

(88), the Phillipines (86), and Israel (79)).³ And, for a period of nearly 50 years, Britain has retained and actively enhanced its capacity and readiness to kill millions of civilians through thermonuclear devastation

There can be few national psyches on which the famous words of George Washington from his 1790 State of the Union Address will have a stronger resonance:

"To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."

The military are held in very high esteem, and local regiments are, in some parts of the country, viewed with the kind of proprietorial pride that is accorded to top football or cricket teams, as evidenced by the recent popular outcry when high-profile local regiments were proposed for disbanding or merger (see "Boost for the Black Watch, *The Scotsman*, 10 Nov 2004⁴). This means that an anti-war posture has been, within a UK context, profoundly "counter-culture", and its deepest challenges may not be related to responding to acute political crises as much as they have to do with working year-in-year-out in the face of deeply-embedded cultural and institutional inertia which reinforces centuries-old beliefs about the moral and practical value of British militarism.

In 2003, some 6 months after the start of the Iraq War, one of the authors - a committed anti-war activist - spent three months in Quebec. It was an unexpectedly deep and restorative experience to live in a society where popular instincts appeared non-violent and co-operative. Violent crime is almost unknown in Quebec. The military is almost culturally invisible. Anti-war views and attitudes appeared within the cultural mainstream as a viable, if not universally accepted, norm. At the end of the stay, going back to England genuinely felt like going back to a battle zone, a place where every day was a struggle to maintain integrity, vision, and energy, in the face of what seemed in comparison a suffocatingly militaristic ideological landscape, capable of draining all those energies that had so recently produced the largest peacetime demonstrations in British history (numbers far in excess of anything achieved in Canada). This chapter will examine the principal forms of anti-war activism in Britain in recent decades, contrasting the consistent but small anti-militarist core of the movement, with the periods when there have been mass movements based on a broader coalition united by more limited and specific policy objectives.

2. An account of UK anti-war activism

2.1 Conscientious objection and pacifism

Contemporary anti-war activism has its roots in a long tradition of pacifism and non-violence, whose greatest 20th Century proponent was Gandhi, and whose primary political expression in countries such as Britain has been the refusal to bear arms or be conscripted into military service. Conscientious objectors have often paid a high personal price for their beliefs, facing imprisonment, and, in some societies, the death penalty. However, there has been no military conscription (draft) in the UK since 1956, and therefore tax resistance (withholding that proportion of taxes that a

³ Mack, A. & Nilezen, Z. (Eds.) (2005) *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁴ <http://news.scotsman.com/opinion.cfm?id=1297492004>. Accessed 16 September 2006

government allocates to military spending) has been the only clearly-articulated alternative form of conscientious objection, which so far remains universally criminalised even by the most “advanced” democracies.⁵ However, the number of people willing or able to withhold taxes in a economy where the vast majority of workers have tax deducted by their employers at source, makes this a minority form of activism even within a minority movement. Conscientious objection in all its major forms has been particularly strongly associated with religious groups, notably but not exclusively the Quakers. Socialism as a political force also gave early and consistent support to pacifists.

Very recently, in the light of deeply held views about the illegality of the Iraq war, a small number of serving soldiers have resigned their commissions on grounds of principle⁶ but these actions are based firmly within an acceptance of the necessity of war, and relate to judgements of the illegality of this one. This is not blanket conscientious objection of the traditional type, although may well be, in current contexts, of considerably more political impact.

2.2 *The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)*

A very significant form of anti-war activism, which has at times achieved the status of a mass political movement, is the campaign against nuclear weapons, first developed and deployed by Britain in the 1950s. British civil society was among the first in the world to develop a co-ordinated mass national campaign, and the London-to-Aldermaston marches inaugurated by CND (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) in 1959 became an iconic symbol of lawful civil protest. The basic motivation for protest was, and always has been, the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the wish to play no part in the indiscriminate damage that any use of nuclear weapons would do to people and planet. The core activity for CND was from the start the public meeting and the mass peaceful demonstration, often a march, ending in a rally. This was a form of activism familiar to, and substantially supported by, the British labour movement, but capable of attracting wider constituencies, including scientists, academic, artists and musicians, and religious groups. The strong support of Labour Party rank-and-file as well as considerable numbers of MPs, and Labour-controlled local authorities in the 1980s, meant that anti-nuclear activism entered the political mainstream, and was pursued with the full-range of party political activities, although it has been a consistent feature of British politics that senior Labour MPs tend to abandon their anti-nuclear convictions on entry into government.

Although the great majority of activists in the anti-nuclear movement remained committed to actions within the law, a significant minority engaged in law breaking through forms of civil disobedience and non-violent direct action (NVDA) such as sit-ins and blockades. These grew as a proportion of peace movement activity in the early 1980s (Rochon 1990: 109) The most significant manifestations of NVDA have been actions at military establishments where nuclear weapons are developed or housed, or where key control systems are operated. These include “breaking and entering” and

⁵ <http://www.conscienceonline.org.uk/Pages/subSections/homePages/whatIsPeaceTax.html>, accessed September 15 2006.

⁶ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/03/12/nsas112.xml&sSheet=/news/2006/03/12/ixhome.html>), accessed September 16 2006

symbolic acts of damage to nuclear delivery systems. NVDA has also extended to factories where military components are manufactured (e.g. Rolls Royce), and also to nuclear power plants, in recognition that such plants are essential for the manufacture of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. NVDA has consistently involved establishment figures whose abhorrence of war has prompted them to undertake actions that have led to their arrest. Britain's most eminent 20th Century philosopher, Bertrand Russell, was arrested in 1961. Since 2000 members of both the Scottish and European parliaments have been arrested for participation in blockades of the Faslane naval base, home of the British Trident nuclear submarines. Prison sentences have, by and large been short and symbolic, but it is still of note that significant numbers of activists have multiple arrests and sentences for very similar actions, often spread over many years.

For instance, Lindis Percy, co-founder of the Campaign for Accountability of American Bases, has been arrested more than 150 times, mainly in connection with acts of protest at or near Menwith Hill, Yorkshire, the US-controlled NSA monitoring centre, which is the world's biggest spying centre outside the USA.⁷

The most notable manifestation of the NVDA-wing of the UK anti-war movement of the 1980s was the formation and long-term maintenance of several peace camps, mostly notably the women's camps surrounding the Greenham Common Air Base, where American nuclear-powered cruise missiles were sited from 1983 to 1991, but also the mixed camp at the Faslane nuclear submarine base in Scotland, which is still in existence. In many cases activists lived in the camps continuously - in conditions of considerable privation - for months on end, leaving jobs and family behind. The feminism of the Greenham camps has been a particularly powerful framework in which anti-war activities have been developed, with non-violence at their core (Roseneil 1995; 2000).

The cruise missile crisis sparked a massive increase in CND membership at a time when a former Catholic priest and serving soldier, Bruce Kent, was its general secretary. Kent became an iconic figure of international stature, possibly the first "superstar" of the movement, with his charismatic rhetoric and skill in handling the media. Kent is not a pacifist, and has gone on record as supporting war under certain circumstances (such as the war against Hitler). CND's high-point was October 1983 when it held its largest ever London rally (400,000). In 1985, national membership passed 100,000 (Hudson, 2005), while the overlapping membership of local groups was around 250,000 (Byrne 1997: 89). CND became of such concern to the government of Margaret Thatcher that she set up well-funded units to monitor and undermine CND by a variety of means, both fair and foul, including the irresponsible but widely believed allegation that the movement was funded by the KGB (Kent, 1992). The British establishment promoted the false popular belief that anti-war activists were dominated by communists and appeasers, who, if not malicious traitors, were at best "misguided".

⁷ (*Peace protester appeals as judge makes tagging order*
http://www.thisisbradford.co.uk/bradford_district/otley/news/OTLE_NEWS3.html
19 May 2005)

2.3 *Academic and NGO activity*

Although individual academics, scientists and intellectuals have been active in the anti-war movement, it was not until the 1970s that organisations began to develop to bring intellectuals together to study and promote non-violent conflict resolution. A key milestone was the foundation of the first Peace Studies programme within a British university, at Bradford in 1973 (O'Connell & Whitby, 2001). Although not engaging in direct activism, its programmes have now informed and empowered students from all over the world, many of whom have gone on to become change agents in various walks of life. In the wake of this an increasing number of peace-oriented think-tanks and NGOs have been formed, and these have often been articulate critics of government military policy while refraining from direct oppositional campaigning. A small number of people have been able to gain paid employment in these organisations (funded by trusts and foundations, by membership subscriptions, and latterly even by government), creating a new species of "paid peaceworker". In general, however, employment in the sector is both poorly paid and insecure (Perks, 2005). The development of an NGO sector also brings with it the internal tensions experienced by the "aid and development" sector (cf recent debates about "Live 8" and Jubilee 2000), where influence with governments is often bought at the price of critical independence. This means that a significant sector of the peace movement remains ideologically opposed to the professionalisation of peace activism.

The development of an NGO peace and security sector has also led to the phenomenon of peace activists and researchers visiting countries where wars were being fought, such as Operation Omega when peace activists went to what later became Bangladesh the International Solidarity movement in the Palestinian occupied territories groups such as Peace Brigades International and the Human Shield volunteers who went to Iraq before the invasion in 2003, on whom more below. All these groups exploited the greater attention paid to Westerners prepared to place themselves at risk in solidarity with people in the South who were vulnerable to military violence. In cases where British activists went to countries where Britain has intervened, in a variety of roles, issues about how to relate to UK military and political representatives (on whom one often has to depend, at least in part, for security and access) have raised new dilemmas. These were strikingly illustrated through the kidnapping of peace activist Norman Kember in late 2005 by Iraqis who he was aiming to support, and his ultimate release by the British military forces whose actions he went to Iraq to oppose. Kember's actions, culminating in his alleged refusal to express sufficient gratitude to his rescuers, has led to censure, even from elements of the peace movement.

2.4 *The Falklands War*

Because the Wilson government declined to accede to US requests to send troops to Vietnam, the 1960s and 1970s were decades where the British anti-war movement concentrated on hypothetical nuclear war more than actual conventional war. The Falklands/Malvinas conflict of 1982 offered a chance for the anti-war activists to respond to a real war fought by British troops. Despite strong editorial opposition to the war from the *Daily Mirror*, and a few high-profile dissident MPs (notably the maverick Scottish Labour MP, Tam Dalyell), several factors hindered a strong anti-war campaign:

- (1) The Argentine invasion came, with almost no notice, on 2nd April. 10 weeks later, on June 14th the war ended with the official surrender of the Argentinian forces. There was little time to mount or build new forms of protest before the war ended.
- (2) The intense and organised focus of the UK peace movement at that time was on the Cruise missile protests, which were numerous and well-organised.
- (3) Some anti-nuclear campaigners supported the Falklands War, or were, at best neutral – believing that the movement should remain concentrated on nuclear issues, and not get diverted by ‘side issues’ (as evidenced by the correspondence columns of “*Sanity*”, the house magazine of CND- see letter by Norman Liverwich and others⁸).
- (4) Despite more than a thousand military casualties there were, amazingly, no civilian casualties. Setting aside reservations about whether war had been necessary to achieve desired political ends, the war itself was conducted entirely within the letter and spirit of international law.

The Falklands war did, however, sow one very profound seed. During the 1983 election campaign, Margaret Thatcher was confronted on the BBC television programme *Nationwide* by Diana Gould of Cheltenham over her role in the sinking of the Argentinian battle ship *General Belgrano*, allegedly set on a course away from, rather than towards, the conflict zone. This confrontation, one of the most remembered and replayed of the entire political debate over the Falklands, has become an iconic symbol of citizens using the media to “speak truth to power” without deference or equivocation.

2. 4 *The Decline of the 1980s Peace Movement*

In the early 1980s the peace movement had a major impact on British politics. Its actions, leaders and the issues it raised received extensive media coverage and it was arguably the major issue in the 1983 General Election which the Labour Party fought on a platform of support for British nuclear disarmament. Yet, Labour performed very badly in that election and this also revealed some of the limits of the movement’s achievements. Polls consistently showed that only between 20 and thirty per cent of the public supported CND’s main aim, which was unilateral British nuclear disarmament.

The peace movement of the 1980s was part of a wider West European reaction against the increase in tension between the USA and the USSR in what was known as the Second Cold War. The first wave of peace activism in several European countries and the USA in the late 1950s and early 1960s died out because the two superpowers seemed to have developed negotiated means of balancing the deterrent effects of nuclear weapons. The era of détente ended effectively in 1979 when NATO decided to station intermediate range US Cruise and Pershing missiles in Western Europe, ostensibly to counter the threat posed by similar range Soviet missiles. Political leaders in Western Europe favoured deployment because it seemed to guarantee that the USA would use its missiles to deter an attack on Western Europe. Others,

⁸ *Sanity*, June-July 1982, no.3, p 4

however, were concerned that this signalled a new NATO strategy based on fighting a nuclear war in Western Europe. It was this specific development that led to the unprecedented levels of peace activism across Western Europe in the early 1980s. The peace movement was unable to prevent the deployment of Cruise and Pershing missiles in 1983 but it put the issue at the centre of the political stage and was able to sustain its activity enough to keep it there. The crucial change came with the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev to power in the USSR in 1986. Gorbachev accepted a 1983 NATO proposal which effectively withdrew all SS20 and Cruise and Pershing missiles from Europe.

Although both NATO leaders and the peace movement claimed credit for this disarmament, neither was wholly responsible. Gorbachev had decided in effect to withdraw from the arms race in part to reduce the pressure on the Soviet economy. NATO argued that it had kept the pressure on the USSR and so forced it to breaking point. The peace movement saw in Gorbachev's espousal of a doctrine of nuclear sufficiency an adoption of some of the ideas of its own strategic research (Carter 1992). There is some evidence to support the latter view, but it was essentially Gorbachev's own strategic vision and courage that achieved the breakthrough on disarmament. His opening up of the Soviet political system and economy and refusal to suppress political change in Eastern Europe led in the end to the collapse of the system that Gorbachev had intended to reform.

Just as the NATO alliance floundered for lack of a clear role after the collapse of the Soviet Union, so did an anti-war movement premised on opposition to those same NATO Cold War policies. With the removal of Cruise missiles from Europe after the INF agreement in 1987 the main focus of the movement disappeared, most of the peace camps, including in 2000 those at Greenham, disbanded, and the UK anti-war movement lost its high profile. Many put their faith in the promised "peace dividend" that was predicted to flow from the end of the Cold War.

Table 1. National CND Membership:

Year	Members	Year	Members
<u>1970</u>	2120	<u>1986</u>	84000
<u>1971</u>	2047	<u>1987</u>	75000
<u>1972</u>	2389	<u>1988</u>	72000
<u>1973</u>	2367	<u>1989</u>	62000
<u>1974</u>	2350	<u>1990</u>	62000
<u>1975</u>	2536	<u>1991</u>	60000
<u>1976</u>	3220	<u>1992</u>	57000
<u>1977</u>	4287	<u>1993</u>	52000
<u>1978</u>	3220	<u>1994</u>	47000
<u>1979</u>	4287	<u>1995</u>	47700
<u>1980</u>	9000	2006	32000
<u>1981</u>	20000		
<u>1982</u>	50000		
<u>1983</u>	75000		
<u>1984</u>	100000		
<u>1985</u>	92000		

Sources: (Byrne 1997: 91) *The Guardian* July 28 2006.

Peace activism certainly went into sharp decline in the late 1980s, but most of the core activists failed to recognise this (Maguire, D. 1992). Many sought to link peace activism to new goals, for example by making the links between the arms trade and instability in the global South under the slogan of “Food not Bombs”. This process of frame alignment made sense to peace activists, committed as they were to an internationalist agenda of social justice, but failed to mobilise the same level of support from other political groups. Membership of CND remained reasonably high (see table 1), probably because the nuclear threat had not disappeared, but the wider peace movement infrastructure of local CND groups, peace camps and other peace organisations withered. The CND groups that remained active locally were dominated by longstanding activists of retirement age.

The 1980s peace movement did not decline as much as the movement had in the 1960s and 1970s. After the mid-1960s there was very little left of the British peace movement. It was essentially the pacifist Quakers and the anti-NATO Communist Party of Great Britain that kept CND alive as an organisation in those decades (Byrne 1997). The 1980s movement had involved more people and a wider range of groups in society and this had a legacy. Organisationally groups such as CND held onto substantial numbers of members, albeit largely passive ‘chequebook activists’ and other organisations such as the Campaign Against the Arms Trade were also able to continue. Many local authorities remained ‘Nuclear Free Zones’ and some trade unions continued to support the campaign. The NVDA wing of the movement also had a significant legacy. Groups such as the Ploughshares activists⁹ continued to take action against nuclear bases and arms manufacturers.

As well as these a new young generation of activists emerged in the early 1990s whose main focus was direct action on environmental issues, particularly protests against new roads. But, although this meant the focus was no longer on peace issues, this was not a movement in competition with the peace movement. The new generation of activists benefited from advice from 1980s peace campaigners on direct action and establishing protest camps and new and older activists took joint action against arms manufacturers (notably at the DSEI exhibitions in London in 2001 and subsequent years) and in protest against British foreign policy. Both groups shared a worldview that Roseneil summarises with reference to the precursors of Greenham Common as ‘a legacy of anti-establishment attitudes, a strong strand of anarchist hostility to hierarchies, a critique of the materialism of industrial societies and of representative forms of democracy and the state, and a belief in the legitimacy and necessity of non-parliamentary forms of action.’ (Roseneil 2000: 95). This counter-cultural current remains a small, but due to the willingness to take direct action, an important part of the British anti-war movement.

2.5 The Kosovo/Serbia war

It was arguably the series of joint UK/US military interventions beginning with the 1999 NATO bombing of Kosovo/Serbia which re-ignited and refocused the movement. The 1999 war differed in almost every respect from the Falklands war, in

⁹ www.tridentploughshares.org

ways which were enabling for a refocusing of the movement. Key enabling factors were:

- (1) The war was illegal. All parties, even proponents of the war, accepted that it was not legitimate under international law, and could not have obtained UN Security Council approval.¹⁰
- (2) The war was a violation of NATO's purely defensive posture. No NATO member was being attacked, or was in imminent prospect of being attacked.
- (3) It was the first post-soviet-era war involving UK military where there were significant civilian casualties on the ground (as well as damage to infrastructure, unexploded ordnance and long-term radiation damage from depleted uranium), but almost no coalition military casualties. New moral and humanitarian issues were raised about a war where the military forces of the aggressor risked little (by exclusive reliance on air-strikes) and the civilian population of aggressor nations risked nothing (because of geographical distance and the incapacity of the Serbian military to threaten them)
- (4) The war brought no quick end to violent conflict involving military and paramilitary forces, and left many intractable political problems unresolved. Violent conflict, resulting in death and displacement of civilians, persisted for many years after the "war" was declared over. There was much for activists to engage with on a long-term basis.
- (5) The war was very much a personal "mission" of Tony Blair soon after a landslide electoral victory, and was tied to an explicit philosophy of "humanitarian intervention" in which it was assumed that Britain would act alongside the USA (Sloboda and Abbott, 2004). As well as gaining majority support from the UK electorate and the Conservative Party, he also gained the overwhelming support of the Parliamentary Labour Party, and significant support from the Liberal Democrats. Given all that, it was almost inevitable that he would look to take Britain into future wars on a similar prospectus. The UK anti-war movement knew it had a long-term mission again, one which also meant, for many seasoned Labour Party supporters, a fight for the soul of the Labour party and the survival of a viable British left.
- (6) There was a significant population of British Serbs, who vocally mobilised within British Society against the war. This set a precedent for seasoned anti-war activists taking common cause with diasporas of the countries under threat of attack, mainly people that had no prior history of engagement with anti-war issues, a precedent which was to be of vital importance after 9-11.

One key consequence of the Kosovo/Serbia war was the strengthening of two other strands of activism, which came neither from CND roots, or from pacifist / NVDA roots (of the sort epitomised by the longstanding publication *Peace News*). The first was an alliance of the disenfranchised political left (fronted by "dissenting" Labour

¹⁰ [The UK **Foreign Affairs Select Committee** Report on **Kosovo** (2000), <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmfaaff/28/2802.htm>]

MPs such as Tony Benn, Alice Mahon and Jeremy Corbyn) together with Serbian émigrés, regional activists, lawyers and humanitarian workers. The second, most curiously of all, was drawn from elements of the libertarian right, particularly strong in the USA, driven in part by opposition to anything that Clinton and his political twin across the Atlantic, Blair, stood for, and a more principled distaste for interventionist foreign policy (for instance, the right-wing Washington think-tank, the Cato Institute, published some of the most trenchant critiques of the Kosovo Intervention (Carpenter, 2000)). Although this alliance was sometimes uneasy, it was less straightforward for Government or populist media to typecast this movement, and it arguably opened up a new arena for anti-war activism, which was not rooted in traditional anti-nuclear networks¹¹ and forms of engagement.

A core focus of the movement was the “Committee for Peace in the Balkans”, led by Alice Mahon MP, which was able to focus in particular on post-war tracking of the complex mix of political and humanitarian dilemmas that the war failed to resolve. Campaigning materials between 1999 and 2001 show significant focus on civilian casualties (including memorial activities), depleted uranium used by NATO forces, refugees, effects of sanctions, and other threats to ordinary people in the region.¹²

2.6 The War on Terror

Then came 9-11. One of the most extraordinary consequences of this was the speed and multifaceted nature of a civil society response, based on profound fears of what the USA might do in reaction to the 9-11 attacks. Within days, a whole range of anti-war letters, petitions, caucuses had formed, enabled by the new societal familiarity with the internet. Soon, millions of people were networking worldwide in a plethora of dialogues about how to prevent the gathering rush to war.

In the UK a range of individuals and organisations (representing mainly the political left) rapidly came together to form a new organisation, the “Stop the War Coalition” (STWC). It was formed at a notoriously fraught meeting on 21st September attended by 2,000 people, 10 days after 9-11, but which succeeded in electing a steering committee and agreeing a basic shared 3-point platform which proved effective in holding the coalition together (“Stop the War: Defend Civil Liberties: End the Racist Backlash”). By as early as November 2001, the Stop the War website was listing 92 separate anti-war events taking place across the country on the first weekend of November alone. The organisational capacity and leadership of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) played a central role in this development, which created some tensions between STWC and the traditional peace movement, represented by CND. These tensions were contained if not resolved, and a key turning point for the British anti-war movement was the entrance of British Muslims into the STWC. Although the first activists were politically radical and not representative of the Muslim mainstream, this changed quite quickly. In Spring 2002, the Muslim Association of Britain became a leading partner in the coalition, and by the time of the build-up to the Iraq War, all anti-war events, marches, and

¹¹ Benn and Corbyn had been longstanding supporters of CND but this was not their principal political identity and as leading left-wing Labour MPs they had strong ties with many other groups on the British Left.

¹² See, for instance: <http://www.balkanpeace.org/events/index.shtml> .

demonstrations, were characterised by a new representation from all sectors of British Muslim life including Muslim women and youth in unprecedented numbers (Murray and German, 2005).

The charting and understanding of the specific psychological factors at play within the contemporary Muslim anti-war movement is not yet well developed. However, the conflicts of dual identity are bound to be central. On the one hand, British Muslims are British citizens, thus at some level identified with the acts of the British Government. On the other hand British Muslims have shared identity (based on race, nationality and religion) with those against whom Britain is acting in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq. The latter identification (first a Muslim, second British) may dominate in motivations for protest. The almost complete absence of British Serbs from active participation in anti-war activism post 9-11 suggests a similar motivational orientation for their engagement (Serbian nationalism is infected with strong anti-Muslim sentiments). And of course, those who oppose the Western alliance's actions in Muslim countries include the radical minority that engages in, or supports, political violence – something which is anathema to the traditional peace movement, built as it is on a foundation of non-violence.

2.7 *The Iraq War*

Whilst bringing together new constituencies in new alliances, the organisational strategy of STWC was traditional and recognisable to activists, and based itself - like CND - on marches, rallies, vigils and other symbolic protests, within the law, including both large national events in capitals, and smaller regional and local events all over the country. Indeed, many of the key events were jointly sponsored by STWC and CND. This led to the largest UK rally in peacetime history, in London on February 15th 2003, weeks before the start of the Iraq War, and in which up to 2 million people participated. There were simultaneous co-ordinated events in many countries round the world, and the event received considerable attention from social scientists, including a group that surveyed participants in seven different countries¹³

But traditional mass-protest was not by any means “the only game in town”. One of the most remarkable, if controversial manifestations of the anti-war impetus of early 2003 was the mobilisation of a group of volunteers prepared to go to Iraq and act as human shields. The term “human shield” has more commonly been used to describe the tactics of military powers, who force civilians to remain close to potential enemy targets in order to deter the enemy from attacking them. International Law deems the use of involuntary human shields as a war crime.¹⁴

However, the human shields of 2003 were civilian volunteers (mainly citizens of the countries of the coalition being mustered to invade Iraq, including several British people) who freely chose to go to Iraq in order to place themselves under coalition bombs. The principal aim was to deter a military attack on Iraq. In this they were not successful, mainly because there were too few of them, but those 70 or so who

¹³ <http://nicomedia.math.upatras.gr/conf/CAWM2003/Papers/Verhulst.pdf>. Accessed on 16 September 2006

¹⁴ (*Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*, August 12, 1949, 6 U.S.T. 3516, 75 U.N.T.S. 287, art. 28).

remained in Iraq during the invasion were situated at key infrastructure installations (e.g. power plants, water purification plants), chosen because many of these installations had been illegally bombed by the USA and Britain during the 1991 Gulf War. None of these installations were bombed by the coalition while the human shields remained there (Simonowitz 2003).

The heroism of the human shields is without doubt. Deliberately putting one's life at risk to protect the lives of innocent others is an act of immense moral courage and intrinsic virtue. Whether or not such action achieves its ultimate goal, its impact on global consciousness is immense. However, much mainstream coverage of the Iraq human shields was astonishingly negative, and focused on highlighting personal shortcomings of the leadership of the movement, gloating in the difficulties experienced by the volunteers, and casting slurs on their motivations.¹⁵

Also noteworthy were the unprecedented multiple acts of symbolic protest that occurred on the day that war broke out (20th March 2003). Thousands of school students boycotted their classes and joined spontaneous and planned protests around the country, which included road-blocks in city centres. Many employees also left the workplace for a variety of acts of protest. In our workplace, a university campus, protesters left their desks, went to their cars, and sounded their horns continuously for 5 minutes, at midday. Nothing like this had occurred before in living memory.

2.8 *Post-invasion activism*

Although UK civil society has seen no further mass demonstrations on the scale of February 15th 2003, the UK has witnessed a range of post-invasion civil society initiatives and projects motivated by opposition to (and growing revulsion with) the ongoing UK military presence in Iraq, where violence continues to claim at least 40 lives per day at the time of writing (Chamberlain 2006)

These initiatives include, for instance, various legal challenges to actions of British military personnel in Iraq, a campaign mounted primarily by widows and mothers of British soldiers killed in Iraq (Military Families Against the War¹⁶), campaigns documenting and publicising ongoing civilian deaths in Iraq (e.g. the Iraq Body Count Project¹⁷), campaigns against torture, illegal detainment, and rendition of prisoners (specifically focused in the UK on the alleged involvement or complicity of the UK government in these actions – e.g. *Below the radar: secret flights to torture and disappearance*.¹⁸ These, and many other “niche” projects, are supported by key mainstream press and media (notably the “Independent” newspaper), as well as by opposition political parties. However, the number of activists involved in any one activity tends to be small (sometimes pitifully small) and there is no uniting philosophy or charismatic leader.

¹⁵ See for instance: Saddam's Idiots. Jonah Goldberg. Townhall.com. January 10th 2003. http://www.townhall.com/columnists/JonahGoldberg/2003/01/10/saddams_idiots
Accessed on 16 September 2006

¹⁶ <http://www.mfaw.org.uk/>

¹⁷ www.iraqbodycount.org,

¹⁸ Amnesty International. 5th April 2006.

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR510512006?open&of=ENG-USA>

A large minority of the Labour Party (both within and outside parliament) has been remained opposed to the government's Iraq policies ever since March 2003, and the most iconic symbol of such dissent (and of the inept government response) came during the 2005 Annual Conference of the Labour Party when an 82-year-old lifelong party member (and anti-war activist) was assaulted by conference stewards and expelled from the conference hall under Anti-terrorism legislation for shouting "nonsense" during a speech of Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. This was one of many signals of an increasingly anti-democratic political party doing all in its power to stifle legitimate dissent within its own ranks. No strong or confident party would ever treat its own senior members so shabbily. But, despite the manifest weakness of Blair's Iraq policy, no credible opposition has been mounted from the other two major political parties in parliament, or from Labour rebels in parliament. In many ways, parliament and parliamentarians have ceased to function as a watchdog on government in this respect, and the damage done to public confidence in the parliamentary system in enormous and possibly irreversible (Beetham (2003), *The Power Enquiry* (2006)).

Three years after the invasion of 2003, Iraq is more unstable than it has ever been, and the USA and the UK have together created the one thing they most feared – a weak and failing state which is a recruiter and exporter of international terrorism - when none was based there before. As a result, the UK has now to deal with an entirely new form of domestic terrorism, manifested in the actions of the four UK citizens who took their own lives and that of 53 others on July 7th 2005. Abortive copycat attempts followed, and more can be expected.

Despite 7/7, or perhaps partly because of it, opposition to the UK presence in Iraq has increased steadily among the UK population as a whole. A Yougov poll reported on 3rd April 2006 showed that 57% of respondents believed that Britain was mistaken to invade Iraq, and that 55% of respondents wanted Britain to withdraw its troops now, or within the next 12 months, without conditions. These are larger percentages against the government than at any time since the invasion. Similar levels of opposition to government policy are found in the USA.¹⁹

And yet, at the time of writing, there are few indications of a change of heart in government thinking. Robust assertions of the need to "stay the course" remain the prevailing mantra. In a speech delivered to the Australian Parliament on 27th March 2006, Tony Blair said "This is not a time to walk away, this is a time for the courage to see it through"²⁰

3. Conclusions

Anti-war activity since 1945 has gone through three major phases, each characterised by a high level of protest and impact on public consciousness and debate, followed by a rapid decline. After 1964 the peace movement almost disappeared after failing to

¹⁹ Time to pull out of Iraq, voters tell Blair. Anton La Guardia. Telegraph. 3rd April 2006. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/04/03/wirg03.xml&sSheet=/news/2006/04/03/ixnewstop.html>)

²⁰ <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/foreignaffairs/story/0,,1740545,00.html> .

maintain the support of the Labour Party for unilateral British nuclear disarmament. In the 1980s CND and a wider peace movement re-emerged from obscurity to become a major political force but was unable to achieve significant changes in policy and declined after the 1987 INF agreement. The “New World Order” of US-led interventions sparked the largest protest in British history in 2003 but this still failed to prevent the UK from joining the US-led coalition in the invasion of Iraq. Since then peace anti-war activity has continued but at a much reduced level.

We examine the psychological dimensions of different phases of UK anti-war movement activity in the next chapter, but before doing so it is important to summarise some of the consistent aspects of anti-war activity in the UK.

As we noted at the outset anti-war activity in Britain has to struggle against a cultural and historical attachment to the military as a significant source of national pride. This is not unique to Britain, but it is exacerbated by Britain’s imperial past and the fact that its wars have been fought overseas. The peace movement itself has been accused at times of sharing in some of these imperial perspectives. James Hinton (1988) argues that at times the commitment of CND to the importance of Britain taking a moral lead and setting an example to the rest of the world through unilateral disarmament was a case in point. In practice the anti-war element of these three successive mobilisations has been only a minority part of the larger movement. A majority of the UK population opposed the deployment of Cruise and Pershing, but only at most 30% favoured British nuclear disarmament and even fewer withdrawal from NATO (Rochon 1990, Carter 1992). CND and other European peace movements became less far-reaching in their aims as they drew in more established political allies and so the anti-war and peace culture aims of the movement receded. In the 1980s Byrne (1997) estimates that only just under half of CND’s membership was pacifist in orientation. CND combines its opposition to weapons of mass destruction with a commitment to general disarmament but that has always been seen as a long-term goal. In each era when the movement has grown larger it has been because a particular policy or issue provided the opportunity for a broader alliance, going beyond the anti-militarist core. It is misleading therefore to see in the mass mobilisations support for the most radical goals of the movement.

The movement has also differed on tactics. In the 1980s there were tensions between the NVDA wing of the movement in which over half the actions were by women’s peace groups, inspired by Greenham, and the wider movement over the effectiveness of disruptive and symbolic NVDA as opposed to more conventional tactics such as peace petitions, mass demonstrations and winning the support of political parties, trade unions and professional groups. The NVDA wings of the movement have seen the emphasis on large-scale demonstrations as likely to produce diminishing returns. The media has shown itself less and less likely to report subsequent demonstrations in a campaign, even when these have been sizeable. On the other hand, while NVDA groups have often gained media coverage out of all proportion to their size, this has often been hostile. In 1980 for instance, 41% of people polled did not know that there were nuclear weapons in Britain but in 1983 only 4% of those polled were unaware of the Greenham Common peace camp (Rochon 1990). Yet, while they knew about Greenham, it is hard to know what they thought of it. The media coverage of Greenham focused increasingly negatively on the details of the feminist community’s lifestyle and said less and less about their ideas. A similar process occurred in

coverage of direct action in the 1990s. Thus it is difficult to communicate a vision of an alternative society through the media lens, which is how most people see direct action protests.

CND generally avoided making strategic choices that would alienate one or other wing of the movement. Thus, it remained committed to unilateral nuclear disarmament, withdrawal from NATO and support for NVDA, even though these were all rejected by a public that did support the short-term goal of opposing the deployment of Cruise and Pershing. CND was controlled by its members and dependent upon a wider and largely autonomous movement of local groups over which it had no practical control. It was therefore not in a position to narrow its strategy without splitting the movement. A similar broad-church alliance, perhaps even broader, characterised the anti-war movement in the 2000s.

There is then a tension between the social movement politics of those who live activist lives directed a deep and long-term social changes and the broader mobilisation on specific crises and policies. As Rochon says: 'To the extent that a movement attempts to achieve specific policy goals, its broader aspect of cultural criticism and transformation is necessarily subordinated.' (1990: 118). This does not mean that either the long-term project of building a peace culture or the short-term policy goals of broad alliances are both doomed, but it does mean that they cannot always be pursued effectively simultaneously in the same groups.

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