



Language

After 1945 the invention of nuclear weapons created a new peril, dramatized by Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which gradually aroused widespread public concern. This concern was exacerbated from the mid-1950s by growing awareness of the dangers to health and the environment caused by the testing of nuclear bombs in the atmosphere.

But development of atomic and then hydrogen bombs, and later of nuclear missiles, was also a product of the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the deep distrust generated by the Cold War. Once both sides had nuclear weapons, developing strategic doctrines of the necessity of deterrence made opposition to US (or British) weapons more politically sensitive. The fact that the Soviet Union mobilized a worldwide 'peace campaign' against nuclear weapons in the early 1950s also meant that in the most frigid period of the cold war western peace protests were almost automatically seen by governments and the media as pro-Soviet. (How far these campaigns, which undoubtedly drew in many non-Communists concerned about the dangers of nuclear war, should be seen as part of the overall peace movement is disputed.)

A strong explicitly nonaligned movement against nuclear weapons, linked in Britain to the [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament](#) [1] (CND), did not therefore develop until 1957/58. The 'first wave' of the nuclear disarmament movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s resulted in mass marches and a wide variety of nonviolent direct action protests against nuclear testing sites, nuclear bases and installations and government buildings. In some cases (as in West Germany) protest originated on the organized left, in others popular protest impacted on trade unions and leftist political parties, leading for example to a unilateralist resolution being passed by the British Labour Party Conference in 1960. The debate also spread to the churches and raised the question whether nuclear weapons were compatible with the doctrine of just war. The 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, signed initially by the USA, Soviet Union and Britain, could be interpreted as a success for the movement, and the USA and USSR began to engage more seriously in a series of arms control negotiations.

By the late 1960s many campaigners had turned their energies to opposing the Vietnam War. During the 1970s environmental protests came to the fore, though concern about nuclear energy sometimes linked up with opposition to nuclear weapons. A second mobilization of mass opposition to nuclear weapons was sparked by US proposals to deploy the neutron bomb and by the NATO decision to deploy cruise and Pershing II missiles – Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) – in Western Europe. The campaigns of the 1980s had greater transnational reach, involved many more people than the 'first wave' of the movement, and influenced the policy of some local councils and regions. The role of the European Nuclear Disarmament (END) campaign in promoting a dialogue between western peace campaigners and East European and Soviet dissidents also opened up a new dimension.

The use of nonviolent direct action was even more widespread in the 1980s than in the 1950s/60s, and less controversial within the movement. There were, for example, many sit-downs and peace camps at bases. There was also widespread transnational cooperation, for example at the peace camp at the Comiso missile base in Sicily. The legality of nuclear weapons under international law was frequently raised in the courts. Some of the most militant actions, for example at the Greenham Common cruise missile base, are also associated with radical feminism and have been listed under the Feminist Movement ([F.5](#), [2]).

Although the nuclear disarmament movement has in general lost momentum since the break-up of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war, the dangers from nuclear weapons and proliferation ensure that campaigning continues. There are still nonviolent direct action demonstrations in Britain, for example at nuclear bases and installations.

There is a large literature on the nuclear disarmament movement. The titles below include assessments from a range of ideological perspectives, but many of them have been chosen because they give some prominence to forms of direct action and civil disobedience.



Books, 1987, pp. 235

Argues that the pretence that nuclear weapons do not constitute an actual danger constitutes a “psychic numbing”, and prevents people from taking positive action on either a personal and political level.

Montgomery, AnneLaffin, Arthur, [Swords into Plowshares: Nonviolent Direct Action for Disarmament](#) [4], San Francisco , Harper and Row/Perennial Library, 1987, pp. 243 pb

This is an account of the origin and early years of the US Plowshares movement launched in 1980 by radical Catholics, and edited by two of the leading figures in this new form of personal ‘witness’ against nuclear weapons. Plowshares took inspiration from the biblical phrase ‘beat your swords into ploughshares’ and physically attacked missiles and associated targets, before publicizing their actions and accepting arrest and often subsequent imprisonment. This book explains their motivation, wider social beliefs, and provides details of early protests.

Source URL (retrieved on 26/04/2024 -

15:30):<https://civilresistance.info/section/d-peace-movements-1945/d3-opposition-nuclear-weapons-1990>

Links

[1] <http://cnduk.org/> [2] <https://civilresistance.info/section/f-feminist-movements-and-protests/f5-war-and-womens-resistance> [3] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1987/waking-nuclear-age-book-nuclear-therapy> [4] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1987/swords-plowshares-nonviolent-direct-action-disarmament>