

CND 1958 - 65

LESSONS OF THE FIRST WAVE



A Socialist Challenge Pamphlet

50p BY TONY SOUTHALL AND
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Dedication

For Alec Acheson who taught us tenacity

The Authors

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Both authors are anxious to discuss some of the experiences recounted here and the conclusions drawn as widely as possible. They are prepared to address meetings and lead discussions. Write to P.Smith, PO Box 50, London N1 2XP

Introduction

Throughout 1961 the movement against nuclear weapons, for unilateral disarmament and withdrawal from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was at the centre of public attention in Britain. During that year a series of demonstrations organised by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and Committee of 100 mobilised tens of thousands of predominantly youthful people. At the end of the four day Easter march from Aldermaston to London 100,000 massed in and around Trafalgar Square. In February in Parliament Square, in April in Whitehall, in September in Trafalgar Square and in December at Wethersfield, Ruislip, York and other bases, thousands participated in sit down protests that led to more than 4,000 arrests. Leading members of the Committee were imprisoned for terms of up to eighteen months on conspiracy charges.

This wave of protest was reflected in an intense battle within the Labour Party whose 1960 conference at Scarborough had committed it to unilateralism. This ended with the reversal of the policy at Blackpool in October.

Berlin Crisis

Throughout the year the movement was fuelled by a tense international situation. Key points were the Berlin crisis in August and the resumption of nuclear weapons testing by both the United States (USA) and Soviet Union (USSR) in September. These substantiated campaigners' continual assertions that nuclear annihilation was an imminent threat demanding an instant response.

The campaigning that reached its height in 1961 had developed progressively over the previous three years. For most participants it was their central political preoccupation - one that could and indeed had to be successful in the near future. If not: annihilation was inevitable. It produced a series of demonstrations, a proliferation of local supporting groups and a level of participation not seen in a 20th century campaign since the suffragette movement.



ALDERMASTON TO LONDON EASTER 62

Aldermaston Good Friday 12noon	Reading Easter Saturday 9am	Slough Easter Sunday 9.30am	Acton Green Easter Monday 9.30am	Hammersmith	Kensington
RALLY HYDE PARK (near Hyde Pk Corner)			12.30-3PM		
FINAL MARCH:			Hyde Pk Corner	Sloane St	Victoria St Whitehall

Within the space of a few years the urgency felt in 1961 had been lost. Aldermaston marches continued to be as large for the next two years. But the battle in the Labour Party was never effectively resumed and civil disobedience demonstrations became smaller and less frequent. By 1965 CND was a shell of its former self and most of its former activists were giving priority to other political goals.

Rebirth

In 1981 the movement against nuclear weapons is at least as strong potentially as it was in 1961. Last year's 80,000 strong demonstration in London and the headlong growth of local branches and individual membership show the possibility of building CND into a movement of bigger size and potential than before. The size of the March Labour movement conference in Manchester showed that support is widespread in that crucial area.

'Death of Detente'

Once again the ground is laid politically. The escalation in the arms programme with the Cruise and Trident projects, the Reagan commitment to the neutron bomb, frequent proclamations of the 'death of detente' etc., reproduce the 1961 situation. This time round however we enter with some key advantages on our side.

Advantages

1. As Edward Thompson continually and correctly stresses, there is a really concrete and achievable objective that can provide a central focus for mobilisation. We can and must thwart the plans to station Cruise in Britain in 1983.
2. The international situation is far less favourable to the plans of NATO. The successive victories of revolutionary movements, above all in Vietnam against the might of the USA, but also in Africa and most recently in Nicaragua, show that, for all its overwhelming military strength, imperialism cannot prevent the emergence of successful popular movements challenging its economic and strategic control.

3. The present capitalist economic recession poses the future of that system as an urgent day to day question for the peoples of its economic heartlands. In Britain the overwhelming vote for unilateralism by the Labour Party conference and the ever more widely expressed demand for an immediate fightback against the Thatcher government, provide fertile ground for linking the fight against the bomb to the groundswell of mass discontent against the effects of the recession.

Learning from History

The account in this pamphlet is presented as a piece of history that is of immediate relevance to building CND today. In the first place we have found that many campaigners are just not aware of what happened then and are intensely interested to find out. Secondly however such knowledge remains purely academic unless it is used to draw lessons. If such a movement could arise and decline without achieving its goals what is to prevent this happening again? What went wrong then and what needs to change if we are to be successful this time round?

This account is presented not just as a service to those who want to know about our history but as an essential part of discussion about how to gain our objectives today.

The Emergence of CND

The first development of CND cannot be understood without reference to the national and international events that formed its context. While the whole of the 1950s was the period of the 'Cold War' in which East-West relations saw minimal contact and maximum public abuse, a number of developments towards the end of the decade led to more questioning of these attitudes.

An immediate cause for concern was the visible stepping up of the arms race. Basically this arose from NATO's reaction to the launching of the first satellite, the 'Sputnik' by the USSR in 1957. Until then the West had held a consistent advantage over its opponents. The Sputnik showed that Russia held a potentially immense lead in the field of weapons delivery: the era of the Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) had arrived and the Soviet Union was in the lead!

NATO reacted immediately in 1958 by stationing Thor Intermediate range missiles in East Anglia, from where they would be able to reach key Russian targets. The programme of weapons development, especially in the area of ICBMs and submarine launchers (Polaris) was accelerated. Britain's own 'Blue Streak' missile project began.

Further fuel for the campaign was the British test of its own 'independent' bomb on the Christmas Island atoll in the South Pacific in 1957 and the increasingly heard protests of sections of the scientific community world wide about the effects of testing on human beings.

Colonial Revolution

More generally, CND grew at a time when new political developments around the globe had begun to undermine the apparently unchallenged position of the USA and its allies. Of course these had commenced with the post Second World War overturn of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the victory of the Chinese Revolution in 1949. For the following decade however military intervention in Korea 1950-53, Malaya 1948-55, Suez 1956, Lebanon 1958, or overt assistance to counter-revolutionary forces - Iran 1953, South Vietnam and Guatemala 1954, were used to prevent, usually successfully, any challenge to imperialism's control.

By the end of the 1950s however, the Cuban revolution was moving rapidly towards its anti-capitalist conclusion. In South Vietnam the NLF was re-assembling its forces against the US sponsored Saigon regime. The Algerian war of liberation against France was in full swing. A wave of independence with incalculable consequences was sweeping Africa.

New Ideas

The changing world situation was reflected in a decline, particularly amongst young people, in the crippling influence of Cold War anti-communist ideology. In the British Labour movement it led to a resurgence of left ideas - despite leadership remaining in the hands of the firmly right-wing Hugh Gaitskell.

This development was assisted by widespread resignations from the Communist Party (CP) that followed the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian revolution in 1956. This liberated thousands of militants from the crippling influence of Stalinism and paved the way for the eventual development of the far left as an important influence in the future. Many ex-CP members were to play central roles in the future development of CND.

Important too was the fact that in the late 1950s crucial decisions about defence policy became public property. The frequent tests of bombs were publicised. The stationing of Thor and later Polaris, the farcical attempt to maintain Britain's 'independent deterrent' through the failed Blue Streak missile project, all became matters of public debate. This was in marked contrast to the original decision to manufacture nuclear weapons taken secretly by a small cabal in the Atlee post-war Labour government.

Early Years

Throughout its existence CND was a coalition of politically diverse forces. Three broad strands can be distinguished in the early years.

Direct Action Committee

In February 1957 the Emergency Committee for Direct Action Against Nuclear War was founded by a group of pacifists, some with a record of anti-war activity of many kinds that went back several decades. The Committee's members were mostly resolutely hostile to party political involvement by campaigners. The battle was, they said, essentially for the 'hearts and minds' of individuals. "Direct" action would be taken that would by-pass existing structures. Its form was heavily influenced by the Gandhian philosophy of 'satyagraha' involving non-violent civil disobedience and passive resistance.

There was an unresolved contradiction amongst the exponents of direct action that was to be exposed with the later development of the Committee of 100. Was the purpose of sit-down demonstrations, arrest, jailings etc., to win public sympathy and support: ie. was it simply a dramatic means of publicity for the campaign? Was it on the other hand directed towards immobilising the military and state machinery and thus forcing capitulation to our demands? Notwithstanding this problem, one important function of the DAC was that many of this group became the most active exponents of work directed at rank and file trades unionists: particularly those involved in weapons production and base construction.

Weapons Tests

April 1957 saw the birth of the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapon Tests. This body clearly developed in response to ongoing international events. It quickly grouped together a number of publicly known intellectuals and artists: names like Bertrand Russell, J.B. Priestley, Professor P.M.S. Blackett and Commander Sir Stephen King-Hall, Ritchie Calder, A.J.P. Taylor, Kingsley Martin, James Cameron. It formed the nucleus of a group that launched the CND in February 1958 at a public rally that filled the Central Hall Westminster and three overflow venues.

This group provided the dominant leadership of CND for the coming period. It was marked by a basic agreement about the undesirability of nuclear weapons but an immense diversity of other ideas and an obvious failure to have clearly thought through the implications of an anti-bomb stand. Some wanted mass action. Some were horrified by the idea. Some were pacifist. Others proposed alternative military strategies. Some supported membership of NATO. Others were opposed. Some backed direct action while some were

horrified by anything that smelt of illegality. Some were conservative, others liberal, socialist etc.

Diversity

This diversity of leadership opinion along with the ad hoc way in which the campaign had emerged as an initiative 'from above' was an important reason for three features affecting its eventual failure.

1. CND's policy was only fully developed over a period of years. Its first policy statement, prior to the Central Hall meeting, was not unilateralist. It merely called for an end to tests and to the establishment of new bases. It was only the response to the meeting and the clearly expressed sentiments of the audience that galvanised the self-appointed Executive Committee into producing afterwards a new much tougher statement. This made its first point a commitment for Britain to

"renounce unconditionally the use or production of nuclear weapons and refuse to allow their use by others in her defence".

NATO Alliance

Considerable further debate within the campaign and the resignation of several leading members were necessary before the logic of unilateralism was drawn out by the incorporation at the March 1960 annual conference of the demand for British withdrawal from NATO. In 1961 this was amplified by a clause that gave support to the then highly popular idea of 'positive neutralism'. Its proponents argued a case that was not too different from that of today's European Nuclear Disarmament Campaign (END)-

Democracy

2. No really democratic structure was created for CND until 1966. Although annual policy making conferences took place from 1959 onwards, these were meetings of delegates from any and every supporting organisation - overwhelmingly local groups with their own diverse structures. Individual national membership was always rejected by Conference on the advice of the Executive. The latter, while strengthened in 1960 by representation from the seven regional councils, remained composed of the same self-appointed nucleus.

Wilson

3. This structure allowed a constantly fluctuating level of commitment by many formal leaders - something that helped promote disillusion and a feeling of powerlessness amongst rank and file activists. Particularly noticeable was the way in which Labour MPs on the Executive disappeared in the period 1962 - 4 as Wilson successfully pulled them into line under the illusion that his policies were a substantial change from those of Gaitskell.

Labour Movement

The Labour Movement was the other source of an important section of CND - at least at leadership level. Michael Foot was a founding member of the Executive. John Horner, then General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, the most active of trades unionists. A small number of Labour MPs like Konni Zilliacus, Emrys Hughes, Stephen Swingle, Frank Allaun, became deeply involved.

YOUTH

From the Central Hall meeting local groups mushroomed countrywide. Like the leadership they had the most diverse origins and membership. Some grew out of previously active nuclei of pacifists, others were initiated by ex-CP members or Labour Party activists. Most importantly, and representing the real political breakthrough made by the movement, most (like the youth groups in Eltham and Croydon of which the two authors were founding members) were composed overwhelmingly of young people who had not been previously involved in any organised political activity. We suspect that this is an experience that is being repeated today.

Within a year there were CND groups in every major and large numbers of minor towns and even villages around the country. Youth CNDs with their own magazine "Youth Against the Bomb" were an important part of this development.

Easter Marches

The most noticeable feature of the Easter marches was their youthful composition and the absence of alternative political affiliations amongst most participants. The overwhelming majority of banners were of various CND and YCND groups. A few Labour Party and (after 1960) Communist Party signs could be seen. Trade union placards were generally few in number. While the Labour movement was usually well-represented at the head of the march its activists were a tiny part of the supporting column. That CND's policies were, at least between 1958 and 1961, subject of a massive and hotly contested debate in the Labour movement was scarcely reflected at these annual gatherings of its activists.



Aldermaston

While these groups engaged from day to day in the most diverse public activity, it was the annual Easter march that quickly became the central focus for campaigners. The first of them was organised in 1958 by the DAC and supported by the newly formed CND. It went from London to the Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Research Establishment in Berkshire. Thereafter the 4 day march was turned around to conclude with rallies in Trafalgar Square that grew larger and larger over the next few years.

'Spies for Peace'

The March that attracted perhaps the greatest attention was in 1963. At its beginning a group, "Spies for Peace" distributed widely a document that gave details of a NATO exercise, Fallex '62, based on a Russian attack on Europe. A lot of it dealt with a Regional Seat of Government (RSG) for use in such an emergency and located at Warren Row near Reading and close to the route of the march. It reproduced maps of the base and details of who was privileged to be sheltered there.

The Spies for Peace called for the march to divert from its regular route in order to pass the RSG. The CND leadership showed its conservatism in its reaction. Recognising the impact the document had made on the march they agreed that those who wished could divert to the RSG and rejoin the march later. But they would take no responsibility for this. Meantime the editors of "Sanity" had reproduced a big part of the document in their special Easter edition due to be sold from the Saturday. Members of the Executive on the march panicked over possible prosecutions and spent half of Friday night tearing out the relevant pages!

The Policy Debate

Throughout the late fifties and early sixties CND activity was both a central concern for many thousands of, especially young, people and an important focus for public interest and debate. Local groups were zealous in organising propaganda activities -

regular open air meetings, sales of "Sanity" and "Youth Against the Bomb", badges, petitions, frequent local demonstrations, fund-raising events big and small. National activities: Aldermaston and the Committee of 100's sit-downs (see below) received wide if not always sympathetic coverage in the press and on radio and TV.

Why The Nuclear Threat?

Most of CND's propaganda was based on an appeal to the individual and especially to his or her conscience and/or sense of fear. Leaflets, speeches etc. were almost always couched in moral terms and more often than not invoked the horrors of impending nuclear disaster. Stress was laid especially on the dangers of the outbreak of accidental war.

A typical example was the speech of Bertrand Russell entitled "Win We Must" to a conference in Birmingham 11 March 1961. Almost all of it was concerned with the dangers of war by accident and exposure of the fallacies of the American and British Civil Defence programmes. None of this could be argued with - then or twenty years later. But its weakness lay in its brief analytical sections and in the conclusions.

Russell

Firstly Russell made a totally simplistic analysis of the causes of this situation. These lay basically in the errors of irrational and mistaken individuals:

"Is it not obvious that all this is a mad, murderous, monstrous nightmare imposed upon the world mainly by bands of fanatical lunatics "

His prescription for ending the problem was equally naive:

- "We only have to let ourselves live in amity and the world could be transformed from a murder factory to a happier community than has ever yet existed."

Unfortunately it was not only from Russell that such politically shallow formulations came. In her history of the Campaign the late Peggy Duff commends the pamphlet "Freed From Fear" by Mervyn Jones as "the best and most detailed analysis published by CND in those early years."

Yet here also we find similar problems. For Jones in 1961:

"The world is in a state of tension and anarchy that tends to lead to war rather than leading to a secure peace."

This unfortunate situation

"follows logically from a deliberate refusal to take new political initiatives, tackle problems at their roots and on their merits, or seek solutions by the road of compromise and negotiation."

Again what is wrong with policy is the irrationality and pigheadedness of leaders. All that is needed is a dose of commonsense: it is misunderstanding and not material interest that stands in the way of peace:

"Some of the steps advocated in this pamphlet are steps which the present government would quite possibly like to take "in theory" - the theory never becomes a reality because it is subordinate to other and quite incompatible needs - keeping in line with Governments with completely different intentions, pursuing the policy of the Cold War and the rigid division of the world, holding military positions in "instant readiness" for a war that cannot be won."

.....And What To Do?

Even more telling in helping to explain why CND failed to consolidate its victory at Scarborough and gain a firm hold in the Labour movement was a pamphlet "Let Britain Lead: A Socialist Defence Policy". This was produced in the wake of the 1960 conference. The names on the cover included five MPs: Brockway, Driberg, Greenwood, Hart and Swingler, John Horner, Ted Hill of the Boilermakers' Union plus Michael Foot and Ian Mikardo. Its proclaimed objective was to build on the 1960 victory.

Once again the argument is at two levels. The first of these is fear:

"There is simply no way to prevent hundreds of missiles taking four minutes in flight and each with a warhead that can destroy a city."

The second is to commend the increased influence that Britain might have in the world by lining up with the existing neutral countries like India, Yugoslavia, Ireland and Ghana.

A final and more distasteful section dealt, in a manner similar to the "yellow peril" cries of the mass circulation papers, with the likelihood of China getting missiles and bombs in the near future:

"One might imagine that it would be common-sense for the West to prove Khrushchev right when he says that war is not inevitable and that the capitalist world is not bent on provoking a clash, instead of furnishing the Marxist diehards with arguments by pressing on regardless with missile bases and patrol flights. One might imagine too that it would be worth considerable sacrifice to halt the arms race before China joins in. Our friends all over the world will be more appalled when China makes an H-Bomb than at anything else that might happen."

Common to all these spokespersons for CND was:
(i) a failure to locate the root causes of the Cold War in the arms race and in the threat of a growing non-capitalist world to imperialism and the need of the latter to arrest any further such developments.

(ii) a failure to chart a course forward for the movement itself. It particularly indicated the lack of perspective for victory by the Labour leaders of CND that their pamphlet made no call at all for campaigners' efforts to be directed at consolidating the gains of Scarborough via work in their local Parties and Unions or even via campaigns directed at influencing these.

Some of the material we have quoted here also helps to explain why the mass of largely unpoliticised youth who formed the bulk of its active membership were not prepared by the leadership to campaign more rationally and effectively.

Political Alternatives

Crucial also was the virtual absence of any structured alternative to such policies.

New Left Review

One potential centre for the development of a socialist perspective on the campaign was the New Left Review (NLR), founded in 1959. This rapidly spawned a series of discussion forums around the country that attracted numbers of young campaigners. The NLR was at least quick to recognise the importance of defending the Scarborough decision:

"The effect of Scarborough has been to throw the switches for CND into the political life of the country. It does not follow that the whole machine must now go down the party

groove. But Scarborough both generalised and politicised the issue of nuclear weapons, and either the members of CND who are in touch, at any point with the organised political life of the Labour Movement put the case for unilateralism there or it will go by default." (Editorial NLR 6, Nov-Dec 1960)

'Positive Neutralism'

Unfortunately this, albeit somewhat passive, acceptance of the importance of the fight in the Labour Party combined with a rather woolly idea of what exactly we should be fighting for. While NLR supporters, most prominently the editor Stuart Hall, fought the successful battle to commit the campaign to a policy of withdrawal from NATO, this was accompanied by a strong commitment to the more questionable line of 'positive neutralism'.

"The point of a disarmed Britain is not....to stand aside from the problems of the Cold War in splendid isolation.....The point would be that Britain, disencumbered of both Bomb and Alliance would then be free to act as a rallying point outside both nuclear alliances - the Warsaw Pact and NATO: a focus for all those other nations, within and without both alliances, which could be persuaded by the weight of international opinion to join an offensive for disengagement and disarmament. The policies of the Cold War can only be broken up by a country moving horizontally across a landscape frozen vertically into two camps."

The problem with this kind of formula was that it was based on a thoroughly idealist view of the real balance of forces in the world. Countries were judged not on the basis of their underlying social and economic structures but on the pronouncements of their leaders. Crucially, there

was no distinction between the systems of east and west, no reference to imperialism and its role or anything else about state and government in the capitalist world. The only hint at such analysis came at the very end of Hall's piece where he talked in terms that pre-date Thompson's well-known 1980 essay on 'exterminism' with its notion of autonomous military elites, East and West, as the decisive powers:

"The irresponsible military pressure groups and planners so well analysed in Wright Mills' 'Power Elite' and referred to by Michael Foot at the end of the Aldremaston March 1960 as the 'military dictatorships' sit in permanent session, beyond the reach of elections, votes and governments."

Bourgeois Diplomacy

The New Left Review tendency played an important role then in raising campaigners' consciousness on the Labour Party and military alliances, yet it had itself no throughgoing alternative analysis that located responsibility for successive crises firmly at the door of the imperialist powers. The policy of 'positive neutralism' quickly became a formula for alignment with a diverse series of "statesmen" - Nehru, Nkrumah, Tito etc. This was a line that took the fight away from the centrality of mass action by the working class and its allies and into the halls of bourgeois diplomacy. It was no accident therefore that Hall was himself responsible for one of the most misleading and destructive pieces published throughout the history of the campaign. The article "The Cuban Crisis: Trial Run or Steps Towards Peace" appeared in the January-March 1963 issue of the CND quarterly 'War and Peace'. Claiming that the Cuba Crisis of 1962 marked a revision up-

wards of the intensity of the East-West struggle, Hall argued that:

"The problem is that those who are opposed to this consistent escalation of the level of danger are never precise enough about their proposals, do not direct their challenge to the particular decisions which are about to be taken. Suppose then that we were to pose a precise alternative route which might take us away from a nuclear showdown in the mid-Sixties, what would our demands be? The advantage of this kind of programmatic approach is that it enables public opinion generally, and the peace movements in particular, to CONFRONT DIRECTLY the decisions which political and military establishments make."

Hall continued to outline a series of steps for negotiation:

"We have tried to make these demands as precise as possible since this is in our view, the only effective way to 'speak truth to power', the only kind of opposition to the military thinking of the two camps which makes sense."

The method of pressure group politics and the deep-seated political pessimism involved here was obvious. The Cuba Crisis, with its dramatised dangers, had combined with the frustrations of five years unsuccessful campaigning to make one of the previously foremost representatives of the more radical wing of the campaign ditch his commitment to the main planks of CND policies and previously stated determination to mobilise the Labour Movement to effect change, in favour of a political practice based on suggesting 'good ideas' to 'well-disposed' politicians. With a clear affirmation of his conversion to

the world of Realpolitik Hall concluded:

"The danger is that, while we stand on the sidelines waving our slogans hopefully, with the best will in the world, the nuclear parade is passing us by."

Was there no alternative to the trimmers of the Labour Left or the fast shifting sands of the New Left?

The Revolutionary Left

Small and lacking in influence though it is in 1981, the revolutionary left is today far stronger in numbers and political experience than it was twenty years ago - and this is something that can be as important for the CND now as it was for the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in the 1960s or the Anti-Nazi League in 1977 - 8.

Sectarianism

Apart from its miniscule size, a further feature of the earlier period was the sectarianism and tendency to stand off from the development of the mass movement displayed by large sections of the then marxist left.

The main trotskyist groups in Britain, affiliated respectively to the International Committee (IC) and the International Secretariat (IS) of the Fourth International, were the Socialist Labour League (SLL), direct ancestors of the present day Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP) and the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL), forerunners of today's 'Militant' group. Both had already begun to evolve towards their present positions: an evolution that would eventually disable them from playing an influential part in the campaign.

One of the author's has a firmly imprinted memory of the intervention of a comrade of the SLL into local YCND meetings. These were, on reflection, 100% correct in their analyses of the class forces operating to promote war and the bomb specifically. Unfortunately they always concluded with the simple formulation that it was therefore the capitalist system and not the bomb against which we needed to direct ourselves. This was never accompanied by any suggestion of how exactly we should go about this - except to sell 'Labour Review'. After this we continued with our business completely unaffected by a speech that came to be regarded as an inevitable feature to be tolerated at every meeting!

The SLL's attitude to the CND of course foreshadowed a path of development that would put them on the sidelines in the development of any and every mass campaign of the 1960s and 1970s, whether concerned with Vietnam, Ireland or Fascism, and lead them into their present blind alley sectarianism.

'Militant'

Another, if different, sectarian line on CND came from the small forces of the RSL who insisted that since any fundamental change in British politics would only take place if there were massive upheavals in the mass party of the class, the Labour Party (true then and true today), political work for revolutionaries should take place only in that body and should in particular not be diverted into campaigns run by the petty bourgeoisie (dead wrong then and eternally!) Of course this attitude disabled them from playing any role in the mass movement that was actually having the most profound effects on the politics of the Labour Movement. As with the SLL/WRP all the subsequent degeneration of the now "Militant Tendency" was encapsulated in their attitude to CND.

Socialist Review

The only marxist tendency that in the early days saw the key importance of the CND was that around Socialist Review/International Socialism: the group that formed the embryo of today's Socialist Workers' Party. It had a correct line then in favour of participation in the Labour Party that made its comments on the development of a body devoted to fighting elections on the single issue of nuclear disarmament particularly apposite:

"The INDEC (Independent Nuclear Disarmament Election Committee) is a product of a right-wing victory within the Labour Party. It rests upon abandoning the Labour Party and trying the political do-it-yourself tactic: a Charge of the Light Brigade. It involves a complete misassessment of what has happened in the Party....a paper decision was reversed - and at least partly because of the failure of CND to fight the issue in the Labour Party and trade unions. After Scarborough it could easily have been foretoldthat there would be a massive counter-attack (heavily backed by the national press) and that the minority of rank and file Party members would be defeated by further manipulation of the trade union vote unless CND led an open campaign to see the defence decision implemented."

INDEC was a way of "leaving the struggle" taken by "a few individuals" who had however "no right to endanger CND and the Labour Left in the process." (International Socialist 9, Summer 1962)

For IS at this time then the central political task was to reverse the Blackpool Conference decision and CND had failed in not concentrating enough attention and resources on this question. This was excellent advice which unfortunately did not gain sufficient attention in the movement.

On three other issues however comrades of the IS maintained positions which (unlike that on the Labour Party) also characterise their work to the present day.

First, and quite logically in view of their origins in a split from the Fourth International in 1950 when they denied the need to defend North Korea against the USA, they continually insisted that no differentiation should be made between the roles of Russia and the USA in the Cold War. These two states represented "the rival forms of imperialism which dominate the world today". While this did not (and does not) prevent their embracing the demand for British unilateral disarmament it did mean that in a series of international crises their line miseducated. The clearest example came in 1962 at the time of the Cuba crisis when in place of fighting for the defence of Cuba against US imperialism's attempts to arrest the development of a socialist state in the Caribbean, they were reduced to the totally unreal slogan of "Washington and Moscow: Hands off Cuba!" Secondly a constant and now familiar distortion marred this group's correct insistence on the need to involve the Labour Movement in the anti-bomb struggle. Their line that all Labour leaders belonged to a homogenous group - "the bureaucracy" - which would inevitably betray all struggles led them to argue that the only worthwhile form of action was that expressed in the slogan: "Black the Bombs! Black the Bases!". This should be campaigned for very much in the manner of the DAC supporters (see below) by approaches to particular sites and enterprises.

Actually this view did provoke some discussion in the pages of their journal. An article by 5 activists in IS no 10, Autumn 1962, explained correctly that

"There is no particular merit in armaments workers per se striking. Not only is it more effective, but also more desirable on other grounds, that general workers should be asked to strike."

Unfortunately this view was not widely held - either in IS or, even more obviously, amongst those most active in the CND and Committee of 100 trade union groups.

Finally there was a constant problem in defining the group's attitude to the nature of the CND. On the one hand there is no doubt that, unlike the SLL and RSL, the embryo IS went all out to build the anti-nuclear movement. On the other hand the pages of the journal are littered with passages that imply the need for CND to become something more than a united front on the issue of the bomb and in effect a more overtly political body with a line on a series of related issues and regarding itself as an institutionalised part of the socialist movement.

United Front

Such a position was (and remains) at least as mistaken as that which comes from elements in the campaign that reject any association with the Labour Movement. A united front like CND exists to bring together the maximum number of supporters around its principled political positions and should not be tied to any specific party or tendency. On the other hand revolutionaries should and do continually argue that the most effective way to meet its demands and therefore the direction into which most energy must be channelled is to win the Labour Movement to its policies.

CND And The Labour movement

CND never had a consistent strategy towards the Labour Movement. There was certainly no ongoing campaign aimed at the factories and the rank and file members of the unions and Labour Party. Instead there was the Labour Advisory Committee. This was set up in the autumn of 1958 and comprised left MPs and union leaders like Frank Beswick and John Horner. They were not used to the open mass campaigning style of CND. To be less than kind, their major political experience had involved politicking in little rooms during the Bevanite revolt and then getting thrashed by Gaitskell and the right.

Ian Mikardo expressed the blinkered view of much of the Labour left when, in an interview with Taylor and Pritchard (see further reading) he dismissed the importance of CND as a mass movement as against the strategy of winning key figures in the organised labour movement:

"Another 10,000 or 20,000 or 50,000 non-political people don't compensate for the loss of those who can exert political pressure at the point of action."

CND's work in the Unions was sketchy. Far more was done by the DAC whose main spokesperson was Pat Arrowsmith. The aim of the DAC, a few local CND trade union committees and later, the industrial sub-committee of the Committee of 100, was to popularise and agitate for industrial action

against the bomb. In 1962 the CND Conference passed a resolution. It was opposed by Michael Foot and the rest of the executive. It was never implemented and Arrowsmith and Michael Scott resigned in protest.



DECEMBER 1962: CND Veterans Pat Arrowsmith & Will Warren.

Industrial Action

Some industrial action did take place. In 1957 it was announced that a missile site was to be built on the East coast of Scotland. The Dundee area of the Building Trades Operatives came out against it:

"Not a pick, not a spade, not a trowel will be used for the establishment of rocket sites in the area."

The proposal was withdrawn.

In the summer of 1960 there was a two month campaign aimed at Bristol Siddeley Engines workers. It culminated in a token stoppage called by the Shop Stewards Committee. In the autumn of 1961 some London dockers refused to handle cargo for Aldermaston.

On Merseyside, at the Petrochemicals site at Carrington, the workforce of 1000 held a one-day strike on 14 May 1962 against the resumption of surface nuclear testing by America and Russia. The actions were small. They were token. But they indicated a potential that the CND leaders and their friends in high places in the Labour movement refused to exploit. The weakness of the pacifist approach was that the aim of some of the DAC exercises was to get individuals to leave war production. This individualised approach, appealing to the consciences of the workers, obviously cut across any strategy to involve the mass of workers in action against the bomb. It could even cause some workers to feel antagonistic as they felt their jobs were under threat. The worst example of this occurred at the Swaffham missile base whilst it was under construction. The DAC launched a sit-

down to stop the building of the base. Some of the workers, with the connivance of the bosses and the police, began to beat up the protesters who responded with non-violence. Other workers, disgusted by these attacks, fought to defend the pacifists. The site became a battle-ground.

Alternatives To Arms

Industrial action has to be understood as a tactic in the broader campaign to win the whole of the working class to reject the bomb. It cannot, and even more clearly in the present era of mass unemployment, rely on appeals to workers to personally disassociate themselves from arms production. This requires an explanation of the possibility of replacing war production by production for social need. Those in CND and the DAC at this time who rejected 'politics' were unable to carry on this argument. Unfortunately the one group of marxists at the time who did recognise clearly the importance of this area of work, those around the journal 'International Socialism' (see above) also never developed beyond repetition of the slogan "Ban the Bomb and Black the Bases".

The mass movement of the CND and its general campaigning did have an impact on the unions - and in some amazing places. In June 1959 the highly conservative General and Municipal Workers (G & M) union went unilateralist. An understandably outraged leadership was then put to the bother of having to arrange within some months a recall conference and bully delegates into getting it right in time for the TUC.

The Transport and General Workers' (T & GWU) then went unilateralist. Right wing commentators normally write this off as due to the bureaucratic influence of its new General Secretary, the left-

winger Frank Cousins. How this explains what happened in the G & M and, in the following year, the Engineers (AEU), Shopworkers (USDAW) and Miners (NUM) and a host of smaller unions is not clear. In reality a big shift of opinion was taking place in the working class.

What did undeniably hasten the process in 1960 was the decision of the CP to support CND and to reverse their position of voting against unilateralist resolutions. The CP position prior to May 1960 had been expressed by the May 1959 editorial in "Marxism Today":

"Unilateralism only divides the movement and diverts attention from the real issue, namely international agreement to ban nuclear weapons"

Union Votes

By the 1960 Labour Party Conference a majority of union votes had been won for unilateralism. This development was a result of a steady advance in the policy's influence. In 1957 sixty six such resolutions went to Conference. This was in part a response to the recent Christmas Island test. The composite resolution was moved by Harold Davies MP and seconded by the Trotskyist, Vivienne Mendelsohn. This however was the moment when Aneurin Bevan made his move to the right and savaged the resolution as "an emotional spasm". The defeat was huge - 5,836,000 to 781,000 - partially due to the impact of Bevan and partially to the votes of the CP influenced unions.

The 1958 Conference saw a small advance in the unilateralist vote and 1959 was an election year with no conference. By 1960 the swing was on in the unions. This was helped by the cancellation in April of the proposed Blue Streak missile - Britain's very own independent deterrent. The Tory and Labour leaders had British H Bombs, but

to get them to Moscow they would be forced to innovate the Busby bomb and send it by parcel post! The confusion was more apparent than real. What Gaitskell grasped, and some of the left didn't, was that it was not particular missiles that were crucial, but allegiance to the foreign policy of NATO. It was not Blue Streak, nor Thor, nor Skybolt - not even Cruise - that was central. It was, and is, the NATO alliance.

Labour Lefts

The 1960 Scarborough Conference should have been the greatest victory the Labour Left had ever won. The union votes were there. The proposing speech of Cousins was lacklustre. The response of Gaitskell was electric. He rejected unilateralism and would "fight, fight and fight again to save the Party we love". Many of the left leaders listened with a sinking feeling. The issues were now wider than mere nuclear annihilation - the Party could split and the next election be lost.

Another worrying feature of the victory was that the Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) supported Gaitskell by 512,000 to 260,000. The right wing was prepared to wage a counter-attack to reverse this decision. The problem was whether the Labour lefts were prepared to seize the victory that the Aldermaston marchers had put into their hands. Their proven specialism was in gallantly losing and remaining a critical but loyal minority. Would the Lefts have the will or political ability to fight again?

The unilateralist victory at the 1960 Labour Party conference left the CND leadership quite unprepared. Jacquetta Hawkes was "absolutely astonished" by the vote and had been "quite unaware" of what had been going on. A.J.P. Taylor regar-

ded the Conference decision as
"really almost a distraction; it was a mis-
fortune that it was carried in this way and
gave the illusion that the Labour Party has
been carried for unilateral disarmament: it
hasn't - something has been carried by the
block vote of the T & GWU."

The confusion was reflected in a call from the
CND Chairman Canon Collins to:

- (i) ensure the conference majority was maintained
and increased and
- (ii) to continue to win mass support for unilater-
alism.

Both these suggestions were absolutely sound if
not totally precise. But then, to cover himself
from the charge of being "political", he called
for a big push to win support in the Tory and
Liberal parties.



CANON COLLINS WITH BERTRAND RUSSELL

The Labour Left leaders were in a dilemma. They had the authority of conference behind them. But if they attempted to apply those decisions, Gaitskell and the right would fight. There would be a risk of splitting the Party and wrecking its electoral chances. A few cried "forward". The MP Zilliagus called on CLPs to ensure that MPs either support conference policy or resign. But most cried "back". In Parliament only 5 MPs voted in line with Conference policy during the Defence Debate. The right, sensing the weakness of the left, removed the whip from them. The right also began to organise in the Unions and Party as the Campaign for Democratic Socialism, run by Bill Rodgers. To their surprise they found that the CND and Labour Lefts were not running a campaign in the Party and union branches.

An indication of the indecisiveness of the Lefts was given in the Parliamentary Labour Party elections. Originally it was decided to run the unilateralist Anthony Greenwood against Gaitskell. The Lefts reconsidered and then decided to run Wilson, a multilateralist and supporter of NATO, against Gaitskell. Wilson would not raise the issue of the Bomb but rather of "respect for conference decisions". He dealt with the CND leaders in beautiful fashion. He had a meeting with them and prevaricated on everything. He explained later that he was not with them on the tactical and political aspects of their case but found them "a genuine, sincere body who strongly believed in their moral campaign". Wilson stated of CND supporters:

"I was not looking for splits for I would say they're all good chaps, essential to the Party, and it was my job to keep links around them all, which I did."

The debate inside the Labour Party had become muddled.

Amazingly the Labour Left after Scarborough managed to get put on the defensive ideologically. Gaitskell raised the issue of NATO repeatedly and harangued the "neutralists and fellow travellers". The Labour Lefts tried to avoid the issue.

NATO

CND was in the process of refining its ideas on NATO. In a 1960 pamphlet Stuart Hall put the case well:

"....to make any sense of its campaign against the use of nuclear weapons, CND must now encompass the case against the nuclear alliances: and since NATO is all we have...by way of foreign policy, the Campaign must see itself politically involved over the coming months, IN HAMMERING OUT THE ELEMENTS OF A FOREIGN POLICY. Weapons after all do not explode themselves: it is not the technical discoveries that brought us to the edge of war....it is the strategies and policies of our present system of alliances - that is, the main direction of our foreign policy."

From this line of argument came the call, adopted by the Campaign in 1961 for "positive neutralism". Unfortunately this concept was profoundly ambiguous. It could mean the rejection of pro-imperialist policies that had been the staple of Labour governments. It could have led to an anti-imperialist and socialist foreign policy that made no concessions to the bureaucratic manoeuvrings of the

Soviet leadership. The aim would be a socialist and non-bureaucratized world order that is the only real answer to the threat of a nuclear war.

A rival and much more widespread interpretation however was based on the lauding of a bunch of scoundrels from Haile Sellasie to Nehru and a concept of neutralism as a "balance" between Russia and America.

This policy is actually very conservative and defends the status quo. Positive neutralism as a balanced equilibrium was supported by the Young Fabians who saw the Labour Party as uniquely fitted to carry out such a policy due to the diversity of opinion within the Party.

"For a foreign policy of neutrality....the existence of such diverse tendencies within one political framework, far from being a liability, becomes a positive asset. Pressure from both right and left on a Labour neutralist foreign secretary would in fact help him, not hinder him."

CND was eventually to show itself less "neutralist" than "neutered" when in 1968 it took a position of neither approving nor disapproving of the massive demonstration of solidarity with the NLF of Vietnam and formally announcing that it refused to join the march as an organisation.

Crossman

In the confusion caused by the inability of the Labour Lefts to take up the issue of NATO, Dick Crossmann and Walter Padley of USDAW floated their "compromise". This came out for the establishment of a non-nuclear club to

avoid the proliferation of nuclear weapons, for disengagement in Europe, for NATO to reject a first-strike strategy and for Britain to remain in the alliance.

Cousins wavered and played with the idea of reforming NATO from within. Foot, in "Tribune" just before the March 1961 CND Conference, so as to have the maximum effect, backed the "compromise". The retreat became a rout. USDAW's conference narrowly rejected unilateralism in favour of the "compromise", which was later dropped, thus giving its leadership free rein to support Gaitskell. The AEU voted narrowly against unilateralism after a number of delegates broke their mandates - at that time 22 out of the 26 AEU Divisions were unilateralist.

After the USDAW and AEU defeats, Foot cleared up the matter of the "compromise". Although the Crossmann-Padley line marked a "step forward from the position which the leadership of the Party has hitherto accepted" it was "a substantial retreat from Scarborough".

Foot explained how he respected the mood that called for unity in the Party. The Left however was not to blame for the lack of unity. It was the fault of the leadership with its "barren debate over Clause Four" and the "attack on the Left in the Party".

Defeat

The rejection of unilateralism by the 1961 Party conference came as no surprise. The Labour Left, showing great skill and ingenuity, had managed to stab itself in the back. The Labour Party is like a Pantomime horse. The front end is basically a liberal capitalist Party while the back end is a muddled working class one. The Labour Left was determined to respect the boundary limits of what

the right was prepared to accept. The front end of the horse was not prepared to accept unilateralism. The back end, rather than risk a split, was reluctantly pulled into line.

CND neither foresaw nor guarded against this. Instead of its policy of leaving the Labour Party struggle to the Labour Lefts, CND should have made a clear turn to the Labour movement, without shifting from its mass campaigning orientation. CND did not produce literature to reach the Union and Labour Party rank and file, nor contact the branches. It used mainly moral arguments rather than spell out the political issues involved and the economic consequences. It refused to raise the issue of industrial action. It did not fight its important Labour movement friends when they equivocated over NATO.

1961: THE YEAR OF THE '100'

As was emphasised in the introduction, 1961 was the highpoint of the previous wave of anti-bomb activity. Its most spectacular and widely publicised feature was the series of sit-downs organised by the Committee of 100 in February, April, September and December. While clearly the international political situation helped to fuel the escalating size (until September) of these demonstrations it is necessary to look for other reasons for the rapid rise and fall of the Committee.

It was already indicated above that one important element in the coalition of forces making up the campaign was the pacifist Direct Action Committee with its conception of non-violent civil disobedience, obstruction of war prepar-

ations and campaigns for boycotting weapons production. This group provided the most important and stable organisational base of the Committee - figures like Pat Arrowsmith, Mike Randle and Terry Chandler. But the DAC had always been a small minority in the CND and even its best publicised demonstrations like those at North Pickenham in 1959 and Harrington (January 1960) had attracted only a couple of hundred to sit down.

What transformed this situation and made possible the 1961 protests that involved thousands? In part it was the international situation. More important however was the outlet which the Committee's activities provided for the energies of thousands of young campaigners eager to see quick results. Particularly indicative of this is that the Committee was actually set up immediately after the Labour Party's pro-unilateralist Scarborough decision. At that stage a cohesive campaign leadership that had democratically debated out its policy would surely have thrown all its efforts into consolidating that victory. Yet precisely the opposite happened. While the Right spent the next twelve months campaigning successfully to reverse the 1960 vote, the mass of CND activists stayed outside of this process and engaged in a series of highly publicised demonstrations at some personal cost - but, it must be said, with minimal political results.

Lack Of Coordination

The tragedy of 1961 was that the campaign operated essentially along two parallel but uncoordinated grooves. While a small group fought and were outmanoeuvred and out-gunned in the bodies of the Labour Movement, the mass of CND's following took part in a series of actions that were totally unrelated to and made little impact on events in that area.

Ultimate responsibility for this situation must be laid firmly at the door of the misleadership of the Left Labour element in CND. They were the ones with years of political experience and the potential weight to change that situation. But instead of doing everything they could to enlist the mass of campaigners in the battle to maintain the Scarborough decision, they preferred to manoeuvre in the committee rooms and to lose out to the Right wingers who were far more adept at that game! We hope that the same mistake will not be made in 1981 by a campaign leadership that seems reluctant to prioritise what must be the number one priority in the coming year: the consolidation and extension of the paper commitment of the Labour Party to our programme.

Some commentators have explained the emergence of the Committee of 100 as the result of a bitter clash of personality between CND's then President, Russell, and its chairperson, Canon John Collins. Others have tried to look a little further and have named Ralph Schoenman, an American student who became Russell's personal secretary and played a key role in pulling together the original committee, as the responsible figure. We prefer to understand its massive development at this point in time as emerging from, on the one hand several years of often frustrating campaigning in which the only victory was a paper one in a Party that didn't hold power anyway, and on the other, the lack of political experience of the mass of campaigners which made them willing to seize on any initiative that appeared to offer the prospects of a real breakthrough.

The DAC had always insisted that its sit-down demonstrations had an essentially symbolic meaning - even if participation did demand high lev-

ON SATURDAY, 18th FEBRUARY, 1961

about the time that the U.S. depot ship carrying Polaris Missiles is expected to arrive in the Clyde, the 'Committee of 100' will organise a non-violent demonstration outside the Ministry of Defence in London. Here the demonstrators, led by Earl Russell and The Rev. Michael Scott, will sit down on the pavement whilst a declaration demanding the scrapping of the Polaris agreement is posted on the Ministry's door. In this way the demonstrators intend to serve notice on the Government that they can no longer stand aside whilst preparations are being made for the destruction of mankind.



ANTI-POLARIS DEMONSTRATION 18th FEB.

In support of the aims of the demonstrators, a March and Rally is being held immediately before the demonstration.

MARCH

Leaves Marble Arch 1 p.m.

RALLY

2 p.m. TRAFALGAR SQUARE

Speakers:

**EARL RUSSELL
SIR HERBERT READ
HUGH McDIARMID**

**NO POLARIS BASES
NO NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

els of sacrifice not only from demonstrators but from others. (eg. the workers asked to give up their jobs building rocket sites etc.) A new and superficially more attractive element was introduced by the Committee of 100. From its first demonstration stress was laid on the mass character of its civil disobedience actions.

'Resistance'

February 18 was not to go ahead unless at least 2000 persons pledged themselves to sit down and lay themselves open to arrest. The most important and novel notion introduced here, which was taken to great lengths by some spokespersons for the Committee, was that of non-violent protest that went beyond the symbolic and became an actual obstruction to the functioning of the state and its military machine:

"A new method of non-violent protest has been established. We are organising mass resistance that cannot be ignored. Our next London demonstration has been banned by the Government. It WILL take place...." (leaflet for September 17 London and Holy Loch demonstrations)

The word "resistance" became more and more frequent in Committee propaganda. It often fuelled strong subjective illusions amongst participants that they were now doing something really effective about the nuclear threat.

Non-Political

If CND failed to mobilise its forces to fight the key political battles, the Committee of 100 was often quite consciously and explicitly non-political:

"National statesmen cannot break the circle because their mandate is to act in the National interest. Only the private individual can act in the name of Humanity: the lead must come from below." (Founding Manifesto of the Committee of 100, 1960)

Its propaganda was also frequently near-hysterical in invoking the imminent threat of war:

"The peril is imminent and deadly. Before the end of the year we may all be dead, you, your children if you have any, your wife or husband, your friends and all who make up the population of your neighbourhood and country. If you do nothing during the coming weeks of crisis you will have your share in the blame. You will have your part in the crimes of killing all those who you care for." (Leaflet: 'No War over Berlin!', September 1961)

The concluding phrase of this and many other of the 100's leaflets, summarised this apolitical appeal:

"Remember your humanity and forget the rest".

Unfortunately such a laudable sentiment came nowhere near confronting the political needs of the situation. It was actually a step backwards from the often unsatisfactory slogans of the CND. That it became the battle cry for the most militant sections of the movement in 1961 says much about the problems facing us at that time.

Rise And Fall

The Committee of 100 was formed in October 1960 on the initiative of Russell, Schoenman and Michael Scott. The tactic of assembling 100 names which could be published as the organisers of any action had a dual purpose - to increase support by

getting the widest possible sponsorship and to ensure collective responsibility for civil disobedience actions.

The first was initially achieved. The size of the demonstrations probably benefitted considerably from the publicity that came from having a number of well-known personalities, particularly from the arts, named as leaders. The second was definitely a failure. Despite the fact that we all signed depositions declaring collective responsibility for the events of December 9th, the state still picked off the key figures in the organisation and jailed them for terms of up to eighteen months.

The first three sit-downs organised by the Committee drew ever-increasing numbers. On February 18 the police were content to encircle the crowd sitting down around the Defence Ministry in Whitehall and Parliament Square. On a repeat performance in April they halted the march in Whitehall, everybody sat down and more than 800 were arrested.

The biggest demonstration was on September 17 when the march was never able to leave the assembly point of Trafalgar Square. More than 1500 people were arrested and a certain amount of sympathetic publicity arose from a fairly brutal and indiscriminate attack by police on the demonstrators just after midnight.

Prison

September was also assisted by the government's pre-demonstration jailing of 36 members of the Committee. Prominent amongst these was Russell, who spent 7 days in Brixton prison at the age of 89 and gained much sympathy. Its size was also certainly affected by the recent resump-

tion of nuclear testing by the USA and USSR and the ongoing crisis over Berlin.

Sit-Downs

The success of September 17 led the Committee to schedule a far more ambitious programme of sit-downs at a series of bases around the country for December 9. Once again these were preceded by arrests - this time of 6 key organisers who were taken in on conspiracy charges. Government pressure resulted in disruption of transport arrangements for demonstrators. More importantly however the size of the turnout was affected partly by the failure to concentrate on one particular target and thus to make a united effort, but more crucially because a growing number of supporters were beginning to wonder about the real political effectiveness of such actions. Many writers have suggested that the near fiasco on December 9 which saw an aggregate turnout much reduced from September's London demonstration, was a result of the Government's firm actions. It is much more likely that it happened simply because the Committee no longer provided a satisfactory political way forward for its supporters.

December 9 1961 was a watershed for the Committee of 100. It continued for the next four years but was never again able to organise anything on the scale of that year. One area in which its activists did however continue to work with some energy was attempts to propagandise amongst workers for direct action. But despite some limited successes (see above) they were never able thoroughly to overcome their isolation.

Themes

Any evaluation of the first CND must include the fact that it failed in its objectives. The reasons for this have to be sought. Certainly this cannot be done by the exercise of a superior and dismissive hindsight. For both authors CND was the most decisive influence in their political lives. CND transformed post-war politics and took it from the committee rooms onto the streets. What CND showed was glimpses of an alternative and superior politics to the conservatised orthodoxies that controlled and continue to control the Labour Movement. Much of the best of radical campaigning that followed: from the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign to the Anti-Nazi League, based itself on lessons learned from CND.

But CND did fail and a balance sheet can and must be drawn. Perhaps one of the most compelling reasons for trying to make it now can be found in the speeches and writings of E.P. Thompson, and in particular in his essay on "The Logic of Extermination". (see Further Reading)

E.P. Thompson

It is not exaggeration to claim that Thompson is one of the single most important reasons for the rebirth of CND. His writings have won thousands to the fight against nuclear weapons. Neither however can it be denied that many of the weaknesses of the first wave of CND have been embalmed and preserved in his current essays.

Campaign Structures

One of the old debates that needs to be discussed anew concerns the structures of the Campaign. The initial executive of CND was a purely self-selected body. Arthur Goss, pacifist and EC member expressed his view of the campaign as follows:

"....we were criticised as being a self-elected, self-perpetuating body - and we were... ..we didn't want membership, either people supported us or they didn't support us. This was the campaign we were running, we decided how to run it...."

It will be interesting, perhaps in another twenty years, to obtain a clear view of how exactly the leaders of today's campaign for European Nuclear Disarmament (END) differ from this statement. Certainly its setting up appeared to be a further exercise in establishing the charmed circle of the good and the great that had been carefully sifted to remove subversive elements.

The situation of today's CND is very different. From 1966 the Campaign has had a fully democratic structure. The challenge to CND and to its leadership, which held on and persisted through the lean years, is of another order. CND has to, and there is some real evidence that it has already begun to grasp this, open itself up to the new forces alerted by the present war drive. Individuals and organisations have to be incorporated into CND. Sometimes, in order to broaden forces or to take up a particular issue, it will be necessary to wage campaigns on partial aspects of CND policies. The campaign also has a job to do in

educating forces newly involved in the struggle on the whole range of its platform, particularly on the case for coming out of NATO. In many towns there exist a variety of groups concerned with the issue of nuclear war. CND has the challenge of, wherever it is politically possible, uniting these groups into a single umbrella organisation.

Unilateralism

The first CND never fully worked out what was meant by unilateralism. One side of the debate was the view expressed by George Clark, one of the leaders of the Committee of 100, that "unilateralism is a way of life". The clash over how far unilateralism should go reached a peak at the 1961 CND Conference. This came out for withdrawal from NATO in opposition to the EC proposal that Britain should remain a member long enough to persuade the alliance to give up its reliance on nuclear weapons - potentially a longish pause as conference had the good sense to realise. Where the conference did begin to go off the rails was in adopting the Crewe resolution that called on every country possessing nuclear weapons, including the USA and USSR, to unilaterally disarm. The notion of getting rid of all nuclear weapons is reasonable enough: but proponents of the "Crewe position" began to concentrate on this question so much, and in particular on the issue of Soviet weapons, that - whereas they might have deflected criticisms that they were dupes of the Soviet Union - the issue of British unilateralism began to fall into the background.

The mirror image of this was the Executive's policy statement "Steps Towards Peace" produced in March 1963 by Stuart Hall with the aim of breaking the deadlock in negotiations for a multilateral agreement. This document did not mention

NATO and was characterised in an "Observer" editorial as being little more than a repetition of the "official policy of the United States government as explained by Walter Lippmann." It was a curious irony that these two opposed positions both had the effect of diluting the case for British unilateralism. Today, whilst accepting the END demand for a nuclear free Europe from Poland to Portugal, it is also important not to counterpose European multilateral negotiations to the British unilateral option.

Strategy

The fundamental criticism that has to be made of the first CND and its offshoots is that they lacked a political strategy. A series of goals to be achieved were assembled. But how were these to be implemented? What would be the political and economic consequences of withdrawal from NATO? One wing of the campaign refused such discussion since they believed - correctly - that this would mean acting politically and that CND was about morality and not politics.

A further explanation of the failure of CND to think strategically lay in the scale of nuclear warfare as perceived by the campaigners. Peggy Duff described their mood

"They believed that the bomb immediately threatened the future of civilisation, that it had to be banned very quickly or Armageddon would come first."

A letter that Bertrand Russell sent 22 December 1961 to members of the Committee of 100 after the disaster of the attempted blocking of bases on December 9 thoroughly bears this out:

"There is an imminent danger of nuclear war because the rockets are resting on a hair-trigger. One error in judgement or an elec-

trical failure may at any minute launch the nuclear devastation that we are seeking to prevent....We must obstruct the bases. We must step up the industrial campaign. We must prevent factories and bases and airfields from functioning. We must aim to bring to a halt the whole machinery of nuclear war. I appeal to you to discuss this memorandum, but not to discuss it for too long. Do not let it be an excuse for inactivity. We may not have the time to sit around in desks for five months."

Nearly 20 years ago there was certainly a great need for urgency and today there still is. There was and is an even greater need to sort out the roots of the present war drive and to set out a political strategy to counter it.

The danger in merely reiterating the horrors of nuclear warfare was shown by the effects of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. People got thoroughly scared but war was avoided: so maybe the deterrent did actually work? The result was that thousands left CND.

Exterminism

E.P. Thompson correctly points out the irrationality of an arms race that produces weapon stocks capable of killing the whole of humanity many times over. He argues that, under a system of exterminism, politics become militarised and

"In such a hair-trigger situation, the very notion of 'political' options becomes increasingly incredible....Today's hair-trigger military technology annihilates the very moment of politics."

Thompson uses these arguments to take the marxist left to task and to oppose their view that the heart of the war drive lies in the very nature of

imperialism and in its struggle since 1917 to smash any attempts to move from the domination of capitalism. In place of this is put the mutually supporting twin systems of "exterminism". Thompson agrees that the profit motive fuels the arms race in the west but argues that to say this merely seeks to lay blame rather than to confront the potential apocalypse. Later in the essay he does appear to accept the argument that arms expenditure plays a role in capitalist economics and that "a business boom on the edge of a bust is a snarling, irrational beast." But the argument is then lost in what Raymond Williams calls "technological determinism".

Thompson sees the marxist left as an actual accomplice in exterminism:

"a falsetto descant in the choir of exterminism".

This disgusting allegation is based on the following arguments:

"Class struggle continues, in many forms, across the globe. But exterminism is itself not a class issue, it is a human issue. Certain kinds of 'revolutionary' posturing and rhetoric which inflame exterminist ideology and which carry divisions into the necessary alliances of human resistance are luxuries which we can do without."

The marxist left is therefore a component of the "choir of exterminism" because it argues that 'the Bomb is a class question' and wishes "to get back to the dramas of confrontation."

This argument has to be rejected on two grounds. Firstly the concept of exterminism, as Raymond Williams points out,

"steers us away from the originating and continuing causes and promotes...a sense of helplessness beneath a vast, impersonal and uncontrollable force."

The concept of the hair-trigger can dramatise the dangers we face, but it can also be used to render ridiculous any idea of uncovering the roots of the crisis and planning how to rid the world of the nuclear threat. The end of this approach is a cowed and oblivious apathy: and that was the main effect of the Cuban missile crisis on the first CND.

Basis Of War Drive

The second failure of this concept is that it does not analyse either the fundamental or even the conjunctural bases of the war drive. For marxists the way to ensure a final end to the potential for nuclear war lies in uprooting the economic system that generates the bomb. It lies in abolishing the stranglehold of imperialism over the Third World. It requires the removal of the bureaucratic layers that dominate most of the 'communist' world.

At present, most of the attempt in the West to raise a war mood comes from conscious ideological choice. The aim is to restore the ideological hold of the ruling classes in a crisis ridden economy by using the time-honoured ploy of an external threat. It is also essential, after the defeat in Vietnam and the growth of anti-war sentiment, to win back working people to the acceptance of "defence". - ie. the necessity to wage further wars against the anti-colonial forces. It is probably true that the Carter/Reagan rhetoric, whilst apparently aimed at Russia, has the real end of preparing intervention against Nicaragua or El Salvador. We do not aid the cause of nuclear disarmament by seeking to dissuade the

populations of these countries from struggling for freedom on the grounds that they are engaging in "the dramas of confrontation". The first CND adopted a neutralist position over Vietnam and doomed itself to irrelevance. In reality the victory of these struggles can only aid our long term aim of a whole world at peace.

Once Again The Labour Movement

The final theme that has to be explored is the relationship of CND to the Labour movement. E.P. Thompson again caricatures the Marxist left as having a wish to

"spurn the contamination of Christians, neutralists, pacifists and other class enemies".

The real aim of marxists is to unify as many as possible around the policy of CND. But it is useless to talk about winning our cause unless we can win the majority of the Labour Movement to our side. Of the many powerful institutions in society it is only the Trades Unions and the Labour Party that have the potential to win our demands and the capacity to implement them. Hugh Richards, chairman of CND, expressed this view in 'Tribune', 23 January 1981:

"There remains only one hope. It is that a Labour Government led by Michael Foot will come into office with a substantial majority and will succeed, against all the odds, in ridding this country of its nuclear weapons, both British and American."

Despite showing considerable illusions in the capacities of Michael Foot, Richards is absolutely right to focus on the Labour Movement as the sole possible agency through which to win our aims.

The history of the first CND shows that a lot is required to ensure that a Labour Government implements a unilateralist line. The debate inside the Labour Movement has to be won far more clearly than at present. Crucially, the issue of NATO has to be sorted out and an unequivocal position for withdrawal from the alliance adopted. In the absence of this all other issues can be fudged. That a battle is urgently needed on this question was shown by Frank Allaum's remarks to CND's March 1981 Manchester Trade Union Conference. There he cautioned against introducing withdrawal into resolutions for the 1981 Labour Party Conference on the grounds that it would confuse the debate. Quite the opposite!

Jobs Not Bombs

To win the debate in the Labour Party means that we have to win in the Unions. This means that CND has to spend time in leafletting factories, showing the "War Game" in canteens and lobbying branches and committees. The Manchester conference was an important move in the right direction. In order to win this debate we have to explain how money cut from the social services is wasted on Trident. The call for 'Jobs not Bombs' is one that lies at the heart of the debate in the unions. Initiatives like the Lucas Aerospace workers' plan for transforming war production into production for useful purposes must be popularised. Within this campaign propaganda should be carried out for industrial action against nuclear weapons.

A Labour Government pledged to unilateralist policies will only be able to carry these out if we build a mass independent campaign that could support it against attack and ensure that the Labour leaders did not 'forget' their stated policy. Already Michael Foot has replaced the pro-NATO

pro-Bomb Rodgers with the pro-NATO pro-Bomb Brynmor John. The Labour leaders will not do our job for us. It is a new CND but the same old Michael Foot. Let's not be fooled again!



Further Reading

Only one book on the history of CND is currently in print: 'The Protest Makers' by Richard Taylor and Colin Pritchard (Pergamon: £10) Only about one third of this expensive volume give an account of events.

The most comprehensive history is in "Left, Left, Left" by the late Peggy Duff, secretary of CND from its foundation until 1965 (Alison and Busby 1971)

A few additional details can be found in "The Protest Makers" by Christopher Driver (Hodder and Stoughton 1964)

Frank Parkin's "Middle Class Radicalism" (Manchester University Press 1968) is the only one of a series of academic dissertations on CND to have found its way into print but is concerned overwhelmingly with social class theory-

The above account is based for the most part on our own personal files of papers, pamphlets and correspondence supplemented by those lent by comrades and friends, to whom "thanks". Anyone interested to study the topic further could best start by surveying the literature of the campaign and its sympathisers: 'Sanity', 'War and Peace', 'Youth Against the Bomb', 'Peace News', 'New Left Review', 'The Newsletter',

'Socialist Review', 'International Socialism',
'The Week', 'Tribune', 'Daily Worker'.

Key pamphlets mentioned here are

"Let Britain Lead: A Socialist Defence Policy"
by Frank Beswick etc CND 1960

"NATO and the Alliances" by Stuart Hall, London
Regional Council CND 1960

"Freed from Fear" by Mervyn Jones, CND 1960

"Win we Must" by Bertrand Russell, Reliance
Printers, Halesowen 1961

L. John Collins: "A Faith to Fight For" (Les-
lie Frewin 1966) illuminates some aspects of
the politics of the CND but is distorted by
Collins' belief that the decline of the campaign
was due overwhelmingly to the Committee of 100.

The debate in today's CND to which reference is
made in the conclusion can be read in articles
by E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams in New
Left Review Nos 122 and 124 (1980)

CHRONOLOGY

1957

Feb Foundation of the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests

April Foundation of Direct Action Committee

May British H Bomb Test Christmas Island

1958

Feb Founding meeting of CND, Central Hall, Westminster

Feb Installation of Thor missiles begins in East Anglia

April DAC organised march London to Aldermaston

July US intervention in Lebanon

Dec DAC demonstration at North Pickenham Thor base

1959

March CND conference rejects direct action tactic and individual membership

Jan Victory of the Cuban revolution

April First Aldermaston - London Easter March
Sept TUC Conference opposes missile bases but supports British nuclear weapons

1960

Jan DAC demonstration Harrington - 82 arrests

March CND conference rejects democratic constitution but supports demand for withdrawal from NATO

April Aldermaston final rally 50,000. Communist Party changes line to support unilateralism

Oct. Labour Party Scarborough Conference passes unilateralist motion

Foundation of Committee of 100

1961

18 Feb Committee of 100 sit-down Parliament Square: no arrests

April Blue Streak missile project abandoned

May U2 incident destroys Paris summit conference

March	CND Conference adopts democratic constitution (but not individual membership), favours 'positive neutralism' and accepts direct action as "one tactic in the fight"	April	US sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba
April	Aldermaston final rally 100,000	June -	repulsed
April 29	Committee of 100 sit-down Whitehall - 826 arrests	Oct	Berlin Crisis
May	DAC demonstration Holy Loch: 200 arrests	Aug/	US/USSR resumption of
Sept 1	Arrest of 36 members of Committee of 100; detained for up to 1 month	Sept	tests
Sept 17	Committee of 100 sit-downs, Holy Loch and Trafalgar Square: 1665 arrests		
Oct	Labour Party Blackpool Conference rejects unilateralism but maintains opposition to Polaris	Nov	Massive increase in US aid to South Vietnam
Dec	Committee of 100 sit-downs, Wetherfield, York, Ruislip etc. 850 arrested		

1962

Feb 6 members of Committee of 100 receive up to 18 months for conspiracy

April

Aldermaston rally 80,000

Oct

Cuban missile crisis

1963

Jan

Publication of 'Steps Towards Peace'

April

Aldermaston enlivened by 'Spies for Peace' revelations: 100,000 rally

Aug

Test Ban Treaty

1964

April

Aldermaston 30,000

1965

Dissolution of Committee of 100

Feb

US begins intensive bombing of N. Vietnam

April

30,000 US marines intervene in Dominica

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