

## **A particular challenge for CND? : a personal review by Peter Nias**

### **Our situation as CND**

Where are we now as a popular mass movement? Less popular and less mass than we have arguably ever been unfortunately. What has happened in that regard and what might we be able to do about it? This note attempts to analyse our situation and offers some thoughts on future directions.

I have always supported CND and have, decades ago, previously carried out seven national studies/surveys commissioned by CND (list on last page).

We as CND are up against it like never before, despite us pointing out the obvious financial, moral and everything else issues that we always have done, not least in a time of particular financial stringency. There is no *popular* national level pressure to save money through nuclear disarmament or scrapping Trident.

I suggest we should take the opportunity now to have an *internal* wide-ranging appraisal. Not on the principle but on the processes. How can we seek to attain 'critical mass'?

### **Some current inter/national issues/events coming together in 2024**

- Ukraine War
- Gaza & Lebanon Wars & others in Sudan, Yemen, Syria, Somalia + .....
- Labour (finally) dropping opposition to nuclear weapons
- Increase in defence spending proposed by Labour
- D-Day commemorations 2024
- Previously, the sad loss of our nationally known and respected Bruce Kent in 2022

With all these events coinciding - with some also fermenting over a period of time - it is perhaps not surprising that *popular* electoral support for CND seems to have declined.

### **Political background**

Labour - and the wider public - have waxed and waned over nuclear weapons for nearly seven decades. From Nye Bevan's agreement to nukes in 1957 (*'naked into the conference chamber'*) to opposition in the 1960's, then not so much until the late 1970's & 1980's, then to lukewarm resistance (no renewal of Trident & 3 nuke subs not 4). Then Stop the (Iraq) War in 00's, then the 2019 election, to now when there seems little difference politically on defence & nuclear aspects between the major parties.

LibDems formally support Trident.

The Green party officially says no to Trident and to stay in Nato, but makes little of it in campaigning.

SNP losing influence.

There is no real party political support for anti-nuclear policies at the national level.

### **So where do we go to now?**

In addition to our current campaigning methods and topics, we need to challenge nukes in other ways too.

### **First, a look at some major societal campaigns/movements , past and present**

Such societal campaigns in the past have often taken at least two generations or so - about 50 yrs+ - to achieve their aims, usually with preparatory work having been done for years before.

A few examples (only very approx dates - I would not argue the specific years - & some are continuing & may be for some while):

- Newtonian scientific outlook subordinated Catholic Popery 1620's-1685, 65yrs
- slavery abolition in UK took from 1783-1833, 50 yrs
- female suffrage took from 1865ish to 1928, c.65 yrs
- campaign against poverty (by Rowntrees & others) 1904 120 yrs & continuing
- civil rights in USA 1909- late 1960's 60yrs
- South African apartheid 1948-1994 47 yrs
- smoking ban campaigns inc in enclosed spaces c.1950's to 2007+ 55 yrs
- Greenham Common military use from 1930's -1995 60yrs
- gay acceptance UK 1970's-2012+ 40yrs
- Migrants acceptance in society - Windrush 1948-2010's 60yrs, Indian & Pakistan mid-1960's +
- Overseas aid since 1950's e.g. Jubilee 2000 & Drop the Debt, but now less aid 75yrs+
- Anti-nuclear & CND - 1958 & continuing 67yrs
- Campaign Against the Arms Trade from 1974 70 yrs & continuing
- Environment - Silent Spring 1962 onwards c.60 yrs & continuing
- Climate change - early 2000's & continuing 20yrs so far
- Violence against women - UN launched campaign 2008 & continuing 17 yrs so far

This long 20th/21st century seems to be a series of continuing campaigns for justice on many issues. New ones keep arising. Partly because of this, there has been much movement of popular campaigning energies between topics, especially latterly to climate change, for both older and younger people.

Each era seems to want - to need - to campaign on something different from before, even whilst the previous campaigns are still required and are continuing. These result in a kind of 'capitalistic competition' between issues and groups, each vying for both support from activists and the attention of the wider public. Perhaps our wider capitalistic society is quite happy about this struggle, as the impact of having many campaigns is thereby diluted, which makes them politically less effective and more governmentally tolerable than they might otherwise be. Such self-induced 'divide and rule' affects campaigning and campaigners (aided and abetted by governments). Of course, if many major campaigns did link, and *stay*, together, there could be a greater difference.

### Thoughts/ideas for discussion

Just supposing CND/anti-nuclear campaigning had not yet happened at all, and we wanted to start doing so now, how might we go about it?

As well as doing the basic campaigning as we have done and are doing, could we also put forward a series of subtle topic approaches. Perhaps like the advertising industry does when launching a new product or service or idea, when a 'feeding-in to society' method is used. However, not to do this with a short term guessing-game launch (like some adverts use), but one which takes the long term re-view-of-society-over-a-period-of-time outlook. Instead, think a programme for a decade or two or three, and one which works in quieter parallel with the essential 'in-your-face and day-to-day' normal campaigning and demos.

This will hopefully then lay continuing groundwork and encouragement for future resurgence of CND when opportunities arise. We would be remiss not to maintain and develop the foundations upon which forthcoming generation of campaigners can build, otherwise they may be diverted elsewhere. We could plan this using the following scheme:

There are three main groups in society to influence and encourage. Each have many sub-divisions of course.

- 1) CND membership
- 2) the wider public(s)
- 3) govts & politicians

A matrix may be useful to propose, to plan & to record influences at each level in society, with some general examples (need to add more). Many of these are done now of course. This matrix may help plan & record actions at each level, and to review it every year or so.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Local area</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>International</b>
<b>To reach CND memberships</b>	List clubs/groups in area Any lapsed members?	Ask former members/ supporters why not now	Peace groups in other countries
<b>To reach the wider public</b>	Attendance at local events. Speaking on radio/TV	Popular influencers Social media influencers	How other countries reach their publics
<b>To reach govts &amp; politicians</b>	Tackle local politicians - cllrs & MP's	Seek political supporters, even if lukewarm	Speaker tours by well-known people from other countries

### Specific suggestions/topics

I acknowledge some may have been tried in various ways before, but may need to be revisited. Some may be off-the-wall.

a) To **seek more latterday JB Priestley type of persons** - those of national respect and repute - to stand up for the principle. Not necessarily writers. There are few on the ground, as they are in multiple demand for other issues too (and sometimes have a dodgy 'back story'). We also need to chose the time to use that type of person, as CND would probably not have started so well if JB Priestley had written his inspiring 1957 New Statesman article a few years before he did (see *PN's 2014 paper on why it took so long (13 years) after Hiroshima for CND to start*).

b) Taking a slightly different inspiration from Priestley and persuade **a range of academics to write stimulating popular papers/articles on wide ranging nuclear issues** - both marginal and 'core' - which may hopefully, bit by bit, be picked up by the wider media. Some do already but it will clearly take more than this to really generate a dialogue. It may at least keep the topic in the wider mind, rather than it being hardly ever mentioned. It would need careful planning, gathering some potential names together (half a dozen or more) and spread over a few years.

c) Commission or ask for **poems, novels and the wider arts**. Perhaps fairly lengthy poems too exploring the wider topic (either new ones or old ones reinterpreted e.g. 'The Waste Land?') - to be written by well-regarded national level poets. To do this gradually and quietly over a lengthy period - talking a decade or more. A steady drip-drip approach when publishing, not a grandiose launch.

d) Nukes have been and are continually being used ever since 1945 by the nuke-weapon-bearing-states. Nukes are always there, being employed politically, subtly or not-so-subtly, influencing the power background of international dealing. Is it worth trying to permanently illustrate this to a wider world in a very spectacular way? For example, one could use the symbolism of the auditorium of the UN general assembly where politicians talk about peace and war.

**Propose covering all or part of its huge magnificent curved walls and ceiling with painted images.** Half would be something like Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel's 'Creation Story', and the other half would be a 'Destruction Story' of mushroom clouds and missiles, Trident subs and bombers

and more, all of which *politically* threaten everyone.

*Auditorium of the UN General Assembly*

This would starkly contrast the beginning and the end of humanity, demonstrating how the possession of nukes, and more, has been and is being used by states all the time (whether or not such dealings are in the UN building, or elsewhere in the world). CND could arrange with an artist(s) of note to produce a design and a mock-up for this. Alternatively, a light show (more practical but less permanent) could be proposed. It would never be actually done of course (would it?), but a major illustrated proposal (perhaps linked with other events, and at a significant date) would make the point.



e) While talking about the UN, that organisation is under pressure to deliver when it is hamstrung by the veto. How much has CND in the past **overtly supported the UN** and could it be more publicly positive in that respect? Especially needed in the next years of American administration.

f) **The churches**, after a solid supporting start for CND in the early years (1950's-70's) seem to have largely kept quiet, institutionally speaking, on the disarmament and nukes issue for a long time, Bruce notwithstanding. Christian CND, and especially linking with other faiths too, needs to be nurtured further.

g) To have **less 'in your face' and more 'in your heart'** campaigning.

h) **The current very large increase in numbers of teenagers (in UK & in Bradford) offers an opportunity.** Climate change campaigning is a 'competitor' for these people of course. Or are they, in part, put off by anti-nuke folks being of their grandparents generation? Or are many not interested in campaigning at all because it doesn't seem to work? There can be many more groundwork rebuilding initiatives.

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Peter Nias surveys & reports commissioned by CND & END:

1982 CND London Demo survey 768 interviews on street

1982 CND Membership survey 300 interviews by post (inc a report for Christian CND)

1982 END Supporters survey 220 interviews by post

1983 CND Sanity magazine readership survey 250 interviews by post

1985 CND membership survey 620 interviews by post

1986 CND Lapsed membership survey 104 interviews by post, 30 in-depth

1989 CND Trident ('Jaws') leaflet survey 200 interviews by post

Other Independent papers by Peter Nias on the nuclear issue:

1986 How deeply do people feel about the nuclear weapons issue? Paper given to International Conference of Political Psychology

2014 The 'lost' anti-nuclear years 1945-1958 2014 5pp (available by email)

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