

After Hiroshima Background Research by Gemma Organ

Daily Express (August 6, 1945): “The bomb that has changed the world” headline. Described as “the most fearful device of war yet produced” and how the bomb was used as “a last warning” against the Imperial Japanese Army in their continued involvement in war against the Allies. The bomb proved efficient as a weapon as conventional invasion of Japan was believed to have caused huge casualties of the Allies.

Statistics: 60-80,000 killed instantly; total death toll around 135,000. Between 1955 and 1962, between 19%-33% of Britons expressed disapproval of the manufacture of nuclear weapons (W.P. Snyder, *The Politics of British Defence Policy, 1945-1962* [1964])

Background: In August 1945, the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb, years ahead of Western intelligence predictions. This led to a superpower race between the Soviet Union, the US and, eventually, Britain and France to develop thermonuclear weapons, with the US testing the H-bomb for the first time in 1952. There was a persistent fear in Europe over the US being a deterrent to Soviet attack; whereby Britain tested the bomb in 1952 (which was seen as a symbol of the loss of a Great Power status) and in 1960 in France (which became a symbol of revitalised French independence). Despite talks in 1960 of a ‘missile gap’ in US presidential election campaigns, the US still had a lead of 4:1 in intercontinental ballistic missiles and a 3:1 in long-range bombers. [Tom Buchanan, *Europe’s Troubled Peace 1945-2000*]

Women: Feminists formed the backbone of the Peace Movement in Britain from the 1950s and involved in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Women’s League for Peace and Freedom and anti-Vietnam War protests.

Feminist peace campaigner, Rebecca Johnson, explains that anti-militant feminism was prominent – military and patriarchal structure are inherently entwined, military power could not exist without the continued notion of patriarchy and women needed to question and overthrow this perception to create a new reality of peace and equality.

Women felt that by endorsing the patriarchal society, and continuing to abide by stereotypical and narrow gender constructs of “femininity” and their expected role within the idyllic nuclear family, they were only empowering men, the military and the violent oppression and war.

With the impact of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, many women gave birth to what was described as the ‘atomic generation’ – total fragility and concern of nuclear devastation which produced a revolt against traditional values.

Aldermaston Marches: were anti-nuclear weapons demonstrations in the 1950s and 1960s at the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston. At the height of the early 1960s, they attracted tens of thousands of supporters. The first Aldermaston march was at Easter (4-7 April) 1958 and was organised by the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War (DAC) and supported by the recently formed CND. Members included: Hugh Brock, Pat Arrowsmith, Michael Randle (DAC), Frank Allaun (MP), Walter Wolfgang (MP) from the Labour H-Bomb Campaign. Several thousand marched to the Atomic Weapons Establishment from Trafalgar Square in opposition to the development, deployment and use of nuclear weapons. (NB: The initial march was in 1952, led by 35 people, including Hugh Brock, as part of ‘Operation Gandhi’). From 1959, an annual Easter march from Aldermaston

to London was organised by the CND, whereby reversing the direction of the march, they distinguished their campaign directed at local nuclear bases and the seat of power. The marches generally garnered few disturbances and were non-violent; involving people from all backgrounds, including trade unions, local government and students. In 1963, the last Aldermaston March took place; the same year that the international test ban was signed (partially banning nuclear tests).

BBC report of Aldermaston (18 April 1960): Thousands protest the H-Bomb. Aldermaston “Ban the Bomb” march gathered at least 60,000 protesters at Trafalgar Square, with crowds reported to number around 100,000 – making it one of the largest demonstrations in the twentieth century in London until then.

Music: Was a significant part of the Aldermaston marches, which symbolised a difference in attitude between CND leaders, who wanted to march in silence, and the youth (led by Pat Carty, the first ‘Youth’ Secretary of CND) who wanted to sign and play guitars. The unofficial peace version of the British National Anthem as written in 1958 by Henry Young for the first Aldermaston march.

Songs associated with CND and Aldermaston included (& were released on EP):

John Brunner – The H-Bomb’s Thunder (unofficial anthem of the CND)

Brother, Won’t You Join The Line? (McColl and Keir, 1958)

The Crooked Cross (McColl and Seeger, 1960)

Strontium 90 (Dallas, 1959)

Hey, Little Man (Dallas, 1959)

Doomsday Blues (Dallas, 1959)

The Ballad of The Five Fingers (McColl, 1959)

There Are Better Things To Do (Seeger, 1958)

The H-Bomb’s Thunder (Brunner, 1958)

Song of Hiroshima (Kinoshita)

The Bomb Has Got To Go (McColl and Seeger, 1959)

Labour Party: Labour MP, Michael Foot, spoke out against the bomb and said nuclear weapons threatened the existence of democracies around the globe through decisions made by military advisors – described the Aldermaston March as a democratic protest against “military dictatorship”.

BRADFORD PEACE ARCHIVES

Songs for the March For Life Against Nuclear Death

28 June 1959, song sheet containing songs on Hiroshima, peace, unity of people to create inspiration and vigour amongst the protests.

Produced by the magazine *SING* for the March for Life, and includes a drawing of a dove for peace.

Songs included: The H-Bomb’s Thunder (words by John Brunner, to the tune of Miners’ Lifeguard), The Family of Man (words and music by Fred Dallas), March for Life (words by Fred Dallas, to the tune of Far Away), ‘negro spirituals’ such as Hoist the Window and When the Saints Go Marching In.

“Death stands at attention: A Protest Against the H Bomb Tests” – Harold Davis, Labour MP
Pamphlet written and published in April 1957 (London) – written on the cusp of Britain’s own plans to explode an H-Bomb on Christmas Island, tries to encourage people to join

together to prevent it from happening. The image of 'Death' and a nuclear bomb explosion – abrasive imagery to incur fear of the danger and lethality of nuclear weapons

The 1956 Annual Conference of the Labour Party showed opposition to nuclear testing, due to fears of the danger to humanity through the radioactive contamination of the world's atmosphere, with hopes to work towards "the abolition of all atomic weapons"

Uses powerful language to convey the urgency of the danger to human life: "The powers are poisoning the world!" and "This is not diplomacy. This is just sheer silliness." He states that the Soviet government are prepared to stop test explosions of British and US governments do the same, so he implores the reader that it is the duty of mankind to take the initiative to stop the "barbarism" of testing.

Davis states: "The world is watching with apprehension" over the possibilities of a new type of war that uses atomic and hydrogen weapons, which were considerably more destructive than the bombs used on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, as tactical warfare. Within hours, a nuclear war could bring all civilised society to an end and if Europe were to be involved, the results would be devastating.

"Gradually the conspiracy of silence about the monstrous destructive powers of the A- and H- bomb is being broken" – Davis continues to refer to the media silence and political denunciations of the dangers of nuclear weapons. He claims newspapers "demanding the truth" include The Observer, Times, Manchester Guardian, News Chronicle, Daily Herald, Daily Mirror, Sunday Pictorial → public attention increasingly focusing on mass effects of H-Bomb explosions. He presents the notion that it is illogical to continue believing that such nuclear weapons are safe.

Environmental/health factors:

Davis claims that since July 1945, there have been 80 nuclear explosions/tests across the world. If testing of nuclear weapons were to continue, he claims the high levels of poisonous radiation would be a threat to mankind. He provides examples of scientific evidence to undermine the general consensus among politicians and scientists that the rate of radioactivity from nuclear testing is low and safe, by indicating the correlations between nuclear radiation and human health.

Examples:

- The radiation from explosions, for example uranium and plutonium, has high biological effects and are believed to have causes higher cases of bone cancer
- Indicates concern that radioactive substances pollute space, soil, air and water currents, which then spread to animal and plant life and on to humans
- Radioactive substances cause mutations in cells, which can be passed on genetically to later generations. Although one may be unaware of the damage initially, children may be born disabled (blind, deaf, etc)
- Research in Japan during the atomic bomb tests in Spring 1955 demonstrate a tenfold increase of radioactivity in the surrounding areas
- *Science* magazine (April 20, 1956) – Libby from the U.S.A Atomic Energy Commission states that if nuclear testing continues, radioactive clouds would grow and standards of safety would be breached
- *The Observer* (March 17, 1957) – John Davy states that every bomb causes damage and causes cancer and genetic changes that would affect descendants – "any

conscientious doctor would have to advise the human race: Don't indulge in ANY nuclear or thermo-nuclear tests if you can avoid it"

- H-Bomb testing near Marshall Islands, 1954 – the population “suffered from the emanation of these radioactive materials” – showing physical symptoms and contamination of fish/pollution of water.

The back of the pamphlet provides methods for the reader to raise the matter personally – through local MP, writing to the Press, raising the issue to local organisations, distributing his pamphlet and organising local meetings

“Scrap all the H bombs” – John Strachey, Labour MP

Pamphlet written April 1958 (London); Strachey was a leading spokesman on Army Matters for opposition in the House of Commons

Labour Party policy is to scrap all H- and A-Bombs, so no country has an advantage over the other – “That is the only way to peace”. At the Annual Conference of the Labour Party in 1957, this comes from the fears of potential nuclear war and pollution; they want British government to pursue a policy of conciliation with other powers and “lay the foundations of a lasting world peace” where the stockpiling of nuclear weapons and continued testing would only be an obstacle to international agreement

“Women Ask Why” – An Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Nuclear Disarmament

Iris Murdoch – “Morality and the bomb”

Supports the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, as the notion of nuclear war is monstrous and arming the country with nuclear weapons is not preventing it. However, she claims by maintaining a staunch stance on unilateral disarmament is too simple as it would be unrealistic to ask the countries to all scrap their weaponry. She claims the nature of war has changed. In order to make an impact, one must express issues of morality into political arguments through the dissemination of information about what nuclear weapons involve – Britain should take the initiative and make decisive actions in their own nuclear disarmament.

Annie McLaren – “Genetic effects of radiation”

Discusses the genetic effects of nuclear radiation on later generations, using evidence from Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors – she states a Canadian study (1948-58) showed an increase of infant mortality and malformations

Jacquetta Hawkes, “The way out”

The term ‘pacifist’ coined only in 1905, so she believes peace is hopeful. She states that long-scale war would be unthinkable due to a moral and psychological standpoint that war would be seen as a ‘mutation’ of human error, in the same way that slavery, cannibalism and the death penalty are shunned in modern society today. Warfare could soon be a thing of the past, as moral revulsions changes conduct. She asks who should save the future: “Why should it not be women?” As men’s instincts are to fight and create war, women should come into their own and prevent it from happening. Also states the younger generation have a deep reaction against war, and are much more independent, educated and confident in speaking against warfare.

Jacquetta Priestley (formerly Hawkes)

In 1958, a series of letters was written by Jacquetta Hawkes to women across the country asking them to join a woman's committee in support of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Whether she received positive or negative responses, there was a general consensus of support and admiration for her involvement and encouragement for women to be involved in the political debate. Some women express outrage and regret at the dropping of the atomic bomb of Hiroshima and find it difficult to accept or justify the actions.

A woman named Enid Starkie responds to Jacquetta Priestley on 17 May 1958: "I have never been able to find any justification for its having been dropped, and I do not think that I ever shall. I know all the arguments about the possible saving of American lives, but do not consider them valid. I naturally would be glad if it became possible to ban atomic war, the use of the atomic or hydrogen bombs." – but argues that the campaign for nuclear disarmament may not be the best choice, because Britain would be left in a vulnerable position to attack if they were the only country without nuclear arms. She states that the possession of nuclear arms might prevent their ever being used, and that disarmament might make it certain they would be used – "What is pretty certain is that, if the Japanese had possessed atomic bombs, Hiroshima and Nagasaki would not have suffered destruction by these bombs. The Americans would not have run the risk of retaliation."

A woman, Ashley _____, responds to Jacquetta Priestley invitation to join the all-women's meeting for the committee: "I thoroughly approve of women as women constituting themselves a power for good and in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Women's are Nature's Conservators, and the sooner they realise that men are not, and why they were not, the more clearly they may come to understand the pressing importance of their undertaking what men have so far notably failed to undertake, namely the task of ensuring perpetual peace. I feel rather strongly that this is likely to be woman's greatest achievement in the not too distant future. Hence, you may readily understand how much I approve your all-Woman meeting.

An unmarked letter, potentially by Jacquetta Priestley: June 27 1958, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is holding a meeting to be attended exclusively by women. "A high proportion of women are strong supporters of the Campaign, and we feel this will give them a very unusual and effective way of expressing their convictions from their own particular points of view." Plan to have a group of distinguished women on the platform, including actresses, including Dame Peggy Ashcroft.

Women's Caravan of Peace, 13 May 1958

NB: In 1958, a group of women formed an international committee to organise a women's caravan of peace which would travel by road from west to east to break through the barrier of the cold war. No organisation would give official support and all those involved took part as individuals and at their own expense. No other such journey has been undertaken before or since.

Letter written by peace campaigner and feminist, Dora Russell – The Women's Caravan of Peace is a further effort in the protest of the people against nuclear weapons and war with plans to visit nearly all European countries on May 27. "The need for peace and security for their families is one of the deepest feelings of all women..." – the 3 month journey would be undertaken by a group of women, ages ranging from 20s and 70s, and of all backgrounds. Four of them are Aldermaston marchers, who will carry news of the demonstration to the British public, and the travellers will be supported by women across the countries. Messages

of support also come from the US, Canada and Australia as a “very fine gesture of goodwill”. At St Paul’s Cathedral on May 24 1958, a service will be held for the Caravan by Canon Collins where the public can give their encouragement and support. [NB. John Collins was active in several radical political movements in the UK and was one of the founders of the CND).