for nuclear conflict and as a demonstration of a readiness and desire to unleash it'.⁴

In this political environment of tension, anxiety, and accelerating arms spiral, CND has been showing the necessary signs of reconsolidation. There have been fairly effective reviews of the election campaign, and there is capacity for self criticism. CND's mobilising capacity was demonstrated by the immense and rapid literature distribution during the election. There have been successful major events in June and July. There has developed some acceptance of the need for a long-haul campaign and clear themes that have emerged for the national demonstration in London on October 22nd. There will be a re-invigoratkm of the door to door peace canvas campaign, and freshly informed local lobbying of MPs. Plans are being laid for an avowedly 'symbolic' large-scale non-violent direct action against Cruise missiles in December. Finally, a number of measures are being taken to improve CND's organisation in the centre, in the regions and in the groups.

The way forward in 1984

To speculate first on political themes: the



concept of the Nuclear Freeze should be increasingly valuable for making a coherent aim out of all the short term nuclear arms limitation demands. However it should be made very clear firstly that in the British context, the nuclear freeze is to be independent, unconditional and immediate, and secondly that the Freeze concept is quite distinct from cosmetic arms control measures, such as the dual control of Cruise missiles, or reductions in the Trident warheads⁵ etc, etc. The Freeze can sustain and sharpen public support which already exists for British nuclear arms limitation (see Table 1). By 1984 it will be essential to give more prominence (within the overall Freeze campaign) to the British Trident system, which will continue to be the likeliest major success for CND, all the more desirable after the probable deployment of Cruise missiles.

The second broad theme which should now be considered is *freedom from American nuclear bases*. Public opinion is responsive to this demand (see Table 1). Provided that the British Freeze demand is also posed, the danger of British nuclear nationalism (or a European version) can be headed off, so that the elements of chauvinism can be transformed into elements of mass anti-imperialism, in effect rather than in name.

A third political theme to consider is the general military and economic uselessness of nuclear weapons. A wide need is felt for a reply in the medium term to the accusation that a non nuclear Britain would be 'defenceless', and perhaps the reply has to be well tested and developed before a nuclear-weapon-free Britain becomes a prominent demand (again). We should however be very cautious about posing the theme in too defensive a way: as the need for 'alternatives' to nuclear weapons. The

Tories have posed this need for an alternative, but CND needs to make clear that nuclear weapons are no defence. So there should not be too much concentration on non-nuclear defence, and non-nuclear jobs conversion. Some studies have been produced on these topics, but we must not panic in these directions. At the end of the day, these are questions of special concern to specialist constituencies, and the relevant people should deal with them, as they will. We should vigorously deny the right of hypocritical pro-nuclear and anti-employee Tories even to raise such questions, far less set the terms of the nuclear weapons debate around them.

the flavour of disarmament but none of its nutritional value

CND in its general work should not appear to concede either that British nuclear weapons could be an effective, continuing form of 'defence' or that they are a tolerable or even effective form of job creation project. We should continue mainly to pour scorn on such projects.

Sometimes the issue of nuclear-weapons jobs is raised by left-wingers and trade union activists themselves as part of an approach to the labour movement. This can endanger the breadth and unity of the movement, which extends beyond trade unionists and far beyond workers directly employed in the arms industries. But the maintenance of the broad alliance for nuclear disarmament precludes an overall reliance on, or intimate identification of style with either the trade unions or the Left parties.

However, there should be a special role in the nuclear disarmament movement for marxists with their presumed analytical habits allied with instincts and strong sympathies for mass politics. Firstly they should try to ensure that minority direct action of a directly obstructive kind, whether industrial or physical, does not undermine mass action, whether indirect boycotting, tax refusals etc, or traditionally demonstrative, propagandist and lobbying. Class conscious marxists should also help develop in the campaign a popular style which allows effective communication with people of non-academic habits: a style which is frank, assertive, clear and simple. C

³ Quoted *miMornmg Star* 21 June 1983.

⁴ Member of Central Committee 'brains trust', quoted in the *Observer* 24 July 1983.

⁵ See Michael Heseltine, *Hansard* 19 July 1983.