



Masked demonstrators on a lobby of parliament against cruise

## CND: Good News And Bad News

'When things go bad for the world, they go well for CND membership', said one of the more experienced officials at Underwood Street, the CND headquarters. In his time he has seen several sudden surges in CND membership and activity, all of them at a time when hopes of achieving nuclear disarmament seemed to be at a particularly low ebb. The recent surge was no exception. The peak in terms of CND activity came in 1980-81, the years when the Americans were preparing Greenham for cruise missiles, and the peak in terms of CND membership came in 1984, the year when the Geneva talks broke down.

The converse is also true. When the prospects for nuclear disarmament brighten up just a little, as they have since Reykjavik and the most recent Gorbachev offer, people lose interest. CND's national membership was

written down from 110,000 to 84,000 in 1986, partly as a result of a stricter system of counting members, but no one denies that the underlying membership has fallen sharply and will probably fall again this year.

Media interest has also waned. 'They got used to Bruce and Joan and there's a definite reluctance to move on to the new leadership,' said another close observer. Joan Ruddock stood down as chair (1985) and vice-chair (1986) and became the Labour candidate for Deptford (1987). Bruce Kent gave up the general-secretaryship (1985). He is still actively engaged as a vice-chair but in February he was forced to choose between his job in the Catholic church and his role on CND's campaign bus, which is now touring the country persuading people to vote for candidates who are opposed to nuclear weapons. To CND's



Peace monk at Molesworth

relief he chose the latter, but no one doubts it will detract from his interest to the media as a bridge between the peace movement and the church establishment.

Though it's difficult to judge, the level of local CND activity is clearly far lower than it was at the time when cruise landed. 'You'll find one group is doing just as much as it was, but in another, where there used to be 30 active members, there are only three now. I don't get the feeling that I am in a declining organisation, but we have stabilised and it's very difficult to hold it up at that level,' said an official. 'It's a big effort.'

There is also the uncomfortable fact that support for CND's policies seems to be ebbing. In August 1986 Gallup carried out a nuclear poll for CND and found there was very nearly a majority for the proposition that: 'Britain should get rid of its nuclear weapons whatever other countries do'. 44% agreed, 46% disagreed. From that peak (or freak) support has now dropped. In a Gallup poll for CND in January, 34% agreed and 55% disagreed. Support for CND's policies, like support for CND itself, is growing in the long term, but it seems to proceed by a series of long forward surges and short backward lurches.

It is lurching at the moment.

The possibility of an INF deal creates another difficulty for CND. The proponents of multilateral disarmament will argue, if there is a deal, that it proves the need for negotiating from strength; if there is no deal, they will argue that they need a stronger negotiating position. Either way, they will try to undermine the case for unilateral measures.

CND is not, of course, opposed to multilateral disarmament and is bound to welcome any progress. 'We will be delighted if there really is a deal. The one thing that people tend to forget is that we're not a set of political manipulators. We actually want nuclear disarmament.' But in the meantime people are less likely to listen to CND's case for independent disarmament initiatives to back up multilateral measures.

CND is not letting any of this affect its morale. The CND bus, which will have toured 44 marginals by the beginning of April and held countless meetings with parliamentary candidates and the public, has been far more successful than the sceptics believed it could be. CND's finances are better than they have ever been. And there is a feeling that the campaign is functioning far better as a pressure group. Parliamentary lobbying, press work and public persuasion through posters, films and publicity, are now on a much more professional basis.

It is no longer enough to be a mass movement of like-minded people. The challenge is to change public opinion and even if CND is a little smaller now than it was five years ago, it may be more effective for all that. And it has learnt one important lesson since 1983. In the coming election CND will lie low, carrying out all of its election work before the poll is officially called. Once the date has been set, the CND bus will go back in its garage and CND will leave it to the politicians for three weeks. Then it will be back on the campaign trail. 0

*Martin Linton*