

# 'Peace with a Capital P': The Spectre of Communism and Competing Notions of 'Peace' in Britain, 1949–1960

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This article is concerned with different factions within the British peace movement during the 1950s and early 1960s, each of which gave the word 'peace' a different meaning. We argue that the movement was made up of several, often contradictory sections, and despite attempts by groups like the Peace Pledge Union to distance themselves from the communist-controlled British Peace Committee, popular perceptions were tainted by association with communism until the mid-1950s. Following the onset of the H-bomb era, this taint lessened as people began to fear the destructiveness of hydrogen weapons. When the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament formed in 1958 it became the predominant British organization opposed to nuclear weapons and achieved popularity because it limited its objective to nuclear disarmament whereas the Peace Pledge Union demanded the condemnation of all war.

**KEYWORDS:** Cold War, British Peace Committee, Communist Party of Great Britain, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, peace

During the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, the British peace movement consisted of several disparate groups with extensive ideological differences. Disagreements between communist and non-communist organizations, represented largely by the British Peace Committee (BPC) and the Peace Pledge Union (PPU) respectively, divided the peace movement. Both groups' leadership of the movement was challenged by the formation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in 1958. CND tried to answer its critics and hoped to unite its opposing components – secular and non-secular, communist, and non-communist. Eventually all sides of the fragmented movement worked together to pursue a single aim: 'unilateral nuclear disarmament'<sup>1</sup>

This article is concerned with popular presentations of the British peace

1 Frank E. Myers. 'Dilemmas in the British Peace Movement since World War II', *Journal of Peace Research*, 10 (1973), 81.

movement, particularly how it was depicted as being dominated by communists and the actual role of the Communist Party within it. Historians such as Phillip Deery and Weston Ullrich have examined some of the key moments when elements of the peace movement drew attention from the media or the government. Holger Nehring argues that the movement contributed towards a transnational community which attempted to find non-nuclear security within the Cold War division, whereas Jodi Burkett suggests that CND reached the British public with a somewhat patriotic message.<sup>2</sup> By examining a number of popular newspapers from across the political spectrum, as well as the peace organization's own publications, this article builds on these interpretations. We argue that popular depictions of the peace movement's relationship with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), and their actual relationship, evolved through three distinct phases during the 1950s, which are explored in the three sections.

The first period, from 1949, saw the CPGB agitate for nuclear disarmament using the label 'peace'. However, it remained ambivalent towards other sections of the peace movement, such as the PPU, who campaigned on pacifist grounds. During this period popular media and public perceptions of the peace movement, informed by the anti-communism of the early Cold War, imagined that communists were subverting non-communist peace organizations and that the entire peace movement was tainted by communism. This article therefore explores how non-communist campaigners such as the PPU attempted to distance themselves from the communist-dominated organizations. The second period emerged following the US's series of hydrogen bomb tests in 1954 and saw the peace and disarmament movements gain a degree of popular respectability as the communist taint faded. This period also saw renewed activism and increased collaboration between organizations. The third period, beginning with CND's establishment in 1958, was characterized by attempts to overcome divisions within the peace movement. Agitation solely on the grounds of nuclear disarmament rather than pacifism helped CND to engage with a public that was still coming to terms with its awareness of thermonuclear weapons' destructiveness. However, CND also tried to distance itself

2 Phillip Deery, 'The dove flies east: Whitehall, Warsaw and the 1950 World Peace Congress', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 48 (2002), 449–68; Weston Ullrich, 'Preventing "peace": The British government and the Second World Peace Congress', *Cold War History*, 11 (2011), 341–62; Holger Nehring, *The Politics of Security: British and West German Peace Movements in the Early Cold War 1945–1970* (Oxford, 2013); Jodi Burkett, *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain: Britishness, 'Race' and the Radical Left in the 1960s* (Houndmills, 2013).

from the CPGB (and the CPGB from CND) until 1960, when the CPGB publicly announced its support for the programme of CND.

### Anti-communism and the peace movement in the early Cold War era, 1949–1953

Whilst the Communist Party was initially supportive of limited nuclear armament,<sup>3</sup> during the Cold War the party began pushing for 'peace' between the communist and western blocs. For the CPGB, the meaning of peace was tied to the defence of the Soviet Bloc, and contradicted the notions of 'peace' and 'freedom' promoted by the United States in the 'cultural Cold War' that accompanied America's recapitalization of Western Europe. Initiatives, such as Radio Free Europe, acted as what Frances Stonor Saunders terms a 'cultural NATO',<sup>4</sup> which voiced the idea that 'there can be no lasting peace until Eastern Europe has been freed from the domination of the Soviet Union' and that 'the increasing military strength of the free world ... [was] designed for the purposes of peace'.<sup>5</sup>

In the post-war era, the communist definition of 'peace' became tied to the prospects of multilateral disarmament. Moreover, as the Cold War progressed it increasingly focused on dismantling the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the continued disarmament of West Germany, as well as non-interference by the west in places such as Greece, Malaya, China, and Korea. In his 1952 exposé of the CPGB, ex-communist Bob Darke described the party's position on peace in the new Cold War era:

the call for Peace, which had been more or less dormant on the Party's cluttered platform, suddenly bounded into life ... It began to appear more and more in Party propaganda. The *Daily Worker* began to print it with a capital P. It was top priority in all propaganda.<sup>6</sup>

One of the Communist Party's key peace initiatives was the BPC, which formed in 1949. Its chairman was Communist Party member Ivor Montagu. An article in the CPGB's weekly journal *World News and Views* on the

3 See Malcolm MacEwen, *The Greening of a Red* (London, 1991), 133–8.

4 Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London, 1999), 327–43.

5 Radio Free Europe, 'Policy guidance memorandum no. 1', 21 Sept. 1950, in Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington, KY, 2000), 317.

6 Bob Darke, *The Communist Technique in Britain* (London, 1952), 143.

foundation of the BPC alleged that ‘active propaganda for a Third World War is being carried out by a handful of powerful privileged interests in America and Western Europe’ and that ‘[m]alice, fear and hatred are being roused against the Soviet Union’.<sup>7</sup> The journal also called for ‘[f]riendship between peoples of all countries and particularly of Britain, China, France, the U.S.A., and the U.S.S.R.’, and claimed that the BPC ‘treat[ed] none as enemies except the instigators of war’.<sup>8</sup> The BPC had an underlying pro-Soviet outlook.

The PPU, by contrast, had been established by ‘progressive’ sections of the Church of England in the mid-1930s.<sup>9</sup> Its approach in the late 1930s divided the group into those who broadly supported appeasement or ‘peaceful change’ and others who became disillusioned following the German invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938.<sup>10</sup> In the 1930s the CPGB saw the PPU as pro-fascist – a sentiment later shared by others who depicted pacifists as ‘Friends of Hitler’.<sup>11</sup> In 1938, the CPGB announced, ‘we have found it necessary to carry on a sharp ideological struggle against those tendencies in the Peace Movement who oppose collective security and seek reconciliation with Fascist countries, specially shown in the leadership of the Peace Pledge Union’.<sup>12</sup> This animosity between the CPGB and the PPU continued into the Cold War era, with the PPU and their affiliated newspaper *Peace News* carefully announcing their opposition to communism.

During the early years of the Cold War, the BPC and PPU dominated Britain’s peace movement. Whilst mainstream media and politicians distrusted the PPU because of its stance in the lead-up to the Second World War, they were more concerned about covert communist agents within peace or disarmament campaigns and shared the PPU’s anti-communism. The BPC, as the British representative of the World Peace Council (WPC), justified some of the media’s association of the peace movement with communism because it had been principally established by the USSR. Moreover, as Gunter Wernicke has written, a number of other peace groups

7 ‘Resolution of the British Peace Congress’, *World News and Views*, 5 Nov. 1959, 532.

8 ‘Resolution of the British Peace Congress’, 532.

9 David Cortright, *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas* (Cambridge, 2008), 74–5.

10 See Lawrence Wittner, *One World or None: The Struggle against the Bomb*, vol. 1 (Stanford, 1993), 84; David Lukowitz, ‘British pacifists and appeasement: The Peace Pledge Union’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9 (1974), 115–27; Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists* (Oxford, 2000), 358–75.

11 *Daily Mail*, 23 Feb. 1940, 6.

12 CPGB Central Committee, *Report of the Central Committee to the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress*, 16–19 Sept. 1938 ([http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/central\\_committee/1938/09/report.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/central_committee/1938/09/report.htm): accessed 23 Jan. 2014).

across Western Europe refused to cooperate with the WPC,<sup>13</sup> and a similar situation occurred in Britain.

During the early 1950s non-communist peace activists often found it necessary to emphasize their non-communist beliefs to the mainstream press. Peter Thompson, Vicar of Holy Cross, Hornchurch, clashed with his local scout troop after banning the national anthem because of its martial connotations. When questioned by the *Daily Mail*, he made his ideological position clear: 'I am not a communist but a pacifist.'<sup>14</sup> When media outlets referred to the actions of the BPC, peace was usually placed in inverted commas in order to make it clear that the word was being misused. One of the key promoters of this idea was Christopher Mayhew, Labour Cabinet minister and founder of Britain's Information Research Department (IRD), who, when referring to the abandoned World Peace Congress of 1950, stated in the *Sheffield Telegraph* that "'peace" ... meant a communist victory'.<sup>15</sup> Reiterating Mayhew's suspicion of the term 'peace', Prime Minister Clement Attlee referred to the BPC in Parliament in November 1950 as the 'so-called British Peace Committee'.<sup>16</sup> Nehring has argued that communist-led initiatives 'discredited many peace campaigns and campaigners in mainstream political culture'.<sup>17</sup> The meaning of 'peace' was debated by communists, mainstream politicians, and non-communist peace organizations alike. Early Cold War fears of communist infiltration combined with the negative connotations that pacifist groups had acquired during the Second World War meant that the PPU found it difficult to make its meaning prevail. When the mainstream media did cover the PPU, it was often reported as something of an oddity, such as when the *Daily Express* reported that a PPU meeting in Holborn was abandoned because organizers found that 'they and the speakers were the only people present'.<sup>18</sup>

In 1950, the BPC was involved in two initiatives that prompted claims from the mainstream media and politicians that it was not working for 'peace', but for Soviet-style communism. Firstly, the BPC campaigned on behalf of the Stockholm Appeal, a petition launched by the WPC in March

13 Gunter Wernicke, 'The communist-led World Peace Council and the western peace movements: The fetters of bipolarity and some attempts to break in the fifties and early sixties' *Peace and Change*, 23 (1998), 270.

14 *Daily Mail*, 2 Apr. 1951, 5. For other instances, see *Daily Mail*, 4 Sept. 1950, 3; *Daily Mail*, 26 Jun. 1961, 3.

15 Cited in Christopher Mayhew, *A War of Words: A Cold War Witness* (London, 1998), 81.

16 *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons). 480, 9 Nov. 1950, 1099.

17 Nehring, *Politics*, 32.

18 *Daily Express*, 25 Apr. 1952, 5.

1950. The BPC collected signatures from the British public supporting the demand to ban all nuclear weapons. The text of the appeal was brief, yet broad. Many anti-communists in Britain depicted the petition as a pledge of support for communism. The conservative historian Max Beloff warned listeners of the BBC's European Service that:

The Stockholm appeal was not simply an appeal for peace; it was an appeal for peace on the Soviet terms; it was an appeal to accept the Soviet pattern of life for ourselves; because if we resist its imposition, force will be used, as it is being used elsewhere.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, the PPU urged its members not to become involved with the Stockholm petition:

Recognising the danger to peace in any confusion between pacifism and communism, and in attempts to avert a third world war being identified with pro-Russian sentiment ... the National Council cannot assume that the word "peace" means the same to all who use it ... Fundamental differences of principle make it neither possible nor desirable for the PPU as a movement to have any connection with the Communist party or BPC, and render it necessary to discourage members of the PPU from signing the BPC petition.<sup>20</sup>

However, this official position was unpopular with many readers of *Peace News*, who wrote to the newspaper attacking the policy, prompting several weeks of defensiveness from the editorial staff.<sup>21</sup> The leadership of movements like the PPU were attuned to the dangers of association with communism and sought to make their own meaning of 'peace' predominate over that proposed by communists in Britain and abroad. Many of their activists, however, took a more pragmatic approach, believing that the peace petition was consistent with their own ends.

Secondly, the WPC scheduled its 1950 congress in Sheffield. The potential arrival of members of a communist front organization caused anxiety for anti-communists in the Labour government and sections of the press. The government disrupted the Sheffield congress by denying entry visas to many foreign delegates, which made holding the event in the UK unviable and it was relocated to Warsaw.<sup>22</sup> Some in the press thought that banning the entry of these foreign delegates was anti-democratic and

19 *The Listener*, 1134, 23 Nov. 1950, 580.

20 *Peace News*, 30 Jun. 1950, 7.

21 See *Peace News*, 30 Jun. 1950, 6; 7 Jul. 1950, 6; 14 Jul. 1950, 6; 21 Jul. 1950, 6.

22 See Deery, 'Dove flies east'; Ullrich, 'Preventing "peace"'.

potentially authoritarian.<sup>23</sup> However, other popular newspapers, such as the *Daily Mail*, criticized the government for being too lax. The *Mail* asked rhetorically, 'odd is it not that a government who propose to control the British people hand and foot cannot stop a lot of subversive aliens coming in'.<sup>24</sup> The editorial continued: 'No one wants to see our liberties infringed, but it may be necessary to take something from them to preserve them. That happened in the last war – and we are at war again, though they call it a Cold War now.'<sup>25</sup> The *Daily Mail* amplified the threat of communism as part of the anti-communist moral panic witnessed in Britain during the early 1950s. The *Mail* criticized the Labour government for being too controlling, but overlooked this apparent self-contradiction as it called for stricter measures against communists.

The *Daily Mail's* comment angered part of its readership, some of whom wrote in condemning the actions of the government (and the *Mail's* tacit support) for its non-liberal nature. One reader asked, 'were they too frightened to allow these people to state their views publically?'<sup>26</sup> Readers of the Labour-supporting *Daily Herald* also raised the issue of tolerance of 'abhorrent' viewpoints and criticized the ban for betraying this British liberal ideal. A Labour councillor for Hackney, J.B. Cohen, wrote complaining that 'We had a magnificent opportunity of exposing the falsity of the so-called Peace Congress. Instead we have allowed ourselves to become instruments of the very things we as Socialists are fighting.'<sup>27</sup> Cohen's letter fits into a wider anti-communist narrative fostered by many in the Labour Party and amongst the readership of the *Daily Herald* that promoted tolerance as a British and socialist value. This supposedly inherent British/socialist value of tolerance was discarded by the Labour leadership during this incident.<sup>28</sup> The exclusions surprised many within the Labour Party. Despite a warning from Party Secretary Morgan Phillips that Labour Party membership and trade union affiliation was 'incompatible' with participation at the WPC conference, a number of Labour Party members travelled firstly to Sheffield and later Warsaw. Welsh Labour MP S.O. Davies expressed 'disgust and resentment at the action taken by certain people in sabotaging [the WPC's] original efforts to hold [its] gathering in Britain'.<sup>29</sup>

23 John Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh, 2006), 120–4.

24 *Daily Mail*, 10 Nov. 1950, 1.

25 *Daily Mail*, 10 Nov. 1950, 1.

26 *Daily Mail*, 16 Nov. 1950, 2.

27 *Daily Herald*, 14 Nov. 1950, 4.

28 Jenks, *British Propaganda*, 120–4.

29 Cited in, Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1941–1951* (London,

Mainstream press criticisms of the non-communist peace organizations as being naïve and misled by communists remained common into the 1950s. The PPU was particularly concerned about this and was aware that their cause was threatened by frequent associations of their organization with the communist-led peace initiatives. Douglas Hyde, an ex-communist turned Catholic journalist, criticized the pacifist movement in the *Catholic Herald*, stating that the campaign of the BPC, led by the CPGB, had ‘puzzled, and in some cases deceived, many genuine peace lovers’. Hyde warned that the campaign was ‘timed and designed to aid the USSR, which stands to benefit so much by the disarmament of the West’.<sup>30</sup> Believing that Hyde was talking about them (despite not mentioning them by name), the PPU issued a robust rebuttal in their journal *Peace News*, declaring:

We are Little Red Riding Hoods who cannot recognise the wolf in grandma’s clothing. We are dove-like harmlessness all compact, but of serpentine wisdom totally void ... We are in short, well-meaning but uninstructed in the facts of life ... The first thing to say about this charge of deception is that it happens to be incorrect. We know all about totalitarian tyranny. We are well up in the methods of the police state. We could pass a pretty stiff examination in the Sins of the Soviets. We have had first-hand evidence of some of the worst things done by Communist terrorism and we can confidently assert that, as far as our education is concerned we do not need to know any more.<sup>31</sup>

Denials such as this demonstrate that the leadership of the PPU became sensitive to the taint of communism and tried to convince the *Peace News* readership of the need to separate their campaign from communist-led organizations.

The PPU also tried to engage with the general population to undo associations with the communist slant of the BPC and launched Operation Gandhi, a civil disobedience campaign against both nuclear weapons and Britain’s Civil Defence programme.<sup>32</sup> In January 1952 they organized a sit-in protest at the War Office in Westminster, which resulted in eleven arrests. The protesters’ leaflet emphasized the PPU’s non-communist stance, stating:

We owe you an explanation. We are not crackpots and we are not communists. We know we look silly. We are doing it to appeal to your intelligence and

1997), 212–13.

30 *Catholic Herald*, 8 Jun. 1950, 8.

31 *Peace News*, 23 Jun. 1950, 2.

32 Sean Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West: The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical Protest* (Cambridge, 2011), 135.



your conscience, although it may lead to arrest and imprisonment ... We who give you this leaflet refuse to take part in war or violent struggle for either West or East.<sup>33</sup>

The leaflet set out to disarm any potential accusations of communism and sought to regain ownership of the word 'peace' for non-communists. The protestors dissociated themselves from communism and simultaneously reasserted their opposition to armed conflict and the Cold War itself. The protest was largely ignored by the popular press, with the exception of the *Daily Mail*, which published a photograph of the demonstration and stated that the protestors claimed to be 'non-political', implicitly suggesting that the movement was untrustworthy. *The Times* dismissed the protest as merely an '[o]bstruction'.<sup>34</sup> Throughout 1952 and 1953, the PPU conducted sit-ins at Mildenhall Airbase, the Aldermaston weapons complex, the Proton Microbiological Weapons Institute, and the Harwell Nuclear Power Plant.<sup>35</sup> These protests were poorly attended, however, and on the few occasions when they received popular media coverage, they were generally depicted with suspicion, as the example of the War Office protest shows.

Against a *de facto* bipartisan commitment to anti-communism by the mainstream media and major parties, the PPU and other non-communist peace campaigners attempted to write their own peace narrative. They disseminated their peace message through their leaflets and their newspaper, *Peace News*, and rhetorically disassociated themselves from the communists. However, the emphasis that newspapers tended to give to communist front organizations like the BPC, especially during the intensive anti-communism of the early 1950s, meant that the repeated insistence of the PPU convinced few that they were not communist agents, and their demand to stop all war preparation won little support. The turning point in the popularity of disarmament movements came with increased awareness of the potential destructiveness of thermonuclear weapons.

33 Leaflet reproduced in *Peace News*, 18 Jan. 1952, 3.

34 *Daily Mail*, 12 Jan. 1952, 3; *The Times*, 12 Jan. 1952, 3.

35 Scalmer, *Gandhi*, 150–2.

## The push to unilateralism, 1954–1957

By the mid-1950s, there were significant shifts in public opinion concerning the prospect of peace. Moreover, concerns over nuclear weapons increased, which allowed the peace movement to grow. The US's Castle series of thermonuclear tests began a new phase in the Cold War. The March 1954 detonation of the Bravo shot, which was the first 'pure' hydrogen bomb and was then the most powerful nuclear weapon ever tested, intensified the arms race between the west and the Soviets. The explosions triggered concerns that any conflict might lead to worldwide devastation. Reports of the test in the news media produced what Dianne Kirby has described as a 'revolution in public consciousness' which was directed against nuclear armaments.<sup>36</sup> A Gallup opinion poll exemplified this opposition in March 1954, finding that 74 per cent of respondents favoured a multilateral agreement to 'ban the atom bomb', although 57 per cent believed that such an agreement was unlikely.<sup>37</sup>

The *Daily Mirror* ran a campaign to convince Churchill to renew attempts made in 1953 to convene a summit on easing Cold War tensions. In April 1954 the newspaper asked readers to send their responses to the questions:

1. Should Churchill at once OPENLY INVITE Eisenhower and Malenkov to a conference on the H-bomb?
2. Should Churchill ask Eisenhower and Malenkov to STOP further H-bomb tests in the meantime?<sup>38</sup>

Within four days, 22,657 people had responded, 21,207 answering 'yes' to both questions.<sup>39</sup> This reaction to coverage of nuclear destruction is a further example of the kind of success the popular press achieved in conveying what Adrian Bingham labels 'the awesome magnitude of the bomb', and helped to raise public awareness about the destructive potential of nuclear warfare in the mid-1950s.<sup>40</sup> Public reaction against the new bomb was exacerbated by footage of the Mike explosion of 1952 broadcast on BBC's *Panorama* on 13 April. This broadcast also featured the philosopher Bertrand

36 Dianne Kirby, 'Responses within the Anglican Church to nuclear weapons 1945–1961', *Journal of Church and State*, 37 (1995), 614.

37 George Gallup (ed.), *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937–75, Volume One: 1937–64* (New York, 1976), 320.

38 *Daily Mirror*, 2 Apr. 1954, 1.

39 *Daily Mirror*, 6 Apr. 1954, 1.

40 Adrian Bingham, "'The monster'?: The British popular press and nuclear culture, 1945–early 1960s', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 45 (2012), 616.

Russell and the physicist Joseph Rotblat, who suggested that 'the annihilation of all life on earth is within the range of possibility'.<sup>41</sup> The stoking of quite often apocalyptic fear within the mainstream media meant that more people became opposed to nuclear arms, despite the previous communist 'taint'. The increased public concern at the destructiveness of thermonuclear weapons encouraged more people to listen to activists' messages and join those later 1950s peace initiatives which, Nehring argues, began with the establishment of the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests in 1956.<sup>42</sup> This apparent 'galvanisation' of anti-nuclear activity was a continuation of the effects of the Bravo moment which began in March 1954.

Concerns about communist 'taints' and attacks on the peace movement lessened as mainstream anxieties about thermonuclear weapons circulated. There was an increasing sentiment that 'something' needed to be done. An editorial for *The Times* asked rhetorically:

Is peace possible? The hydrogen, after the atomic, bomb has amplified but not created the question; peace is popular ... No government, one would suppose, whatever its side of the Iron Curtain can turn an entirely deaf ear to it.<sup>43</sup>

The editorial also lamented the previous association of peace with communist subversion because it discouraged peace initiatives. The peace movement was no longer automatically dismissed because of potential links to communism. But those who were sympathetic were often wary about the participation and methods of communists.

The Communist Party stressed that the testing of the hydrogen bomb had increased vocal opposition to nuclear weapons and strengthened the voice of the peace movement. The front page of *World News* on 10 April declared:

The widespread anxiety and anger of the people continues to mount. It was expressed by the many who lobbied their M.P.s on Monday night, and by the thousands who sent messages of protest and demands for action to the House of Commons.<sup>44</sup>

This rising anxiety amongst the British population presented the CPGB and the BPC with the opportunity to exploit this collective indignation

41 *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Apr. 1954, 12.

42 Nehring, *Politics*, 63–4.

43 *The Times*, 10 Apr. 1954, 7.

44 'The H-bomb and the EDC', *World News*, 10 Apr. 1954, 282.

and to influence the direction of the peace movement. The following week, *World News* announced on its front page:

Since the end of the war there has never been a time when such profound depths of feeling among the people were revealed as over the H-bomb. This feeling has been mounting at tremendous speed, as seen by the demonstration held in London during the week-end in response to the call of the British Peace Committee and the London Peace Foundation.<sup>45</sup>

The CPGB now called for unity within the peace movement, saying that the 'great need of the hour is that the efforts of all the peace forces should be united and that campaigns ... should be of an all-inclusive kind'.<sup>46</sup> The campaign against the H-bomb became a key component of the Communist Party's and the BPC's peace campaigning in the mid-1950s. As Willie Thompson wrote, the peace movement was central to the party's programme in the 1950s as it 'link[ed] together all its international concerns in terms of both security for the Soviet bloc and objection to what Western military forces were doing to Third World peoples'.<sup>47</sup>

The Communist Party's press warned that campaigns that did not embrace unity amongst peace campaigners would 'not only fall far short of their immediate aims, but will make no lasting contribution to the cause of peace'.<sup>48</sup> However, the party did not always follow its own advice and, at times, resisted initiatives made by other peace groups whose notion of 'peace' was not directly tied to a desire to 'protect' the Soviet Bloc from western attack. An example of this was the party's relationship with the Hydrogen Bomb National Campaign (HBNC), which was launched by a group of one hundred Labour MPs following the outcry over the Castle hydrogen bomb explosion. The HBNC drew up a petition, circulated nationwide, calling for the British government to renounce H-bombs and to refuse to allow Britain to host American airbases.<sup>49</sup> Eventually the petition gathered 750,000 signatures that were delivered to Parliament. Kate Hudson suggests that this example of Labour Party-led activism was an important precursor of the formation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1958.<sup>50</sup> However, the HBNC received little support from

45 'The people v the H-bomb men', *World News*, 17 Apr. 1954, 301.

46 'The people v the H-bomb men', 302.

47 Willie Thompson, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920-1991* (London, 1992), 98.

48 'The people v the H-bomb men', 302.

49 *Manchester Guardian*, 8 Apr. 1954, 16.

50 Kate Hudson, *CND: Now More than Ever* (London, 2005), 37-9.

others in the peace movement, including the CPGB: the *Daily Worker* gave the campaign no coverage in its pages.

Other peace campaigners were also critical of the HBNC. The PPU argued that the abolition of hydrogen bombs was not enough and that the only answer was the total disarmament of *all* weapons. With spokespersons Sybil Shepherd and Stuart Morris leading the group's opposition, the PPU stated:

Under the circumstances we feel that we have no option but to discourage pacifists from taking part in the 'hydrogen bomb – national campaign' and to urge them instead to throw all their energies in[to] ... making clear the pacifist answer to the situation by emphasising the moral issue ..., not by signing an inadequate petition but by signing the pledge to renounce war.<sup>51</sup>

Disagreement within the peace movement suggests that, even when people were increasingly aware of the threat posed by greater destructive power, the movement remained divided between ideologically opposed factions whose different belief systems made it difficult to unite around a common aim. Despite popular misconceptions, the peace movement was not controlled by the Communist Party, which was equally very wary about certain sections of the peace movement. The HBNC was an attempt by some Labour MPs to force the Conservatives to pursue international nuclear agreements. It was also an attempt to maintain the initiative on nuclear arms control that many in the Labour Party, including Coventry East MP Richard Crossman, believed that their party had achieved by placing sustained pressure on the government during March and April 1954.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the campaign aimed to promote Labour's leadership of the peace movement, but both the communist-led BPC and the PPU were apprehensive about this parliamentary initiative.

Coinciding with the growing popularity of peace movements, the Labour-led Coventry City Council refused to implement its statutory Civil Defence commitment and informed the Home Secretary, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, that:

In view of recent reports in regard to the explosion of the hydrogen bomb and its devastating effects, [we] inform the Home Secretary that it is a waste of public time and money to carry on with the Civil Defence Committee: therefore it is the Council's intention to take steps to terminate its existence.<sup>53</sup>

51 *Peace News*, 23 Apr. 1954, 5.

52 Janet Morgan (ed.), *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman* (London, 1981), 303–7.

53 Coventry History Centre CCA/1/4/65/1, Coventry City Council Civil Defence Minutes,

The announcement showed that the councillors thought the new nuclear weapons had radically diminished the possibility of any form of defence. The action allowed opponents of Coventry City Council and Labour to express their concerns that Labour's left was being unduly influenced by the CPGB.<sup>54</sup> Coventry City Council's decision to disband its Civil Defence committee went against the national Labour Party's directives and the council was criticized by both the Conservatives and sections of the parliamentary Labour Party.<sup>55</sup> However, several Labour-controlled local councils supported Coventry and suggested that they might follow suit (although none actually did).<sup>56</sup> Following Coventry City Council's protest against a Civil Defence exercise held in the city on 31 May, a number of critics made associations between Coventry's actions and communism, and accused the council of being sympathetic to the Soviet Union. For example, Gilbert Richards, a Conservative councillor in Coventry, argued that this move would 'bring gladness only to those behind the iron curtain' and the *News Chronicle* accused the council of copying 'a theme song from Moscow'.<sup>57</sup> Whilst Coventry's decision to jettison its Civil Defence commitments tapped into the public's fear of thermonuclear weapons and the potential devastation of the hydrogen bomb, the taint of communism persisted and Nick Tiratsoo has noted that local Conservatives and Liberals were quick to associate Labour with Moscow during the 1955 general election campaign.<sup>58</sup>

Whilst Coventry's City Council was led by a Labour Party majority, it was praised by the CPGB for its decision regarding Civil Defence, which right-wing critics used to suggest associations between the two. Whilst still a CPGB member, Fire Brigades Union official John Horner congratulated the council for its 'magnificent stand for peace'.<sup>59</sup> In an editorial for *Labour Monthly*, the Communist Party's R. Page Arnot wrote that 'the futility of the Home Office's "Civil Defence" has been strikingly exposed' and that

28 Apr. 1954, 78/163.

54 Nick Tiratsoo, *Reconstruction, Affluence and Labour Politics: Coventry 1945–60* (London, 1990), 92.

55 See Nicholas Barnett, "'No protection against the H-bomb": Press and popular reactions to the Coventry Civil Defence controversy, 1954', *Cold War History*, 15 (2014), 1–24.

56 For example: *Daily Mail*, 30 Apr. 1954, 1; *Daily Mirror*, 4 Jun. 1954, 16; *Daily Mirror*, 23 Jun. 1954, 3; *Daily Mirror*, 23 Jul. 1954, 16.

57 *Daily Mail*, 7 Apr. 1954, 3; *News Chronicle*, 31 May 1954, 4. See also Modern Record Centre University of Warwick (Hereafter 'MSS') MSS.24/3/2/1 Telegrams to Lord Mayor of Coventry from Craythorne, 9 Apr. 1954; MSS.24/2/3 30 Apr. 1954.

58 Tiratsoo, *Coventry*, 93.

59 MSS.24/3/1/11 Telegram from John Horner to Sydney Stringer, 7 Apr. 1954.

the Coventry Labour Party had demonstrated that 'the only defence against total destruction is to prevent the use of the hydrogen bomb'.<sup>60</sup> In an open letter to Fyfe, the Secretary of the BPC and *Daily Worker* staffer William Wainwright commended Coventry for its stance, stating: 'Coventry's decision is making history. May we hope that you will respond to its appeal to work for the abolition of all weapons of indiscriminate slaughter?'<sup>61</sup> Whilst Coventry's councillors were frequently accused of ignoring the communist threat, communists applauded them and frequently sought to capitalize on nuclear anxieties.

Throughout the mid-1950s, the issue of nuclear weapons remained contentious, particularly during the general election of 1955 and then again during the crises of late 1956 – the Hungarian uprising and the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Suez. The fear that international conflict might spark a nuclear war resulted in the emergence of a popular movement against nuclear weapons. This concerned the Conservative government, which attempted to contain nuclear anxieties. Peter Goodwin suggests that the Conservatives were particularly worried about the new media presence of television and scrutinized the BBC for its coverage of nuclear and peace issues, writing that they 'directly and indirectly ensured that the BBC downplayed the dangers of the bomb'.<sup>62</sup> During this phase, peace became more popular as there was a growing realization of the dangers posed by nuclear weapons. Simultaneously, the peace movement became more diverse with the growth of many non-communist organizations. Having dominated the peace movement in the early 1950s, the BPC was still one of the largest peace organizations in Britain, but its influence was challenged by other non-communist organizations. In the late 1950s, a new organization with a broad appeal further threatened the dominance of the BPC – the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. CND's formation was to cause consternation amongst Britain's communists, who zigged and zagged in their approach towards the new organization.

60 R. Page Arnot, 'War or peace?', *Labour Monthly*, 37 (August 1954), 343.

61 Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester (hereafter LHASC), CP/CENT/PEA/01/02 Letter from William Wainwright to David Maxwell Fyfe, 16 Jun. 1954.

62 Peter Goodwin, 'Low conspiracy – government interference at the BBC', *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 2 (2005), 209.

## CND and Britain's first mass disarmament movement, 1957–1960

In November 1957 the *New Statesman* published J.B. Priestley's article 'Britain and the Nuclear Bombs', which discussed how the Soviets' launch of Sputnik would increase nuclear competition.<sup>63</sup> Priestley's article spurred a number of activists (such as Bertrand Russell, Michael Foot, and E.P. Thompson) into action and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was formed in February 1958. The original aim of CND was, as Mark Phythian wrote, 'a short, concerted campaign to inform and win over public opinion and the Labour Party ... to the wisdom of unilateral UK renunciation of nuclear weapons as a first step towards world disarmament'.<sup>64</sup> CND's limited objective gave it an advantage when compared to the PPU, which demanded an end to all armaments nuclear and conventional. Increased public awareness of the effects of nuclear weapons and a desire for some kind of limitation on proliferation on an international scale meant that CND capitalized on the development of broader concerns about nuclear war. Furthermore, the campaign brought differing ideological groups, including members of the PPU, Operation Gandhi, Labour Party activists, and later trade union activists and the communists, together to pursue unilateral nuclear disarmament. This led to several disagreements within CND over its direction, but also meant that some pre-existing groups were wary of the organization.

The PPU had a problematic relationship with CND. A statement in *Peace News* suggested that the problem was CND's refusal to promote the abolition of all armed forces:

While ... sympathising with the concern of those who are demanding unilateral disarmament of nuclear weapons, the PPU confidently asserts that the only effective answer lies with those who are committed to all the implications for total peace and the complete renunciation of war itself. It is that answer which the PPU must continue to give clearly and without compromise if those who now feel unable to accept the full pacifist position are to be helped to see the logical conclusion of their demands and to accept the personal responsibility of renouncing war itself and urging unilateral total disarmament.<sup>65</sup>

The PPU's approach was consistent with its pacifism: it asserted that anti-nuclear campaigns were inadequate and campaigned for total conventional

63 J.B. Priestley, *New Statesman*, 2 Nov. 1957, 556.

64 Mark Phythian, 'CND's Cold War', *Contemporary British History*, 15 (Autumn 2001), 135.

65 *Peace News*, 28 Feb. 1958, 5.



disarmament. The memory of the Second World War was relatively fresh and coverage in the press had stoked fears around thermonuclear conflict, which meant that the PPU's stance had marginally stronger appeal than CND's. Moreover, it was typical of the PPU's reluctance to cooperate with other groups in the peace movement – a position that proved detrimental to the PPU itself (as well as the wider movement) as CND rose in prominence. CND had won support by focusing on the horror that could be caused by thermonuclear conflict, while the PPU denounced all war preparation and advocated complete disarmament by the British. In the era of the Cold War, opposition to nuclear weapons grew (a Gallup Poll in May 1958 suggested that 30 per cent approved of unilateral British nuclear disarmament), but there was little public appetite for total conventional disarmament.<sup>66</sup>

Dominic Sandbrook has asserted that the Cold War was generally absent from British daily concerns, proposing that the public felt a general indifference to international politics.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, reportage of flashpoints such as the Soviet invasion of Hungary, the Suez crisis, and the nuclear arms race made the Cold War conflict impossible to ignore and during the late 1950s, anti-nuclear activists encouraged people to think about the international situation.<sup>68</sup> However, as the May 1958 opinion poll and lack of press support for CND's position suggest, unilateral disarmament was not overwhelmingly popular. Much of the popular press treated the unilateralist approach of CND with contempt or downplayed their early activities, but the first Aldermaston march during Easter weekend of April 1958 changed this media outlook.

The first march from London to Aldermaston was the expansion of a march planned by the Direct Action Committee, a pacifist organization linked to the PPU and *Peace News*, but was subsequently dominated by CND.<sup>69</sup> The press could not easily dismiss over ten thousand marchers.<sup>70</sup> Despite not supporting CND's objectives, the *Daily Mirror* congratulated the organization on its principled stand:

The *Mirror* salutes the Aldermaston marchers. Blistered feet and all ...  
Everybody wants to get rid of the bomb. The argument is the best way to do

66 Gallup, *Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, 462.

67 Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London, 2005), 259.

68 Nehring, *Politics*, 183.

69 Holger Nehring, 'The British and West German protests against nuclear weapons and the cultures of the Cold War, 1957–64', *Contemporary British History*, 19 (2005), 230.

70 Jeremy Tranmer, 'Odd bed-fellows: British Christians and communists in the struggle for peace', *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal*, 9 (2011) (<http://lisa.revues.org/416>: accessed 6 Aug. 2014).

it ... This newspaper has made it clear that it thinks the Aldermaston marchers are on the wrong tack.

But at least they UPPED and DID something.<sup>71</sup>

As the newspaper with the largest circulation in Britain at the time, the attention that the *Mirror* gave CND was vital in disseminating its ideas to the wider British population. At the same time, however, the newspaper's staff expressed concerns about the organization. The opinion writer 'Cassandra' expressed unwillingness to embrace unilateral nuclear disarmament, but applauded the marchers:

[T]he fact that hundreds of people, no matter how misguided, are prepared to tramp through the streets and the lanes for four days of acute discomfort shows that the people of this country are deeply uneasy at the nuclear perils that now surround them.<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile, the *Daily Herald* followed a similar line, declaring: 'We may not agree with all they are marching for but at least ... they have acted for their beliefs'.<sup>73</sup> Roy Greenslade suggests that these headline articles angered Labour Party leaders, but that they pleased the 'vast majority' of the *Herald's* readership.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, newspapers engaged with broader anxieties over the threats posed by nuclear proliferation. Moreover, whilst press opposition to nuclear weapons indicated their desire for international agreement, they also suggested that a mass movement against nuclear weapons, rather than simply a pacifist movement, reflected many people's concerns.

CND's emergence coincided with broader anxieties about the nuclear arms race and the increased destructiveness of the new generation of weapons since 1954. The movement rapidly grew beyond its organizers' expectations.<sup>75</sup> Bingham has found that the popular press was often alarmist about the nuclear issue, with newspapers applying labels like the 'horror bomb' to thermonuclear weapons.<sup>76</sup> The emergence of a mass nuclear disarmament movement further demonstrates Bingham's argument that the scale of coverage given to nuclear weapons helped to form opinions about the arms race. By engaging in large-scale evocative protests, such as the Aldermaston march, CND expanded on concerns about nuclear

71 *Daily Mirror*, 8 Apr. 1958, 2.

72 *Daily Mirror*, 7 Apr. 1958, 4.

73 *Daily Herald*, 7 Apr. 1958, 2.

74 Roy Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits from Propaganda* (London, 2003), 113–14.

75 Nehring, *Politics*, 129.

76 Bingham, "'The monster'?", 623.

proliferation, which had begun in the popular press. Whilst the popular and usually Labour-supporting press did not necessarily support CND's aim of unilateral disarmament, it accepted that nuclear weapons were terrifying and that peace must become a political priority. CND's position often followed more widespread concerns and it was able to utilize this popular support for the reduction of nuclear tensions unlike the PPU, which demanded the total renunciation of war.

But other, possibly more conservative, newspapers were less favourable towards CND and reported communist infiltration of the movement. The *Daily Sketch* claimed that the CND leadership was absent from the Aldermaston march and that the rank-and-file protestors were naïve, allowing 'about 2000' communists to take over the march.<sup>77</sup> The politically liberal *News Chronicle's* Frank Barber similarly implied that the Aldermaston marchers were mainly communist, but this sparked a number of letters from readers criticizing the journalist.<sup>78</sup> This press representation contrasted with the government's own intelligence reports which, after careful investigation, concluded in 1959 that 'the communists have not at all penetrated the CND at national level' and that '[t]he Communist Party does not support the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament'.<sup>79</sup>

Some right-wing newspapers were also concerned that the appeal of CND was expanding to non-traditional peace activists, such as the suburban middle class. Writing in the *Daily Mail*, Alan Brien stated that for every communist attending the march, 'there were a hundred respectable private persons from semi-detached houses with tradesmen's entrances who ... wished to show their uneasy concern for tomorrow'.<sup>80</sup> Nehring uses the *Daily Mail's* coverage of the 1958 Aldermaston march to demonstrate the paper's conservative values and 'dislike' of the middle class, which could presumably be interpreted as an anti-intellectual position.<sup>81</sup> But as Judy Giles points out, the *Daily Mail* was also seeking to attract the aspirational middle class, which formed a significant section of its readership.<sup>82</sup> Its coverage might therefore have been reflecting on the similarities between the usual leisure pursuits of

77 *Daily Sketch*, 3 Apr. 1958, 2; 5 Apr. 1958, 1; 7 Apr. 1958, 16.

78 *News Chronicle*, 7 Apr. 1958, 1–5; 5 Apr. 1958, 1–3.

79 TNA FO 371/140482, Foreign Office Minute, 7 April 1959 'Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament'.

80 *Daily Mail*, 7 Apr. 1958, 4.

81 Nehring, *Politics*, 81.

82 Judy Giles, 'Class, gender and domestic consumption in Britain 1920–1950', in Emma Casey and Lydia Martins (eds), *Domestic Cultures of Commercialisation of Everyday Life* (Aldershot, 2007), 20–1.

the middle class and engaging in popular concerns about nuclear weapons. CND aimed to appeal to a cross-class base, but drew much of its support from Britain's aspiring middle classes and echoed the concerns of many 'ordinary' people who made up the readership of newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*.<sup>83</sup> The articles therefore reflected a common concern over nuclear weapons shared by newspaper and readership, rather than a criticism of the campaign's middle-class membership. Street activism and opposition to nuclear arms was not always attacked outright – a testament to how far the British peace movement was interacting with the popular consciousness by the late 1950s.

Whilst some contemporaries were concerned that CND was being infiltrated by communists, scholars investigating the British left have long contended that the CPGB was hostile towards CND because it threatened the BPC's dominance over the peace movement. Since the 1970s, a number of scholars have argued that the CPGB were opposed to CND in its initial years, with Willie Thompson explaining:

In the first place it had seen the new movement as a distraction from what was really important, namely disarmament negotiations between the Great Powers ... The second reason for the party's suspicion was that the Campaign was seen as a potential rival to its own front peace organization, the British Peace Committee ...<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, other scholars have argued that the attitude of the Communist Party towards CND (and the peace movement more generally) was more ambivalent. As Roger Seifert and Tom Sibley have written, the 'main efforts [of the party] were directed toward the peace campaign' in the 1950s, but always on the multilateral platform of banning all nuclear weapons.<sup>85</sup> Richard Taylor has also stated that, 'Contrary to popular opinion both inside and outside CND, the *Daily Worker* had given considerable coverage to Peace Movement activities prior to the formation of CND.'<sup>86</sup>

Throughout the 1950s, the focus of the Party's peace activism was the BPC, with which it encouraged trade unions to affiliate. On paper, the

83 On the class basis of CND's membership, see Frank Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism: The Social Bases of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament* (Manchester, 1968).

84 Thompson, *Good Old Cause*, 116. See also David Widgery, *The Left in Britain* (Harmondsworth, 1976), 106; Nigel Young, *An Infantile Disorder? The Crisis and Decline of the New Left* (London, 1977), 154; Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, 147.

85 Roger Seifert and Tom Sibley, *Revolutionary Communist at Work: A Political Biography of Bert Ramelson* (London, 2012), 47, 56.

86 Richard Taylor, 'The Marxist left and the peace movement in Britain since 1945', in Richard Taylor and Nigel Young (eds), *Campaigns for Peace: British Peace Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 1987), 163.

Party 'pledge[d] its support to the efforts of all peace organizations',<sup>87</sup> but as mentioned above, it was actually quite reluctant to work with other peace organizations, such as the PPU. This did not really present a problem while the BPC was probably the most organized peace group in the country. However, the emergence of CND was a problem that the CPGB had to negotiate.

As Richard Taylor has written, one of the major disagreements between the CPGB and CND was the latter's policy of unilateral disarmament.<sup>88</sup> The Party's Assistant Secretary George Matthews criticized the CND policy of unilateralism for being too 'liberal' and 'defeatist', and argued that 'even if what the unilateralists propose were to become Government policy, it would not solve the problem of the H-bomb, since American and Russian H-bombs would remain'.<sup>89</sup> Instead of focusing on unilateral disarmament, Matthews proposed that the peace movement should concentrate on international disarmament agreements between the superpowers: 'the best way to rally the people to secure the banning of the bomb by Britain and all other countries, is to concentrate on the fight for international agreement'.<sup>90</sup>

The CPGB was also concerned that CND had not integrated itself into the labour movement and risked splitting the peace movement. A draft resolution written by the Communist Party's Political Committee showed that the Party was worried that right-wing elements in the labour movement would manipulate this difference 'to divide the peace forces'.<sup>91</sup> To counter this, the CPGB declared:

Congress therefore appeals to all sections of the peace movement in Britain, unilateralists and non-unilateralists, to unite in a supreme effort to this end. It appeals for the unity of the peace movement and the Labour movement for these aims.<sup>92</sup>

Some Communist Party members questioned whether it was more strategic to get the organized labour movement to agitate for peace, rather than the Party cooperating with peace organizations, particularly as many trade unions were still wary of CND.<sup>93</sup>

The CPGB's Executive Committee commended CND for bringing

87 CP/CENT/PC/03/15, LHASC, John Gollan, 'Notes for report to Executive Committee', 6 Mar. 1958.

88 Taylor, 'The Marxist left', 164.

89 George Matthews, 'Unilateralism and the fight to peace', *World News*, 15 Mar. 1958, 163–5.

90 Matthews, 'Unilateralism', 165.

91 CP/CENT/PC/04/09, LHASC, CPGB Political Committee (PC), 'Draft political resolution', n.d.

92 CP/CENT/PC/04/09, LHASC, CPGB PC, 'Draft political resolution'.

93 CP/CENT/PC/04/10, LHASC, PC, 'Some proposals for pre-congress discussion in *World News*', 29 Jan. 1959; Taylor, 'The Marxist left', 164.

‘many from the professional and middle sections of the population’ into the peace movement, but warned:

Its weakness has been that its leaders have held themselves aloof from the organized Labour movement, have often taken up an ‘anti-political-party’ attitude, have tried to impose bans and proscriptions, and have emphasised the issue of unilateral nuclear disarmament in a way which has tended to divide rather than unite the forces for peace.<sup>94</sup>

The CND’s “‘anti-political-party’ attitude’ which the CPGB found distasteful helped the campaign to gain support. Its ability to steer clear of association with communism allowed it more respectability in British society. The Party, while using supportive language in regard to CND, still believed that the BPC fulfilled a role in the peace movement that no other organization could. The Executive Committee stated:

It is an organization trying to conduct continuous activity for peace, on all the major international issues, and not engaging in only spasmodic campaigning on particular questions [and also] ... recognises the key importance of winning the organized Labour movement into action for peace ...<sup>95</sup>

By mid-1959, antagonism between the CPGB and the TUC increased as it seemed that the latter was looking to support CND, rather than the BPC. The CPGB alleged that the ‘General Council of the TUC and the top leadership of the CND have both advised against support’ for a ‘March for Life’ demonstration organized by the BPC.<sup>96</sup> In July 1959, the CPGB acknowledged the Aldermaston march as one of a number of events that showed ‘the widespread alarm at the nuclear dangers’ amongst the British public, but still supported the ‘March for Life’ demonstration.<sup>97</sup>

Richard Taylor suggests that this antagonism coincided with a change of heart by the CPGB towards unilateralism as the labour movement warmed to CND, which appeared to be building serious opposition to the Labour Party leadership’s position.<sup>98</sup> Taylor quotes George Matthews, who reflected on this tactical shift in 1978:

Around the middle of 1959 we came to the conclusion that whether or not we had been right earlier on about the issue of unilateralism ... the situation had

94 CP/CENT/EC/06/05, LHASC, CPGB Executive Committee (EC), ‘26<sup>th</sup> national congress draft political report’, 14–15 Mar. 1959.

95 CPGB EC, ‘26<sup>th</sup> national congress draft political report’.

96 CP/CENT/PC/04/15, LHASC, PC, untitled document, n.d.

97 CP/CENT/PC/04/16, LHASC, PC, ‘Labour and the bomb’, 11–12 Jul. 1959.

98 Taylor, ‘The Marxist left’, 166.

developed as far as public opinion, and opinion in the Labour Movement, was concerned where the issue was combining the two: that is, calling for Britain to renounce the Bomb as a step to international agreement.<sup>99</sup>

By 1960, the positions of CND and the CPGB had aligned. That year's Aldermaston march was celebrated by the Communist Party press, the *Daily Worker* featuring a sizeable article on 'Why They'll March from Aldermaston'. Although the CPGB had previously agitated for a greater trade union presence within the peace movement, it now applauded the diversity of those marching:

When this Easter the thousands – pretty girls and young men, at once sober and gay, mothers with prams, and fathers piggybacking Joan and John; Labour, Liberal and Communist, Quaker, Jew and Nonconformist, Indian, West Indian and African – make their pilgrimage, it will be not just in protest against the boffins of death at the Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Research establishment.<sup>100</sup>

In the months following the Aldermaston march, the communist journal *Labour Monthly* published two articles by CND representatives, one by Anna Steele (Secretary of CND's London Regional Council) and one by S.R. Broadbridge (Treasurer of CND north-west region), which demonstrated the Party's shift towards openly embracing the Campaign.<sup>101</sup> The article by Broadbridge was important because it tacitly acknowledged the previous disagreement between CND and the CPGB (and the BPC):

Since the foundation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament there have been two organizations working for peace in Britain, with differing policies and appealing to different sections of the public. It has become increasingly clear recently that this benefits none but the opponents of international agreement and that only a united effort can force success in the many negotiations at present in progress.<sup>102</sup>

But the article now commended the united efforts of the two campaign groups, stating 'we are not rivals', although it reminded readers that 'Not all C.N.D. supporters have lost their hesitations over cooperation, [and] not all trade unions have ceased to believe that C.N.D. is a set of middle class cranks.'<sup>103</sup> Long-time Party member Arnold Kettle praised the 'wide and enthusiastic participation of progressive middle-class people, and particularly

99 George Matthews, cited in Taylor, 'The Marxist left', 166.

100 *Daily Worker*, 23 Mar. 1960, 2.

101 Anna Steele, 'Why we are marching', *Labour Monthly*, Apr. 1960, 163–6; S.R. Broadbridge, 'Campaigners – unite!', *Labour Monthly*, May 1960, 224–6.

102 Broadbridge, 'Campaigners', 224.

103 Broadbridge, 'Campaigners', 226.

students and young people, in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Aldermaston marches', but also clarified that these marches were 'not, in any case, demonstrations of class against class', and emphasized that those involved were part of the 'petty-bourgeois Left'.<sup>104</sup>

## Conclusion

Peace campaigners in Britain had long challenged the 'taint' of communism, which had been regularly raised in the popular press and in mainstream politics since the late 1940s. By the early 1960s, however, there was a broad cooperation between communist and non-communist peace campaigners under CND. By this time, as Marc Selverstone has demonstrated, anti-communism in Britain was diminishing somewhat.<sup>105</sup> This lessening of anti-communist furore meant that active participation, although not leadership, by CPGB members was, to an extent, acceptable. The shift in attitudes towards CND by the Communist Party also coincided with a peak in support for participation in CND's large-scale protests but also a change in tactics with the group's increased use of direct action from 1961. Other authors have argued that this amounted to a loss of popular support which was caused by the CPGB's increasing influence over CND.<sup>106</sup> But this does not mean that CND's slump was caused by any virulent anti-communist agenda (although Jodi Burkett has shown that in 1962, CND was still declaring 'we are neither the Conservative Party nor the Communist Party').<sup>107</sup> It is more likely that CND ran out of steam as a pressure group and extra-parliamentary movement, exacerbated by the split of the Committee of 100 over the issue of direct action and CND strategy.<sup>108</sup>

In the early 1950s the peace movement was represented in the mainstream press with a mixture of anti-communist sentiment and disdain. Throughout the decade, coverage changed firstly towards bemusement and then a certain level of acceptance, which helped CND to achieve a higher level of popularity than earlier movements. The aim of total, if not unilateral, nuclear disarmament received tenuous approval in the popular press despite

104 Arnold Kettle, 'How new is the "New Left"?', *Marxism Today*, Oct. 1960, 302–3.

105 Marc Selverstone, *Constructing the Monolith: The United States, Great Britain and International Communism 1945–1950* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 195.

106 See Young, *An Infantile Disorder*, 154–7.

107 Cited in Burkett, *Post-Imperial Britain*, 43.

108 John Minnion and Philip Bolsover, 'Introduction', in John Minnion and Philip Bolsover (eds), *The CND Story* (London, 1983), 22–31.



an undercurrent of suspicion about the perceived influence of intellectuals, communists, and non-conformist clergy within the peace movement. Even though both Labour and Conservative governments tried to manipulate public opinion against the peace movement, the media were, as the 1950s progressed, increasingly less likely to portray it in a wholly negative light. By the late 1950s, when the Aldermaston marches were reported as the 'greatest' mass gatherings 'since VE Day', it became impossible for the press to ignore the popularity of the peace movement, which went beyond the communist-dominated oddities they had depicted earlier in the decade.<sup>109</sup>

Since the late 1940s the British peace movement had been disparaged by claims that it was a front for communist subversion. However, as we have argued, the movement actually worked in parallel to the communist-led BPC and the non-communist PPU (and other groups) for most of the 1950s. From its formation in 1949 until the invention of the H-bomb, the BPC was the most active organization within the peace movement and it was easy for the mainstream press, and the government, to dismiss the entire movement as a communist front, even though the PPU attempted to garner attention for the non-communist sections. Following the testing of H-bombs by the US in 1954, however, nuclear disarmament gained in popularity and the press were divided over whether this hostility to nuclear weapons was still a communist-dominated phenomenon or whether a broader grassroots movement was forming. At the same time, the Communist Party was unwilling to cooperate with some other parts of the peace movement and worked in parallel with other peace campaign groups. By the time of the establishment of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, opposition to nuclear weapons was a persistent and popular narrative and its activist networks were usually clearly outside communist influence – particularly as the CPGB was hesitant to fully support the CND's unilateralism and 'middle class' politics. The irony is that by the time the CPGB warmed to CND, the organization had already reached a mass audience with a message based on cross-class cooperation over concern about thermonuclear war. The CPGB had missed its opportunity to provide leadership to the movement.

Of the non-communist peace organizations, CND was able to succeed while the PPU faltered for several reasons. CND benefited from emerging in the late 1950s, when the intensity of the early Cold War anti-communist narrative had diminished. The PPU had struggled to distance itself from accusations of communism and historical association with appeasement

109 *Daily Mirror*, 19 Apr. 1960, 6.

from the 1930s. Alongside this, CND's message that Britain should provide worldwide leadership by destroying its nuclear arsenal was patriotic, whereas the PPU often denounced the bipolarity of the Cold War.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, CND's objective of nuclear disarmament was much more popular and realistic than the PPU's demand to end all war in any circumstances. Nevertheless, CND did build on the disarmament campaigns of the PPU and the BPC, which predated the thermonuclear era beginning in 1954. CND was able to mobilize a significant section of the British public behind nuclear disarmament.

Overall, CND benefited from emerging in a period of the Cold War when anti-communist sentiment had lessened to a degree (assisted by the rise of the New Left following the events of 1956 and a reassessment by the government of the political 'threat' of the CPGB).<sup>111</sup> This grassroots progressive movement could operate without the automatic 'taint' of communism. Moreover, people were mobilized against the use of nuclear weapons by continuing anxieties amongst many sections of the British population over the potential for thermonuclear war between east and west. CND's position of unilateral disarmament was a simple notion that most peace campaigners could rally behind and proved more realistic than those proposed by the PPU and the BPC. These two organizations had dominated the peace movement in the early 1950s, but by 1960, CND had become its popular face, eclipsing the anti-communist/communist divide which had plagued the movement for the previous decade. This negation made CND the first single-issue mass movement in post-war Britain.<sup>112</sup>

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110 Burkett, *Post-Imperial Britain*, 84–6.

111 See Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London, 2009), 406.

112 See Anthony M. Messina, 'Postwar protest movements in Britain: A challenge to parties', *Review of Politics*, 49.3 (Summer 1987), 420–5.