

Hearts and minds: The propaganda war over the British nuclear
deterrent, 1957-1963

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ABSTRACT

The main subject of this thesis is Britain's independent nuclear deterrent between the years 1957 and 1963 and the propaganda surrounding it. The thesis examines both the promotion of the nuclear deterrent by the Conservative governments led by Harold Macmillan in this time period, and the presentation of the case from the main opposition movement in this field, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).

Three research questions are posed which add new thinking, using primary archive material to illustrate the arguments. First, what was the significance of the role of Charles Hill as the government's information co-ordinator? The thesis focuses on how Hill introduced a professional approach to government propaganda management and communicated the case for the nuclear deterrent to the press, public, academics and scientists. Second, how did the changing media and communications environment of the period shape the propaganda war, such as the emergence of television as the most popular mass medium? The BBC faced twin challenges from commercial television, and its own broadcasters wanting to scrutinise government policies such as the deterrent. Newspapers with huge circulations, which largely supported the nuclear deterrent, experienced commercial pressures to entertain which influenced their choice of what was newsworthy. Third, what were the challenges to CND in making its case, both from a hostile media and internal weaknesses? CND harnessed the talents of radical designers to make a powerful appeal for public sympathy on moral grounds,

and successfully discredited the official case for civil nuclear defence. But it never resolved an internal debate about how to gain media attention. The thesis situates its argument in the ‘cultural turn’ that has recently developed in British Cold War historiography, namely the emphasis on the impact of the Cold War on the everyday lives of citizens, as opposed to a previous focus on high-level strategic and diplomatic policy. The thesis also analyses for the first time how documentary film was produced by CND and the government as an important propaganda tool. The research shows how secrecy and denying a platform to alternative views was a feature of the official handling of nuclear deterrent policy. Two case studies, on Civil Defence and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, examine the effectiveness of propaganda strategies in this debate.

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Chapter 1 – Research questions and literature review

Research questions

Several research questions are posed in this thesis. First, how did the Macmillan governments between 1957 and 1963 develop their propaganda for the nuclear deterrent and what publicity formats did they use? We shall see that the governments were responding to increasing public concern and the question is asked about the significance of the appointment of Charles Hill as information co-ordinator. Second, how did rapid changes in media production and consumption impact on the deterrent debate? The rise of television and commercial pressure on newspapers to gain a mass audience should have provided opportunities for the anti-nuclear case, but it will be shown that these were restricted by outdated broadcasting rules and hostility to the alternative message. Third, what were the challenges to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in presenting its moral case for unilateral nuclear disarmament, and how much was the weakness of its own communication strategy a factor in the failure to win over a majority of the public?

In addressing these issues the thesis draws on scholarly work that has been done on Cold War culture in Britain as well as the concept of a nuclear culture. It situates the argument in the ‘cultural turn’ that has developed in British Cold War historiography, namely the emphasis on the impact of the Cold War on the everyday lives of citizens, as opposed to a previous emphasis on high-level strategic and diplomatic policy. The battle for the hearts and minds of the public was seen by both the government and CND as crucial to winning the

argument over the nuclear deterrent policy. The context of previous work in this field will be set out more fully in later sections on historiography and methodology.

In this thesis the term propaganda has been chosen rather than ‘communication’ or ‘information’ in order to reflect the intent to persuade as adopted by Taylor and Vaughan.¹ It is also important to note Risso’s related argument that Western democracies fostered the illusion of open debate during the Cold War, in order to compare themselves favourably with the Soviet Union and state-run bureaucracies which allegedly carried out objectionable propaganda. This thesis is evidence that British governments were quite prepared to manipulate opinion to suit their policy ends.²

The time period chosen

The period between 1957 to 1963 was chosen for this thesis as it conveniently covers an intensive propaganda debate in Britain over the nuclear deterrent. The 1957 Defence White Paper marked cutbacks in conventional forces at the same time as Macmillan attempted to re-assert Britain’s standing in the world after the Suez crisis through a greater

¹ Propaganda is variously described by Philip M. Taylor as the deliberate attempt to persuade the public to think and behave in a desired way, and by James R. Vaughan as covering the range of techniques by which governments seek to influence public opinion for the benefit of their wider national objectives. As opposed to communication, propaganda implies the intent to persuade and, as Taylor argues ‘propaganda uses communication to convey a message, an idea, or an ideology that is designed to serve the self-interests of the person or persons doing the communicating.’ Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: War Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Nuclear Age* (Patrick Stephens, 1990), pp. 11-12; James R. Vaughan, *The Failure of American and British Propaganda in the Arab Middle East 1945-1957: Unconquerable Minds* (Palgrave, 2005), p. 3.

² Linda Risso, *Propaganda and Intelligence in the Cold War: The NATO Information Service* (Routledge, 2011). Risso says NATO documents argue that Communists were carrying out ‘propaganda activities’ against NATO and the West whereas the western alliance was ‘informing’ the public or ‘enlightening public opinion.’ She adds (p.7) : ‘However, closer inspection reveals that the methods and techniques used by the two sides were similar and that the lexical differences were primarily due to the negative connotations associated with the term “propaganda”.’

reliance on the nuclear deterrent. Charles Hill and Harold Evans, Macmillan's Chief Press Officer, were at the centre of government in this period and it will be shown later that as propaganda experts they were given full access to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. This enabled them to have an insight into official thinking and to promote simplified and co-ordinated messaging on defence policy, including the nuclear issue. As indicated already, this was also a period when politicians had to adjust to greater accountability through scrutiny by television, which was the most innovative development in popular culture since the hegemony that radio enjoyed during and after the Second World War. The period also mirrors the formation of a mass anti-nuclear weapons movement in CND, and the high point of its propaganda in countering the official narrative that a British nuclear deterrent was necessary to defend the nation. It will be argued that during these years, CND achieved considerable success in moving the government and public opinion towards its position in several key areas, such as a genuine commitment to halt atmospheric nuclear tests, a scepticism about the effectiveness of Civil Defence, and a greater fear of nuclear proliferation. But it failed to undermine public confidence in a strong defence which the government was able to embody in the nuclear deterrent. The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963 mark a convenient endpoint to the time period as they saw a tapering off of CND influence.

Research contribution

This thesis intends to be a contribution towards modern Cold War Studies and to provide originality and insight into how nuclear deterrent decisions were made and the impact of those decisions on British people between 1957 and 1963. The thesis follows on

from the work of Jonathan Hogg, Matthew Grant and Christopher Hill who have developed a body of fruitful research in this field. One original contribution of the thesis is a new focus on the role of Charles Hill as information co-ordinator in the governments of Harold Macmillan. Hill was brought in to manage information flow and to enhance propaganda. Together with Harold Evans, Macmillan's head of press, Hill's appointment marked the rise of propagandists in government who enjoyed influence at the heart of national politics.

Another original feature of the thesis is to use an oral history approach in order to show the way that Britain's possession of nuclear weapons had a direct bearing on people's everyday lives and experiences. Young people in particular responded to the nuclear threat with anxiety about the future of life itself. A section in Chapter 6 on the Cuban Missile Crisis examines forms of young people and student protest, which included their action on the streets and school strikes. However, it also led to them using private forums like diaries to express an emotional agony about how the future could be taken away from them by a nuclear war involving Britain.

A third contribution to existing research is an analysis of how the deterrent debate took place during a period that saw complex changes to media production and consumption. The 'visual politics' brought about by the rise of television in this period and pressure from broadcasters to scrutinise nuclear policy clashed with traditional BBC principles of balance and impartiality. Examples from the press are provided to show how newspapers placed a greater premium on personalities and entertainment, which tended to overshadow CND's campaign to challenge the official nuclear narrative. While CND harnessed the skills of radical designers to make a powerful and direct appeal to the public on moral grounds, it never resolved an internal debate on how to gain media attention.

A further original approach is a detailed analysis of documentary film as produced by both the government and CND to advance their propaganda strategies. There has been little study until now of the different commissioning film environments that existed between 1957 and 1963. The iconic 1959 documentary *March to Aldermaston*, with its quiet tone of moral outrage and produced by volunteers was used to motivate CND activists at meetings around the country. In contrast the government used state resources to hire a private company to make a series of public information films designed to offer reassurance that preparations could be made for an enemy nuclear attack.

Lastly, the thesis builds on the work of other scholars in using official government archives to detail a pattern of suppressing or controlling discussion of the nuclear deterrent. Work by Lorna Arnold, Matthew Grant and others is designed to show how an official narrative of identity and superiority associated with the deterrent was developed. The thesis provides examples of the government closing down debate both among its own ranks, such as preventing Lord Hailsham stage a Parliamentary debate on nuclear fallout, and stopping opponents like CND obtaining publicly available Civil Defence materials. One example of the government attempting to manage the deterrent argument and deflect criticism was Macmillan agreeing to meet a group of CND women in 1962 in order to persuade them of the deterrent case. The thesis explores how women had genuine fears about nuclear weapons testing, and the effects of radiation on children both born and unborn.

Historiography

This section sets out the scholarly context in which the research has been carried out, firstly as to how it directly adds to the most recent work of historians in this field, then secondly how it builds on the approach to cultural Cold War studies undertaken in the two decades since 2000. The appointment of Charles Hill as Macmillan's information co-ordinator and, in essence, head of propaganda, has been undervalued by recent historians. Yet his reorganisation of the PR machinery of government and his plain-speaking briefings on the nuclear deterrent played a significant part in setting the tone and content of official nuclear policy. At the same time these measures were also a clear response to a rising tide of public anxiety on the nuclear arms race. This theme follows the work of Christopher Hill in his 2018 work *Peace and Power in Cold War Britain*, in which he argued that changes in the media including television offered opportunities for critical anti-nuclear voices but that the state succeeded in denying them space to argue their case. Charles Hill's strengthening of the government's PR function and rebuttal strategy, as well as allocating extra resources into the Parliamentary Lobby of journalists, increased the power of official propaganda and left less room via the media for alternative views which were more critical of the deterrent.³

Another section of the thesis that builds on recent work has a focus on young people as one particular group that reacted to the threat of nuclear war with a distinctive emotional protest. School and college students were seemingly fired with a desire to show their anger at a potential waste of human life. They did this by the traditional methods of street protest but also in private diaries and in school strikes which involved a degree of bravery in defying the educational authorities. This personal focus is in line with recent scholarship on nuclear culture such as the 2019 special issue of *Contemporary British History*. Hogg and Brown introduce six articles with the main themes of localised history around the physical

³ Christopher R. Hill, *Peace and Power in Cold War Britain: Media, Movements and Democracy, c.1945-68* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

mobilisation of Cold War nuclear projects, and the personal voices of communities and particular groups. The authors in the special issue identify and develop work to ‘refine and deepen focus on the social experience of nuclearisation.’ To achieve this they say that the six articles use under-utilised archives alongside oral histories and social memory to reveal subjective understandings of the nuclear age.⁴ Another recent example of this approach is Grant in his 2019 *Social History* article on narratives of voluntary civil defence in which he examines the specific Cold War experience of volunteers.⁵ This section also draws on Christopher Andrew’s paper *Remembering the Cuban Missile Crisis*, which argued that recording memories of both adults and children who lived through the crisis helps fill some of the gaps in official archives.⁶

As Hogg and Brown argue, the growth of cultural Cold War studies in the 1990’s and 2000s led to historians focussing on cultural production which reinforced or resisted dominant policies. This was partly a reaction against previous research on the Cold War which tended to focus - on the military and strategic struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States and took as its subject the post-1945 conflict leading to the fall of Communism in 1989. Examples are Gaddis in his work *The Cold War* and, in the British context, Clark in his study on the nuclear deterrent and the Anglo-American special relationship.⁷ Since 2000, a number of historians have sought to complement this geopolitical approach by assessing the impact of the Cold War on the lives of ordinary citizens. The associated ‘cultural turn’ in scholarship has emphasised that the Cold War had an enormous

⁴ Jonathan Hogg and Kate Brown, ‘Introduction: social and cultural histories of British nuclear mobilisation since 1945’, *Contemporary British History*, Vol.-33, No. 2, 2019 pp. 161-169.

⁵ Matthew Grant, ‘Making sense of nuclear war: narratives of voluntary civil defence and the memory of Britain’s Cold War,’ *Social History*, Vol. 44, No.-2, 2019, pp. 229-254.

⁶ Christopher Andrew, ‘Remembering the Cuban missile crisis: Memoirs, oral history and lieux de memoire,’ in David Gioe, Len Scott and Christopher Andrew (eds.), *An International History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, (Routledge, 2015), pp. 9-24.

⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (Allen Lane, 2006); Ian Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy and the Special Relationship: Britain’s Deterrent and America 1957-1962* (Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 15-16.

psychological impact on millions of citizens ranging in a nuclear context from the fears they held about the future to their views on physical protection from an atomic attack. It is necessary to briefly outline the overall development of this scholarly thinking. Caute's seminal book *The Dancer Defects* was already arguing in 2003 that the Cold War was a conflict waged on the ideological and cultural front as much as the political and military front. There were bitterly contested areas of cultural achievement between East and West, he posited, on a scale without historical precedent, spanning painting, theatre, ballet and even chess.⁸

This approach was developed further in a specifically British context by several scholars soon afterwards, for instance in a 2005 special issue of *Contemporary British History* looking at British Cold War culture.⁹ This issue argued that Cold War history had been excessively concerned with high politics, diplomacy and military affairs, producing an approach that elevated privileged political elites over the role played by ordinary people. Shaw and others proposed examining the 'everyday history' of the Cold War using state as well as non-state sources. Crucially, they wanted to establish domestic British society and its cultural components as a field of study in its own right. Culture was defined broadly, covering everything from education and propaganda to sport and the arts. In this way the scholars hoped to uncover the 'general mentalities' and values that underpinned Britain's take on the Cold War.¹⁰

Grant focused on the nuclear dimensions of this theme and related them specifically to people's experience of civil defence in the context of the increasing threat of a nuclear war. In his 2009 book *After the Bomb* he showed that while CND had been successful in

⁸ David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford, 2003).

⁹ Tony Shaw, 'Introduction to special issue on 'Britain and the Cultural Cold War'', *Contemporary British History*, , Vol. 19, No. 2, June 2005, pp. 109-115.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

undermining the argument that Britain could survive a nuclear attack, it was nevertheless important for the government to maintain a minimum level of civil defence. This was because Macmillan and his ministers saw it as a vital element of ensuring public support for wider Cold War policies like the deterrent. The government's propaganda gave the impression that volunteering for civil defence was seen as a patriotic duty and had echoes of the 'Blitz spirit' of the Second World War.¹¹ Grant's work links to this thesis by showing how government policy was to maintain support for its nuclear deterrent and oppose disarmament at all costs. .

Jonathan Hogg and Christopher Laucht further opened up the debate about the British people's attitudes towards nuclear matters in their 2012 special issue of *The British Journal for the History of Science*, which explored the concept of a singularly British nuclear culture. Hogg and Laucht argued that nuclear culture reflected profound psychological, spiritual and social change and that more research was needed to develop aspects of this nuclear culture, using a cross-disciplinary approach.¹² Two individual essays in that issue raised related questions of cultural production. Jeff Hughes identified increasing numbers of studies around the theme of popular nuclear culture, covering areas such as print and broadcast media or advertising, but was concerned that the form of production itself could shape people's idea of citizenship and identity rather than only reflecting them.¹³ Adrian Bingham in an analysis of nuclear weapons coverage in the British popular press, argued that the sheer volume of newspaper output helped shape attitudes towards the nuclear deterrent. Bingham argued that most of the press including both Conservative and Labour-supporting newspapers tended to support the government's policy of having an independent nuclear deterrent. His caveat was

¹¹ Matthew Grant, *After the Bomb: Civil Defence and Nuclear War in Britain 1945-68* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹² Jonathan Hogg and Christopher Laucht, 'Introduction to special issue on ' British Nuclear Culture', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, Vol. 45, Part 4, December 2012, pp 479-669.

¹³ Jeff Hughes, 'What is British nuclear culture? Understanding Uranium 235', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, Vol. 45, Part 4, December 2012 pp. 495-518.

that there were individual journalists willing to criticise that policy, and the competence of governments and the military.¹⁴

In 2016, Hogg brought together several of these themes around culture and nuclear issues and attempted to synthesise them in a much fuller way, in his work *British Nuclear Culture: Official and Unofficial Narratives in the Long 20th Century*. Hogg argued that responses to nuclear technology had to be acknowledged as a central part of how everyday life in the Cold War is understood. The notion of deterrence was loaded with meaning, in other words, and the logic of nuclear deterrence depended on the public's acceptance that the nuclear threat was permanent. Hogg made a distinction between official and unofficial narratives, and argued that official histories of Cold War Britain had tended to support the idea of the deterrent but that these were increasingly being challenged by Grant and Hennessy, amongst others, who had investigated government records to lay bare official decision-making. Hogg advanced the argument that the government intentionally developed an official narrative to justify possessing a nuclear deterrent and that this narrative 'encapsulated a complex theme of national identity, prestige, duty, technological superiority and paternal responsibility.' He analysed how this narrative was reflected in newspaper coverage and also how CND attempted to combat the official line by trying to educate the public on the dangers of nuclear war.¹⁵

Finally, in a more recent study referred to earlier, Christopher Hill explored the way middle-class protest movements such as CND saw television and other media forms as a way of challenging the state monopoly of information. These movements saw it as potentially a

¹⁴ Adrian Bingham, 'The Monster? The British Popular Press and Nuclear Culture, 1945-1960s' *The British Journal for the History of Science*, Vol. 45, Part 4, December 2012, pp. 609-624.

¹⁵ Jonathan Hogg, *British Nuclear Culture: Official and Unofficial Narratives in the Long 20th Century* (Bloomsbury, 2016).

new source of democratic participation but Hill believes that the state wanted to deny CND a platform. One way to do that was to restrict the independence of the news media as a forum in which the anti-nuclear cause could gain expression. Here, Hill is on similar terrain as Hogg in analysing unofficial narratives, such as anti-nuclear marches and demonstrations which were in turn mediated by news coverage. He argued that CND tried to become more sophisticated in its media policy by publishing a regular newspaper called *Sanity*, to encourage what he called 'an alternative dynamic' with broadcasters and the press which was not wholly reliant on arguments about unilateral nuclear disarmament.¹⁶

This thesis builds on the work of Grant, Hogg and Hill who in their different ways provided insight into official policy on matters related to nuclear weapons. They have opened up a fruitful area of debate on how far the government sought to deal with public concern in an era dominated by the threat of nuclear war. This concern took several forms, such as lack of faith in civil defence, fear of living in a perpetual nuclear culture and challenges to state monopoly of information. The thesis draws on these scholars to explore how the government was determined to maintain a nuclear deterrent using the propaganda tools at its disposal, in the face of systematic opposition from CND.

Methodology

The thesis does not rely on one research tool to make its arguments. It draws on newspapers, government records and memoirs, but also on the added value that an oral history approach can bring to historical research. This has recently been demonstrated by

¹⁶ Hill, *Peace and Power in Cold War Britain*, p. 174.

Jessica Douthwaite in an article exploring the testimonies of civil defence volunteers, where she argues that a more nuanced history of Britain's Cold War must include a greater focus on individuals.¹⁷ The volunteers described in detail to her aspects of their nuclear training during the 1950s but also their ambiguous feelings about preparation for a nuclear war and the Cold War context of the time. Participants did not passively internalise official versions of nuclear planning and often rationalised their role by accepting that a 'deferred' nuclear war was unimaginable and would never happen. The 'Blitz spirit' of the Second World War was invoked by some recruits to refer to a stoic way of coping with the possibility of nuclear war. Douthwaite believes that the oral history approach can uncover hidden mentalities of people's lived experiences and is a valuable research tool. She quotes Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson favourably to argue that oral memory can reveal how myths are embedded in real experience.¹⁸ In the case of civil defence the British state was dependent on nuclear myths to sustain its policy. On the one hand politicians argued that there was no real defence against the nuclear bomb due to its terrifying results and that deterrence was the only answer, while still maintaining a minimum level of civil defence to reassure the population. Douthwaite shows how this ambiguity and contradiction was reflected in the views of civil defence recruits.

This thesis recognises the validity of Douthwaite's argument and employs elements of oral history in two ways. The first is in the form of face to face interviews with a number of people who give an insight into specific periods of the narrative and who serve to strengthen the main themes where there was a lack of official documentation. One example is Ernest Rodker, who was able to comment on his personal memories of working with CND's radical designers when they were producing propaganda materials which contributed a distinctive

¹⁷ Jessica Douthwaite, '... What in the hell's this?' Rehearsing nuclear war in Britain's Civil Defence Corps, *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2019, pp. 187-207.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4; R. Samuel, and P. Thompson, (eds.), *The Myths We Live By*, (Routledge, 1990), p. 6.

look and feel to the unilateralist campaign. Another interview is with film-maker David Cobham who directed several public information films promoting civil defence under commission from the government. These recollections have to be seen in the context of individuals looking back 60 years and remembering in different circumstances – Rodker being face to face and Cobham via telephone. Douthwaite refers to these necessary caveats when considering oral history evidence. For example, she interviewed Matilda aged 101 and comments that ‘Matilda’s interview must be considered, therefore, in the context of her age, the development of our relationship, and the specific interview environment; in many ways, it was similar to a reminiscence session.’¹⁹

The second use of oral history in this thesis is to reflect the personal experiences of young people and students as they went through the Cuban Missile Crisis. The individual diaries and memories of that period convey anxiety and anger that are not found in other source material and are therefore a valuable addition to what we know of the time. Penny Cloutte’s account of the Midhurst school strike brings together the public and private side of involvement in the crisis. While not tested in the way of face to face interviews these written stories do give a unique flavour of what it was like to be affected at the time.

National newspapers provided invaluable source material for the thesis, although there was no attempt to provide an overall survey of the British press and its views on the nuclear deterrent, as that would have been one-dimensional and limited in its insight. The aim was to draw on a selection of mainstream newspapers for two reasons. The first was to illustrate particular arguments around propaganda strategies. For example, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* were chosen as newspapers reflecting differing political standpoints, in order to analyse their coverage of the arrival in 1958 of Thor nuclear missiles from the US.

¹⁹ Douthwaite, p. 202.

The *Daily Telegraph*'s treatment of CND was analysed in detail to illustrate the difficulties that CND faced in receiving a fair hearing of its unilateralist case. The other aim of quoting press coverage was to understand how newspapers arrived at their editorial positions, in other words to get behind the headlines. Examples of this were the internal debates in *The Times* between the editor and his staff on the British nuclear deterrent, and the aim of the *Guardian*'s editor to promote his solution to the arms race in the editorial columns of his own newspaper, namely the idea of a non-nuclear club.

Thesis structure

The scope of this thesis is to argue that the government was prepared to use all the propaganda tools at its disposal to defend the policy of an independent nuclear deterrent. The five chapters following this introduction show how the government dealt with the press and public relations, television, documentary film and printed publicity to further the message that the deterrent protected Britain. They also explain how CND developed its counter propaganda, and the problems it faced in gaining a hearing from the public.

The thesis opens by examining the role of the press as an important influence on the public's views and the attempt by the government to control the terms of the nuclear deterrent debate. This topic has been chosen taking into account the huge circulations of national newspapers at that time, and the resources employed by the government to improve its propaganda machine and in particular, invest more in areas such as the Parliamentary Lobby of journalists. Chapter 2 examines the interaction between mass circulation newspapers, a government PR drive to promote the nuclear deterrent, and the resulting effect on public

opinion. It details how the press, which could shape the views of millions of people, supported with a few exceptions the need for the deterrent and the accompanying view of Britain as a world power, despite the Suez fiasco. Macmillan attached great importance to the reorganisation of the government's communications structure and the role of propagandists Charles Hill and Harold Evans. The chapter argues that the public as consumers of print media were not passive recipients, however, and forced the nuclear threat issue up the political agenda. But evidence is provided of CND's inability to convert this anxiety into a viable press relations strategy.

Chapter 3 focuses on the obstacles placed in the way of those seeking to provide public scrutiny of the deterrent strategy. It provides detailed evidence of the range of methods used by the government to minimise opposition and control the debate, both externally and within its own ranks, around nuclear deterrent policy. It is clear from four examples that the propaganda battle for the hearts and minds of the public was of the highest concern to Macmillan and his Cabinet. The draconian use of D Notices to restrict press coverage of American Thor nuclear missiles sited in Britain, and of the *Spies for Peace* pamphlet, revealed the government's sensitivity over its claim to be an independent world power.

Chapter 4 then goes on to highlight the emerging influence of television, and specifically how the BBC as the major public service broadcaster handled a sensitive issue such as nuclear war. The chapter details the profound impact that television had on political discourse over the nuclear deterrent, personalising politics in a visual sense and forcing politicians to be more directly accountable to the public. It shows that the BBC faced challenges from commercial television companies and also from its own broadcasters, who wanted to break free of longstanding inhibitions on scrutinising sensitive topics like the threat of a nuclear attack on Britain. The government tried to exert political pressure on the BBC to promote its arguments and limit criticism of the deterrent.

The next two chapters use the specific issues of civil defence and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 to assess the relative effectiveness of the propaganda strategies of the government and CND. Chapter 5 examines how propaganda formats such as posters, leaflets and film were employed to win over the public to the value of civil defence as protection in the event of nuclear war. The government's tone was often defensive given the success of CND in undermining civil defence as an essential support to the nuclear deterrent. Delay and confusion around producing updated official guidance on how to prepare for a nuclear attack are outlined, as is the role of documentary film, which was seen as providing reassurance for the government but moral anger for the opposition.

The government appeared to be a bystander during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Chapter 6 argues that it was unable to communicate a credible independent message, despite having the nuclear deterrent. However, CND also failed to take advantage of the crisis in the nuclear arms race to argue for its unilateral disarmament approach. Equally significant was that the crisis was the first televised world event, and watching the world on the edge of war seemed to increase a sense of powerlessness among the public. This was compounded by official secrecy in Britain, with the press and public not told anything about British nuclear bombers being placed on a high state of readiness at the time. A concluding Chapter 7 summarises five original contributions of this thesis and suggests how the research could stimulate further work in a few selected areas.

Chapter 2 – The press and government public relations

Introduction

Newspapers carry news reports and opinion columns which are read daily or weekly by millions of people. In propaganda terms these can be highly influential in forming or confirming the public's views. This makes it important to examine their role between 1957 and 1963 in the nuclear weapons debate. The support from the majority of the British press for the nuclear deterrent was a significant factor, although it can be argued that it did not reflect the complexity of views in the population, including those opposed to the policy. This chapter will examine in detail four areas where propaganda had an important influence on the nuclear debate.

The first was a concentration of press ownership in a few hands, which had the effect of downplaying alternative views to the status quo. These individuals running newspaper groups and their editors were immensely powerful and were courted by leading politicians. At the same time the rise of television presented a serious challenge to their hegemony as the major communications medium. The government realised that while harnessing the power of television, it had to be careful not to alienate its long-standing relationships with the press. Second was a belief among most newspaper proprietors and editors that despite the Suez debacle, Britain was still a 'great' world power that deserved a place at the top table of nations. This chimed with the Conservatives' adoption of its own nuclear weapons as central to Britain's defence. One exception was *The Times*, and a case study looks at internal staff

debate which came to a different conclusion. Third was the advent of a reorganised public relations machine run by central government which made it one of its key priorities to bring propaganda together under one Cabinet minister. That minister put greater resources into co-ordinating media messaging, rebuttal and the Parliamentary Lobby of journalists. Fourth was the use of D Notices by a Whitehall committee to restrict press discussion of nuclear installations in Britain.

In this context CND found it difficult to gain substantial coverage of its unilateralist case. Much of the reporting of its activities by the press tended to be negative, highlighting internal splits in the campaign or adopting a patronising or hostile tone. However, this was compounded by CND's own communications failures. Despite this the chapter argues that the strength of public opinion expressing a fear of a nuclear war was such that it was reflected in press coverage, even if that did not mean embracing the unilateralist cause of Britain giving up its nuclear weapons.

Press ownership

One of the factors underpinning the editorial consensus over nuclear weapons was the increasing concentration of press ownership which meant that a handful of daily newspaper titles could have a powerful impact on the reading public. The Royal Commission on the Press which reported in 1962 said that the three leading organisations – *Daily Mirror* group publishing the *Daily Herald* and *Daily Mirror*, Associated Newspapers producing the *Daily*

Mail, and Beaverbrook Newspapers publishing the *Daily Express* – controlled 67 per cent of the total circulation in 1961 as against 45 per cent in 1948.²⁰

The actual circulation figures were huge – 4.5 million for the *Daily Mirror*, 4.3 million for the *Daily Express* and 2.6 million for the *Daily Mail*. The only comparable title in size of circulation on the quality newspaper side was the *Daily Telegraph* at 1.2 million.²¹ The Commission argued that the risk of this concentration in a few hands was that alternative views on the big issues of the day could be sidelined.

The Commission's report detected the trend of the stifling of different though legitimate opinions. It said the influence of the Press was gradual through 'the subtle conditioning of opinion to the acceptance or rejection of particular approaches to social and political problems.'²² A variety of opinion might be stifled and 'the real danger may not lie in the active propagation of one-sided views, but in the conscious or unconscious suppression of shades of opinion which ought to have a voice.' It was certainly true that the advocates of nuclear unilateralism believed that the national press took a deliberate decision not to reflect alternative views. JB Priestley when writing a *New Statesman* article in November 1957 which is widely thought to have prompted the founding of CND blamed the press for hiding the truth about nuclear weapons from the public. Priestley said that, 'People are deafened and blinded by propaganda and giant headlines, they are robbed of decision by fear or apathy.'²³ Veteran campaigner Bertrand Russell was even more direct in attacking the misrepresentation of the case against the bomb by opponents 'who command the main organs of publicity' and who made it very difficult for the case to be known. He was clear that a combination of

²⁰ *Royal Commission on the Press 1961-1962: Report*, Cmnd Paper 1811 (HMSO, 1962), p. 15.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12

²² *Ibid.*, p. 18

²³ JB Priestley, 'Britain and the Nuclear Bombs,' *New Statesman* November 2, 1957, in Stephen Howe (ed.), *Lines of Dissent: Writing from the New Statesman 1913-1988*, (Verso, 1988), p. 145.

politicians, their advisers, the popular press, broadcasting and television and, in the last resort, the police, prevented western democracies knowing the truth about nuclear weapons.²⁴

The Commission thought it was campaigns conducted over a longer period that could have the most effect on readers. Although national newspapers to be successful had to provide entertainment and information, the owners made no secret that they were prepared to use their titles to promote their political world view. The Royal Commission gave as an example Lord Beaverbrook who ran Express Newspapers and carried out a propaganda campaign in support of the ideals of the British Empire and later against the European Common Market. The Commission said Beaverbrook may not have achieved all that he wished with those campaigns but ‘it would be impossible to suppose that they had no result.’²⁵ The political affiliations of owners and editors in influencing coverage of the big issues of the day were a significant factor. For example, both the Beaverbrook family and the Northcliffe dynasty, which owned the *Daily Mail*, had long and close connections with the Conservative Party as MPs and supporters. One exception to the Tory cause was Cecil King, a nephew of Lord Northcliffe, who took over the *Daily Mirror* and transformed it into a mass circulation paper backing the Labour Party.²⁶

Despite these powerful press interests the government began to take account of the new communications environment that was beginning to shape political discourse. It recognised the need to take television seriously as a rival medium to communicate its messages. Between 1957 and 1962 television replaced newspapers and radio as the main news source for the public.²⁷ Charles Hill was well aware of the rivalry between long-

²⁴ Bertrand Russell, ‘Civil Disobedience,’ *New Statesman*, February 17, 1961 in *Lines of Dissent*, p. 176.

²⁵ *Royal Commission*, p. 18.

²⁶ Dennis Griffiths (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of the British Press 1422-1922*, (Macmillan, 1992), pp. 69-70.

²⁷ Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (Routledge, 1997), p. 94. Crisell says that in 1957 the ratio of media which people chose as their main news source was 30 per cent for newspapers, 46 per cent for radio and 24 per cent for television. By 1962 that had changed dramatically to 52 per cent for television, 31 per cent for newspapers and only 17 per cent for radio.

established newspapers and television which was expanding its influence into every home week by week. Hill accepted that ‘the press recognise as a fact of life that TV can “beat” them in putting out announcements and news items which come along late in the day.’ In a memo to the Cabinet Hill said the government had to take advantage of television facilities and the press had to recognise that television was here to stay. But the government depended heavily on the press and it would be wise to avoid unnecessarily offending them.²⁸

The reality of the pressures driving the newspaper industry at that time meant that gaining advertising became a pre-eminent factor. To do this the popular press had to appeal to a wider mass market or face closure (as happened to the left-leaning *Daily Herald* which closed in 1964 despite having a circulation of over a million). This meant in some cases restricting views which might be controversial, and Bingham and Conboy in their study of the tabloid press make an interesting distinction between the tabloids and broadsheet newspapers. They argue that the former were driven by circulation wars to be more interested in entertainment and domestic news, leaving the latter to provide specialist information and the details of foreign affairs. The tabloids embraced the drama of a British atomic bomb which, as those authors argued, ‘was desired as a symbol of national virility.’²⁹

However, the broadsheets while supporting the official pro-nuclear deterrent line could at times take a more nuanced approach. One example was the suggestion that Britain should concentrate on building up its conventional forces and leave nuclear defence to the USA and NATO. This featured in the letters and editorial columns of the *Daily Telegraph* in the early 1960s, accompanied by the Labour Party’s switch to this policy line, while *The Times* as we shall see later had an internal debate among its own staff about whether the

²⁸ PREM 11/3484, TNA, ‘The Press and Television’. Memo from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to the Cabinet, April 17, 1958.

²⁹ Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy, *Tabloid Century – The Popular Press in Britain 1896 to the present* (Peter Lang, 2015), p. 50.

nuclear deterrent should be held by Britain or managed entirely by the USA. The tabloids did occasionally allow dissenting voices, for example the *Daily Mirror* gave space to columnists like Richard Crossman who opposed an independent deterrent. But in an editorial sense they supported the government's line on the deterrent.

The owners often exercised their power by proxy through the editors they appointed, and Harold Macmillan as Prime Minister regularly invited editors to meet him. It is worth noting that there was at times an element of 'the old school tie' in links between some editors and proprietors, and Macmillan, which meant they shared the same world view. One example was Sir Colin Coote, who was editor of the Conservative-leaning *Daily Telegraph* between 1950 and 1964. Coote was a fellow student at Balliol College, Oxford with Macmillan before the First World War and they kept in touch over a long period. As Prime Minister Macmillan met Coote at The Other Club which was a gentleman's dining club for MPs and other 'distinguished members' based at the Savoy Hotel in London, and they discussed political issues of the day.³⁰ The *Daily Telegraph* was a loyal supporter of the nuclear deterrent, even if it aired differences that service chiefs had with some aspects of the policy. Max Beaverbrook also attended dinners at The Other Club.

Sir William Haley, editor of *The Times* between 1952 and 1966, was previously Director General of the BBC and was something of a maverick among the right of centre editors. Haley kept a distance from ministers and encouraged his own staff to contribute their expert knowledge. According to Iverach McDonald, Haley did not join 'the chatty clubs' (as perhaps Colin Coote seems to have done) and though he might meet ministers at official events he preferred business-like meetings at Downing Street. Haley did feel a 'kinship of

³⁰ 'Dinner at *The Other Club*. Before dinner, a good talk with Colin Coote, [editor *D Telegraph*] who was helpful. He says that the great majority of the letters he gets are anti-American.' *The Macmillan Diaries*, Entry for May 27, 1960, p. 303.

spirit' with Macmillan and their meetings could blossom out into relaxed exchanges but ministers knew his reputation well enough not to expect him to slavishly follow official policy.³¹ Although the press through its owners and editors tended to support the broad thrust of defence policy, they could not always be relied on to give unconditional backing to every twist and turn of decisions that the government made.

Britain as a world power

There is a view that elements of the British establishment were in denial about the decline of Britain as a world power in the decade after the Second World War. For instance, historian Robert Self refers to the 1956 Defence White Paper which talked of maintaining a deterrent 'commensurate with our standing as a world power.'³² Self believed Harold Macmillan knew the economic situation would restrict his defence policy but was 'equally reluctant to challenge the rhetoric of national greatness.'³³ This continued into the next decade, argues Self, and the angry reaction in Britain from elements of the national press to US diplomat Dean Acheson's remark in 1962 that 'Great Britain has lost an empire and not yet found a new role' appeared to testify to a sensitivity about the direction in which Britain was headed. In reality Acheson was only reflecting President Kennedy's private view that there was no need for Britain or France to have an independent nuclear force (see Chapter 6 for further detail of this). What annoyed the press was the fact that Acheson said openly that Britain's future lay in the European Common Market. He argued that a separate power role

³¹ Iverach McDonald, *The History of The Times, Vol.V, Struggles in War and Peace 1939-1966* (Times Books, 1984) p. 215.

³² Robert Self, *British Foreign and Defence Policy since 1945: Challenges and Dilemmas in a Changing World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

for Britain based on a special relationship with the US and on being head of a weak Commonwealth was ‘about played out,’ and its policy of being a broker between the US and Russia was as weak as its military power.³⁴ Both the *Daily Express* and *Daily Telegraph* carried prominent news stories and editorials attacking the Acheson speech, often in personal terms, such as the latter arguing that it should be treated ‘as the aberration of one who, as he showed in 1950 in the context of Korea, has been more immaculate in dress than in judgement.’³⁵ Macmillan took the opportunity to assert British pride, saying that in so far as Mr Acheson had appeared to denigrate the resolution and will of the British people, he had made the same error as Philip of Spain, Louis the Fourteenth, Napoleon, the Kaiser and Hitler.³⁶ But the *Sunday Telegraph*, which often took a different line to the daily paper, said the speech merely stated the realities as America saw it. This was that NATO allies should build up their conventional forces in Europe and allow the US to manage the nuclear deterrent.³⁷

Self does caution that this debate about Britain’s decline in the world should not be exaggerated and Britain was still a formidable force.³⁸ Yet after the Suez crisis newspapers still sought to bolster the myth of Britain’s ‘greatness’ in their columns and the government’s stress on nuclear as the cornerstone of the country’s defence appeared to fit well with this approach. Two studies are important in reflecting how the biggest-selling tabloid newspapers of the day offer evidence of press support for the government’s defence policy. Firstly, Adrian Bingham’s examination of *Daily Express* and *Daily Mirror* reporting of nuclear

³⁴ Douglas Brinkley, *Dean Acheson and the ‘Special Relationship’: The West Point speech of December 1962*, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, Issue 3, (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 599-608.

³⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, Editorial headed ‘Are we downhearted,’ December 8, 1962, p. 8, British Library digital collections

³⁶ *Daily Express*, Front page story headed ‘Premier slaps down Acheson’, December 8, 1962, p. 1.

³⁷ *Sunday Telegraph*, Gordon Brook-Shepherd, ‘Acheson tells Europe the Facts of Life,’ December 9, 1962, p.14.

³⁸ Self, *British Foreign and Defence Policy since 1945*, p. 8.

weapons between 1945 and the early 1960s concludes that those newspapers supported the broad thrust of government defence policy. This included Britain having its own bomb, possession of which ‘was an integral part of both papers’ vision of Britain as a “strong” nation with a major international presence.’³⁹

The author’s own content analysis of how the loan of American Thor missiles was handled in the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* supports Bingham’s research. This second study shows how readily the press accepted the government case of the value of the nuclear deterrent and its ability to use it independently, as a way of maintaining world power status.⁴⁰ The study argues that those papers were consistent in their support for the Thor programme in their editorial and news pages as a necessary home-based deterrent, and accepted assurances about British control of the bases and weapons. Referring to Minister of Defence Duncan Sandys, the *Daily Mail* headline was ‘RAF will man the rockets, says Sandys,’ and the story reported that Britain would manage and operate the missiles, although ‘the nuclear warheads will remain in American custody.’⁴¹ Another article referred to in the study from the *Daily Mail* entitled ‘Does it make sense for Britain to be an H-bomb power?’ answered its own question. ‘Many people laugh at this British deterrent. It is fashionable to say the Kremlin does not even consider it. But make no mistake. It is effective. We could and will remain able to expunge the 20 biggest cities in the USSR. That is too high a price for Mr Khrushchev to pay for the luxury of destroying Britain.’⁴²

The author’s study also refers to a *Daily Mirror* leader called ‘The *Mirror* and the Bomb’ which defended the deterrent, arguing that ‘No sane person likes this Balance of

³⁹ Adrian Bingham, ‘The Monster’? The British Popular press and nuclear culture, 1945-early 1960s’ *The British Journal for the History of Science* p. 623.

⁴⁰ Thor Missiles in the UK – author’s analysis of coverage in *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*, 1958-62, British Library digital collections.

⁴¹ *Daily Mail*, February 25, 1958, p. 5.

⁴² *Daily Mail*, February 9, 1959, p. 6.

Terror. Yet it remains the world's best hope of maintaining an uneasy peace until East and West agree to end the arms race.'⁴³ Both the Mail and Mirror believed the bomb gave Britain a status in world affairs, although for different reasons. The *Daily Mail* tended to see the policy as a sign of independence and sovereignty, while the *Daily Mirror* thought that the deterrent provided a strong defence which could be used as a bargaining tool in peace talks with the Soviet Union.

The Conservative press gave consistent backing to the government, while at times also reflecting a growing perception that the US had its own interests which did not always coincide with Britain's. To illustrate this theme it is instructive to analyse the *Daily Telegraph's* coverage of nuclear weapons policy between 1957 and 1963. The newspaper had supported Eden over the Suez crisis and despite that debacle continued to back defence policy under Macmillan. Its journalists appeared to have been briefed even before the 1957 White Paper was published in April of that year which set the tone for the policy of nuclear deterrent. An article supported the need for cuts in defence spending and said the new reality was nuclear warfare. The only 'salvation' as it termed it was preventing a war starting through having the means of retaliation, and so expenditure must be concentrated on bombers, on nuclear weapons and on guided missiles. Airborne planes and large armies were out of date, the paper said.⁴⁴ In an editorial after the White Paper there was praise for the government's savings made by cutting back on conventional weapons, although it expressed a fear that in the long run these might be cancelled out by the increased cost of guided missiles and thermonuclear weapons.⁴⁵

⁴³ *Daily Mirror*, September 20, 1960, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Daily Telegraph*, January 22, 1957, p. 6.

⁴⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, April 6, 1957, p. 6.

However, there were doubts expressed about relying on nuclear to such an extent, found in the Letters column of the paper. A Lt-General Sir Wilfrid Lindsell put the traditional services view when he said that nuclear weapons were no good for occupying and holding territory. 'In the long run it is the old fashioned infantry soldier on whom we have to rely. Private Thomas Atkins and his opposite numbers in the Navy and Air Force are the indispensable elements in our Armed Forces, and we can never do without an adequate number of them, however wonderful our nuclear weapons may become, Lindsell said.'⁴⁶ But the paper's editorials were adamant that the nuclear bomb had helped keep the peace for 12 years and echoed one of Macmillan's themes on the dangers of appeasement. 'To allow the mounting campaign against the H-bomb, which creates an instinctive revulsion from all its horrible aspects, to disguise its central and over-riding virtue, would be to repeat all the errors of the peace pledge agitation in the 'thirties.'⁴⁷

Continuing this hostile approach the *Telegraph* coupled an attack on CND in March 1958 with defence of the deterrent. It reported a government Minister Lord Mancroft claiming that ban-the-bomb campaigners were buttressing Soviet hopes of weakening the west by propaganda.⁴⁸ The paper also closely followed the splits in the Labour Party on defence and welcomed Aneurin Bevan's stand against unilateralism at the 1957 Labour Party conference. This according to an editorial showed that both government and opposition agreed on the wisdom of Britain possessing an H bomb and only on testing did the opposition differ with Bevan wanting a total ban.⁴⁹ Over the next two years the *Daily Telegraph* maintained its pro-deterrent position, reporting that Duncan Sandys still believed in the strategy of the nuclear deterrent despite the services arguing that this would not deter the

⁴⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, April 11, 1957, p. 8.

⁴⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, April 24, 1957, p. 6.

⁴⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, March 6, 1958, pp. 1 and 17.

⁴⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, October 4, 1957, p.8.

Soviet Union from launching conventional attacks.⁵⁰ But a growing sceptical tone on Britain's policy was reflected in coverage between 1961 and 1963, principally because Britain had to abandon its medium-range ballistic missile called Blue Streak in 1960, and the US then cancelled the preferred replacement Skybolt in 1962.

One critic was Peregrine Worsthorne, the editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, which had its own staff but often shared stories with the daily paper. He agreed with Labour that the abandonment of Blue Streak 'killed the illusion of Britain's independent nuclear deterrent' and Britain had no inherent right to be a world power. He believed its future lay in Europe and not with the Anglo-American alliance.⁵¹ Even the daily paper began to ask questions after Skybolt was cancelled so suddenly. 'There is also the ugly suspicion that America will accept a failure that would leave her as the sole power in the West with a formidable nuclear deterrent.'⁵² But both papers welcomed the agreement reached between Macmillan and President Kennedy in December 1962 for Britain to buy 100 sea-based Polaris nuclear missiles from the US to arm the Royal Navy's nuclear submarine force, and so maintain an independent deterrent.⁵³

The *Telegraph's* instinctive support for Conservative defence policies enabling Britain to sit at the 'top table' of world summits has been reflected in this section. As with other national newspapers it might have criticised aspects of Britain's reliance on the US but never wavered in its opposition to scrapping the nuclear deterrent.

The Times case study

⁵⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, February 9, 1957, p. 8.

⁵¹ *Sunday Telegraph*, December 31, 1961, Issue 48, p. 12.

⁵² *Daily Telegraph*, December 18, 1962, Issue 33487, p. 8.

⁵³ *Sunday Telegraph*, April 7, 1963, p. 1.

An examination of internal discussions that took place within *The Times* newspaper over nuclear deterrent policy appears to show that where there were specialised readerships it was possible to follow a different path than the majority. There was a degree of open debate between senior editors and correspondents about defence policy at that newspaper. While given its history one would expect *The Times* to be a supporter of Conservative governments, its then editor Sir William Haley made a point of stressing its independence. It was not a government organ, he said, and the paper had to judge each issue only in reference to the broad national good.⁵⁴ In 1960 John Grant was then *The Times* defence correspondent and supported an independent UK nuclear deterrent. The official history of the paper stated that, ‘While believing that Duncan Sandys as Secretary of State for Defence staked too much on the nuclear deterrent, Grant was none the less convinced that Britain should keep her own bomb. She was unlikely ever to use it, true enough; but possession of it would save her from being blackmailed by the nuclear threat of others, say, in the Middle East.’⁵⁵

In June 1960 Grant wrote a *Times* leader headed ‘Will it Defend?’ questioning the defence policy announced by the Labour Party the previous day which said Britain should cease to possess or manufacture nuclear weapons, and rely on the Americans for strategic nuclear defence. Britain was only able to take part in international talks to end nuclear tests because it held nuclear weapons, he believed.⁵⁶

A change to this approach came in 1961 when Grant was made home news editor, and Haley replaced him with Alun Gwynne Jones, a Lt Colonel in the War Office who had served in Malaya after the Second World War. Gwynne Jones took a completely different view than Grant believing that a British bomb had no credibility as a deterrent, would never

⁵⁴ McDonald, *The History of The Times*, p. 222.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 367.

⁵⁶ *The Times*, June 23, 1960, p. 6.

be used independently of America, and was generally a waste of money. He and Haley probed the matter together in many long talks. Gwynne Jones clinched his argument in a long internal memorandum, saying that the choice for Britain was between NATO as it was and a European third force which would weaken and disrupt the western alliance.' Britain should 'retire gracefully from the nuclear race when the present bomber force with its British weapons becomes obsolete; and to concentrate on building up strong conventional defence forces...'⁵⁷

As McDonald's history of the newspaper makes clear, Grant was still against giving up the bomb entirely but editor Haley's mind was made up. 'I have read Mr Gwynne Jones' memorandum on the independent deterrent. Fundamentally I am in agreement with it.'⁵⁸ This signalled a major shift in approach with Gwynne Jones writing leaders attacking the independent deterrent. For instance in January 1963 he wrote, 'The cancellation of Skybolt has cleared the way for Britain to play an effective part in the defence of the west. Her greatest contribution would be to integrate fully into the alliance, without reservations of independence, the existing British nuclear striking force.'⁵⁹ Gwynne Jones later joined the Labour government led by Harold Wilson in 1964 and it is no coincidence that Wilson fought the election of that year on a policy of scrapping the independent deterrent. Yet he later backed the installation of US Polaris nuclear missiles in British submarines as a round-the-clock deterrent.

Individual journalists on a few other newspapers were also given space to challenge the official line of their own employers and of the government. There were often specific reasons for this. For example, Labour MP Richard Crossman who had a column in the *Daily Mirror* was allowed to appeal to the left-wing readership in the Labour Party that was either

⁵⁷ McDonald, *The History of The Times*, pp. 367-8. See for Memorandum, Gwynne Jones to Oliver Woods (assistant editor) December 19, 1962.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 368, Memorandum, Haley to Woods, December 20, 1962.

⁵⁹ *The Times*, January 23, 1963, p. 11.

unilateralist or thought Britain should rely solely on a US nuclear shield. He wrote that ‘the truth is that the British nuclear deterrent is so small and insignificant that no one in Washington or Moscow minds very much whether we keep it or abandon it.’⁶⁰ His *Daily Mirror* colleague William Connor, better known as Cassandra, often gave voice to people’s fears about nuclear war. The *Daily Mail* covered issues from a military or strategic view which appealed to their strong services readership. In one article the *Daily Mail’s* defence correspondent Stevenson Pugh criticised static Thor missiles fixed to the ground as being vulnerable to Soviet air attack, compared to a sea-based nuclear deterrent.⁶¹ It seemed that newspapers could allow its journalists on occasions to represent sections of its readerships which might be different than the official line of the paper, although *The Times* appears to be an exception as a Conservative paper adopting its own editorial policy on the independent deterrent contrary to the government’s.

Public Relations Machine

Evidence from opinion polls confirms that the public had genuine misgivings about the associated risks of the deterrent bomb, such as the effects of testing and radiation, particularly on children, both living and as yet unborn.⁶² But there were a series of developments which made it more likely that newspapers would reflect the official narrative and not other strands of opinion. One was that they were served by a re-organised and more

⁶⁰ *Daily Mirror*, February 28, 1958, p. 8.

⁶¹ *Daily Mail*, January 24, 1958, p. 6.

⁶² ‘The peak of public concern seems to have been September 1961 when in answer to the question from Gallup, ‘Does all this talk about H-bombs, rockets, satellites and guided missiles worry you a lot, a little, or not at all?’, 27 per cent said a lot and 35 per cent said a little. This was the month of reaction to the renewal of Russian and American H-bomb tests.’ Christopher Driver, *The Disarmers: A Study in Protest* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), p. 98.

professional government public relations machine led by Charles Hill, which laid the basis for the style of government communications today. The key developments in this process were the co-ordination of government communications at home and overseas (this thesis is only concerned with the home front), the confidence that the Prime Minister had in the person tasked with performing this role, and the importance given to building relationships with the media, mainly through the Parliamentary Lobby of journalists.

It is necessary to briefly explain the background of Charles Hill and the historical context in which he was appointed as the co-ordinating minister. This is because it provides the backcloth to the way the government simplified its messages around the nuclear deterrent. Charles Hill, later Lord Hill of Luton, had built a reputation for addressing complex issues with simple language – he had been a deputy medical officer in Oxford in the 1930s, and became known during the Second World War as the ‘Radio Doctor’, giving regular talks on the BBC on how the public could stay healthy, as part of the Ministry of Food’s programme *Kitchen Front*. After the war when Aneurin Bevan advanced plans to introduce the National Health Service he had to deal with Charles Hill as the combative secretary of the British Medical Association. Hill opposed Bevan’s plan to have GPs as full-time salaried doctors within the state system, and succeeded in securing them as self-employed practitioners. His career was thereafter associated mainly with the media in one form or another.

Hill became MP for Luton in 1950 and was appointed Postmaster-General in 1955 which was a non-Cabinet ministerial position with responsibilities that included broadcasting. The Suez crisis of 1956 was a central factor in future policy on propaganda and Hill was clear in his memoirs that the Eden government’s failure to communicate what it was doing was catastrophic. He said that during the Suez crisis government spokesmen were left without information or guidance on what was happening.’ How an information man can ever begin to

do his job in such conditions of blackout I cannot imagine. Nor can anyone else. Yet this is what happened – and still the information services were blamed.’⁶³

This is confirmed by John Black in his work on British propaganda where he argues that prior to Hill’s appointment ‘propaganda specialists’ as he termed them had little influence on policy. ‘It would appear that not only were they not involved in the actual formation of policy, but they were not even made aware of the policy once it had been decided. In this case the vital policy decisions were being made in great secrecy by a limited number of Cabinet members.’⁶⁴ The lesson from Hill and Black was that any minister in charge of propaganda had to enjoy the full confidence of those formulating policy, namely the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. Hill as Postmaster-General from November 23, 1956 took charge of all government information and could be invited to Cabinet meetings on occasions. Once Harold Macmillan was firmly in power as Prime Minister he promoted Hill in January 1957 to Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster with his own seat in the Cabinet, but no other departmental responsibilities. It is important to stress that this was a break with tradition and a considerable change from the past, as Ogilvy Webb observed in her study of Government Information Services. She argues that this was the first time that a Cabinet Minister was able to devote all his time to thinking about information both at home and overseas. ‘He could think about the information content of government policy before the event – something that busy ministers had previously never been able to do.’ For the first time Hill was a real co-ordinator and she added that Chief Information Officers (of which

⁶³ Lord Hill of Luton, *Both Sides of the Hill* (Heinemann, 1964), p. 180.

⁶⁴ John B. Black, *Organising the Propaganda Instrument: The British Experience* (Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1975), p. 71.

there was one in each government department) thought ‘the change was very noticeable as soon as Dr Hill took over.’⁶⁵

Credence to this account is given by Cockerell, Hennessy and Walker in their book *Sources Close to the Prime Minister*. They say the success of Hill’s appointment rested on two other people, Macmillan himself who gave Hill ‘free rein’ to co-ordinate propaganda, which was denied to other colleagues, and Harold Evans as Chief Press Officer for Number 10.⁶⁶ Evans was recommended by Hill because he was a career civil servant with good experience as a working journalist. Evans makes clear in his memoirs that anyone in his position had to have complete knowledge of what the government was doing and planned to do, and that ‘this begins with knowing the mind of the Prime Minister.’⁶⁷ He also had to overcome the suspicions of civil servants about propagandists. Evans said that civil servants believed publicity was detrimental to official business and that spokespeople like him were ‘an inescapable evil.’⁶⁸ But he built up a good working relationship with the Prime Minister, sometimes visiting him at Number 10 early in the morning for a discussion when Macmillan had the habit of sitting up in bed reading the day’s newspapers.

The two appointments meant that the key propagandists in the government machine both had the confidence of the Prime Minister and an insight into the development of government policy. A specific example of the confidence Macmillan had in Hill was a memo he sent him on May 3, 1957. ‘I feel I must write and tell you how grateful I am to you for all you have done since you took your present office,’ Macmillan said. He added that Hill had one of the most important roles in the government and while he was criticised by some, those

⁶⁵ Marjorie Ogilvy-Webb, *The Government Explains: A Study of the Information Services* (George Allen and Unwin, 1965), p. 90.

⁶⁶ Michael Cockerell, Peter Hennessy and David Walker, *Sources Close to the Prime Minister: inside the hidden world of the news manipulators* (Macmillan, 1984), p. 66.

⁶⁷ Harold Evans, *Downing Street Diary: The Macmillan Years 1957-1963* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), p. 27.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

nearest the centre knew the great success he was making of it.⁶⁹ However, it would be wrong to suggest that Hill's role was not viewed with some suspicion by departmental ministers, and the Whitehall machine was vigilant. For example, when Hill circulated a background note on defence policy in November 1960, the Cabinet Secretary Norman Brook pointed out to the Prime Minister that this should be sent 'simply for reference' to other ministers rather than encouragement for them to speak about defence policy. This contrasted with Hill's suggestion in an earlier memo in September of that year that all ministers could be asked to explain defence policy in their speeches, where appropriate.⁷⁰ In that same memo Hill said he had set up a small group of Information Officers including Harold Evans to meet fortnightly under his chairmanship to ensure more co-ordinated presentation and occasionally rebuttal around defence issues. He added that for this to work effectively he needed to know about current thinking and decisions concerning defence matters. 'It would help if I could attend Defence Committee meetings or receive all or some of the papers,' he proposed to Macmillan. There is no record of whether this was accepted but it would not be surprising if departmental ministers and officials felt that Hill was encroaching on their territory.

Before itemising the structural changes that Hill introduced, with Evans' help, regarding co-ordination, rebuttal and the Parliamentary Lobby system, it is important to link his presence in government directly to the nuclear deterrent issue. It is clear from the National Archives and Hill's communications with Number 10 that the presentation of the nuclear deterrent policy to the public and the media was central to his work and that of the government as well. He wanted to provide briefing to ministers which summed up the pro-deterrent arguments simply and forcefully. The developments in the Cold War and the 1957

⁶⁹ PREM 11/1888, TNA, PM memo to Hill, May 3, 1957.

⁷⁰ PREM 11/3074, TNA, Hill memo to PM, September 14, 1960.

Defence White Paper placing the nuclear deterrent at the centre of defence policy made this even more imperative.

In briefings to Macmillan and the Cabinet, Hill framed the argument in terms of nuclear weapons being ‘the best hope of avoiding global war’ and said the basic proposition was that ‘in the face of nuclear weapons, no aggressor can achieve victory, because the victim can always be sure of destroying his attacker.’ He could understand pacifists or those who had moral objections but not the unilateralists ‘since many of those who advocate it are apparently content to rest beneath the protection of American nuclear weapons.’⁷¹ He then added FAQs (frequently asked questions with his answers) for use in speeches and interviews. For instance, ‘why is an independent deterrent so important to Britain?’ followed by the answer, ‘We developed it; we have it; it is one of the main parts of our armament. Because we have it, our contribution to the Defence of the West is greater and our choice of action is wider.’⁷² His advice to ministers on defence issues was often colloquial in style. For example, if they were asked if a nuclear deterrent could be independent of the USA if Britain relied on the Americans for their delivery, he wrote, ‘Of course it can, your car is not less yours if it is made in America; you press the button of the starter and you decide where to drive to.’⁷³

Turning to the structural changes that Hill introduced, in his first progress report to the Prime Minister after being appointed he said that in pursuit of co-ordination, he had convened an official committee on government publicity, which had already started meeting daily, under his chairmanship. It involved information officials from the Foreign Office, Chief Information Officers of several other departments such as Defence and Treasury, and

⁷¹ PREM 11/3074, TNA, Hill memo to PM, Background note on defence policy, November 22, 1960.

⁷² Ibid, Some Questions on Defence Policy and the Answers.

⁷³ Ibid, Some Questions

Information Officers from other departments when needed. The purpose was to exchange ideas and agree a common line, and because Hill was attending Cabinet, he was able to ‘give current and forward guidance to the representatives of all the Departments concerned, and to take their views about questions likely to be asked and problems just around the corner.’⁷⁴

Part of his aim was to increase the status of information officers in each government department. After a time these meetings were held twice a week and then became weekly meetings – they remained as weekly meetings of Chief Information Officers, at least until 1965 when Ogilvy-Webb published her study, and probably beyond.⁷⁵

Rebuttal of critical articles in the press was another key element of the strategy and Hill told Macmillan that, ‘Defence is no longer the preserve of the heavy newspaper and its defence correspondent. Others, like the *Daily Mail*, are wading in with sensational inaccuracy, he said. ‘Confronted by grossly inaccurate figures for so-called loss, we ourselves should use figures more where security and commercial considerations permit. For example, the *Mail* allegation of £80 million lost on the Victor II bomber’s cancellation could be met by the truth, which is that a saving of the order of £10-15 million is being made.’⁷⁶ Hill tried to encourage his information officers to actively challenge newspapers and if possible drop unhelpful stories. He told Macmillan that, ‘We are more than usually busy “killing stories.” For example, one night last week it took some three hours to persuade the “*Daily Mail*” not to run a story that Britain was not (underlined), in fact, in possession of the H-bomb! Birdsall worked like a trooper on this killing.’⁷⁷

The parliamentary lobby was, according to Hill, ‘perhaps the most important information channel’ to communicate government messages and he suggested that as

⁷⁴ PREM 11/1888, TNA, Hill memo to Prime Minister, Co-ordination of Government Publicity, Stamped in Cabinet Registry as received March 18, 1957, marked 15/3b/G.

⁷⁵ Ogilvy-Webb, *The Government Explains*, pp. 89-90.

⁷⁶ PREM 11/3074, TNA, Hill memo to PM, August 10, 1960.

⁷⁷ PREM 11/4285, TNA, Hill memo to PM, May 7, 1958.

information minister he should meet the press as well as the regular Thursday briefing held by the Lord Privy Seal, then Home Secretary RA (Rab) Butler.⁷⁸ Butler was given a written brief on current policy including potential questions and answers before these meetings by Harold Evans. Ogilvy-Webb stresses the importance of Hill being in the Cabinet. She said only Cabinet members had that picture across the whole field of government which was essential for dealing with the Lobby.⁷⁹ Hill considered that one of his most important and difficult tasks was to persuade other ministers to talk to the Lobby although he was not always successful in that. 'He himself saw the Lobby regularly at least once a week and let them ask him questions ranging over the whole information field,' she said.⁸⁰ An example of the way Hill appeared to successfully steer the lobby his way was given in a memo he wrote to Macmillan in May 1958, obviously reflecting his own version of events.

'The press reaction to the Russell letter and petition was better than I feared. After consulting Sir Harold Himsworth, I put out a good deal of guidance on Thursday night, at a special meeting of the Lobby and through other contacts. Friday's press played the story down giving as much prominence to your letter as to Russell's effort. The *Sunday Press* ignored the petition. I suspect that this is an indication that the Press, and maybe the country, is a little weary of the whole business of polls, processions and pontifical pronouncements on the Hydrogen bomb. The supplementary Russell letter aroused little interest in yesterday's press.'⁸¹

This was evidence of the greater attention that Hill was paying to countering moves by the unilateralist figures like Lord Russell, through releasing rebuttals via the Lobby.

⁷⁸ PREM 11/1888, TNA, Hill memo on Co-ordination of Government Publicity.

⁷⁹ Ogilvy-Webb, *The Government Explains*, p. 92.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁸¹ PREM 11/2778, TNA, Hill memo to PM, May 7, 1958. Sir Harold Himsworth was Secretary to the Medical Research Council at the time.

Support for the argument that this era laid the basis for a new importance given to the Lobby comes from Cockerell et al. They commented that: ‘The Evans era marked the institutionalisation of regular Lobby briefing by officials of Number Ten. He laid down a pattern of lobby contacts which few of his successors have broken, even as the power and influence of television has grown.’⁸²

Critics of the Parliamentary Lobby system say that journalists who are under pressure to fill newspapers tend to accept what they are given at face value. Evans himself wondered aloud if some people thought the lobby system was too cosy a relationship between lobby journalists and ministers, and whether this made it possible for ministers to manipulate news and comment. But he equally believed that journalists could be tough interrogators, and had other sources of information such as the Opposition and party organisations to balance the official line.⁸³ James Margach who was then a *Sunday Times* journalist, admired Macmillan’s communications skills believing that ‘his real work was all behind the scenes where he was a shrewd, tough and cunning manipulator of Government, Party, Parliament and the Press.’⁸⁴ Bingham thought the lobby process served the government’s nuclear deterrent policy well. ‘Newspapers were often reluctant to challenge the veil of secrecy shrouding the activities of the British state, and it was frequently easier and cheaper to rely on government information than to delve more deeply into controversial matters.’⁸⁵

Commenting on this debate, Christopher Moran in a recent book accepts that ‘historiographical orthodoxy has tended to dictate that the British press, by contrast,[to American journalists] was remarkably timid when it came to exposing secrets’ and US

⁸² Cockerell et al, *Sources Close to the Prime Minister*, p. 68.

⁸³ Evans, *Downing Street Diary*, p. 46.

⁸⁴ James Margach, *The Abuse of Power: the war between Downing Street and the Media from Lloyd George to Callaghan* (WH Allen, 1978), p. 115.

⁸⁵ Bingham, p. 612.

commentators have been quick to point out that adversarial investigative journalism was not a feature of British political life.⁸⁶ He says the lobby system could be one example of press deference, although he believed that the British press was far more troublesome to the secret state than has been acknowledged before.⁸⁷ Moran particularly cites the work of Chapman Pincher, *Daily Express* defence correspondent from the end of the Second World War to 1979, but apart from one instance where Pincher published a leading article claiming that Britain possessed around 30 atomic weapons,⁸⁸ the evidence from Moran's book is that Pincher and others were more interested in exposing defecting Soviet spies and intelligence secrets than probing nuclear weapons issues.⁸⁹

Not all the government's propaganda was channelled through the lobby, with Macmillan initiating a covert plan to persuade academics, church figures and journalists to carry press articles sympathetic to the deterrent case. This was in the early days of CND when the government appeared to be shaken by its appeal to the middle classes. He delegated this task to Hill in a memo which said people were being led by emotion rather than logic. Macmillan wanted to find a way of directing an effective campaign against what he called the 'current agitation' against nuclear weapons. He thought that it would be natural for ordinary people to criticise government policy and to accept opposition arguments, even when these were contradictory or illogical. He added in the same memo of March 1958, 'Letters to the *Times* are all very well, but do not reach the middle range of people. How can we build up a really effective counter-campaign? Can we persuade some influential publicists to write articles? Are there any reliable scientists?'⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Christopher Moran, *Classified: Secrecy and the State in Modern Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 96.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30, "'New Nuclear Row Blows Up,'" *Daily Express*, November 3, 1958.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-3.

⁹⁰ PREM 11/2778, TNA, PM memo to Hill, March 24, 1958.

A week later Hill reported that active steps were being made to identify such people and ‘they will be discreetly approached with a suggestion that they should give expression to their views in one way or another.’⁹¹ Church people and Conservative backbenchers were being organised and ‘the objective is a steady stream of spoken, printed and broadcast contributions.’⁹² Hill clearly came up against some resistance as the next memo from him was over a year later, in which he reported that ‘there have been many difficulties, with which I will not trouble you.’ He referred to meetings with Lord Adrian, the Master of Trinity College, and expressed his frustration about moving ‘moderate opinion’ away from a critical view of government policy. ‘There is little chance of organised action. Many dons prefer to smile indulgently at those who have fallen for Russell and leave it at that,’ Hill wrote to Macmillan.⁹³

But he did manage to persuade some bishops and MPs to meet informally three or four times a year, and the bishops would be given specific statements of policy in letters signed by ministers as and when they needed them. But this initiative was then put off until after the 1959 general election.⁹⁴ It is interesting that this brief given to Hill went beyond that of co-ordinating government information through existing channels such as the Lobby and media relations via departmental press officers. It was about planting government arguments to be written ostensibly by independent figures such as church people and scientists but in reality stemming from official sources. The resistance that Hill met was particularly striking in the academic and scientific community, and his comments perhaps illustrate that the government under-estimated how far these professions had embraced the anti-nuclear weapons cause.

⁹¹ Ibid., Hill memo to PM, April 2, 1958.

⁹² Ibid., Hill memo to PM, April 22, 1958.

⁹³ Ibid., Hill memo to PM, May 7, 1958

⁹⁴ Ibid., Hill memo to PM, July 29, 1959

D-Notice system

The D-Notice system, which was set up in 1912, was another inhibition on press coverage of nuclear deterrent issues. It was a typically British ‘gentleman’s agreement’ between Whitehall and newspaper editors and was run by the Defence, Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee. The committee issued notices requesting the press to avoid reporting on certain issues considered sensitive for national security, and although voluntary there was always the implicit threat of the Official Secrets Act behind it. Editors might differ in their editorial stance but were still subject to D-Notice restrictions where it was thought national security might be affected, such as reporting on where the Thor missiles or other secret government installations might be sited in England. For instance, editors largely complied with the Chief Press Censor Rear Admiral Sir George Thomson after he wrote a letter to them on ‘War Potential’ in April 1957. This said that ‘in an era of developing nuclear deterrence theology, it was nevertheless still undesirable to allow a potential enemy “too much information” which would allow calculation about conventional weapons, stocks and reserves, as this would enable assessment with some certainty of the degree of risk when planning any war.’⁹⁵

In February 1958 a D-Notice was issued restricting coverage of the Thor nuclear missiles to be installed in East Anglia, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, including numbers, precise location, layout of sites or operational relationship between them. As John Boyes observes, ‘CND were well aware of the locations and published advance notification of their planned demonstrations in local newspapers.’⁹⁶ But Thomson insisted that secrecy was still

⁹⁵ Nicholas Wilkinson, *Secrecy and the Media – The Official History of the United Kingdom’s D-Notice System* (Routledge, 2009), p. 248.

⁹⁶ John Boyes, *Project Emily: Thor IRBM and the RAF* (Tempus, 2008), p. 94.

justified.⁹⁷ The media side of the committee protested at a meeting in July that they were finding it difficult to know what to include in their reporting that would not give away the sites, such as missile protests or even ‘some speech by the local vicar.’⁹⁸ Thomson always played down the ultimate sanction of the Official Secrets Act but strayed close to the line when he warned in a letter that August against referring to a future Thor site at Mepal in Cambridgeshire as ‘an RAF rocket base under construction’, as protest march organisers had done, saying this would breach the Act. ‘The wording of Thomson’s letter looks to a modern eye a little too much like passing on to editors an official threat, rather than a helpful reminder,’ observed Wilkinson.⁹⁹

The use of D-Notices to suppress debate on what was or was not of public interest flared up again in 1963 when a group called Spies for Peace distributed a pamphlet at the Easter CND march revealing specific sites known as RSGs or regional seats of government planned in the event of nuclear war, details of which were covered by a D Notice. (The secrecy aspect of this affair is covered in Chapter 3). Labour queried whether something widely known should remain under D Notice, to which Macmillan replied that it was not the job of government to publish details just because they had been leaked, and praised the Press for ‘so loyally keeping to the regulations.’¹⁰⁰ An exception was *The Guardian* which decided to publish locations of an RSG in Berkshire and one outside Edinburgh. This was a decision taken by its then editor Alistair Hetherington and explained in his memoirs *Guardian Years*. Hetherington always pursued an independent path on nuclear policy and this will now be illustrated.

⁹⁷ ‘The Russian Intelligence will inevitably find out where the sites are because they are not hidden from public view and the broad area in which they are located is generally known. If the Press abide by the ‘D’ Notice however we have made the Russians’ task a little more difficult.’ Quoted in Boyes, p. 88.

⁹⁸ Wilkinson, *Secrecy and the Media*, pp. 249-250.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

CND coverage

Hetherington's attitude to CND was that of a 'critical friend' in that he was sympathetic to the organisation and gave it a good deal of coverage, but was never a unilateralist. He favoured the idea of a 'non-nuclear club', which he expounded in many leader articles. This approach meant that Britain would give up the bomb in exchange for an undertaking by the other nuclear powers not to export their technology, and a renunciation of the bomb by all the countries not then (1957-58) possessing it. Hetherington described in his memoirs how two of his journalists contributed to the paper's thinking on this, John Maddox the science correspondent and Leonard Beaton for defence.¹⁰¹ An editorial on February 14 1958 stated that Britain should volunteer to abandon its own weapons in return for an agreement that nobody else would start making them. Although Labour and the TUC were enthusiastic, neither the government nor CND were interested. In a 1959 Lords debate Lord Home for the government opposed the idea arguing that the inspection system proposed as part of the scheme would allow the Russians to oversee Britain and US defences in Western Europe.¹⁰² There was an Irish initiative on the non-nuclear club through the United Nations and pressure on the Labour Party to support it but Hetherington said the idea fell away before the 1959 general election, with Macmillan at an election rally in Manchester attacking what he called 'the Socialist proposal for a non-nuclear club.'¹⁰³

Compared to the pro-nuclear press *The Guardian's* editorials were balanced and tried hard to see both sides of the argument. An editorial in early 1960 praised CND for moving

¹⁰¹ Alistair Hetherington, *Guardian Years* (Chatto and Windus, 1981), p. 60.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

public opinion forward in the previous two years so instead of it being ‘almost cranky’ to agitate for nuclear disarmament, the non-nuclear club was now a central part of Labour policy. But unilateral disarmament would do nothing to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. ‘CND has been magnificently right emotionally – but wrong intellectually,’ the paper said.¹⁰⁴ Unlike other national newspapers *The Guardian* carried regular coverage of CND marches however small, such as 500 people in two marches in 1960 from Warwick to Gaydon, an H-bomber base, and from Hackney in east London to an atomic weapons research base at Foulness Island in Essex.¹⁰⁵ Despite the twists and turns of splits within CND *The Guardian* continued to offer campaigners a forum. For example, a report headed ‘First-ever CND canvass finds sympathy on the doorstep’ reported that half of people questioned in one Manchester constituency supported the aims of CND.¹⁰⁶ A full-page statement by CND organising secretary Peggy Duff set out the aims of the movement.¹⁰⁷ *The Guardian* was respected by the government for the standard of its journalism but aroused the anger of some sections of Whitehall for not following the majority line on the deterrent, and being more open about the Spies for Peace affair.

This was illustrated when Hetherington reported a dinner he had in May 1963 with Colonel Sammy Lohan, who was acting secretary of the D-Notice Committee after Thomson resigned due to ill-health.¹⁰⁸ He had asked for the meeting to clear with him what he (Hetherington) intended to say in a speech about the D Notice system, and what he could publish about RSG’s. To his surprise he was forced to defend his paper’s coverage, although it is not clear if the attack had the support of official government circles, or was an example

¹⁰⁴ *The Guardian*, January 2, 1960, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ *The Guardian*, June 7, 1960, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ *The Guardian*, May 10, 1962, p. 19.

¹⁰⁷ *The Guardian*, June 12, 1962, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Hetherington made a point of interviewing key political leaders of his time and made, detailed notes of all his interviews, which are kept at the LSE Library.

of the extrovert Lohan taking an independent position. Hetherington said that in the course of the dinner Lohan had launched into a long attack on “*The Guardian*”, both for its opposition to the independent deterrent and for its sympathy towards the CND. Lohan said that *The Guardian* was playing the CND’s game, and the CND was playing the Russians’ game. ‘We were helping the Communist cause. He said that he didn’t think I knew how much damage the CND was doing.’

Hetherington conceded that his paper might have more sympathy for CND than other papers but said *The Guardian* had done more than any other paper to get the Labour Party out of the unilateralist camp.¹⁰⁹ Lohan also criticised activists who had blocked the telephone lines of the intelligence services MI5 and MI6 and had even forced their way into their headquarters and took photos of staff entering and leaving the building. *The Guardian* carried denials by CND that it supported such actions and an editorial condemned it as ‘outright sabotage.’¹¹⁰ Hetherington told Lohan it was probable that the mass of CND supporters, and certainly the mass of *Guardian* readers would be ‘horrified’ if any genuine CND people were involved in such activity.

The truth was that apart from the Communist *Daily Worker*, *The Guardian* was the only counterweight to a national press that either largely ignored CND as a mass social movement, or adopted a negative and patronising tone. *The Times* was particularly critical after the 1963 Easter march and the Spies for Peace row. It described the marches as ‘the annual shuffle from Aldermaston to London’ which had long ceased to have much direct connection to nuclear weapons.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ CND Archive, LSE files, Hetherington 4/14, Strictly Confidential, Telephones and Photographs (note dictated on May 18, 1963). Note of a meeting on May 9 1963.

¹¹⁰ *The Guardian*, May 13, 1963, p.8.

¹¹¹ *The Times*, April 16, 1963, quoted in Driver, *The Disarmers – A Study in Protest*, p. 152.

This editorial approach can be contrasted with *The Times* publishing 65 letters on the subject of nuclear disarmament during one month in 1958.¹¹² In other words it was happy to give space to individual comment and opinion but not to treat CND as a serious organisation in the newsworthy sense. CND was almost inevitably resigned to this with CND chairman Canon John Collins remarking that, ‘Who can doubt that, at the top level, the Press, and particularly the so-called responsible press, is hostile.’¹¹³ Christopher Driver who wrote an early account of the movement’s history was surprised at the ‘meagre’ amount of newspaper space afforded to the new CND Executive’s first press conference on January 30, 1958. There was just nine inches in the *Manchester Guardian*, 51 inches in the *Daily Worker* and ‘not much else except in the Left-wing and pacifist weeklies.’¹¹⁴ *The Times* failed to report the first CND conference on February 17, 1958 at which 5,000 people filled Central Hall, Westminster and there were three overflow meetings.¹¹⁵

But the kind of coverage that CND received has to be explained by a more complex analysis than attributing it to straightforward hostility, although undoubtedly that existed among some editors and owners. Much of the press, especially the tabloids, appears to have largely felt that CND did not produce ‘news’ as the titles defined it in an era when drama and entertainment were at a premium. It was this that characterised their approach, as exemplified in a sample analysis of CND coverage in the years 1959 and 1960 in the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*. In September 1959 the *Daily Mail* featured the actress Constance Cummings carrying a sandwich board being moved on by police while taking part in a CND protest in Whitehall. The headline ‘Move Along Miss Cummings! – You Can’t Stand Here, the PC said’ embodied the light-hearted approach. The piece ended by saying ‘novelist Doris Lessing, teetering on stiletto heels beneath her sandwich boards, cried: “Oh, my poor

¹¹² Driver, *The Disarmers*, p. 54

¹¹³ CND Archive, LSE files, CND 3/4: speech to the 1962 national conference.

¹¹⁴ Driver, *The Disarmers*, p. 45.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

feet!’”¹¹⁶ The aim of the reporting seemed to be entertainment rather than information, another example being a story of 20 Eton College schoolboys deciding to take part in the annual Easter ban-the-bomb march. ‘Will the boys wear Eton boaters, starched white collars, black jackets and striped trousers? Almost definitely not,’ said the story.¹¹⁷

With the *Daily Telegraph* it was more of a consistently negative approach which revolved around splits, rejections and disputes, painting a picture of an organisation always mired in controversy. Reports ranged from a Labour MP withdrawing from the annual Easter march because she said direct action supporters had urged Labour members not to vote in a by-election; the Prime Minister rejecting a request to meet a CND deputation; a CND poster banned from London Underground stations because it contained ‘political propaganda’; and fighting at a CND rally in London when Labour politicians were heckled by supporters of the British National Party.¹¹⁸

It is hard to find a positive story about CND in this sample. Further examples were the *Daily Telegraph* carrying a story about Earl Russell offering to resign as CND President over his support for civil disobedience.¹¹⁹ Another article had the town clerk of Scarborough protesting at ban-the-bomb posters being ‘plastered’ as he termed it all over the town early one Sunday morning. The sub-text was that the good citizens of the town felt violated by these campaigners from outside.¹²⁰

Some of this steady drip of disapproving newspaper coverage for CND can be attributed to the press itself. But the problem as to why this was the case was also closer to home, evidenced by the long, agonising internal CND debate about ‘image’ which can be found in the CND archives, and the lack of a professional attitude to media relations. Wittner

¹¹⁶ *Daily Mail*, September 14, 1959, issue 19718, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ *Daily Mail*, March 31, 1960, p. 9.

¹¹⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, March 28, 1959, p.7; *Daily Telegraph*, April 15, 1959, p. 21; *Daily Telegraph*, September 9, 1959, p. 15; *Daily Telegraph*, November 1, 1960, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, October 1, 1960, p. 7.

¹²⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, October 4, 1960, p. 15.

refers to this as a ‘significant problem’,¹²¹ and given it was facing a formidable government PR machine this was an important area of organisational competence. One recurring theme was the apparent inability to vary campaign tactics, which relied heavily on marches and rallies. An insight into this weakness came from activists themselves. A *Guardian* report of 70 CND members who were marching from Edinburgh to London in a 1960 recruiting and publicity drive said that, ‘The marchers are disappointed that their efforts have not aroused more interest and publicity, and some of them feel that the British have become so accustomed to mass walks of one kind or another that the march has lost some of its value as a propaganda weapon.’¹²²

This frustration at the lack of interest fed into the move by some campaigners towards direct action and a different approach which would involve illegality. The need to gain newspaper headlines was cited by Lord Russell and others as a key reason for the establishment of the Committee of 100 as a breakaway group from CND in October 1960. In a significant speech he was quite open about attributing the tactics of sitting down in Whitehall and courting arrest by the police to the objective of gaining the attention of the press.

‘The main reason why we cannot be content with these [constitutional methods] alone is that, so long as only constitutional methods were employed, it was very difficult – and often impossible – to cause the most important facts to be known. All the great newspapers are against us. Television and radio gave us only grudging and brief opportunities for stating our case...It was very largely the difficulty of making our case known that drove some of us

¹²¹ ‘Despite the impressive size and appeal of Britain’s nuclear disarmament movement, it struggled with some significant problems. One of these had to do with media relations. Although the Committee of 100’s early sit-downs were well-attended and well publicised, they alienated many Britons. In October 1961, a Gallup poll found that 61 per cent of the public disapproved of the “direct action of sitting down against H-bombs.” Lawrence S. Wittner, ‘The Struggle Against the Bomb, Vol. II Resisting the Bomb,’ *A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement 1954-1970* (Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 194.

¹²² *The Guardian*, September 12, 1960, p. 10.

to the adoption of illegal methods. Our illegal actions, because they had sensational news value, were reported, and here and there, a newspaper would allow us to say why we did what we did.’¹²³ He believed that while CND was carrying out valuable work, ‘the press is becoming used to its doings and beginning to doubt their news value. It has therefore seemed to some of us necessary to supplement this campaign by such actions as the press is sure to report.’¹²⁴

Evidence from CND archives is that those activists within CND concerned with communicating the key messages of the campaign were privately angry at its inability to reach a bigger audience. David Boulton, editor of CND’s monthly paper *Sanity*, made a withering critique of CND’s media performance in an internal paper saying that relations with the press were poor and CND statements went ‘wholly unreported.’ He blamed this on over-worthy press releases and too much concentration on Canon Collins as CND spokesperson. ‘We have failed to learn the lessons that Bertrand Russell learned many months ago. That is that statements to the press must be highly coloured, dramatic and often overdrawn. Responsible press statements, where every sentence is qualified, statements which purr, “Look how statesmanlike we can be,” fall with a heavy thud on a news editor’s desk, and with a heavier thud into his waste paper basket.’¹²⁵ Francis Butler, a former secretary of London region CND, wrote that there had been a failure to present the positive ideas of CND in a popular and readily available form and there was a lot to learn from popular journalism.¹²⁶

Public opinion and the press

¹²³ Speech on April 15, 1961 in Birmingham to the first annual conference of the Midlands region Youth CND. *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, Vol. III 1944-1967* (George Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 139.

¹²⁴ Bertrand Russell, ‘Civil Disobedience,’ *New Statesman*, February 17, 1961, in *Lines of Dissent*, p.177.

¹²⁵ CND Archive, LSE files, CND/2008: 7/4/2.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, CND 3/5.

In this battle for hearts and minds the attitude of the public was important and they were not only passive reflectors of what they consumed. There was a complex interplay of government propaganda, pressures in the newspaper industry and Cold War tension. There is evidence from opinion polls that public opinion had forced the issue of the nuclear deterrent high up the policy agenda. According to Grant, who undertook a detailed critique of civil defence policy after 1945, public concern was fed by successive governments' denial of information on the actual effects of nuclear bombing, leaving a vacuum which was filled by a growing belief in an apocalyptic nuclear war in which there would be no survivors. This also encouraged CND's appeal as a moral one based on renouncing the bomb as the only alternative to the end of the civilised world.¹²⁷ This 'all-or-nothing' fear in which the idea of civil defence and surviving a nuclear war was increasingly discredited, certainly gained pace in the decade before the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. *Times* editor Sir William Haley believed it was coalescing into a powerful expression of opinion which politicians could not ignore.

Haley expounded his view of how public attitudes were formed in his 1958 Haldane Lecture, in which he said that on occasions a slowly developing 'climate of opinion' could influence policy-makers. It tended to spread via a grapevine in the community and 'mass circulation newspapers which help to set the national temper' had a key role to play in this. He cited nuclear weapons as the best example, and said newspapers' coverage of George

¹²⁷ Matthew Grant, 'Images of Survival, Stories of Destruction: Nuclear War on British Screens from 1945 to the early 1960s,' *Journal of British Cinema and Television, Vol 10, Issue 1*, pp. 8-9, *Special section Cinema, Television and the Cold War*, Alan Burton and Tony Shaw (eds.), (Edinburgh University Press, 2013). One example of suppression of information was the Strath report prepared by civil servants for ministers in 1955, which warned that an H-bomb attack on Britain could kill one-third of the population within 24 hours and leave large parts of the country uninhabitable. It recommended fallout shelters for the whole population, and the public to be fully educated on the effects of nuclear war. The report was kept secret and never published. See Melissa Smith, 'What to do if it happens': *planners, pamphlets and propaganda in the age of the H-bomb* (Endeavour magazine, June 2009, Vol. 33, No.2, pp. 41-80.)

Kennan's 1957 Reith Lectures on BBC had helped to stir up public opinion.¹²⁸ The lectures made a big impact in Britain by proposing an alternative to superpower brinkmanship and previous US thinking based around 'massive retaliation', suggesting that the struggle with the Soviet Union was a long-term political and economic one and not military. The West should talk to them, he believed, and this led to pressure on the governments of Harold Macmillan to propose international summits, including with the Soviet Union, in an effort to reduce tension. But Marsh and Fraser, who produced one of the few studies which examined this issue specifically in relation to nuclear weapons, were more cautious on the impact of public opinion, citing the complexity of defining what 'public opinion' is and the problems of assessing how far the mass media was being influenced in a way that would set policy agendas.¹²⁹

The evidence seems to be that while newspapers echoed government policy on the deterrent, they did also serve to reflect a wider concern about the dangers posed by possession of H-bombs and testing. According to Hugh Berrington, opinion polls revealed an ambivalent stance by the public who, while not wanting any major change on nuclear defence, were fearful of the possible consequences. He said that the different results obtained by changing the wording in opinion polls evoked contradictory reactions from the public. His conclusion was that 'anxiety about the enormous capacity for damage which these weapons have, jostles with fears of being exposed, helplessly, to foreign attack; concern about the health hazards from radiation, lies cheek by jowl with the reassurances that armed strength deters.'¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Sir William Haley, *The Formation of Public Opinion*, Haldane Memorial Lecture delivered at Birkbeck College 1958, pp. 6-9; Professor George F. Kennan, BBC Reith Lectures, six lectures on the theme of *Russia, The Atom, and the West*, November 10-December 15, 1957.

¹²⁹ Catherine Marsh and Colin Fraser (eds.), *Public Opinion and Nuclear Weapons* (Macmillan, 1989), p. 13.

¹³⁰ Hugh Berrington, 'British Public Opinion and Nuclear Weapons', in Marsh and Fraser, *Public Opinion and Nuclear Weapons*, p. 34.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown press support overall for the official nuclear deterrent line. In an era of huge newspaper circulations the concentration of ownership in a few hands tended to reinforce the status quo of defence policy. Most newspapers believed that possession of the nuclear bomb reinforced Britain's position in the world as a great power. There were exceptions to this and the case study of *The Times* illustrates that the 'quality' press in particular was willing to give space to a range of opinions. A reorganised government public relations machine benefited from a single co-ordinating Cabinet Minister who was devoted full-time for four years to communicating consistent propaganda messages. This made it less likely that journalists would look elsewhere for their information or challenge the basis of deterrent policy. The D-Notice system was used occasionally to inhibit newspapers from delving too deeply into the development and installation of nuclear weapons.

Evidence has been presented that the press linked their editorial support for the deterrent with a generally negative or patronising approach to CND and its campaigning activities. But CND compounded this by failing to vary its appeal to a wider public through an imaginative public relations strategy. An internal debate discussed the organisation's 'image' problem, and the desire for bigger headlines helped to drive some activists to split the movement in what with hindsight could be seen as a fatal development.

Chapter 3 - Secrecy and suppression: how the nuclear deterrent debate was closed down.

Introduction

A distinct pattern of approach can be identified throughout the period of Harold Macmillan's governments towards propaganda around Britain's independent nuclear deterrent. This was secrecy and the suppression of information which might be harmful to the policy, together with the denial of a platform to its critics which the government feared might lead to wider scrutiny. This chapter will draw on National Archives, CND papers, Ministerial diaries and selective secondary material to illustrate this approach, and the material will be contextualised to provide an understanding of how it contributes to the overall argument around the nuclear deterrent. The arguments will also demonstrate the way in which a small group of senior civil servants in the Prime Minister's office at times appeared to play a disproportionate role in shaping policy, as opposed to advising on it. The chapter first examines three instances of the government preventing debate on nuclear deterrent-related issues because of a fear it could harm its policy. It then refers to how Ministers were flexible in publicly meeting CND women who were critical of nuclear testing, in order to manage their arguments and neutralise their appeal. Two other cases of the government imposing D Notices are analysed to illustrate how it was prepared to use a range of tactics to restrict discussion in the press but also in wider society, of what were arguably matters of great public interest.

The concept of government secrecy runs like a thread through these arguments. David Vincent selects the field of nuclear power and nuclear weapons as an example of secretive official decision-making.¹³¹ He refers to one detailed study on nuclear energy which concluded, ‘in Britain one feels that secrecy having begun as a necessity continued as a convenience and eventually became an obsession.’¹³² There was little Parliamentary knowledge or critical evaluation of nuclear policy and Vincent says Harold Macmillan, who had covered up what he calls ‘a potentially disastrous fire at Windscale,’ had an ‘instinctive horror of openness in any area of nuclear energy which placed him squarely in the tradition of his predecessors in Downing Street.’¹³³

The chapter argues that the government strategy was to deter debate on the nuclear deterrent among its own internal ranks, from opposition movements and in the public sphere generally. The use of D Notices was aimed at the press but also served to remind the public of the dangers of becoming involved in a policy for which there was no feasible alternative.. Hogg’s point is relevant here, namely that the logic of deterrence depended on the belief that the condition of nuclear threat was permanent. Hogg argues that, ‘without this, deterrence is useless as an idea. Deterrence cannot be temporary.’ Such concepts were powerful influencers on social and cultural attitudes, Hogg argues.¹³⁴ In practical terms this meant that Macmillan and the Conservatives were able to use the ever-present fear that people had of nuclear war to say that only the deterrent was the guarantee of peace. However, unlike previous post-war governments the administrations of 1957-1963 had to contend with a large oppositional movement in CND, which believed that the public needed educating about the

¹³¹ David Vincent, *Britain: The Culture of Secrecy 1832-1998* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹³² R. Williams, *The Nuclear Power Decisions* (London, 1980), p. 324 quoted in Vincent.

¹³³ Vincent, p. 202.

¹³⁴ Hogg, *British Nuclear Culture*, p. 7.

real effects of nuclear weapons, and could be persuaded that they did not deter an enemy and were therefore valueless.

Closing down the nuclear deterrent debate

The government's reaction to a major fire at the Windscale nuclear reactor in Cumbria in October 1957 led to an overt act of censorship. There are several reasons which make this event important for this thesis. First, it was an early example of secrecy surrounding nuclear policy, which continued during the lifetime of Macmillan's governments. Second, the reactor was seen as crucial to developing Britain's thermonuclear H-bomb programme. The Windscale plant was asked to produce material for this programme and anything untoward that happened there would have a direct bearing on the entire weapons programme.¹³⁵ But it is relevant to argue here that the rush to develop the programme always ran the risk, as will be shown, of accidents and projects going wrong. Hogg and Laucht in raising the concept of British nuclear culture discuss how nuclear science was unpredictable and uncontrollable. They say the public reaction to the Windscale fire demonstrated a fear of experimenting with this new source of massive energy.¹³⁶

Third, it is argued that there was a reputational issue for Britain since Macmillan had set great store by renewing an alliance with the US after the debacle of Suez. In particular, he wanted the US Congress to repeal the Atomic Energy Act of 1946, better known as the McMahon Act, which prevented the Americans sharing nuclear expertise with other

¹³⁵ Lorna Arnold, *Windscale 1957: Anatomy of a Nuclear Accident* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 26.

¹³⁶ Hogg and Laucht, 'Introduction to special issue on British Nuclear Culture', *British Journal for the History of Science*, , pp. 479-699.

countries. Access to this would enable Britain to be in a better position to develop its own nuclear weapon.

To advance this objective the Prime Minister had visited Washington for talks with President Eisenhower in mid-October 1957, after the fire itself but before the inquiry report was finished. In a joint statement the President committed himself to seek an amendment of the McMahon Act to permit ‘close and fruitful collaboration of scientists and engineers of Great Britain, the United States, and other friendly countries.’¹³⁷ In his diary entry for the time Macmillan describes this as ‘the great prize’ that he was seeking.¹³⁸ The US Congress was due to be discussing this, and Macmillan feared any bad publicity from the Windscale fire could put in danger this co-operation.

In terms of reliable accounts of the fire and the politics surrounding it, Laura Arnold is perhaps the best source as she was the official historian of the Atomic Energy Authority (AEA) and essentially of the UK’s nuclear programme. But her work is complemented by additional information from Douglas Holdstock and Frank Barnaby’s section on Windscale, political and social historians Peter Hennessy and David Kynaston, as well as from Harold Macmillan’s diaries. The nuclear reactors known as Windscale Pile 1 and Pile 2 were built and opened near the village of Seascale, Cumberland between October 1950 and June 1951. The plutonium from these reactors was used in the first British nuclear test in October 1952 and ‘the short time between these events indicates the speed at which the nuclear weapon programme proceeded.’¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Arnold, *Windscale 1957*, p. 84.

¹³⁸ Peter Caterall (ed.), *The Macmillan Diaries, Vol II Prime Minister and After 1957-1960* (Macmillan, 2011), p. 67. October 24, 1957 – Macmillan describes a visit to Washington for talks on defence co-operation. ‘Dulles came to luncheon again at the Embassy. We had a talk afterwards, and he produced the draft of a “declaration”, to be called “declaration of common purpose.” I glanced at it, and saw, embedded in a lot of verbiage, para 3 – the end of the McMahon Act – the great prize!’

¹³⁹ Douglas Holdstock and Frank Barnaby (eds.), *The British Nuclear Weapons Programme 1952-2002* (Frank Cass, 2003), p. 5.

The fire on October 10 1957 was the result of the mishandling of a routine operation to shut down one of the two reactors. This led to a massive heating up of the graphite which surrounded the uranium fuel, leading it to burn and the fuel to catch fire. To try and put the flames out carbon dioxide gas was pumped in, which failed to work, and then water was used as a last resort since it could have potentially caused an explosion. Ultimately that succeeded in stopping the fire, but not before a cloud of radioactive steam was produced and released into the atmosphere. There were immediate health implications for the surrounding population, as Arnold, and Holdstock and Barnaby have detailed.¹⁴⁰ Milk from local farms was found to contain harmful amounts of iodine-31, which can cause cancers, and consumption of milk was eventually banned in a radius of 200 square miles.

The government's approach to both the health risks and political fallout was to minimise the implications of the accident while stressing that the complexities of the reactor process meant it could not be understood by lay people. Kynaston commented that, 'From the start the official line was to downplay the seriousness of the situation and its potential dangers: the BBC's six o'clock radio news bulletin on the 11th stressed that no public hazard was being caused because the wind was blowing from the east and carrying radioactivity out to sea, while next day the ban on the sale of locally produced milk covered only 14 square miles.'¹⁴¹

The resulting information cover-up took several forms. Firstly, Macmillan rejected calls for an independent judicial inquiry. He agreed only to an internal inquiry headed by Sir William Penney, who had helped the Americans develop the first nuclear bomb, and was head of the Aldermaston atomic research base. The understanding was that the inquiry panel

¹⁴⁰ Arnold p. 54, Holdstock and Barnaby, pp. 7-8.

¹⁴¹ David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain 1957-62* (Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 77.

would not meet in public and its report would not be published.¹⁴² Arnold refers to *The Economist* magazine arguing that however fair a private inquiry might be, it was not enough and an independent judicial assessment was needed. Press reaction was mixed with some newspapers favourable or at least neutral while others criticised the constitution of the inquiry and the under-estimation of the seriousness of the accident. The London office of the AEA sent one of its press officers to Windscale for the duration of the emergency to help overloaded staff there cope with the rush of enquiries.¹⁴³

Penney's report, which was kept secret and not published until 1988, found that the accident was caused by a combination of human error, poor management and faulty instruments.¹⁴⁴ It did not deal with the suggestion by others that safety at the Windscale plant had been put in jeopardy by the rush to meet weapons programme deadlines. It can be argued that all new scientific developments can never be risk-free as they are pioneering to some extent. However, Holdstock and Barnaby held a different view, 'Perhaps the Windscale tragedy was built into the plant. The two reactors were put up in a great hurry to make plutonium for Britain's nuclear weapons. Corners were cut because of the haste: the reactors had no containment, no operating manual was prepared, temperature gauges were put in the wrong positions and so on. In the circumstances, the Windscale accident was hardly surprising.'¹⁴⁵

Of key significance to the secrecy argument is that it was the Prime Minister's decision alone not to publish the full inquiry report. In terms of the advice he was given, executive heads of the AEA considered the report on October 28, advised the full AEA Board

¹⁴² Arnold p. 57.

¹⁴³ Arnold p. 69.

¹⁴⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/november/8/newsid_3181000/3181342.stm

¹⁴⁵ Holdstock and Barnaby, p. 5.

to accept its findings and recommended to the Prime Minister that it be published in full.¹⁴⁶ Yet in the days following Macmillan first played for time then made a personal decision not to publish. On October 29 he fended off calls for full publication of the report when answering questions in Parliament. Macmillan said that, 'I will certainly make a full report to this House. I received this report myself only this morning.' He added that the report was very technical and not easy for lay people to follow. Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell then pressed the Prime Minister for more transparency in the form of either full publication or a further independent inquiry, asking if Macmillan appreciated the importance of allaying public anxiety and giving an assurance that nothing would be hidden.¹⁴⁷ But Macmillan skirted round the question replying that, 'I will consider all these things, but I am also interested in maintaining, as I am sure is the right hon. Member for Leeds, South (Mr. Gaitskell), the tremendous, unique reputation of our scientists in this field throughout the world.'¹⁴⁸

The next day after the debate the full AEA Board met and accepted responsibility for the accident. It recognised it might shake public confidence in the authority but believed there should be no attempt at a cover-up. When the Penney report was sent to Number 10 the AEA chairman Sir Edwin Plowden wanted it published in full and rang Macmillan offering to resign but the Prime Minister rejected this.

'Edwin Plowden (Atomic Energy Authority) called – in a great state of emotion – about the report on the accident at Windscale. He wants to offer his resignation. I dissuaded him, as best I could. But the problem remains – how are we to deal with Sir William Penney's report. It has of course been prepared with scrupulous honesty and even

¹⁴⁶ Arnold, p. 80.

¹⁴⁷ Hansard HC Deb Vol 575 Cols 32-6 (29 October 1957) [Electronic version]

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

ruthlessness. It is just such a report as the board of a company might expect to get. But to publish to the world (especially to the Americans) is another thing. The publication of the report, as it stands, might put in jeopardy our chance of getting Congress to agree to the President's proposal.'¹⁴⁹

Macmillan had so much at stake over his dealings with the Americans that he could not allow anything to interfere with what was happening in the US Congress. He downplayed the event as 'a mishap' telling his civil servants that he would make a short oral statement to the House and make a longer written statement, probably in a White Paper. "It would explain that, as the Penney Report was one made by a servant of the Authority to the Authority about a mishap at a factory engaged in defence work it would not be suitable for it to be published.'¹⁵⁰

Macmillan's decision was to issue to Parliament a memorandum which stated that the report was for the AEA to help them discharge their statutory responsibilities and was only 'a technical document.' It went on, 'It also presupposes considerable knowledge of the technology of this particular pile. It would not be in the national interest to publish the report.' An annex contained 'a less technical version' on events surrounding the accident.¹⁵¹ The cover-up worked in the sense that not too many questions were asked by MPs and Macmillan's relief expressed in his diary was palpable.¹⁵² His apparently reassuring statement to the Commons said that, 'In the last twelve years, we in Britain have built up this new industry without a single serious injury caused by radiation, there is no evidence that this accident has done any significant harm to any person, animal or property.'¹⁵³ This is now

¹⁴⁹ *Macmillan Diaries* p. 6, October 30, 1957.

¹⁵⁰ Arnold, p. 83.

¹⁵¹ *Accident at Windscale No 1. Pile on October 10, 1957* (Cmnd 302, November 1957).

¹⁵² *Macmillan Diaries*, p. 71, November 8, 1957, 'I made a statement in the House at 11am about the Windscale accident. I have published a long White Paper (the substance of Penney's report) and this seemed to satisfy the House. At least, no one asked about publication in full....'

¹⁵³ *Hansard HC Deb Vol 577 Cols 465-8 (8 November 1957)* [Electronic version]

contestable as later research published in 2007 claimed that twice the amount of radioactive materials had been released as was previously thought and 240 deaths from cancer could be attributed to the 1957 incident.¹⁵⁴

The radioactive isotopes released during the Windscale fire included polonium, a highly radioactive substance used in early nuclear weapons. This was ignored at the time as were many other facts which Holdstock and Barnaby believe were deliberately suppressed.¹⁵⁵ Macmillan's secrecy over the report was a theme of his nuclear policy. Support for this is also found in Chapter 6 where military historian Jim Wilson asserts a clear link between the cover-up over Windscale and keeping the public in ignorance over military planning during the Cuban Missile Crisis, five years later.¹⁵⁶ While Macmillan may have thought he had successfully reassured the public after the accident some observers believed it left a sense of unease about the risks of the nuclear programme. Mollie Panter-Downes, the London correspondent of the *New Yorker* magazine, detected 'a wave of national disquiet' not only about the 'alarming leak of radioactive iodine' into West Cumberland's milk supplies but more generally about 'what went wrong, why the Atomic Energy Authority was so slow in saying that anything had gone wrong, why the safety measures were fumbled – and slow off the mark, too.'¹⁵⁷ The *News Chronicle* found the subsequent White Paper on the accident reassuring but highlighted the 'radiation risks about which we still know far too little' and

¹⁵⁴ Garland, J.A. and R. Wakeford, 'Atmospheric emissions from the Windscale accident of October 1957,' *Atmospheric Environment*, Vol. 41, Issue 18, (2007), pp. 3904-3920.

¹⁵⁵ Holdstock and Barnaby, p.7. 'We now know that this was at the direct order of the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan. He gave this order, in spite of the health hazards of the radiation from the accident, for fear of what the Americans may have thought...If the full facts had been published the Americans might have ended collaboration with British scientists on nuclear weapons.'

¹⁵⁶ Jim Wilson, *Launch Pad UK: Britain and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Pen & Sword Aviation, 2008), pp. 163-4.

¹⁵⁷ Kynaston, p. 77.

added that ‘it is this mystery, this sense of vague and ill-understood menace, which worries the public.’¹⁵⁸

In the following year 1958 this censorship extended to voices within the Cabinet concerned about the effects of nuclear fallout. But in this case the fear was not of alarming the Americans but of handing a platform to domestic critics of the deterrent policy, and encouraging some eminent scientists to voice their concerns. Lord Hailsham was Lord President of the Council from 1957 and in that capacity was responsible for the work of the Medical Research Council and the Agricultural Research Council. National archives for 1958 document his fruitless attempt to persuade the Cabinet to hold a parliamentary debate on the dangers of nuclear fallout and radioactivity. The background is that he was a senior member of the government, serving as Conservative Party chair between 1957-59 and later to be Minister of Science and Technology. Members of the Cabinet clearly thought if such a leading Tory gave voice to the fears of the many scientists who were opposed to nuclear weapons, that would severely undermine the credibility of the nuclear deterrent.

Frederick ‘Freddie’ Bishop, Macmillan’s Principal Private Secretary, played a pivotal role in steering leading scientists such as Sir John Cockcroft away from assisting Hailsham, and this sheds light on the highly interventionist methods used by civil servants around Macmillan to prevent open debate of nuclear matters. Bishop was part of a small group of civil servants and politicians that advised the Prime Minister and he trusted them. Other members were Philip de Zulueta, who like Bishop had been an adviser to Anthony Eden when Prime Minister and was now private secretary for foreign affairs; Sir Norman Brooke who was Cabinet Secretary from 1947 to 1962 and represented continuity and longevity; Edward Heath the Chief Whip in the Commons; Charles Hill brought in to co-ordinate

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 78.

information; and Harold Evans Chief Press Officer. They had the ear of the Prime Minister and were a strong influence in Whitehall.¹⁵⁹

This formidable team came up against the pugnacious Hailsham, who was an articulate populariser of ideas as well as an experienced barrister and QC. Writing about the period later in his memoirs, he said, ‘These facts [about the generation of electricity by nuclear means] and the foreign policy and defence requirements had made me no enemy of nuclear power generation for civil purposes, nor a friend of unilateral nuclear disarmament in defence. Nevertheless, my contacts with the scientists had led me to entertain real anxieties about the dangers of the emission of radioactive isotopes in to the atmosphere as the results of the tests of nuclear weapons by the then three main nuclear powers....’ He believed that unless tests were banned or confined to underground ‘there would be, or so at least I believed, a very real danger to the health of the world...’¹⁶⁰

Driven by these anxieties he took the initiative in February 1958 to draft a letter to Lord Adrian, Master of Trinity College Cambridge, a noted scientist himself who was known to favour stopping the spread of nuclear weapons. This suggested either a question or short debate in the Lords. ‘I cannot help feeling that knowledge and understanding outside the relatively small circle of well-informed scientists are lagging very far behind and that in the absence of sound information a great deal of dangerous misconception may spread in the public mind,’ Lord Hailsham wrote.¹⁶¹ As soon as he sent the draft note to Number 10 for comment the alarm bells began to ring. In the Prime Minister’s absence the Lord Privy Seal Rab Butler dealt with it. ‘What is clear is that we certainly don’t want to encourage a debate in the Commons. Ergo, we don’t want to encourage a debate in the Lords. I do not mind the

¹⁵⁹ Harold Evans, *Downing Street Diary*, p. 29. Evans refers in detail to the team around Macmillan including their experience and co-ordination.

¹⁶⁰ *A Sparrow’s Flight: The Memoirs of Lord Hailsham of St Marylebone* (Collins, 1990). p. 341.

¹⁶¹ PREM 11/2549, TNA, Tube Alloys, February 1958, Hailsham to Adrian, February 6, 1958.

Master's view being taken but let us reserve the question of a debate.'¹⁶² The letter was sent and Lord Adrian replied making clear his worries about nuclear fallout and the lack of international enforcement of safety regulations.¹⁶³

At that point Freddie Bishop became involved in the manoeuvres to quash the proposal to hold a Parliamentary debate. He wrote to Sir Edwin Plowden, still chairman of the Atomic Energy Authority (AEA), in a 'secret and personal note' saying that Lord Adrian had approached Sir John Cockcroft about a possible debate and referred to Butler not wanting one. (Cockcroft had won the Nobel Prize for splitting the atom and was a full-time member of the AEA as well as being an honorary fellow of St John's College, Cambridge.) Bishop confided that 'between ourselves, I judge that his [Lord Hailsham's] letter leaned rather more in favour of encouraging a debate in the House of Lords than we should really want. At all events, I am sure that the right thing for Cockcroft to do is to lead Lord Adrian if possible to discourage the idea of a debate. I am not happy about the way this matter has gone, and that is why I am marking this letter secret and personal.'¹⁶⁴

Hailsham appeared to realise he was facing opposition as he wrote to Macmillan saying he recognised that any debate would have to be limited to the 'medical and biological aspects of the matter' and keep off the issue of disarmament.¹⁶⁵ Lord Home, who was Commonwealth Relations Secretary and Leader in the Lords, also opposed a debate and expressed the real fear that it would be a platform for those seeking to discredit nuclear weapons. He said that, 'Lord Adrian would, of course, make an admirable speech and so would the Lord President but I fear that their reasoned analysis would attract less attention than the examples of strontium percentages in children, cows, sheep and pastures which

¹⁶² Ibid., Butler comment on draft letter, February 7, 1958.

¹⁶³ Ibid., Adrian to Hailsham, April 4, 1958.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., Bishop to Plowden, February 21, 1958.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., Hailsham to Macmillan, April 21, 1958.

would be gleefully trotted out by those who are always looking for a good platform to do so and are waiting to stir up the public to put more pressure on the government to abandon tests.¹⁶⁶ The final word came from Whip Sir Charles Harris whose letter was quoted by Macmillan. 'He asked me to say that we cannot possibly manage to find special opportunity for such a debate in the Commons and a debate in the Lords on this subject might well stimulate such a demand, especially if the matter proves very controversial.'¹⁶⁷ The proposal was finally dropped. Despite this debacle for the minister Macmillan still had high regard for Hailsham's qualities and later chose him to lead the British delegation to the Moscow talks in 1963 which led to the signing of the partial Test Ban Treaty. As he commented in his diaries, 'I sent Hailsham to Moscow on purpose, to test his powers of negotiation etc. He did very well....'¹⁶⁸

So the issue of the debate was not so much a personal snub to Hailsham but rather evidence that the Cabinet was almost obsessive about preventing public scrutiny around nuclear weapons and testing. The way that ministers and civil servants conspired to block even minimal discussion of its scientific consequences suggests a real fear that the public would be alarmed and the deterrent policy would be undermined.

The government was prepared to suppress materials that were meant to be publicly available for this purpose. In particular, they had no wish to encourage CND to take part in such a debate and evidence of this was the government's reluctance to agree to releasing materials such as posters and films about civil defence in the event of nuclear war. In 1958 North West CND asked the Home Office for use of a poster showing the explosion of an H-bomb, so they could display it at a meeting at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, to be

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., Home to Macmillan, April 24, 1958.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., Harris to Macmillan, May 1, 1958.

¹⁶⁸ *Macmillan's Diaries*, p. 590, September 5, 1963.

addressed by the Bishop of Manchester. At the same time the Central Office for Information (COI) was approached to loan a film about the atom bomb prepared for civil defence purposes, to be shown in Ipswich at a private meeting. The film was in the unrestricted section of the COI library allowing it to be used in public.¹⁶⁹ The matter landed on the desk of Home Secretary Rab Butler who wanted to refuse both requests on the grounds that the poster was for recruiting purposes only and the film for training use, and neither of these purposes were served by the proposed meetings. ‘My impression is that we would be open to more criticism for making either the poster or the film available than we shall be if we withheld them.’¹⁷⁰ Charles Hill the Cabinet’s information co-ordinator agreed about the poster but said the film had been openly advertised as being available to the public. ‘Here the point is that the Central Film Library have it on their open list and I think we would be blamed by a lot of people quite outside the nuclear disarmament group if we broke the Library’s own rules. But I certainly agree that steps should be taken quietly to remove this film from the open list...’¹⁷¹

Butler relented about the film but then asked for it (and a series of other civil defence-related films) to be ‘unobtrusively’ taken out of the catalogue advertising them.¹⁷² Ten days later the Public Relations division asked COI to remove certain films from the open list, namely *The Atomic Bomb: its Effects and How to meet Them* (five parts); *The H-Bomb*; *Civil Defence Makes Sense*; and *Atomic Attack*. These films would still be available to local authorities and those having ‘a genuine civil defence interest’ for training purposes. A special list of such films would be created and only supplied on request but in a slightly Kafkaesque move this would be difficult as ‘any reference to the existence of this list should be removed from future editions of the catalogue.’¹⁷³ One anonymous information officer from within the

¹⁶⁹ HO 322/119, TNA. Request for materials from “Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.” May 1958.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., Butler to Charles Hill, May 9, 1958.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., Hill to Butler, May 9, 1958.

¹⁷² Ibid., Butler to Hill, May 12, 1958.

¹⁷³ Ibid., Mr Edwards to COI, May 21, 1958.

government involved in the correspondence over the poster issue obviously felt strongly enough to draft a written objection to the censorship. ‘Civil Defence is non-party and has no reason to take sides on the “ban-the-bomb” issue; it may be rare, but it is not impossible for a bomb-banner to be a civil defender as well without inconsistency. I think there is less, if any, danger of doing harm by sending this poster to the organisers than there would be by withholding it.’ Rab Butler tellingly responded in a hand-written note on the same message, ‘We must take NO positive action such as this to help a Ban the Bomb meeting – Rab.’¹⁷⁴

Women and nuclear weapons

This unwillingness of the government to countenance CND views in any way usually extended to a ban on face to face meetings with them. But propaganda needs required flexibility if there was an advantage in being able to publicly rebut people’s concerns about nuclear war. One example of the government attempting to manage the terms of the deterrent debate with a key group was Harold Macmillan’s decision to meet a CND women’s deputation in March 1962. There was a recognition of the strength of feeling of women about nuclear testing, its effects on children and opposition to the British deterrent, particularly at a time when the US was planning to resume nuclear tests.

CND had tried since its inception in 1958 to acknowledge that feeling by developing a movement called Women Against the Bomb. In that year it held an all-women’s rally which according to Minnion and Bolsover was virtually ignored by the press. One of the organisers Jacquetta Hawkes wrote to several papers saying, ‘It seems that so long as we women are

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., May 1, 1958. Butler wrote his comment on the same note.

trivial, we are assured of space in the press; when we are deeply serious over a matter of life and death we are ignored.’¹⁷⁵ A further protest took place in 1961 when about 600 people, mostly mothers with young children, demonstrated at the Soviet and US embassies against the resumption of nuclear tests in the atmosphere. Diana Collins of CND wrote to Macmillan the following February asking for a meeting because ‘ this is a matter of vital importance which is exercising the minds of millions of women, both in Britain and elsewhere, who are concerned about the health and future of their children.’¹⁷⁶ In PR terms it was felt prudent for ministers to agree to this in order to persuade women that possession of a deterrent was the best way to pressure the Soviet Union into disarmament talks.

A briefing note to the Prime Minister said the Minister of Defence thought it would be useful to see the CND women, ‘although he has himself so far refused to receive deputations from the Nuclear Disarmers. Although the deputation proposed contains some people who are thought of as being virtual fellow-travellers, there are some others who are well thought of.’¹⁷⁷ Influential backing to go ahead with this came from party chair Ian Macleod who said that, ‘ women are naturally most deeply concerned with the effects, in particular the genetic effects, of tests. For this reason a sympathetic hearing would, I think be helpful.’¹⁷⁸ The strong CND deputation was led by Dame Alix Meynell, who was an under-Secretary at the Board of Trade from 1945-55, and Macmillan may have been struck by some of their arguments. Writer Marghanita Laski said the psychological effect of young people living in a world threatened by nuclear war could be causing more juvenile delinquency, and added that young girls feared barrenness or the birth of deformed children. Diana Collins said that as a Christian she found it impossible to reconcile teaching children Christian ethics while

¹⁷⁵ John Minnion and Philip Bolsover (eds.), *The CND Story* (Allison and Busby, 1983), p. 16.

¹⁷⁶ PREM 11/4290, 1962-1963 Home Affairs, TNA, Letter to PM from Mrs Diana Collins, February 1, 1962.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, note to PM from HW, February 9, 1962.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, note to PM from Ian Macleod, February 14, 1962.

preparing them to take part in a nuclear war.¹⁷⁹ But Macmillan had come to the meeting well briefed. For instance that on nuclear fallout President Kennedy had said exposure due to radiation from these tests would be less than one-fiftieth of the radiation due from natural radioactivity in different parts of the USA. Macmillan rejected the deputation's arguments, declaring that unilateral action was no solution. 'I must think of the security of the West. At least the deterrent has deterred until now,' Macmillan said.¹⁸⁰ He had been able to show he was listening while at the same time making no change at all to the deterrent policy.

Diana Collins when looking back at what the meeting had achieved said that Macmillan told them that he personally had persuaded US President Eisenhower on several occasions not to carry out nuclear tests. It was clear to her group that Macmillan was beginning to recognise the dangers of over-reliance on nuclear weapons. The deputation felt the meeting was worthwhile, they received some coverage on television and 'we heard afterwards that Macmillan had been much impressed.'¹⁸¹

D Notices and questioning official secrets

The same motivation to suppress debate appeared to lie behind two further controversial nuclear-related affairs that involved the government imposing D Notices. Both raised the question of what was a genuine official secret, as opposed to a topic that the government felt uncomfortable about openly discussing. The first concerned the siting of 60 US missiles in Britain between 1958 and 1963. This presented a challenge in propaganda

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., note of the meeting with CND, sent March 15, 1962.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., briefing note to PM for CND meeting.

¹⁸¹ Diana Collins, *Partners in Protest: Life with Canon Collins* (Victor Gollanz, 1992), pp. 262-3.

terms since the government had to accept weapons from another country on British soil, so the questions that might arise were the reason for the deal and who had control over their use. In other words, the Thor missile installation raised the sensitive issue of UK sovereignty and how far the 'independent' nuclear deterrent really was independent of the US. The agreement to accept the missiles and details of the deployment in Britain were deliberately shrouded in secrecy, so that even the name Thor was not specified in the agreement with the US. A D Notice was issued to the press in February 1958 stating that the location of the missile sites could not be identified, only that the bases would be in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and East Anglia.¹⁸² Twigge and Scott have made clear that intense negotiations went on behind the scenes on the sovereignty issue as the British government was aware that CND and others were criticising US nuclear operations carried out within the UK. What was agreed was an unusual 'dual key' system which granted both Britain and the USA a physical veto over the launch of the missiles.¹⁸³ The Prime Minister made an elaborate argument in Parliament as to why Britain had operational control of them:

'The rockets will be the property of Her Majesty's Government, manned by British troops who will receive their prior training from American experts. The rockets cannot be fired by any except the British personnel, but the warhead will be in the control of the United States - which is the law of the United States - and to that extent the Americans have negative control; but it is absolutely untrue to say that the President and not the British government

¹⁸² TNA.DEFE 13/120 E14, D Notice February 24, 1958, Rear Admiral (Retd) George P.Thomson, Secretary of the Service, Press and Broadcasting Committee, quoted in Boyes, p. 88.

¹⁸³ Stephen Twigge and Len Scott, 'The Other Missiles of October: The Thor IRBMs and the Cuban Missile Crisis', *Electronic Journal of International History* – Article 3, pp 2-3. <http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/3387/#undefined>

will decide when these missiles will be launched and at whom. So long as we rely upon the American warheads, and only so long, that will remain a matter for the two governments.’¹⁸⁴

Despite the fact that the US was paying for the weapons it was important in public relations terms for the Prime Minister to assert sovereignty over the potential use of them. The Thor deployment was seen as a useful way to repair the ‘special relationship’ between the two countries, and was agreed during a summit between Macmillan, his Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, and President Eisenhower at Bermuda in March 1957. However, little was said officially at the time about this and Macmillan hardly mentions it in his diaries. ‘The President.... came to this afternoon’s meeting, but much of the morning meeting we left to the Foreign Secretaries. This is all to the good, because it allows work to proceed, with sub-committees of officials etc, while he and I have a series of informal chats.’ There is then a footnote which says that ‘Agreements reached included the co-ordination of strike forces and the storage of American nuclear weapons on UK bases.’¹⁸⁵ The Thor rockets were seen as an interim measure until Britain developed its own IRBMS to be called Blue Streak, as it was realised that such guided missiles would have to replace V bomber jets dropping nuclear bombs.

According to Sir Michael Beetham, who was head of Bomber Command in 1962 at the time of the Cuban Crisis, the government did its best to restrict information on this unprecedented arrangement. ‘The general public knew little about the plans for Thor deployment. The British government had enough on their hands dealing with CND and other factions protesting against nuclear weapons and, to aggravate the situation in the public mind, Thor had American nuclear warheads, although the British insisted on maintaining control

¹⁸⁴ Robert Jackson, *Strike Force: USAF in Britain* (Robson Books, 1986), quoted in Carpetbagger Aviation Museum, Harrington, Northamptonshire, ‘Thor Missile Deployment in the UK’, para 3,

<http://harringtonmuseum.org.uk/ThorUK.htm>
¹⁸⁵ *Macmillan Diaries*, p. 23, March 22, 1957.

and a veto over their use. Thus the Government, whilst unable to conceal the deployment within the UK, certainly gave Thor minimum publicity.¹⁸⁶ Robert Jackson in his account of US airforce deployment in Britain points out the local populations in these areas were not consulted on the operation but controversy was soon stirred by CND organising demonstrations at several of the bases:

‘Despite the secrecy surrounding the location of the Thors, people in sleepy little towns and villages stretching in an arc from Yorkshire to Suffolk did not take long to realise that, in the space of just a few months, they had jumped into the front line of NATO’s nuclear arsenal and would be the first to be hit by an enemy strike if war broke out. Not that the three missiles at each location were much in evidence to the casual onlooker; for much of the time they lay prone and invisible in their shelters, behind heavily guarded perimeters, emerging only for practice countdowns.’¹⁸⁷

As well as this secrecy on installation, the public was not initially told whether the missiles were fitted with nuclear warheads which made them operationally ready to be fired, and this was only confirmed in 1960. Otherwise fitting the warheads would have taken at least 24 hours to complete, and placed a question mark over their value faced with a sudden attack. According to Jackson, the warheads controlled by the Americans were not kept on site but stored with other V force weapons under extreme security at Faldingworth, an old wartime airfield in Lincolnshire. ‘Such was the secrecy surrounding Faldingworth that from 1956 to 1980, the airfield was not shown on Ordnance Survey maps.’¹⁸⁸ To add to the delay, spare parts for the rockets were held in the USA and had to be flown over.

¹⁸⁶ John Boyes, *Project Emily*. Foreword by Sir Michael Beetham, Marshal of the Royal Air Force.

¹⁸⁷ Jackson, para 10.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*.

Within the Cabinet and Number 10 there was much discussion over how much Parliament and the public should be told about the operational readiness of Thors and where they were being placed. A secret memo from Freddie Bishop to the Prime Minister in August 1958 just before the missiles were due to be delivered reported that 'there is some difficulty about publicity.' It was hoped that the D Notice would prevent coverage of their arrival,' but as some of them will be deployed near a main road and will be quite visible to passers-by, it is doubtful if it will be possible to avoid publicity.'¹⁸⁹As the press were getting restive about wanting to cover the arrival Sir Richard Powell at the Ministry of Defence proposed to Bishop that the press be allowed a photo-opportunity at RAF Feltwell in Norfolk, the site of the first missiles to arrive.¹⁹⁰ But Bishop was against this and responded with a hand-written note in terms unusually emphatic for a civil servant. 'I am against any further Press arrangement about the arrival of Thor, nor do I see why the Press should be given facilities for a visit to Feltwell, at any rate for some time. The Defence Departments are far too ready to give out news, and to 'leak' it.'¹⁹¹ This suggests a tension and even suspicion between the defence ministry and Number 10 about how far to accommodate the press and allow a degree of openness connected to missile deployment. This may have been due to the centralisation of information under Charles Hill which restricted the ability of individual departments to run their own communications operations.

The Prime Minister agreed showing the same instinct for secrecy as in the Windscale incident. 'I do not think it is necessary or desirable to announce the arrival by air of one missile. Although the Press has mentioned Feltwell I do not see any reason to give any facilities to the Press to go there at this moment. I think the Defence department should be

¹⁸⁹ PREM 11/2633, TNA, Bishop memo to Macmillan, August 14, 1958.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., Powell to Bishop, August 25, 1958.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., Bishop to Powell, August 29, 1958.

warned to give no, repeat no, further information to the Press at present.’¹⁹² But Macmillan had to relent when his office was told that the D Notice applied to the deployment of Thors not to photos of the weapon itself, which had already appeared in some British and American newspapers. He eventually agreed to the Press facility on September 12.¹⁹³ This illustrates that the government was keen to minimise the existence of US nuclear missiles on British soil in line with its approach of preventing debate around its nuclear deterrent. It sought to prevent press coverage of their deployment and as Twigge and Scott found, it wished to avoid any discussion of pressure from the USA for the Thor missiles to form part of the wider NATO alliance, which would have eroded British independence in their operation.¹⁹⁴

The second affair in which D Notices were drawn on to curtail debate was Spies for Peace in 1963. This was also significant in the way it sheds light on the information the government wanted to keep secret about emergency planning in time of war, whether conventional or nuclear, and why. It also raised the question as to how much the public deserved to know, and whether they were any better protected for not knowing. Although the government argued that the information in question related to emergency civilian organisation, the campaigners who published the pamphlet *Danger! Official Secret – RSG6* were clear that the public were being kept in the dark about planning for nuclear war in which the top elite would form a quasi-military government.¹⁹⁵

To understand the context of the heavy-handed official reaction to this event, it is necessary to give a brief account of how the pamphlet emerged. In April 1963 members of the Committee of 100, which believed in direct action to further unilateral nuclear

¹⁹² Ibid., Macmillan to Powell, August 29, 1958.

¹⁹³ Ibid., de Zulueta to Powell, September 12, 1958.

¹⁹⁴ Twigge and Scott, p. 3.

¹⁹⁵ *Danger! Official Secret – RSG6* (Spies for Peace, 1963). http://www.subbrit.org.uk/sb-sites/sites/s/special_events/index9.shtml

disarmament, began giving out a document of duplicated sheets to people taking part in the annual Aldermaston to London CND 'ban-the-bomb' march. Details were given of a proposed emergency regional seat of government called RSG-6 covering southern England run by a small group of people 'who have accepted thermonuclear war as a probability, and are consciously and carefully planning for it. They are above the Army, the Police, the Ministries or Civil Defence...The people in RSG6 are professors, top civil servants, air marshals and policemen' and headed by a Regional Commissioner in each case. The belief was that 'they are quietly waiting for the day the bomb drops, for that will be the day they take over....'¹⁹⁶

The implication was that while the elite would be protected the ordinary public would be left to fend for themselves in the chaos of a nuclear attack. Despite this the pamphlet argued that RSGs were staffed and equipped 'without a scrap of democratic control or consent.'¹⁹⁷ The authors of the document called themselves Spies for Peace and printed and distributed four thousand copies to the national press, political parties, the Prime Minister and the head of MI5.

These activists had found the physical building housing RSG-6 near Reading and encouraged marchers to divert away from the main route to look at the bunker in Warren Row, originally a site to manufacture aircraft components. According to Driver about a tenth of the 6000 marchers defied CND and went to see the secret site.¹⁹⁸ It is not clear that knowledge of these regional headquarters was an official secret as the government later argued that a regional government system for emergency purposes had been initiated in the 1920s and reactivated during the Second World War in case communications broke down

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁹⁸ Driver, *The Disarmers*, p. 150.

between central and local governments. But the government appeared to consider that a wider knowledge of these emergency systems was not in the public interest. Sadler in her work on the D Notice system confirms that the Services, Press and Broadcasting Committee which issued D Notices had sent out a D Notice in 1962 headed *National Defence* which appeared to replace eight previous notices dating from the Second World War onwards. It asked the media to refrain from publishing ‘any indication of the whereabouts, depth, size or other details’ of five locations, the third of which was ‘Underground sites, constructed or under construction, designed to serve as Regional Government headquarters or as communication centres in time of war.’¹⁹⁹ Clearly even though they had been around for a long time newspapers were still banned from identifying individual RSGs, and although some found a way around the ban, as shall be discussed, most complied. Prime Minister Macmillan praised the press in Parliament for ‘so loyally keeping to the regulations.’²⁰⁰

There was another reason why the government saw the pamphlet as a threat. It appeared to cast serious doubt on its civil defence planning, and this was a sensitive area relating to the credibility of the nuclear deterrent. In Chapter 5 there will be further discussion of this issue, in particular the propaganda formats such as film and posters used to convince the public that they could be protected in the event of a nuclear attack. *Danger! Official Secret – RSG6* referred to internal classified documents that the activists had seen when they entered the Warren Row site describing a NATO exercise called Fallex-62 which was designed to be a full-scale rehearsal of a nuclear war scenario. The pamphlet said the exercise which involved RSGs showed that medical services in Britain broke down completely,

¹⁹⁹ D Notice headed ‘National Defence’, from the Services, Press and Broadcasting Committee, Private and Confidential. Undated. Pauline Sadler in her *National Security and the D Notice System* (Routledge reissue, 2018), p. 43 said that evidence from the Public Records Office showed there were D Notices in existence which would have prevented the press republishing the material contained in the pamphlet. ‘On the list dated 28 February 1962 there is a new D-Notice (‘26.2.62 *National Defence*’) which seems to be an umbrella D-Notice that included material from those D-Notices that disappeared between the two lists.’

²⁰⁰ Nicholas Wilkinson, *Secrecy and the Media*, p. 270.

communication systems were paralysed and ‘three quarters of the police in the Southern region were killed, injured or irradiated. Losses among the civilian population were proportionately even higher. Whoever won the war, we lost it.’ The seriousness with which this was viewed by the government was illustrated by the fact that the police still tried to seize as many copies as they could find and arrested a few people for distributing them. This was despite thousands of leaflets summarising the document being distributed on the CND march, and copies distributed in Cambridge coffee bars and Doncaster pubs.²⁰¹

The Security Services and police Special Branch treated the revelations about the Fallex-62 exercise as if they were an official secret and fully investigated them. A briefing prepared for the Prime Minister before his statement to Parliament tried to identify the source of the leak. It said all RSGs had been ‘activated’ for the Fallex-62 exercise and about 450 military and civil staff took part at each of the 14 headquarters and of these about 360 people had access to the classified documents that the pamphlet referred to. This meant something like 4,000 people could have seen the documents and would have been subject to normal security vetting.²⁰² The leaker was never found but the government gave the impression to the public and the press that it had to be seen to be taking seriously such criticism of its nuclear stance.

A number of questions can fairly be advanced about the government’s reaction to this affair. If a piece of information is widely known should it still remain an official secret? Should the public have been told about the results of the nuclear exercise as it had clear implications for their survival in a nuclear exchange? Macmillan tried to play down the damage from the leak but that raised the issue of the need for secrecy in the first place. He

²⁰¹ Driver, p. 151.

²⁰² CAB/21/6027, TNA, Draft of a statement on “Spies for Peace” to be made by the Prime Minister: Notes for Supplementaries.

told the Commons that, ‘The document to which publicity has been given is concerned with what it described as regional seats of Government. There is nothing mysterious or sinister about their existence...Although the existence of these headquarters has long been widely known, their exact location and the details of their organisation have not been publicised.’ He added that ‘the deliberate breach of security [over Fallex-62] is in itself both serious and strongly to be condemned. The disclosure of the particular information involved is not seriously damaging to the national interest. Nevertheless, vigorous steps are being taken to try to identify the person or persons responsible.’²⁰³

Labour’s deputy leader George Brown asked if secrecy was really necessary: ‘May I ask the Prime Minister whether he is aware that the country is very puzzled by what is a secret here and what is embarrassing? Does not he see the difference? There are references to regional seats of Government, publication about which I could well understand would be embarrassing, but not necessarily secret, especially in view of the fact that large numbers of people—as the right hon. Gentleman has told us—already know about them. Yet the Government are maintaining the D Notice provision, which clearly relates to secrecy, for something which clearly cannot be kept a secret. Does not the Prime Minister think that the time has come to stop that nonsense and to remove the D Notice provision and allow that part to be known, as it is so well known now?’²⁰⁴

The response was similar to protests at the secrecy around the Thor missile installations. Macmillan said that, ‘The only question is whether the right hon. Member or anyone really considers it the duty of the Government seriously as a result of this matter

²⁰³ Hansard *HC Deb 1963 Vol 676 Cols 23-32 (23 April 1963)*, [Electronic version]

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

leaking out to publicise every detail. Not at all. I think we are far better to stand on the position where we are. There is no reason why we should give all these details.’²⁰⁵

It can be argued that the government had a right to protect classified information but there is another view, expressed by Driver, that the public had a right to know and would not necessarily have objected. ‘The whole episode clearly demonstrated the dangers inherent in the bureaucratic instinct for secrecy. The outline and purpose of the RSG system could not have been kept secret from anyone who seriously wanted to find out about it, and the vast majority of the population, had they been aware of the system’s existence, would have accepted that it was beneficent in intent.’²⁰⁶ As far as the press were concerned they largely accepted the need for secrecy. Even though as Wilkinson has pointed out the D-Notice system was a voluntary compact between the government and the media, and was guidance supported by no legal sanction, editors knew that the government could theoretically invoke the Official Secrets Act if it considered the offence serious enough to prosecute. This potentially applied to RSGs as much as to disclosure of nuclear weapons sites. The only partial breach of the D Notice came from the *Daily Telegraph*, which quoted from a summary of the pamphlet broadcast over *Prague Radio*, knowing that using a foreign source was not a breach of the regulations.²⁰⁷

Another sign of the seriousness with which the leak was viewed in Whitehall was that in the wake of the affair, action was taken to dismiss any civil servants thought to be in sensitive posts related to the nuclear deterrent. A meeting of the Personal Security Committee of the Cabinet held on May 29 1963 discussed a note from the Security Service recommending that in the light of Spies for Peace, any supporters of CND or the Committee

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Driver, p. 153.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 151.

of 100 who were in sensitive posts might be deemed 'unreliable.' A member of the committee is reported as saying that 'although the CND was not on the whole a subversive organisation, it would be unsafe to draw too fine a distinction between members of that movement and those of the Committee of 100.' He said the committee accepted that 'the existence of a hard core of ill-intentioned people in the CND and Committee of 100 movements constituted a security risk.' The answer was to identify such people and move them to other work.²⁰⁸ However, the Air Ministry later requested an amendment to this, apparently agreed, which said that in extreme cases those found to have CND sympathies would have their service careers terminated without prior consultation with the Security Service or the Treasury.²⁰⁹

Conclusion

The cases cited in this chapter demonstrate the essential elements of the government's propaganda strategy on the nuclear deterrent. This was to set the terms of the debate as far as possible and attempt to manage the arguments in favour of a strong defence through the nuclear capability. The strategy included a clear pattern of suppressing any information which might cause people to question the policy, denying platforms to organisations and individuals critical of the policy, while meeting groups such as women who might have a greater claim on public sympathy. This approach meant interfering with debate fostered in scientific circles, in the press, by CND and opponents of nuclear weapons, and even by ministers in the government's own ranks. The overall approach was shown in small ways

²⁰⁸ CAB/21/6027, TNA, Personal Security Committee, Extracts from the Minutes of the 1st meeting held on 29th May, 1963, pp. 1-2.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., Memo from Group Captain EG Rands, Air Ministry to WG Angle, Treasury Chambers, 12 June, 1963.

such as denying CND groups who were holding public meetings the loan of materials like posters and films used for civil defence training purposes. It could be argued that CND members had a right to be informed about civil defence as much as other people, although they were likely to be more sceptical of its value. But the government was determined to pursue a policy of non-cooperation with CND as it did not want to encourage them. An obsession with secrecy characterised the government's response to the Spies for Peace affair, even though some aspects of information revealed had been in the public domain for decades. It saw the publication by the Committee of 100 of plans for Regional Seats of Government (RSGs) in the event of an emergency as less dangerous than revelations about Britain's role in a NATO civil defence exercise. This was because the Fallex-62 simulated exercise showed there would be chaos and confusion following a nuclear attack. As far as the campaigners were concerned this proved once and for all that 'there is no defence against nuclear war.'²¹⁰

²¹⁰ *Spies for Peace* pamphlet, p. 8.

Chapter 4 – Broadcasting and nuclear weapons

Introduction

The government and CND recognised that broadcasting gave them an opportunity to reach a mass audience with their propaganda case for and against the nuclear deterrent. This chapter will analyse the developments in broadcasting during this period in order to understand the context in which sensitive issues like nuclear weapons were being raised. It will start by showing how television had the effect of ‘personalising’ the nuclear issue, through identifying who the individuals were who were taking part in political action and what their personal motivation was. It will then briefly outline the relative importance of radio and television at the start of the period under review and will show how politicians recognised the opportunities that television in particular offered for promoting their policies.

This will be followed by outlining how a series of challenges faced by the BBC impacted on the nuclear debate. The first was that commercial television, which began in 1955 and quickly became a competitor, did not see itself restricted by some of the rules governing the BBC and was prepared to break new ground in airing sensitive issues like the bomb and civil defence preparation. Second, the BBC was dealing with political pressure from government circles to play down criticism of its nuclear policies. Examples are provided of interference behind the scenes to tone down its critical coverage. At the same time, long established principles which had imbued BBC public service broadcasting, such as political balance and impartiality, were beginning to be questioned. While programmes featured a

genuine battle of ideas with the two sides in the argument carefully balanced, they very rarely broke new ground in terms of the information offered to the public. Writers like Crissell and Hendy argue that strict balance within programmes meant that although both the government and CND were offered time to make their argument there was a risk of each nullifying the other as there was no apparent compromise position available.²¹¹ This will be explored with examples from popular radio panel shows like *Any Questions?* and *Matters of Moment* and evidence from the National Archives.

Third, there was internal pressure on the BBC to adopt a less deferential approach to the nuclear deterrent issue, which in turn meant challenging the existing ethos laid down by Lord Reith, the first chairman of the BBC. This had consisted of treating the listener holistically across a wide range of subjects rather than serving minority interests, preserving a high moral standard, avoiding controversy of what he termed ‘unsavoury subjects’, and seeing education in the broadest sense as the hope of the future. A case study of *The Bomb* radio programme which tried to tackle a controversial subject head-on will explore the obstacles that had to be overcome in its making.

The personalisation of the nuclear issue

In terms of key influencers of opinion radio had been pre-eminent during the Second World War and in 1949 BBC’s average evening radio audience was almost nine million people. But by 1958 this had dropped to less than half that or 3,350,000, of which three-quarters were people without television sets. The dramatic change came with television, and

²¹¹ Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (Routledge, 2002); David Hendy, *Public Service Broadcasting* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

the number of combined TV-radio licenses which stood at only 14,560 in 1947 leapt to over 10 million by 1960. Television changed from being a luxury item to being essential viewing for much of the population.²¹²

This meant that the ability of the mass of the population for the first time to see what participants in the nuclear debate looked like, whether CND marchers or leading politicians, represented a profound new development affecting the public's perception of politics. According to Crisell, 'On the nation's screens appeared an astonishing, motley procession of people: bearded students in duffel coats; young couples with placard-bearing infants in pushchairs; leading public figures – radical clergymen, aquiline intellectuals like Bertrand Russell, and personalities from the arts; and accompanying the spectacle the sounds of skiffle groups, jazz bands and oratory.'²¹³ Crisell also cites Negrine to argue that campaigners could attract TV coverage because in cutting across the lines of conventional party politics they could be seen as 'non-political' and the broadcasters did not have to worry about balance or partisanship.²¹⁴

Hewison makes a similar point about the general appeal of CND to cultural expression whether in the media or the arts. This was because it was a single-issue, non-party movement, and he quotes the *New Statesman* of the time to say that official circles were 'confused and alarmed' about CND because it had no one political group behind it, and no leaders serving personal ambitions.²¹⁵ According to Christopher Hill, television presented an opportunity to personalise politics and obliged politicians to defend their view on the nuclear deterrent. 'The emergence of the ban-the-bomb movement during a period when changes in

²¹² Burton Paulu, *British Broadcasting in Transition* (Macmillan, 1961), pp. 154-55.

²¹³ Crisell, *An Introductory History*, pp. 179-180.

²¹⁴ Ralph Negrine, *Politics and the Mass Media in Britain* (Routledge, 1994) pp. 139-140, quoted in Crisell, p. 180.

²¹⁵ Robert Hewison, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945-60* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1981), p. 165; *New Statesman*, May 10, 1958.

communication raised issues of representation and accountability is not merely coincidental. If the decision to develop nuclear weapons was considered unrepresentative, then politicians were held accountable for making Britain a target in a nuclear war.²¹⁶ But the personalisation of politics by television could also have negative consequences leading to a more superficial coverage of substantial issues. Crisell for one observes that ‘it often replaces thoughtful discussions of abstract issues with “personalities” and confrontations, and concocts phoney news items like photo-opportunities and walkabouts.’ Politicians could find themselves being accosted by journalists at airports, shopping precincts, on flights or train journeys.²¹⁷

Radio did also attempt to humanise protestors who took to the streets. One example was a BBC *Woman’s Hour* edition of 11 April 1958, timed to be broadcast just after the first-ever Easter CND march from London to the nuclear weapons plant at Aldermaston. The significance of the programme was twofold, both in its attempt to get beyond slogans to examine the motives of individual people in the debate, and its careful balancing of the pro-government and pro-CND views.

Presenter Margaret Hubble said a previous question from a radio listener had produced a big postbag, with strong views on both sides. She gave examples of a woman listener who said she was in her sixties and could remember that Britain had not been prepared for war with Hitler in 1939, believing that the recent CND march was organised by enemies of this country. In contrast she read a letter from someone who had taken part in the march and said she felt strongly the other way. It read, ‘Certain sections of the press wrote us off as “Communists and cranks.” The majority of us are neither. However, since this is a thing which can affect our very existence, surely the people who deserve the biggest sneers are not those who feel strongly for

²¹⁶ Christopher Hill, *Middle Class Radicalism and the media: Banning the Bomb in Britain 1954-65* (Thesis due for publication 2016), p. 43.

²¹⁷ Crisell, *An Introductory History*, pp. 171-2.

and against unilateral nuclear disarmament, but those many, many thousands who simply haven't given it as thought, or couldn't care less.'²¹⁸

The programme then balanced the discussion by bringing together Pat Arrowsmith, who had organised that march, and Norris McWhirter who was a right-wing campaigner for individual liberty and who later set up the National Association for Freedom. He had attempted to heckle the marchers through a loudspeaker and claimed his car was then attacked, although conceding they were not marchers but sympathisers.²¹⁹ Arrowsmith said she did not welcome the damage done and her side believed in non-violence, while McWhirter said he had known he was going into 'the lion's den' but 'I must say I did think there'd be more of the doves of peace.' He thought people on the march always tried to intimidate anyone expressing an opposite opinion to theirs because they were of 'a totalitarian mind.'²²⁰ The programme seemed to illustrate the polarisation of the deterrent debate in which the listener was forced to come down on one side or the other.

This interest in what actually motivated people to march was touched on during an April 1960 *Any Questions?* discussion on the Light Programme. *Sunday Mirror* journalist Anne Allen said that 'it's no use calling people who march from Aldermaston cranks anymore – these are the ordinary people who care....it's no joke marching for 55 miles with the prospect of any and every weather meeting you.'²²¹ However, evidence later in the chapter will show that the Macmillan government and sections of the press tried to portray CND as Communists and therefore politically unreliable. It has also to be said that seeing

²¹⁸ *Women's Hour*, April 11, 1958, microfilm tapes, BBC Written Archives, Caversham.

²¹⁹ According to his obituary in the *Daily Telegraph*, April 21, 2004, 'Over Easter 1958, he drove his brother to Aldermaston, where anti-nuclear demonstrators were due to end their annual march. From the roof of their Mercedes, a megaphone told the marchers: "Each one of you is increasing the risk of nuclear war. You are playing Khrushchev's game. Moscow is making use of you." Enraged pacifists attacked the car, causing £150 worth of damage before they were hauled off by stewards.'

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, *Women's Hour*.

²²¹ *Any Questions?*, April 22, 1960, microfilm tapes, BBC Written Archives, Caversham.

CND supporters on television or hearing them on radio might have produced a negative as much as a positive reaction – the development did not by itself shift the public's overall rejection of giving up British nuclear weapons unilaterally.

The impact of television

Both major political parties in Britain realised that television could have an important bearing on the propaganda surrounding the bomb, and this led them to devote considerable resources to the medium. It is necessary to analyse the period before the 1959 general election when television first played a vital role in British political discourse. In the weeks before Macmillan called the election for October 8 1959, his media team organised a joint TV broadcast with him and US President Dwight Eisenhower in which the two leaders dressed in dinner jackets and bow ties, sat discussing politics in sombre terms while in armchairs at No 10. It was the first time a live broadcast was transmitted from 10 Downing Street and was regarded as a success by Macmillan's PR team. The Prime Minister spoke about the threat of nuclear war saying that, 'War has become so frightening in its capacity for destruction of the whole of civilisation that we... have the responsibility of making sure that our actions... are all directed by this single purpose.' The two men discussed the threat of Communism and the Anglo-American efforts being made to control the Soviet Union's attempts to dominate Western Europe, particularly in Berlin.²²²

²²² http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/31/newsid_3034000/3034678.stm

Harold Evans, Macmillan's chief press officer, acknowledged that the idea of televising an informal fireside chat between the two leaders had an American genesis – it had originated in a conversation with the President's media adviser Jim Hagerty and he believed it worked because it symbolised for a British audience the restoration after Suez of the Anglo-American 'special relationship.'²²³ But Labour had also been discussing how to adapt to television, in a Broadcasting Advisory Committee chaired by Tony Benn, who had briefly worked for the BBC after the Second World War. Benn instigated the building of a set in the BBC's studios from where party political broadcasts were filmed, coupled with outside location shots. This was called the Labour Television and Radio Operations Room, and in the first broadcast for the 1959 election on September 21 1959, leader Hugh Gaitskell was shown there talking about Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's visit to the USA and proposals for nuclear disarmament.²²⁴

TV political broadcasts became a new battleground of ideas and policies. Hennessy observed that Labour's superior use of television in the first two weeks of the campaign was credited with halving the Tory lead in the polls from six to three per cent.²²⁵ Macmillan noted in his diaries that 'The Socialists had a very successful TV last night – much better than ours. Gaitskell is becoming very expert.' The Tories responded with a final election broadcast in which Macmillan talked directly to the camera for the full 15 minutes allowed, which was considered also to have been successful.²²⁶

The evidence from Harold Evans and from Michael Cockerell, writing about British Prime Ministers and television, is that Macmillan struggled at first to adapt his declamatory

²²³ Harold Evans, *Downing Street Diary*, p. 43. 'This was criticised from the political left as a pre-election gimmick, but it originated during a discussion between Jim Hagerty and myself about how a television appearance by the President might be organised to best effect. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first occasion on which anything of this kind had been attempted.'

²²⁴ Bert Hogenkamp, *Film, Television And The Left* (Lawrence and Wishart, 2000), p. 105.

²²⁵ Peter Hennessy, *Having It So Good – Britain in the Fifties* (Penguin Books, 2006), p. 569.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 572.

speaking style to the more intimate demands of television. But he later mastered it and said its importance was that ‘television is so vivid, personal and instantaneous a means of communication.’ At the same time, he added, television would never become a propaganda instrument of the government as it was not under government control.²²⁷

In recognition that ministers needed to come to terms with the new medium, Charles Hill the government’s information co-ordinator felt it necessary to advise the Cabinet in a confidential note in April 1958 about giving TV interviews. For instance, Hill said producers were not that interested in policies and ‘some producers count it a success to arrange matters so that the minister appears in the dock and is destructively cross-examined.’ A good general rule ‘is to regard all interviewers as hostile diversionists and to persist until one has finished making one’s point.’²²⁸ Macmillan as Prime Minister and his media advisers tried to combat that by presenting him as a world statesman above the day to day minutiae of British politics, capable of negotiating with the Russians over nuclear policy and defending the deterrent. Independent Television News (ITN), which supplied news to the new commercial TV companies, had discovered that airports were the best place to catch politicians for quick interviews or press conferences, and this suited Macmillan too as he was regularly flying off and returning from foreign summits. One example was an October 1957 interview with ITN at London Airport after Macmillan returned from a meeting with US President Eisenhower, in which he gave an interview about wanting the US Congress to repeal the McMahon Act allowing their nuclear secrets to be shared.²²⁹ The government, the opposition and the broadcasting companies all had an interest in using television to best effect – ministers could

²²⁷ Michael Cockerell, *Live from Number 10 – the inside story of Prime Ministers and Television* (Faber and Faber, 1988), pp. 78-79.

²²⁸ PREM 11/3484, TNA, ‘Interviews on Television’, Confidential note to the Cabinet from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, April 2, 1958.

²²⁹ <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/video/macmillan-returns-from-talks-with-president-eisenhower-news-footage/811298448>

promote their policies, the opposition could be seen to present an alternative, and programme-makers could carry up to the minute news.

The challenge from commercial TV

At the same time as the visual possibilities opened up, the BBC was facing a challenge from the commercial television companies, which wanted to create an identity distinct from the BBC and in some cases push the boundaries of what could be explored. The BBC Handbook for 1956 referred to a long-standing policy, first issued by the Postmaster General in 1926, to forbid 'any broadcast matter expressing the opinion of the Corporation on current affairs or on matters of public policy.'²³⁰ An inference could be drawn that this covered many vital issues of concern to the electorate. Up to 1956 the BBC had also observed a ban on all references to politics during election campaigns, apart from party political broadcasts.²³¹ More specifically, the 14 Day rule adopted during World War Two had been that broadcasting on the BBC should not pre-empt or prejudice discussions due to be conducted in Parliament in the coming fortnight. The effect was to inhibit coverage of election campaigns throughout the 1950s. For example, according to Christopher Hill, for this reason a parliamentary debate in February 1955 prevented the TV programme *In the News* from discussing whether the government should develop thermonuclear weapons.²³² The rule was only abandoned after the 1956 Suez crisis when Prime Minister Anthony Eden insisted on defending the government on television and Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell successfully demanded the right of reply.

²³⁰ David Miller, 'The History Behind a Mistake,' in *British Journalism Review*, Vol.1. No.2, Winter 1990, p. 34.

²³¹ Hogenkamp, *Film, Television and The Left*, p. 107.

²³² Christopher Hill, *Middle Class Radicalism and the media*, p. 32.

Although this freed up the BBC to some extent in covering political issues it was still conditioned by a deference to established values. As one observer noted, the arrival of commercial television challenged this approach, as ‘the franchise-holding companies did not feel bound by “fossil” BBC taboos.’²³³ Granada TV led by Sydney Bernstein was one of the first independent companies and considered one of the most radical. In March 1958 it showed a play by JB Priestley called *Doomsday for Dyson* about an H-bomb attack on Britain, which included dramatic images of smoking ruins of houses, and charred timber. This would have been a shock to viewers as the subject of nuclear war had not been given such a dramatic visual airing until then.

Priestley was a committed opponent of nuclear weapons who had written the play specially for television, and declared in the press that, ‘We shall recover our rightful place in the world when we have the sense and courage and humanity to stand up and announce that we have done with these filthy things.’ Granada was planning to keep the play a secret until it was shown but ‘then we considered the shock might upset people.’²³⁴ It went out on the entire ITV network and was followed by a studio discussion which tried to achieve political balance, consisting of pro-deterrent Conservative MP Peter Thorneycroft and multilateral Labour MP Emanuel Shinwell, with left wing Labour MP Barbara Castle and Methodist leader Rev Donald Soper, a CND supporter.²³⁵ Surprisingly there were few protests from viewers, with the *Daily Mail* reporting that just 10 people phoned Associated Redifusion with six in favour of the programme and four against. *The Daily Mail* commissioned an opinion

²³³ Hogenkamp, *Film, Television and the Left*, p. 107.

²³⁴ FO 371/129239, File ZE 112/63, TNA, Press cuttings from *Daily Herald*, March 6, 1958 and *Daily Mail* March 11, 1958, ‘ITV Plans Terrible H-Bomb Play’.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

poll after the play which found that almost 70 per cent liked it and agreed with its anti-bomb views.²³⁶

Granada's decision to report on a by-election in Rochdale in February 1958, the first time such a political event was shown on television, was another example of how the television companies were being pioneering and showing up the BBC as stuck in its ways. The company was deliberately testing the idea that election coverage was illegal under the Representation of the People Act 1949, and to comply with the law, all candidates although interviewed live on television were given an equal amount of time. The result was that televising the election aroused huge interest in the voting public, and there was a record turnout of 80.2 per cent on election day.²³⁷ The companies could now argue that television did not damage the democratic process but enhanced it.

While it was considered a milestone in TV reporting with the Labour, Conservative and Liberal candidates shown live discussing the key issues, it was no accident that the nuclear deterrent featured strongly in the campaign, given public concern expressed in opinion polls and fears about the superpower arms race. First, the prospective Independent Labour Party candidate, Mr Haycock, publicly offered to stand down if JB Priestley stood as an anti-nuclear weapons candidate, an offer the playwright declined. Then the Labour candidate Jack McCann appeared to switch from a previously stated multilateralist position to adopt a unilateralist approach during the campaign. He first told the *Tribune* journal that, 'I don't think we ought to scrap the bombs we've got until we can persuade America and Russia to do the same.' He then declared to an election meeting in Rochdale a few days later that 'this country should be prepared to take the risk of unilateral disarmament as an example to

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ UK Election Statistics: *1918-2012 Research paper*, 12/43, August 7, 2012, p. 26, House of Commons Library.

the world.²³⁸ This was probably tactical to counter Ludovic Kennedy, the Liberal candidate and well-known TV presenter, whose own party had already declared in favour of scrapping Britain's independent nuclear deterrent. In the event the existing Tory majority of 1,590 disappeared as Labour won closely followed by the Liberals with the Tories a poor third. On television afterwards Mr Macmillan said he was 'concerned' that 80 per cent of the Rochdale electorate had voted for candidates who did not want a British H-bomb.²³⁹ The lessons of Rochdale were quickly picked up, as the BBC proceeded to follow suit with extensive coverage of the 1959 general election, meaning that television had truly arrived as a powerful influencer of opinion.

Political pressure and balance in programmes

At the same time as the BBC reacted to competition it was also subject to political pressure revolving around the nuclear deterrent and nuclear testing as the biggest issues of the day. There was discussion at government level of strengthening the deterrent case within broadcasting by influencing messages to be given out or interfering with programme making itself. One example concerned the *Matters of Moment* radio series from the BBC Home Service, which devoted an edition on 13 March 1958 to *Britain and the Bomb*. It was chaired by Bruce Miller, Professor of Politics at the University of Leicester and featured two people in favour of Britain having the bomb – the 11th Earl of Dundee who controversially thought Britain should use atomic weapons even if attacked by an enemy with conventional forces, and Sir Lyn Ungoes-Thomas who believed they should only be used in a second strike if

²³⁸ Driver, *The Disarmers*, p. 67.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

Britain was attacked with nuclear forces. The two against were John Foster who thought Britain should rely on the USA's nuclear shield, and Philip Toynbee who was a unilateralist on moral and political grounds.²⁴⁰ What the other speakers would not have known was that Lord Dundee was privately briefed on anti-Communist lines by junior Foreign Office minister Ian Harvey before the broadcast. A Foreign Office official reported that Dundee had contacted the ministry saying that 'all three (of his fellow participants) will oppose our retention of the Bomb. Lord Dundee himself, however, intends to defend it and his theme will be "Russian militarism is the only factor now hindering world disarmament."' He wanted any background information and the minister's private secretary agreed to send him some material before the programme.²⁴¹

The material that was sent to him included two papers from the secretive Information Research Department (IRD), set up by the Foreign Office in 1948 to counter Soviet propaganda and infiltration. The papers were *The Nature of Communism Today* which was an analysis of the threat of International Communism, military and non-military, and the *Quest for Disarmament*, which put the Western case on various issues. In sending the material Dundee was reminded not to refer by title or ascribe to an official source the IRD papers. Lord Dundee then went in to see Harvey personally just before the broadcast.²⁴² Dundee spoke first in the programme and duly said that the only real factor hindering world peace was Russian militarism. To give up British nuclear weapons or to refuse to use them against a conventional attack from Russia was 'a grave disservice to the cause of peace.' This set the agenda, with the others reacting to what Dundee said. Sir Lyn described his approach as 'sheer lunacy' while

²⁴⁰ *Matters of Moment*, BBC Home Service, March 31, 1960, microfilm tapes, BBC Written Archives, Caversham.

²⁴¹ FO 371/129239, File ZE 112/68, TNA, Folder headed BBC Broadcast – 'Britain and the Bomb' – request by Lord Dundee for some material in his broadcast on Thursday March 13, 1958. Memo from PCM Alexander, March 11, 1958.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

Toynbee said he was not a pacifist but to be realistic you had to envisage Communist occupation rather than have a nuclear war. Dundee replied, ‘don’t you think that in practice the vast majority of free men in this world would in fact prefer to fight and die rather than be enslaved....’ The chair summing up the discussion said two issues were predominant, how terrible nuclear warfare was and whether inevitable, and the possibilities of a Communist tyranny.²⁴³ Lord Dundee was made a Minister without Portfolio in the Macmillan government in October of the same year.

In another case the government was involved in trying to interfere with BBC programme makers’ choice of speakers, who ministers believed were on the left and politically dangerous. The subject was a series of three radio talks on the H-bomb and the scientific effects of nuclear fallout planned for early in 1957. Officials in government departments wanted to rebut the views of scientists opposed to nuclear weapons, and tended to brand them as Communist sympathisers and therefore somehow unbalanced. In this case the scientists due to take part were physicist Dr Joseph Rotblat, who was one of the most famous opponents of nuclear weapons and a member of the Atomic Scientists Association, and geneticist Professor Lionel Penrose. He was a leading member of the Medical Association for the Prevention of War and was referred to in internal memos as ‘a well-known supporter of Front Organisations’ (ie Communist sympathiser).²⁴⁴ The Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd would then take part in the final programme.

A Foreign Office official spoke to the Ministry of Defence who suggested that the BBC should be approached to change these speakers as ‘unhelpful’, particularly just before

²⁴³ *Matters of Moment*, March 31, 1958, microfilm tapes.

²⁴⁴ FO 371/129239, Folder ZE 112/76, TNA containing files from records of Permanent Under Secretary Atomic Energy. Secret memo from GG Brown April 2, 1957. ‘The first two choices of speakers is not a happy one. Dr Rotblat is known for his very strong opposition to the manufacture of nuclear weapons. Professor Penrose is a well-known supporter of Front Organisations and for that reason was not chosen by the MRC to be their genetics adviser to the UN Radiation Committee delegation, although he is the foremost expert and on one of MRC’s advisory panels.’

planned nuclear tests. He proposed speaking to the then BBC Director General Sir Ian Jacob to find out whose idea they were and what line they would adopt. The Foreign Office replied that, 'I explained the well-known difficulties of influencing the Home Service of the BBC, of which we have considerable experience, but they (MoD) were obviously not convinced and I think they are absolutely right.'²⁴⁵ The official added that it was hardly 'impartial' to have two speakers against and only one in favour of nuclear testing.²⁴⁶ Ministers then decided to wait until after the broadcast to intervene. During questions from BBC presenter Robert McKenzie on the air, Selwyn Lloyd defended the UK's deterrent policy and claimed that much of the evidence on the damaging effects of nuclear tests came from 'people with strong fellow-travelling tendencies and leanings.'²⁴⁷ Rotblat complained about this by letter saying he was 'very aggrieved' to be labelled as a suspected Communist, and asked for a public apology.²⁴⁸ Lloyd eventually agreed to an exchange of letters with the scientist making clear his comment was not meant to refer to Rotblat's association or its committee on radiation hazards.²⁴⁹

The issues were highly sensitive for all sides, and the BBC was facing emerging challenges to long established concepts of political balance and impartiality which had governed their philosophy of broadcasting. Crisell and Hendy examine both principles and conclude that they are easier to frame in theory than deliver in practice. The BBC as a public service broadcaster appeared to aim for a formula of strict political balance of the speakers invited on current affairs programmes, with additional laypeople. According to Crisell total balance was 'an impossible concept' as balance does not extend 'to views which do not have

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 'Broadcasts on Nuclear Problems', Secret Memo from GG Brown April 10, 1957.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., Transcript of Secretary of State's broadcast on April 29, 1957 at 2pm on the BBC Light Programme.

²⁴⁸ FO 371, Folder ZE 112/137, TNA, letter from Prof Rotblat to Selwyn Lloyd, May 1, 1957.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, memo of April 7, 1957 when officials agree that Selwyn Lloyd should make a statement through an exchange of letters.

significant parliamentary representation – views which would be, almost by definition, eccentric or “extreme.”²⁵⁰ A similar point is made by Hendy in relation to impartiality when he says that the danger of the broadcaster remaining impartial is that ‘a certain establishment way of seeing the world gets reinforced.’ He adds that ‘being detached avoids overt partisanship; but it can also end up with a narrow range of voices conveying establishment values.’²⁵¹

Although as we shall see the BBC was able to modernise its appeal in the early 1960s, political representation was still confined to a fairly narrow range of social classes and groups. Hewison has no illusions about what happened. ‘The BBC tolerated dissent and modest controversy because its discussion programmes were designed to produce synthetic debates that muffled issues between balancing statement; just as only “acceptable” speakers were allowed to take part in current affairs programmes, only artists and critics who had already succeeded contributed on the arts.’²⁵² The word ‘synthetic’ may be judged a harsh one, as the clashes of opinion broadcast on air on the nuclear deterrent were real, but nonetheless it is important to critically examine how wide the spectrum of views was and how far the boundaries of acceptable discussion were pushed.

The general difficulty of achieving a balanced coverage of sensitive issues was recognised by BBC Director General Hugh Carleton-Greene as he tried to change the way politics was reported after being appointed in 1960. ‘Nothing is more stultifying than the current affairs programme in which all the opposing opinions cancel each other out,’ he said. That method might have to be used occasionally but programmes would be livelier and have greater impact if balance could be achieved over a period, for instance in a series of related

²⁵⁰ Crisell, *An Introductory History*, p. 175.

²⁵¹ Hendy, *Public Service Broadcasting*, p. 30.

²⁵² Hewison, *In Anger*, p. 171.

programmes.²⁵³ Even before his appointment, when he was BBC Director of News and Current Affairs, Carleton-Greene decreed that for the 1959 general election campaign reporting should be ‘on the basis of news values’ and that news values should take precedence over balance. ‘There will be no time within the individual news periods to provide an exact balance between the different parties and their statements,’ he said adding that it had become clear that previous BBC policy which was probably right at the time in not trying to influence people in any way, could not stand up to modern needs.’²⁵⁴ *Any Questions?* was a clear example of a popular current affairs radio programme which sought strict political balance for each programme. Although the nuclear deterrent featured regularly as a theme for the panellists, it was discussed according to a formula which could be argued was ‘stultifying,’ in the sense of blunting or deadening debate. This is illustrated by an analysis of several *Any Questions?* editions between 1958 and 1960.

Case study of *Any Questions?*

Opinions on the programme were always evenly divided between government supporters and those favouring unilateral disarmament. On February 21 1958 the panel featured pro-deterrent Tory MP Peter Kirk, multilateralist disarmer Labour MP Emanuel Shinwell, and two lay people in Mary Stocks and Alan Villiers, sea captain of the ship *Mayflower II*. Asked if the British government placed too much reliance on nuclear weapons, Shinwell said it was desirable to rely on conventional weapons for as long as possible to avoid a nuclear war but given that the Soviet Union had nuclear weapons, the only way out of

²⁵³ Burton Paulu, *Television and Radio in the United Kingdom* (Macmillan, 1981), p. 212.

²⁵⁴ Burton Paulu, *British Broadcasting in Transition*, p. 113, quoting *The Times*, September 18, 1959, p.14.

the impasse was for the great powers to meet and negotiate a solution. Kirk then put the official government line that paradoxically the more you made it certain that a war would result in world annihilation (by having weapons), the more there was a chance of averting it. Villiers made a rather different point that he did not accept that the Russians were 'horrible' and the western powers were 'noble', and when working with Russians and Finns he had found they were quite nice fellows.²⁵⁵ This edition merely confirmed the existing standpoints of the political parties but offered no new solutions.

The same comment applies to the programme on March 7 1958 which had a panel including Percy Cudlipp, journalist and former editor of the liberal Daily Herald but a deterrent supporter, prison governor CA Joyce, and two regular commentators Jack Longland and Isobel Barnett. They were asked about accepting the US Thor nuclear rockets on British soil and Longland argued that they had no value as we were 'very small beer' compared to the two big superpowers and they were not a useful bargaining weapon and would make little difference to the amount of destruction meted out. The balance was achieved by Cudlipp who said that if Britain abandoned the H-bomb unilaterally Britain would lose any influence over America that we had.²⁵⁶

On April 4 1958 the panel was asked if Germany should be armed with atomic weapons. It consisted of left-wing Labour MP Tom Driberg, the conservative-minded journalist Charles Curran, London vicar Rev Austen Williams and cricket commentator John Arlott, a Liberal Party member and supporter of creating a 'non-nuclear club'. This meant persuading any nations currently without nuclear weapons not to acquire or build them. Driberg said it would be a provocation to give them to Germany, with summit talks due to be held very soon. Arlott called an atomic weapon 'an evil thing' and said it was impossible to persuade other nations

²⁵⁵ *Any Questions?* February 21, 1958, microfilm tapes, BBC Written Archives, Caversham.

²⁵⁶ *Any Questions?* March 7, 1958, microfilm tapes.

not to use it when Britain had its own weapon. He said that as long as atomic weapons were competitive everyone would want them and it was possible that ‘one hot-headed maniac will drop one and that will be the end.’²⁵⁷

Any Questions? for April 25 1958 had Ulster Unionist MP Patrick McLoughlin as the conservative figure, along with mainstream Labour MP Francis Noel-Baker, Liberal John Foot who supported CND, and regular lay person Ralph Wightman. Debate was prompted by a question on a recent incident with an American H bomb flight towards Russia’s frontiers. McLoughlin thought Britain was leaving itself wide open to what might happen if we didn’t have the H bomb as a reasonable precaution. Foot said there were ‘terrible risks’ from accidentally dropping a bomb and the only logical conclusion was to renounce nuclear weapons altogether. Noel-Baker said Britain was not now a great power but a very important second rate power, and it should use its influence as a nuclear nation to pressure for talks.²⁵⁸

The same balanced formula was observed on January 1 1960, when the panel consisted of CND supporter Winifred de Kok who was a child welfare specialist, poet Charles Causley, sports writer and government supporter Denzil Batchelor and Ralph Wightman again. The question posed was their reaction to US President Eisenhower’s decision to resume nuclear testing. As the deterrent supporter, Batchelor said it would be wrong ‘to kowtow to the Russians’ over nuclear tests but Wightman thought it ‘an astonishingly foolish thing to do before an international summit.’ De Kok said that these bombs were lethal not only in war but in test explosions due to radioactive fallout, and this was a real danger to children.²⁵⁹

The political clash on the programme of April 22 1960 came from Tory MP Gerald Nabarro, and writer AG Street on the conservative side, opposed by journalist Anne Allen, with

²⁵⁷ *Any Questions?* April 4, 1958, microfilm tapes.

²⁵⁸ *Any Questions?* April 25, 1958, microfilm tapes.

²⁵⁹ *Any Questions?* January 1, 1960, microfilm tapes.

Labour MP Roy Jenkins in the political centre. They were asked if they thought the Aldermaston anti-nuclear march had any effect on achieving nuclear disarmament. Allen attributed the British government pressing for an international summit to the growing tide of public opinion expressed by CND marches, but Nabarro described this as ‘manifest nonsense’. The British government had been negotiating for many years and the marchers had not brought peace any nearer, he said. AG Street thought the marchers were composed of people ‘who prefer to walk it off rather than think it out’, and Jenkins did not claim that the march would have any great effect on the Pentagon or the Kremlin, but at least it made people think and face up to the moral issue.²⁶⁰ These examples provide a flavour of how the two sides in the propaganda argument sought to win over audiences, tending to reiterate entrenched positions with minimal meetings of minds or alternative courses of action.

Reithian values and the bomb

The shift in the broadcasting environment towards the end of the decade spanning 1950 to 1960 encouraged greater scrutiny of accepted policies and beliefs, such as that having the nuclear bomb gave Britain protection, and that it was possible to survive a nuclear attack. This was accompanied by a dilution of what might be called Reithian values, which were the legacy of Lord Reith’s reign as BBC Director-General between 1927 and 1938. A brief discussion of this background is important to set out the context against which a BBC programme called *The Bomb* challenged these previous assumptions.

²⁶⁰ *Any Questions?* April 22, 1960, microfilm tapes.

Reith set out his ethos in a book *Broadcast Over Britain* in which he talked about preserving a high moral standard and avoiding what he called ‘anything approaching vulgarity or directing attention to unsavoury subjects.’²⁶¹ The issue of who should decide what was vulgar or unsavoury was not discussed but the implication was it came from him. In practice this meant a policy of mixed programming with talks on scientific achievements, health and foreign affairs; light and classical music, church services and plays. Reith as part of his vision of what people wanted to hear introduced Royal broadcasts during the 1930s, including the monarch’s annual Christmas message. The BBC’s responsibility was to carry into the greatest possible number of homes everything that was best about knowledge, endeavour and achievement. To have provided “entertainment” alone would have been a prostitution of the Corporation, the double quotation marks being his and emphasising the seriousness of his purpose. Controversial matters had rarely been handled, he said. Casting himself as a practical idealist rather than a dreamer he thought ignorance was due to a lack of education. ‘The practical idealist looks to education as the hope of the nation,’ he said.²⁶² Hendy assessed the Reithian legacy as offering people new and unfamiliar things such as art, literature, ideas and music.²⁶³ This has often been categorised as ‘rule by experts’ although Hendy said it was more about the BBC persuading people to trust it as ‘an honest and friendly guide.’²⁶⁴

This earnest approach infused the post-war reorganisation of radio, which was largely still intact in the late 1950s, consisting of the Home Service with news, serious music, religious programmes and talks, a Third Programme intended for the serious-minded, with classical music and Shakespeare, and the Light Programme for relaxation and amusement. By the period under examination, Reith’s concept of public service broadcasting was being questioned.

²⁶¹ J.C.W. Reith, *Broadcast Over Britain* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1924), pp. 32-33.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 181.

²⁶³ Hendy, *Public Service Broadcasting*, p. 22.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Crisell discusses three different challenges to the status quo. First, the Reithian view of ‘serving the whole person’ was only sustainable as a monopoly but when audience choice for a range of companies existed, populist programming would drive out all other kinds. Second, the idea of ‘rule by the greatest number’ could be matched by commercial companies with better and more popular programmes. Lastly, a claim to attract minority interests was dangerous for the BBC as it depended for its funding on the entire viewing public.²⁶⁵

A more critical view would be that the BBC by this time had become part of the Establishment. It is encapsulated in Hewison’s statement that ‘the BBC had the greatest potential for producing a homogeneous, middlebrow society, and in the middle 1950s seemed to have turned the social solidarity of wartime into a respectful deference for authority and tradition.’²⁶⁶ Grace Wyndham Goldie who was Head of Talks at the BBC and brought the innovative magazine programme *Tonight* to the screens in 1957, said television broadcasting had been dominated by Reithian attitudes and ‘suffused by intellectual condescension.’ She thought the new mood meant ‘experts were not invariably right and the opinion of those in high places did not have to be accepted.’ By 1957 the viewing millions were impatient of paternalism and ‘they could see and judge for themselves the performances of footballers, of politicians, of interviewers, of entertainers, of actors and actresses. They were no longer content to be the grateful recipients of the opinions of those who were supposed to know better.’²⁶⁷

She was specifically referring to television but the BBC as a whole was undergoing change. An illustration of this was the making of an hour-long enquiry into ‘the nature of a possible nuclear attack on Britain’ called *The Bomb*, broadcast on the BBC Home Service on February 6, 1962. There were several aspects of this programme that are relevant to the current

²⁶⁵ Crisell, *An Introductory History*, pp. 109-110.

²⁶⁶ Hewison, *In Anger*, p. 171.

²⁶⁷ Grace Wyndham Goldie, *Facing The Nation: Television and Politics 1936-1976* (The Bodley Head, 1977), pp. 216-217.

argument. The first was that it came to be made at all, according to its creator and producer Douglas Geoffrey Bridson (known as D.G. Bridson) who was an Assistant Head of Features for radio at the time and a highly experienced broadcaster, having been with the BBC since 1935. He wanted to show in dispassionate factual terms exactly what a nuclear attack on Britain would mean but he was clear that ‘during the fifties, under Sir Ian Jacob (the previous Director-General), such a programme would never have been allowed onto the air.’²⁶⁸ This was partly due to the challenge to accepted thinking on the deterrent, which Bridson implies the BBC had shared with the government. ‘The general climate of official thinking of the Cold War had been such that any completely honest statement of the consequences of a nuclear attack would have been regarded as so much Communist propaganda designed to undermine public morale,’ he said in his memoirs.

Bridson believed the view had come to be accepted that ghastly as nuclear war would be, it could not be more ghastly than any other warfare. Seventy thousand people had died at Hiroshima but 50,000 people were thought to have died in ‘conventional’ bombs in the RAF attacks on Hamburg and Dresden, so what was the essential difference?²⁶⁹ Scientists were disturbed by this complacency but ‘were generally dismissed as alarmists or sentimental cranks.’²⁷⁰ Bridson believed the full power of the H-bomb should be more fully understood and ‘with this mind, and in view of the greater freedom that had come to radio in the sixties, I put forward a carefully worked out scheme for dealing with the threat of the Bomb in a large scale documentary.’²⁷¹ There is no doubt that the programme received the go-ahead due to the support of Hugh Carleton Greene as the new Director General. Greene said later that he had

²⁶⁸ A Personal Recollection by D.G. Bridson, *Prospero and Ariel: The Rise and Fall of Radio* (Victor Gollancz, 1971), p. 290.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

seen his role to banish ‘stuffiness’ from the BBC and ‘break down that ivory tower mentality.’²⁷²

It was not so much that the programme did not contain experts and a balance of pro and anti the deterrent – it was advised by three science journalists and spoke to a range of scientific and military specialists, including nuclear critics like Dr Joseph Rotblat – but it questioned accepted truths and scrutinised every aspect of nuclear and civil defence policy. Bridson’s internal brief said that ‘certain statements are bound to conflict and contradict each other and we should make every attempt to throw the emphasis on the more probable or reliable statements...If need be we can go back to the speakers and grill them on what they have said.’²⁷³ The result was a forensic examination of the massive numbers who would die in a nuclear blast, the minimal four-minute warning of rockets arriving from the Soviet Union, the pattern of any explosion (such as creating firestorms), the spread of deadly radiation, and the lack of evidence that shelters could protect civilians from inevitable death.²⁷⁴

Another aspect of the making of the programme was the opposition of government departments, which Bridson only overcame by convincing them that the BBC would take full responsibility and retain editorial control. He makes clear in an internal paper that the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office would have preferred the programme not to have been made, although they did suggest official spokespersons. ‘The Home Office was anything but enthusiastic about the programme being done at all and though they co-operated to some extent in suggesting outside speakers, they made it perfectly clear that they had no desire to be associated with it officially in any way. This was an understandable attitude in so far as the

²⁷² Ibid., p. 294 – ‘The fact that the programme could be made was witness to the courage of the BBC for which Hugh Greene was certainly to thank.’; Interview with Sir Hugh Greene by Frank Gillard 1982 for History of the BBC <http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/bbc-memories/hugh-greene>

²⁷³ *The Bomb*, suggested coverage and treatment of programme, November 2 1961, memo from Bridson, Features Department, BBC Written Archives, Caversham.

²⁷⁴ TLO 76495, TNA, Transcript of *The Bomb*, Home Service, February 6, 1962.

whole effect of the programme was to turn a searchlight onto various disquieting aspects of Civil Defence which the Home Office preferred to leave in discreet obscurity.²⁷⁵

Press reaction was mixed, with *The Guardian* saying the programme had ‘broken new ground in its criticism of government policy on civil defence,’ although Bridson felt there was no direct criticism and the facts spoke for themselves. Lord Chalfont, the defence correspondent of *The Times*, dismissed the ‘flood of popular science’ which had gone into it and complained about its ‘obsession with the horrors of the nuclear weapon.’²⁷⁶ But listeners seemed to like it, audience research showing that the programme was heard by 250,000 people, a relatively small number, but according to Bridson they were ‘remarkably appreciative’ with an Audience Appreciation Index (AI) of 77 per cent. There were 50 letters in response including 16 from Civil Defence Centres and a majority asked for a repeat, although this was turned down by the BBC authorities.²⁷⁷

The relative freedom for programme-makers and the move away from strict political balance led to attempts to capture the public mood with direct interviews both in the studio and on location. On television the approach of *Panorama* was important as it was the BBC’s flagship current affairs programme. It devoted at least two editions to civil nuclear defence. Nuclear weapons was one of the most polarising issues of the time, which sharply divided opinion and presented for some a stark moral choice. One theme that kept recurring was a comparison with the warnings of air-raids that people received in the Second World War, a reminder that, particularly for the older generation, Hitler’s attacks on Britain were still the most potent memories of war. A *Panorama* outside broadcast in October 1960 examining the state of civil defence preparation in the city of Stafford in the Midlands, painted a picture of a

²⁷⁵ *The Bomb*, memo from Bridson to AHCPops (Recording), February 27, 1962, BBC Written Archives, Caversham.

²⁷⁶ D.G. Bridson, *A Personal Recollection*, p. 294.

²⁷⁷ *The Bomb*, memo from Bridson to AHF, March 9, 1962, BBC Written Archives, Caversham.

sleepy town wholly unprepared for a nuclear attack which would, in the words of presenter James Mossman, turn the town ‘into a charred crater.’²⁷⁸ The town’s civil defence officer, Colonel Marshall and its inhabitants gave the impression they would have plenty of notice of an attack to give time to move equipment and mobilise volunteers. The officer said that ‘one plans on something like four to six days warning of the outbreak of hostilities,’ while another resident said that ‘if anybody intended to drop this bomb we should get at least a month beforehand to know’. Mossman’s conclusion was a damning indictment of either the point of Civil Defence or its capacity. ‘From our survey of just one town, I think it becomes very clear that not many people take Civil Defence in this country very seriously....’²⁷⁹

According to Grant who looked at coverage of nuclear war in films and television, this approach matched CND’s dismissal of any value to post-nuclear survival, which was backed up by opinion polls. He believed the programme supported the government’s own unpublished research which found that the public view of civil defence was dominated by veterans of World War Two still obsessed with the Blitz. But officially stress was laid on nuclear survival in the event of war and he also thought the government hoped to discourage the true power of nuclear weapons and reduce dissent by limiting the amount of information available to the public.²⁸⁰ The *Panorama* programme shattered this delicate balancing act and the political fallout was immediate, with the BBC accused of extreme bias towards civil defence. Members of the government’s own press office were besieged by Regional Directors of Civil Defence calling the programme ‘excellent propaganda for CND’ and ‘a sad and serious blow to Civil Defence.’²⁸¹ These complaints were taken by the government’s Press

²⁷⁸ *Panorama*, TNA, Pty 60, 10/21/5, Transcript October 10, 1960.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ Matthew Grant, ‘Images of Survival, Stories of Destruction: Nuclear War on British Screens from 1945 to the early 1960s,’ in *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, p.15.

²⁸¹ TNA, Pty 60, 10/21/15, Comments about the Civil Defence item in the BBC Television programme *Panorama* of October 10, 1960, extracted from the reports of Regional Directors of Civil Defence.

Office to a meeting with the BBC's Director of News and Current Affairs where 'the excruciating pain' caused by the programme was described.²⁸² The matter went to the top with Director-General Hugh Carleton Greene forced to defend it saying that, 'I do not agree that it was in any way negative or unhelpful to Civil Defence.'²⁸³

Not discouraged by this angry reaction from official quarters, *Panorama* in October 1961 pursued this same issue of survivability but attempted to draw a comparison with the growing pressure in the USA for a government-funded nuclear shelter programme. The newly-elected President John F Kennedy had resisted such a move, partly on cost grounds, so it was left to private industry to offer to fill the gap. The *Panorama* programme had two components, the first part of which was a filmed report from Ludovic Kennedy in California on the growing private market. A salesman said the sophisticated underground homes he was marketing would contain food supplies to last a family for up to four months in the event of a nuclear war. He said survival had always been a major human objective and although some people in the USA were saying if there was a war they would rather be dead, that was too easy a response – 'especially if they had children, nobody wants to be dead.'²⁸⁴

This issue of survival was then brought back to the studio with presenter Richard Dimbleby introducing Home Secretary Rab Butler and 'a mixed audience which includes mothers and married and unmarried, and teachers, nurses, trade unionists, a whole mixture of people' who were asked whether the shelter solution could apply in Britain. Several thought it could, including those who believed there was a responsibility to those that might survive, although another picked up on the US salesman saying a family would have two minutes to

²⁸² Ibid., letter from Keith Fowler, Government Public Relations Officer to DI Edwards, BBC Director of News and Current Affairs, October 26, 1960.

²⁸³ Ibid, letter from Hugh Carleton Green, BBC Director-General to JP Holden, Town Clerk, Borough of Sutton Coldfield, October 25, 1960.

²⁸⁴ *Panorama*, October 9, 1961, microfilm tapes, BBC Written Archives, Caversham.

escape into the shelter after a blast 25 miles away. ‘There’ll be a very short warning with these weapons – we won’t get air raid warnings going and the bombers sighted somewhere over France...the American film rather gave the impression that they were living it back in the last war...I don’t think they were really taking it so seriously.’ There was no consensus reached which was perhaps unsurprising for a debate which posed a hypothetical question, but the implications were taken seriously, not least by the mother who wanted the government to issue suicide pills on the NHS to help her family avoid a slow agonising death from radiation.²⁸⁵

Alternative voices

Anti-bomb activists felt the BBC had a monopoly of the nuclear deterrent narrative and they sought to offer a radical alternative. The Voice of Nuclear Disarmament (VND) was launched in 1961 by the Committee of 100 which had broken away from the mainstream CND. It was essentially a pirate broadcasting station operating from time to time on the BBC and ITV wavelengths, after viewing hours. Following the Queen’s Christmas message in December 1961 and the usual rendering of God Save The Queen, the tunes of ‘Don’t you hear the H-Bomb’s thunder?’ were heard followed by an interview with Bertrand Russell, in which he was asked about his ‘frightening statement’ that no-one might be alive in a year’s time because of the nuclear threat. The VND had a character known as ‘Fallout Freda’ to present the items.²⁸⁶ This initiative showed the daring of the ban-the-bombers but perhaps also the lack of opportunities to put their case during normal schedules. Christopher Hill has covered some elements of this area in his recent work on the anti-nuclear movement and the

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ *Daily Worker*, December 5, 1961, quoted in Christopher Hill, p. 34.

rise of television. He highlights the government's determination to deny the anti-nuclear cause a hearing in the news media, and the work of radical film-makers who were attracted to CND by the idea of educating and empowering citizens.²⁸⁷

In this fevered atmosphere of the time those who declared themselves in favour of disarming unilaterally felt they were making a courageous statement, almost as if in today's terms they were 'coming out.' To do so on air during a broadcast must have had an impact for the listener, even if they disagreed with the stand being taken. John Foot, brother of Labour MP Michael Foot and later a Liberal Democrat life peer, made his declaration during an *Any Questions?* debate in 1958 which was discussing mistakes happening to nuclear bombers which could trigger war. 'I am a supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament whether the other nations follow us or not, to say we will have nothing to do with this weapon at all.'²⁸⁸ Another 'confession' came from Winifred de Kok, a child welfare specialist, during an *Any Questions?* panel discussion on whether President Eisenhower should resume H- bomb tests. 'As a doctor I feel I cannot under any circumstances condone anybody having hydrogen explosions for whatever reason and I feel that – Im proud to say that I am a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament – and although I don't know whether we do much good I think perhaps we do a little good in pointing out to people that there really are great dangers in letting off these explosions.'²⁸⁹

The defence of the government's nuclear deterrent policy in these debates was less dramatic but perhaps powerful in that it seemed to offer protection and a continued influence in the world. Tory MP for Gravesend Peter Kirk told one programme that it was a paradox that world disarmament was more likely to come with both sides having nuclear weapons which could result in annihilation, 'so that you have either got to disarm or risk blowing up

²⁸⁷ Hill, *Peace and Power in Cold War Britain*, pp. 106 and 156.

²⁸⁸ *Any Questions?* April 25, 1958, microfilm tapes, BBC Written Archives, Caversham.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, January 1, 1960.

the whole world.²⁹⁰ Another Tory MP Gerald Nabarro attacked CND marchers in an April 1960 programme saying they had not brought peace any nearer.²⁹¹ The cause of peace would not be advanced by Britain renouncing its weapons. It is more likely that negotiation through strength will bring this closer, not by a tiny percentage of the nation wearing their conscience on their sleeve.²⁹¹

The implications of this fiercely fought debate even reached into the schools as many young people embraced the moral idealism of opposing weapons. On the *Topics North* programme of the BBC Home Service in January 1962, schoolboy Arthur Johnson along with his mother was interviewed about being expelled from school for wearing the CND badge and taking part in a ban-the-bomb demonstration.²⁹² A *Family Affairs* edition broadcast in May 1960 dealt with problems that might arise if a school forbade the wearing of CND badges along with jewellery. Should they prevent free expression of political opinion, the programme asked.²⁹³

Conclusion

The chapter has examined several aspects of developments in public service broadcasting in this period so as to contextualise the way that the nuclear deterrent issue was raised. This links to the main themes of the thesis as a whole, namely how the government sought to promote its propaganda, changes in people's consumption of the mass media, and the ability of CND to communicate an alternative message. The power of television to

²⁹⁰ Ibid., February 21, 1958.

²⁹¹ Ibid., April 22, 1960.

²⁹² *Topics North*, January 11, 1962, Home Service, index of programmes, BBC Written Archives, Caversham.

²⁹³ *Family Affairs*, May 5, 1960, index of programmes, BBC Written Archives, Caversham.

personalise politics and to reach into every home was being grasped, but at the same time the BBC was operating in a new commercial and political environment. It has been argued that the independent companies forced the BBC to over-turn previous restrictions around covering sensitive issues like the nuclear deterrent, and it became clear that the ability to speak directly to voters on TV, as well as radio, could have a direct bearing on party political campaigns. In the midst of a propaganda war, the two main parties attempted to adapt to the television age, although the government wanted to strike a balance between appearing to debate the issues while not alarming the electorate too much about a possible Armageddon scenario.

The chapter has tried to demonstrate that despite political pressure from the government behind the scenes to influence particular programmes, current affairs programmes such as *Any Questions?* provided a forum for the contentious issues around the nuclear deterrent to be debated. But it was increasingly felt that the BBC was not performing a proper scrutinising role over government policies. Television and radio programme makers used new freedoms afforded by a wind of change to ask serious questions about nuclear weapons, testing and civil defence. There was less deference and a willingness to question Reithian values which had guided public service broadcasting for decades, such as avoiding controversial issues and ignoring minority interests.

Chapter 5 - Survival and Propaganda

Introduction

This chapter focusses on how the two sides in the propaganda war chose particular publicity formats to advance their case on the nuclear deterrent. Taking the idea of surviving a nuclear attack and civil defence measures as its main theme, the chapter demonstrates how the government gave reassuring messages to the public, while CND used shock value and innovative design techniques to warn that civil defence was pointless. One of the reasons for selecting this particular theme is because civil defence inevitably involves giving information direct to the public, and therefore provides valuable insight into whether the government was open and transparent about the benefits and risks of preparing for a nuclear war.

The chapter firstly examines the variety of publicity formats used. The government claimed that while preventing war through nuclear deterrence was its primary aim, it was important to have civil defence as an insurance in case war broke out. It produced posters, booklets and film on this theme and encouraged the belief that nuclear war was survivable if ordinary people made some basic preparations. CND conversely believed civil defence had no credibility since a nuclear exchange would bring total devastation. The movement attracted radical designers who drew on techniques from other medium, such as magazines and photojournalism, to produce its own posters, leaflets, badges and also film documentary. These conveyed a stark message embodying a moral belief that nuclear weapons were evil.

Secondly, the chapter dissects the contradictions inherent in the messages put forward. Government statements about the importance of civil defence appeared to be at odds with its own defence policy which cast doubt on the ability of people to survive a nuclear attack. Third, it analyses the arguments set out by Whitehall civil servants, ministers and MPs around providing information on home defence without alarming the public. Lastly, the role of documentary film in the propaganda war is given added prominence. Previously, CND films have been treated as historical curios and the official civil defence documentaries were largely forgotten. This was partly because most were only shown to the emergency services and withheld from the public. Films produced by both sides of the nuclear deterrent case will be explored in detail, to illustrate the different commissioning environments involved and to place them in proper context as part of an overall propaganda strategy.

Civil defence publicity material

The chapter begins by exploring what were the key messages for the public contained in the propaganda material produced by the government. Between 1957 and 1963 it published a series of booklets and posters, some advising the public about steps they could take within the home to prepare for a possible nuclear attack, while others were aimed at the Civil Defence Corps of volunteers, which had steadily grown in the previous decade and numbered 375,000 in 1961.²⁹⁴ The corps and especially wardens were seen as the local leaders to instruct and organise the public in their communities. In an era of the arms race and

²⁹⁴ Duncan Campbell, *War Plan UK: The Truth about Civil Defence in Britain* (Burnett Books, 1982), p. 124.

international tension these publications attempted to clarify the role of the emergency services in helping people survive an unprecedented nuclear strike.

A 1957 booklet *The Hydrogen Bomb* was at pains to reassure that ‘the publication of this summary does not mean that the government think war likely. As the 1957 White Paper on Defence made clear, the existence of nuclear weapons and of the means to use them is a safeguard against aggression and a deterrent to war. But everyone should know what these weapons could do, and have some idea of how their effects could be reduced.’²⁹⁵ Practical measures suggested in this publication ranged from whitewashing the windows to counter heat radiation, to a slit trench with overhead cover or a prepared refuge room inside a house with windows strengthened by sandbags, earth or heavy furniture. The booklet, with the familiar image of the atomic mushroom cloud on the cover and issued for sale at nine pence rather than being free to the public, was stated to be a simpler, less technical version of a 1956 handbook. This suggested that the Home Office was continually revising and updating its civil defence material. A large billboard-style poster of the same name was also produced using small diagrams to illustrate the practical advice for ordinary citizens.²⁹⁶

The following year came a booklet called *The H Bomb* specifically aimed at civil defence recruitment, and again with a poster using the same language and terminology.²⁹⁷ The aim of both appeared to be to counter arguments from critics that there was no point in civil defence since a nuclear war would destroy civilisation. The poster was headed *Civil Defence is Common Sense* and it attempted to convince the public that survival was a realistic proposition in the aftermath of an attack. It used humour as vehicle to lighten what was a dark theme, through the means of commissioning a large illustration by *Daily Mail* cartoonist

²⁹⁵ *The Hydrogen Bomb* (HMSO, 1957), p. 3.

²⁹⁶ INF 13/281, TNA, *The Hydrogen Bomb – What the Hydrogen Bomb Does*: recruitment poster for Civil Defence, 1957.

²⁹⁷ INF 13/235, TNA, *The H Bomb* (Central Office of Information for HM Government), HO 5814, 1958; *Civil Defence is Common Sense*, (Issued for HM Government by the Central Office of Information), poster 1957

Leslie Ilingworth. This was accompanied by the banner title '*If You Think It's Hopeless, You're Wrong*', showing three people with their heads buried in buckets of sand. They are saying 'It'll never happen, 'what's the use' and 'there isn't any'. The H-bomb threat looms in the background as a poisonous cloud, while a Civil Defence chief prepares to tackle their pessimism. The poster stated that people were told too much about the horrors of war and not enough about surviving it. It said a message was sent out that if Britain was attacked with H-bombs, everyone would be wiped out. The poster then added, 'That just isn't anything like the truth. There would be terrible devastation, but for millions and millions of people, chances of survival would be very good. It depends very much on our Civil Defence. The more people we have in it, the better.'²⁹⁸

The defensive nature of these materials appears to implicitly recognise that critics had made inroads into the public's confidence in nuclear survival and it was necessary to counter the cynicism engendered. Opinion polls of the time bear this out. According to Driver, in March 1958 over half Gallup's sample (80 per cent of those who ventured an opinion) did not expect as much as half the population of Britain to survive a nuclear war between Russia and the West.²⁹⁹ When Gallup asked in November 1958, 'if nuclear weapons, like the H-bomb, were used, do you think that Britain would or would not survive it?', a majority 45 per cent said it would not, compared to 25 per cent who said it would and 30 per cent who were don't know.³⁰⁰

Despite or perhaps because of this scepticism the government continued to produce civil defence material, although not always for general public consumption and often aimed at volunteers and emergency workers. In 1960 there was a further Civil Defence booklet

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Driver, *The Disarmers*, p. 101.

³⁰⁰ *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937-1975*, Vol. 1 1937-1964 (Random House, 1976), p. 484.

General Information, explaining the structure of the Corps and other services,³⁰¹ and one called *Rescue* which was an updated version of a previous manual.³⁰² This was followed in 1961 by an illustrated guidebook *Survival* aimed at the Women's Voluntary Service.³⁰³ But the context of these publications was that while the 1957 White Paper referred to in *The Hydrogen Bomb* was meant to promote the nuclear deterrent, it also led to further confusion. This will be seen later in the section on 'Contradictions of defence policy.'

CND Publicity

In a sense CND did not have to contend with mixed messages or potential confusion about the intended audience for its propaganda. It attracted professional artists such as graphic designers and photographers precisely because of its apparent clear moral stance that nuclear weapons were wrong and civil defence only perpetuated an illusion that lives could be saved in any war. The resulting formats of the iconic CND badge, posters and leaflets were expressions of that unilateralist position. They were unambiguous and contained a stark warning to the human race. As with government publicity there was some element of commissioning by central CND but there was also a spontaneous element befitting a movement that consisted of several different groups and many different individuals.

The origin of the CND logo that laid the basis for all the other propaganda materials, for example, appears to have been fairly accidental. According to national CND secretary Peggy Duff, an artist called Gerald Holtom came to the first meeting of CND's London Region in 1958 and unrolled a long strip of black cloth with the words Nuclear Disarmament

³⁰¹ *General Information (All Sections)*, Civil Defence Pocket Book No. 3, (HMSO, 1960).

³⁰² *Rescue*, Civil Defence Handbook No.7 (HMSO, 1960).

³⁰³ *Survival* (prepared for the WVS by the Central Office of Information, 1961).

in white. At each end there was what she called ‘a strange symbol’ in white against the black - a broken cross inside a circle. Holtom, who was a textile designer and graduate of the Royal College of Art, told the meeting that the symbol represented the semaphore for the initials ND, the broken cross meant the death of man and the circle the unborn child, so the total message was the threat of nuclear weapons to all mankind. ‘He sold us the idea and the colours, white on black or black on white, which were stark and funereal. We then went back and made the Aldermaston March banners.’³⁰⁴ This single one-off art creation came to sum up the campaign almost without the need for explanation, and spawned the badge, the wearing of which for some became almost a political act in itself.

CND activist Ernest Rodker, who knew Holtom and other designers, thought the design for the badge had a new, easily recognisable strong and simple image. He said that in the early days of CND there was no other image that was really in competition with it, although the anti-apartheid badge, at a later date, with the same black on white format, was also successful. ‘There were badges for the older, long-standing organisations, associations and Trade Unions, but they were usually die-cast in metal, and not easily recognisable. The CND badge in contrast had a very simple, bold design on a white background, with a plastic covering; it could not be mistaken for any other badge or representing any other campaign and it was cheap to produce.’³⁰⁵ According to Crowley, the badges were distributed by CND ‘with a poignant note explaining that, in the event of a nuclear war, these fired ceramic badges would be among the few human artefacts to survive.’³⁰⁶

Rodker also knew Robin Fior who was a self-taught designer and typographer who later taught at the London College of Printing in 1960 and at Chelsea School of Art in 1963.

³⁰⁴ Peggy Duff, *Left, Left, Left: a personal account of six protest campaigns 1945-65* (Allison & Busby, 1971), p.115.

³⁰⁵ Ernest Rodker, interview with the author, September 21, 2016.

³⁰⁶ David Crowley, *Posters of the Cold War* (V&A Publishing, 2008), p. 68.

Fior was influenced by the discipline and objectivity of designers in Switzerland. He created a simple poster for the first CND demonstration which was a mass lobby of Parliament, and then designed a poster and leaflets for the first Aldermaston to London Easter march in 1959. Rodker commented that, 'As with the posters, his leaflets for these events were also fine examples of graphic design serving the message – immediate, visually striking, clear and uncluttered.'³⁰⁷ Fior later brought in a photographer friend called Ken Garland. He had done National Service in the army, had developed radical politics, and as a graphic designer had been heavily influenced by *Picture Post* magazine, which pioneered photojournalism during its existence from 1938 to 1957. After seeing a poster that Garland did for the Committee of 100 advertising protests, Peggy Duff asked him to work for the campaign. He said, 'if she wanted me to do it overnight, I did it overnight. Peggy turned up one Sunday morning and said she needed a poster for showing in the Tube the next week. So I took the existing poster of the CND circle and gradually laid one poster on top of another and felt it said something about a march – like the dawn of something when the moon comes to full size from being a small crescent.' This became the official poster for the CND Easter march of 1962.³⁰⁸

The work of Holtom, Fior and Garland for CND and the Committee of 100 has been described as creating 'a distinctive graphic aesthetic' which 'captures the mood and inherent fear surrounding the abstraction that was the nuclear bomb.'³⁰⁹ However, it should be said that this was not a conscious co-ordinated movement but the particular conjunction of artists preoccupied with seeking more socially relevant work and a cause which they could identify with. According to Poyner, they were rejecting commercial art and its stress on meeting

³⁰⁷ Ernest Rodker, *Letter: Robin Fior's posters for CND*, *The Guardian*, October 9, 2012.

³⁰⁸ Rick Poyner (ed.), 'Interview with Ken Garland' in *Communicate: Independent Graphic Design since the Sixties*, (Laurence King Publishing, 2004), p. 149.

³⁰⁹ Exhibition *From Fear to Sanity – CND and the art of protest from 1958-1963*, The Horse Hospital, 9-30 August 2008.

market demands in favour of playing a social role in society, and CND offered an avenue to express what he called 'their passionate degree of personal commitment.'³¹⁰

The loose regional structure of CND did allow for local groups to use their ingenuity when it came to visual publicity, and one example was a visual exhibition called '*No Place to Hide*' staged by Hampstead CND in 1958, which later became a travelling exhibition able to be hired by other local CND groups. This featured various images of the effects of nuclear war such as Hiroshima and the dangers of radioactive fallout. There were two interesting features of this event worth noting in the context of anti-war propaganda work, first the collaboration with central CND, and second, the involvement of creative people from different professions who were already attracted to the CND cause. First, CND archives contain an item for June 10 1958 marked 'Special – Urgent: Publicity Material' referring to 'posters for March on London specially designed for the Hampstead H-Bomb exhibition *No Place to Hide*, which received favourable comment in the national press.'³¹¹ The memo said the posters were designed to highlight the dramatic effect of a nuclear blast and the inability of civil defence to protect people. The posters were described as double crown size (20 inches by 30 inches), white and red on black, with the price including strips to be stuck on a map of Britain, one which gave the name of the major city on which it is assumed the nuclear bomb had fallen, and a strip with the effect of the bomb on nearby towns or suburbs. All local activists had to do was write in the name of their particular town or suburb. According to the archive, to describe the effects there were four different strips – if the distance from the centre of the bombed area was 0-5 miles the result was 'total extinction, life ceases in this area, few survive'; at 5-12 miles 'most people die in this area, fatal radiation'; 12-100 miles

³¹⁰ Poyner, pp. 23-24,

³¹¹ CND/2008/4/3, Folder 1 of 2, LSE Archives, Circular for March on London, June 22, 1958, Issued June 10, marked Special – Urgent: Publicity Material.

‘keep out, highly radioactive, atomic dust area’; 100-180 miles ‘death dust everywhere, many sick.’³¹²

The second feature was the apparent enthusiasm for the CND cause to be a rallying point for disparate creative individuals. In the case of this exhibition these included Gerda Flockinger, a jewellery maker who later had several exhibitions at the V&A Museum in London, stage designer Sally Jacobs who later worked for the Royal Shakespeare Company, and modernist furniture designer Clive Latimer. They were all studying or teaching at the Central School for Art and Design and were all members of the Hampstead CND committee. Flockinger described in an oral interview for the British Library how the idea for the exhibition came from the committee and was then developed. Clive Latimer offered to help and arranged special lighting for the exhibition. He was an anarchist and a pacifist who had driven ambulances in the Second World War rather than enlist. She added that ‘a lot of people saw *No Place to Hide*, the images in it were very strong and there were lots of photographs from Hiroshima. They were horrific pictures.’³¹³

Both the government and CND deployed such images but for different reasons. For example, the often-used photo of the initial mushroom cloud caused by a nuclear explosion such as at Hiroshima and Nagasaki could be seen on posters from both sides. For the authorities, it was more of a warning that people ought to be prepared in the event of war but was accompanied by a reassurance that the number of deaths and injuries could be contained and to some extent some could be prevented by good civil defence. For CND it was deployed as pure shock value to drive home the evil nature of nuclear war. A visual demonstration of this desire to disturb any complacency the public might have was epitomised in the 1963

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Gerda Flockinger, (8 of 17) National Life Stories Collection: Crafts Lives, British Library, shelf mark C960/01.

poster '*Stop Nuclear Suicide*' commissioned by CND from graphic designer FHK Henrion to be displayed on London Underground stations. This brutally challenged the official survivalist strategy. It featured the mushroom cloud sitting on top of a giant human skull with the CND logo at the bottom. No words were necessary as the macabre implications appeared all too obvious. According to Crowley who looked at posters of the Cold War, 'This image rejected the theory of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), the military doctrine that argued that war was inconceivable when both sides possessed nuclear weapons. Combining a powerful historic symbol of death, the skull, with another modern one, the mushroom cloud released after a nuclear explosion, Henrion's message was devastatingly simple.'³¹⁴

Contradictions of defence policy

CND was able to exploit statements in the 1957 White Paper which had the effect of undermining public confidence in civil defence, and this forced the government into the public arena to justify its policies. There appeared to be a contradiction between the positive message of official posters on the chances of surviving a nuclear attack, and the stark admission in the White Paper that 'it must be frankly recognised that there is at present no means of providing adequate protection for the people of this country against the consequences of an attack with nuclear weapons.'³¹⁵ The White Paper seemed to compound the shock of this statement by placing the military above the civilian population. It went on, 'Since peace so largely depends upon the deterrent fear of nuclear retaliation, it is essential

³¹⁴ F.H.K. Henrion, *Stop Nuclear Suicide*, poster commissioned by CND for London Underground stations, 1963; Crowley, *Posters of the Cold War*, p. 63.

³¹⁵ White Paper - *Defence: Outline of Future Policy* (Cmnd Paper 124, April 1957), pp. 2-3.

that a would-be aggressor should not be allowed to think he could readily knock out the bomber bases in Britain before their aircraft could take off from them. The defence of the bomber airfields is therefore an essential part of the deterrent and is a feasible task.’³¹⁶

Duncan Sandys the Defence Secretary was quoted as admitting that civilians could not be protected. In a speech in Australia in August 1957, he said that the government had decided not to defend the whole country but to defend only our bomber bases. ‘I must pay tribute to the people of Great Britain for the readiness with which they have accepted these harsh but inescapable facts.’³¹⁷

In the White Paper civil defence was relegated to a minor role although to maintain the view that it was still taken seriously, it said there would be ‘some precautions to minimise the effects of a nuclear attack, should the deterrent fail to prevent war.’³¹⁸ Local civil defence organisations would carry on as would essential training, emergency communications, and work on fallout warning and monitoring systems.³¹⁹ Another factor was the economic imperative of cutting the defence budget and spending on home defence was reduced by £22 million on the previous year.³²⁰ It appears from this approach that civil defence was downgraded in importance and this ran the risk of suggesting that the public could not be properly protected. Duncan Campbell argued that the answer was minimal measures which did not cost much but provided reassurance.³²¹

Crossley also believed there was a decline in the importance given by the government to civil defence between 1957 and 1963 as memories of the Second World War and the Blitz faded. He noted the secrecy that accompanied any questioning of civil defence plans which

³¹⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

³¹⁷ *Nuclear Disarmament is the only effective Civil Defence*, CND leaflet 1961, British Library.

³¹⁸ White Paper - *Defence: Outline of Future Policy*, p. 3.

³¹⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

³²⁰ Grant, M., ‘Home defence and the Sandys Defence White Paper, 1957’, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 31 (6), (2008), p. 23.

³²¹ Campbell, *War Plan UK*, p. 443.

only served to increase suspicion about the government's ulterior motives. Such evidence as there was cast doubt on the actual protection from nuclear fallout that the public might be afforded. Crossley quotes a 1960 *New Statesman* article by MC Berenbaum which examined the medical consequences of a nuclear attack and concluded that Britain continued with civil defence despite scientific evidence questioning its ability to handle casualties or maintain order. The *New Statesman's* conclusion was that '...the main purpose of civil defence is to soothe the fears of the electorate and to win support for the deterrent policy.'³²²

Matthew Grant's work on the subject of the 'imaginative landscape' of nuclear war in Britain is particularly pertinent here. His chapter from research jointly with Benjamin Ziemann, on the idea of an imaginary nuclear war, supports the argument already made that the memory of wartime destruction and the Blitz pervaded the government's civil defence plans. The contrast with the debate in the USA is instructive (and referred to in a 1960 BBC *Panorama* programme in Chapter 4), namely that American families believed they could survive a nuclear war using fallout shelters offered by private companies. Due to what Grant calls 'British pessimism' and the successful propaganda of CND, people had no faith in British civil defence.³²³ They were influenced by CND's moral revulsion of nuclear weapons and ironically, people of both pro and anti-deterrent opinions shared the same inability to see beyond the 'emptiness' of the post-attack world, Grant believes. The government was forced on several occasions to try and publicly correct these contradictions implied by the White Paper. It was embarrassed in May 1957 when St Pancras Borough Council in London cited the White Paper as the reason for voting to reject the duty of local authorities to prepare for civil defence, contained in regulations issued throughout the Cold War and originating from

³²² MC Berenbaum, 'The Civil Defence Fraud' in *New Statesman* 60, No. 1538, September 3, 1960 p. 292, quoted in George Crossley, *The Civil Defence Debate in Britain 1957-1963*, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bradford, 1985), pp. 27-29.

³²³ Grant, Chapter 5, Grant, M. and Ziemann, B. (eds.) *Understanding the Imaginary War: Culture Thought and Nuclear Conflict, 1945-90*(Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 100-103.

the 1948 Civil Defence Act. According to Grant, ‘the Town Clerk informed the Home Office that, “in view of the government’s admission in the recent White Paper that there is no real defence against atomic and hydrogen bomb warfare, we are of the opinion that to continue with civil defence is a complete waste of money.”’³²⁴ The council urged other local councils to do the same and went further in calling on the government to abolish all nuclear weapons.³²⁵ The council would normally have spent £1,844 p. a. on civil defence, making a total of £7,000 p. a. when the rate support grant was added.³²⁶ Home Secretary Rab Butler moved quickly to stop what could have become a rolling protest by other local authorities. St Pancras suspended all civil defence duties on June 1, and within 24 hours a civil defence commissioner was appointed by central government. The commissioner remained in office until the following year when the council reversed its decision and re-imposed a duty to provide civil defence.³²⁷

At the height of this episode, the Home Secretary was forced to tell the Commons that St Pancras was ‘under a misapprehension’ and that the White Paper stated that civil defence would continue to play an essential part in the defence plan. ‘The council was further informed that the government were satisfied that should the deterrent fail to prevent war civil defence preparations made in advance would save very many lives that might otherwise be lost and do much to provide a framework for the preservation of organised society.’³²⁸ On September 28 of that year Butler returned to the same argument in a BBC radio programme called *The Part of Civil Defence in our Defence System*. He said people had ‘misunderstood’ the White Paper as implying that civil defence was useless. What it really meant was that

³²⁴ Town Clerk, ‘Metropolitan Borough of Saint Pancras to the Under Secretary of State’, Home Office, 11.4.1957 in Grant, *Home Defence*, pp. 20-21.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³²⁶ Crossley, p. 21.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³²⁸ *Hansard*, Civil Defence, St. Pancras, HC Debates 08 May 1957, Vol. 569 Cc 77-8W.

Britain could not be guaranteed immunity from a nuclear war and although many would die in what he called 'limited areas,' that was no reason to do nothing for the injured and homeless who were left alive.³²⁹

CND in its own publications hailed the admissions in the White Paper as a vindication of its stand against civil defence. Historian A.J.P. Taylor, who was a founder member of CND, had summed up the opposition to civil defence in a booklet which argued that 'there is no defence against H bombs according to the Minister of Defence and no preparations are being made to secure the civilian population. The Russians can easily reach the UK if the Americans bomb them and we will pay the price.'³³⁰ While this statement was partially untrue, in that basic protective measures were put in place, it served to emphasise the campaign's unilateralist stand.³³¹ In general CND was clear in its outright opposition to what it believed was the 'illusion' of protection afforded by civil defence, although it was careful not to criticise ordinary people for wanting to protect their country. In a 1961 leaflet it said that, 'We have no quarrel with the good citizen who gives up his time and leisure to train himself to give aid and succour to the sick and wounded. Our quarrel is with the government which spends a mere pittance on Civil Defence and asks you to believe that this can give you protection in a nuclear war.'³³²

Whitehall disagreements on information

³²⁹ Crossley, p. 20.

³³⁰ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Great Deterrent Myth* (CND, 1958), p. 1.

³³¹ Crowley, *Posters of the Cold War*, p. 73.

³³² *Nuclear Disarmament is the only effective Civil Defence*, CND leaflet, 1961.

One of the themes in this thesis linking civil defence with the government's overall nuclear policy was the reluctance to trust the public with information on nuclear war. This appeared to be borne partly out of a desire not to shock and depress the population in advance of any conflict, but also from a lack of clarity as to what was expected of ordinary citizens. This could be the reason why there was a delay in output of civil defence publicity aimed at the general public, as opposed to specialist volunteer groups, between 1958 and 1963, when the Civil Service Handbook Number 10 called *Advising the Household on Protection Against Nuclear Attack* was published. This was prior to a series of seven short films with the same name being made ready for use.³³³ The National Archives reveal that the long gap in production of Handbook Number 10 was due to internal disagreements between senior civil servants and also involving Ministers over a number of significant issues. The first disagreement was whether the advice should be targeted at the general public or the emergency services. The title on 'advising the household' appeared straightforward enough but Ministers later argued it was really directed at the emergency services so they could provide advice to householders. Ordinary people did not need to take any action themselves, which produced confusion. The second disagreement was about whether it should be made available free to the public, which would have guaranteed a larger distribution. Lastly, there was dispute on the actual practicality of what ordinary people were expected to do in their homes, given they might only have hours or even minutes to prepare for an attack. These disagreements came out into the open when MPs later debated the publication.

There appeared to be official confusion regarding the target audience. Home Secretary Henry Brooke, who had succeeded Rab Butler after the handbook was published, was unwilling to give information direct to the public, even though the title contained the

³³³ Civil Defence Handbook No.10: *Advising the Householder on Protection Against Nuclear Attack* (HMSO, 1963); *Advice to Householders*, IWM Hoy 66, 1964, available at <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060004875>

words ‘advising the household.’ Instead he claimed it was a training publication for members of the civil defence, police and fire services, and people did not have to do anything at all.

‘There is no present action which householders are being asked to take. The handbook will be kept up to date,’ he told the Commons on 7 February 1963.³³⁴ This did not satisfy Joan Vickers, Conservative MP for Plymouth, Devonport who thought it desirable that householders should have this advice directly as they did in Canada and other Commonwealth countries ‘to get people prepared in case an emergency occurs.’ But Brooke disagreed adding that ‘any householder can have a copy – the price is only nine pence – but I do not think this is the time for householders to start white-washing their windows and doing the other things they might have to in a real emergency.’³³⁵

Regarding the cost and the issue of charging the public, Rab Butler when Home Secretary had recommended the booklet should be issued free to the public.³³⁶ But following much internal debate it was eventually decided that the public would be charged nine pence, which it could be argued made access for ordinary people more difficult. It was sent free only to local authorities and civil defence organisations. The total cost of producing the handbook was £50,000, a considerable investment which would amount to over £1 million today, while the accompanying film was made available in 1964 having cost £500 to make.³³⁷

The third contentious issue surrounding the publication was how early the public should be warned and what exactly an ordinary member of the public would be expected to do in their property either before or during a nuclear alert. If they started to prepare too early it would involve unnecessary physical tasks, the thinking went, however too late and the

³³⁴ *Hansard*, Nuclear Warfare (Civil Defence), HC Debates February 7 1963-02-07.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ T 227/1526, TNA, RA Butler, comment on proposals by the Official Committee on Civil Defence on issuing guidance to the public (marked Secret), May 31, 1962.

³³⁷ *Ibid.* *Civil Defence Expenditure on Production and Distribution of Handbook and Film “Advice to the Householder.”* File begins 8.9.61.

preparations would be meaningless given the nature of a nuclear blast. A memo from Treasury official DMB Butt to his Home Office counterpart RJP Hewison in November 1961 referred to the proposed handbook and said, ‘If we find ourselves inhibited from printing this pamphlet in advance of its use, because of its alarming nature – or if printing and distribution in a period of high tension looks like taking altogether too long to be completed in time – is not the answer that a shortened version of it should be printed as a supplement to the national newspapers?’³³⁸ This was supported by Home Secretary Rab Butler in a secret memo, who agreed there was no alternative to using newspapers to distribute the booklet so it could reach them within a reasonable time.³³⁹ While the Home Office official thought the newspaper idea was ‘a brilliant suggestion’ it was never actually implemented, but the substantive debate was on what physical tasks the average person could manage in the time available before an attack.³⁴⁰

The controversial section in the draft text of the handbook they were discussing was what the public was asked to do to strengthen a room in the house designated as a refuge room which might protect against nuclear fallout. The draft said, ‘The windows are the weak point in a fall-out room and you will not be properly protected until they have been blocked up. Do this in one or other of the following ways: put sandbags or earth-filled containers outside the windows. If you cannot do this, block the windows from inside with bookcases, chests and drawers or other large furniture packed tightly with earth, books or other heavy material.’³⁴¹

The official DMB Butt said that it was not clear whether the householder should immediately on receiving the advice get on with doing these many laborious tasks ‘which

³³⁸ Ibid., Butt to Hewison, memo November 2, 1961.

³³⁹ Ibid., RA Butler, comment on proposals by the Official Committee on Civil Defence on issuing guidance to the public (marked Secret), May 31, 1962.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., Hewison to Butt, memo November 3, 1961.

³⁴¹ Civil Defence Handbook No.10, p.8.

will pretty well wreck his home, and take a good many hours to do so. Most of the normal life of the country will come to a stop as he does them.’ He said that was acceptable if the booklet was delivered at the last minute but questioned whether in peacetime there should be a distinction between things to be done now and those done later when the BBC or others instructed them to do so.’³⁴² The film was broken down into seven mini-films with titles such as *Nuclear Explosion – The Basic Facts*, *Protective Measures*, *What To Do If It Happens*, and *What To Do Immediately After an Attack*, described as ‘a series of short films on nuclear bomb precautions intended for showing on television in the event of a threatened nuclear war.’³⁴³ This raised a question of whether that would make it too late for the public to take action.

MPs in the Commons questioned whether householders could be expected to re-organise their homes in a short period of time. Emrys Hughes, MP for South Ayrshire protested in an Adjournment debate that, ‘is it a serious instruction to householders to make these preparations now. Does not the Ministry think that these elaborate measures would tax the ingenuity of a very good general contractor? Can they possibly be put into operation in the short time that would be available in the event of a short air-raid warning?’ The MP quoted criticism of the booklet by the Commons Estimates Committee that the booklet did not ‘achieve any useful purpose’ as few householders would buy it and those that did would not be convinced that the proposed measures would be effective. Therefore the committee said it should be withdrawn.³⁴⁴ Montague Woodhouse, the junior Home Office Minister responsible, struggled to explain the apparent confusion in the face of this scepticism, arguing that people had been ‘misled’ into thinking the pamphlet was aimed at householders but it was actually for civil defence staff to advise the public about simple precautions when a

³⁴² T 227/1526, TNA, Butt to Hewison memo, November 3, 1961.

³⁴³ Ibid., IWM Hoy 66, 1964.

³⁴⁴ *Hansard*, HC Debates December 2, 1963, Vol. 685 Cc 940-50.

nuclear alert was on.³⁴⁵ Oxford city council was one representative body that took the contrary view that people needed to know themselves and in time to prepare, and because of this published its own pamphlet for its local population setting out the measures that all citizens could take in the event of an attack.³⁴⁶

Documentary Film and the bomb

The different sides of the argument had clear positions on nuclear survival but they continually faced the issue of how best to communicate them. Both sides turned to film for a propaganda tool which could deliver a more powerful emotional impact than posters or handbooks. Film was seen as a direct and more durable way to reach the largest number of people, but the commissioning environment was very different. The government had the resources to make commercial arrangements with film companies, while the lack of resources for critics of deterrent meant they had to rely on allies in the trade unions to donate their services.

One film critic Alan Lovell of *Peace News*, was aware of this problem, and in 1962 asked, 'how can one oppose the values that are purveyed throughout the country every minute of the day by the press, radio and television, using the latest technical resources, and backed by large sums of capital.'³⁴⁷ But Lovell was adamant that 'the struggle for good art

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ The Oxford pamphlet said, 'The Government have placed on sale a number of pamphlets dealing with the effects of nuclear weapons and outlining some possible measures of protection against them; but these have had but a limited circulation. For this reason, the Civil Defence Committee of the Oxford City Council feel that everybody should have the opportunity of knowing about the dangers and of learning what relatively simple measures they can take which might mean the difference between life and death in the event of an attack. The Committee also believes that it is better for the public to have this information now rather than when it might be too late.' *Preliminary advice on possible measures of self-protection against the effects of nuclear attack*, City of Oxford Civil Defence Department, September 1962.

³⁴⁷ Alan Lovell, 'The importance of criticism,' *Peace News*, June 1, 1962, p. 5, quoted in Hogenkamp, , p. 67.

seems to me just as important as the struggle against the bomb.’³⁴⁸ Another difference compared to government was that CND wanted to openly champion its activities and provoke debate amongst the public. Visual media were seen as mobilising tools to stir people to action, rather than providing reassurance or information. A notable example of this ambition is the CND documentary film *March to Aldermaston*, released in 1959, which is the most important campaign film to emerge from that period. It came about after the formation of CND in 1958, and its first march from London to the nuclear weapons establishment at Aldermaston.³⁴⁹ The project to make this film attracted film-makers who were committed to the CND unilateralist cause but came from different creative backgrounds and this, for some, reduced its impact.

One influence was known as the Free Cinema movement - a group of film-makers including Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz who wanted creative freedom to make their own films, and produced short features using hand-held 16mm cameras which, according to the BFI, ‘used sound and editing impressionistically.’³⁵⁰ Anderson made clear that with little money they could not make commercial films ‘but you can use your eyes and your ears. You can give indications. You can make poetry,’ he said.³⁵¹ Other film-makers came from a television and a more orthodox documentary background, such as Derrick Knight who had been active in the film technicians union ACT. After the union supported the policy of renouncing all nuclear weapons, Knight was instrumental in the union setting up a Film and TV Committee for Nuclear Disarmament, which according to Hogenkamp suggested a film of the march.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 67

³⁴⁹ *March to Aldermaston (1959)*, Contemporary Films, b/w, sound, 33 mins, BFI Library
<http://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b69e0f6d6>

³⁵⁰ Christophe Dupin, *A History of Free Cinema*, in BFI screenonline, at
<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/592919/>

³⁵¹ Ibid.

Around 30 trade union members and non-members of various political leanings from sectors such as newsreel, advertising and television, volunteered to help film the 1958 march without pay.³⁵² One crew member said equipment and film stock was ‘begged, borrowed or stolen.’³⁵³ During the four days of the march 18,000 feet of film was shot, and later sympathetic laboratory workers processed the material without further cost.³⁵⁴ Despite being made on a shoestring, *March to Aldermaston* had a fairly wide distribution, being shown at the Academy Cinema in London for several months paired with *La Grande Illusion*, an anti-war epic by Jean Renoir, and was used regularly to start off CND branch meetings around the country.³⁵⁵

It is difficult to disentangle the mythology behind the making of *March to Aldermaston* from its effectiveness as a propaganda vehicle. It has long been celebrated as an iconic testament to the ban-the-bomb years and there was a special screening in 1998 at a joint BECTU History Project and CND 40th anniversary event, with all those who worked on the film listed under a ‘Roll of honour’.³⁵⁶ Accounts have referred to overcoming massive technical difficulties and the torrential rain on the Easter weekend of 1958. ‘How we transported, often on foot, equipment and crews over the next four days, sometimes through the wettest weather this century, remains a blur,’ wrote Kurt Lewenhak. He praised the spirit of the film-makers who, he felt, revelled in a project they really believed in.³⁵⁷ This

³⁵² Hogenkamp, p. 56.

³⁵³ Letter from Stephen Peet to Francis Jude, April 15 1958, personal archive of Stephen Peet, London, quoted in Hogenkamp, p. 57.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 57

³⁵⁵ Hogenkamp, p. 60. ‘What Baker (editor of *Films and Filming*) failed to see was the mobilising power that a film like *March to Aldermaston* had for CND supporters. It created a demand and soon it was not possible to imagine branch life without regular film shows.’

³⁵⁶ Kurt Lewenhak, *Aldermaston 40, ‘When the saints went marching in,’* Stage Screen and Radio, May 1998, p. 6.

³⁵⁷ Ibid. - He referred to a Free Cinema element: ‘By the third night we even had a night shift. A night-owl crew led by Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz shot a memorable sequence of marchers at rest and at play.’ He said there was a ‘marvellous’ collective spirit but ‘this idyllic harmony did not last once shooting was completed. Debate was lively even combative during the editing and post-production stages. Alternative versions were touted, different commentaries proposed.’

hagiography can obscure the variable quality and impact that the film had. The black and white film is somewhat of an uneasy collage mixing marchers proceeding along country roads and suburban streets, straight to camera interviews on what motivated people to take part, and impressionistic images, such as an improvised jazz dance in a hall, marchers sleeping on a floor and a woman having her feet washed in a bowl.

The opening sequence involves what seems to be a ‘poetic’ Free Cinema approach. A man is seen walking on his own through a snowbound, deserted countryside carrying a sign saying No H Bombs, accompanied by the sound of marching feet, followed by the voice of an unseen woman who says she is doing the best for her children. ‘We watch their first tooth come, we’re pleased when we see them crawl, and what is the good of all this if at any minute somebody can press a bomb just to obliterate them all.’ Music is used in two ways, to record jazz musicians keeping up the spirits of marchers, and then to comment on images, as when the march passes a cemetery and a haunting ballad ‘I dreamt that the Bomb had fallen’ is heard with the line ‘and a million people were dead.’ Two other features related to the commentary are worth noting. There appears to be a general agreement that Lindsay Anderson sidelined other people to take over the editing of the rushes, and then asked the poet Christopher Logue to write a commentary, which was eventually spoken by actor Richard Burton. According to a report of the film’s screening on its 40th anniversary, Christopher Logue recalled that after viewing the film in the cutting room, he decided that the text had to be sparing and not too much was required.³⁵⁸ An example from the script was, ‘at 10 o clock we set off from Hounslow on the worst Easter Saturday of the century. The sensible people stay indoors on a day like this [shot of mother and child inside a house looking out]. But in a crazy world, being sensible doesn’t seem to do much good.’

³⁵⁸ Bectu History Project No 607802, *March to Aldermaston and Onwards (original)*, Synopsis.

The reaction of film critics to *March to Aldermaston* was mixed, with praise for its moral tone but criticism of the way the message was presented. For instance, the identification of the commentary with the marchers using the ‘we’ continuously, irritated some. Penelope Houston reviewing it in *Sight and Sound* magazine thought use of the ‘we’ avoided responsibility for offering solutions. ‘It implies that “they” must be castigated for failure, while “we” can take political action and keep our hands clean.’ Houston praised its memorable images and thought there was propaganda of a kind in it – ‘here is propaganda which sets out to convey the conviction, the decency, the “ordinariness” of the Aldermaston marchers, to suggest that a cause which has such supporters demands the support of all of us.’ But she believed the different film styles used did not mesh that well together, and it did not tackle head-on why Britain should go it alone unilaterally.³⁵⁹

The BFI *Monthly Film Bulletin* review, which thought the film ‘exciting, stimulating and provocative’, was still critical of *March to Aldermaston* in general. The journal highlighted another aspect in its use of film of Hiroshima razed to the ground, and still photographs of mutilated Japanese H Bomb victims, as giving the impression of a film hastily edited and put together. It thought the commentary was ‘sanctimonious’ and never touched on CND’s ethical, religious and political arguments.³⁶⁰ Another journal *Films and Filming* called *March to Aldermaston* ‘singularly inept’ and complained that it was only finally released in 1959 a year after the actual march. ‘A year late, it falls short of what a reasonably competent TV team could do in less than a week.’³⁶¹ But the *Financial Times* was more complimentary. ‘The film squashes the idea that the music and dancing which enlivened the march showed some kind of immaturity. As the commentator says, “It’s no good being

³⁵⁹ Penelope Houston, *March to Aldermaston* in Film Reviews, *Sight and Sound* magazine, Vol. 28, No. 2, Spring 1959, p. 89.

³⁶⁰ *March to Aldermaston (1959)*, *The Monthly Film Bulletin* published by the BFI, Vol. 26, No. 303, April 1959, pp. 49-50.

³⁶¹ *Films and Filming*, Vol. 5, No. 7, April 1959, p. 25, quoted in Hogenkamp, p. 59.

against death if you don't know how to enjoy life when you've got it.”³⁶² Despite the criticism, Alan Lovell praised the film's part in raising the issues stating that ‘one of the features of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament has been the realisation of the power of the film both to convey information and to challenge people's imagination.’³⁶³

A follow up film of the 1959 Easter march, this time ending in London, was made by a different group of film-makers. It was only 10 minutes long and there is a lack of any continuity with the previous film, as there are no interviews and no obvious ‘poetic’ images presented. *Aldermaston 1959* was the idea of two CND campaigners Eric Walker and Eric Bamford, who had set up a separate Nuclear Disarmament Newsreel Committee, which as its name implies was more concerned with straight reportage.³⁶⁴ The commentary on *Aldermaston 1959* does not repeat the ‘we’ identification with those taking part, but it is not known if this was deliberate following the criticism of that approach, or merely the style of the makers. They had previously produced the short *Rocket Site Story* newsreel of a direct action sit-down at a US airforce base in Norfolk.³⁶⁵ *Aldermaston 1959* concentrates on the number of marchers and how their ranks are swelled as they near London, as if this dogged determination was enough to challenge what they saw as the government's mistaken policies. It refers to 4,500 people at the start, then 8000 people at Chiswick and finally 15,000 who enter London. While this is impressive the commentary strains for a grand effect which is jarring. ‘They are pledged to the common cause of mankind. Each by marching denies the growing fear that the people of the world are mere puppets, incapable of influencing events by their personal actions. They know a nuclear war will mean suicide for Britain.’ The claim

³⁶² Quoted in Driver, *The Disarmers*, p. 58.

³⁶³ *Peace News*, December 4, 1959, p. 6, quoted in Hogenkamp, p. 67.

³⁶⁴ *Aldermaston 1959*, Concord Film Council, b/w, sound, 10 mins, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0r6Hw_-VuE

³⁶⁵ *Rocket Site Story* (1959), Concord Film Council, b/w, sound and silent, 20 mins, available at East Anglian Film Archive, <http://www.eafa.org.uk/catalogue/665>

that this is ‘believed to be the greatest demonstration of the century’ strikes an unrealistic note, and reviews were not that favourable.

With these films CND had taken the initiative in producing campaign material with an approach to nuclear war which could be summed as ‘disarm or die.’ By adopting a unilateralist position it had removed any choice of a middle way. The government used film to carry a different message, that civil society could survive a possible nuclear attack if the public was prepared, and this would match the preparations of the emergency services, including those ready to monitor and advise on radiation fallout. Three films that were commissioned by the Home Office in this period and are worthy of analysis are *The Warden and the Householder* (1961), *Radioactive Fallout* (1961) and *A Hole in the Ground* (1962). Each reflected these themes and were part of a series of nine civil defence productions made between 1961 and 1964.³⁶⁶ There are at least two possible explanations for the timing of this burst of commissioning. The first was the advent of television which had become the mass communications medium in Britain by the end of the decade, and offered a speedy way to transmit messages to the public should the need arise. (A special re-edited version of *The Warden and the Householder* was made for television showing if needed). The second was the need to reassure local authorities, civil defence organisations and the emergency services that despite the impression in the 1957 White Paper, Britain was serious about home defence.

The Warden and the Householder attempts just that, using a ‘film-within-a-film’ format, so we see a group of wardens in training being addressed by a uniformed instructor,

³⁶⁶ *The Warden and the Householder*, RHR Productions, IWM Hoy 64, 1961, available at <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060004873> ; *Radioactive Fallout*, RHR Productions, IWM Hoy 61, 1961, available at <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060004870>; *A Hole in the Ground*, RHR Productions, IWM Hoy 67, 1962, available at <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060004876> . The others included *Operation Exodus* (1961), about the evacuation of an area of high fallout radiation after a nuclear attack, and *Rescue* (1964) in which several people trapped after a blast are rescued ‘before the arrival of fallout.’

then a man is seen loading a projector for the film itself. It is as if the aim is to inject realism so the viewer feels they are part of the exercise. At just under 30 minutes the film is about the same length as *March to Aldermaston*, but the only similarity is the opening sequence. This portrays Hiroshima before and after the nuclear attack. Babies and children are seen playing innocently, then a plane drops the bomb and the mushroom cloud erupts, causing raging fires and the burning bodies of children and adults. A voiceover draws a strikingly different conclusion to CND from these scenes. 'They are entirely incapable of dealing with the vast numbers rendered homeless or trapped by blast. And they were wholly untrained to care for those injured and dying from heat flash burns or gamma radiation.' This means a 'new and positive approach to Civil Defence becomes vital...' Having made this point the film moves to the lecture hall where the instructor talks about the destructive power of the nuclear bomb. The camera pans in close up to the wardens as he says in a grave voice that people would be relying on wardens and 'it's up to you, each one of us, to prepare for this very great responsibility.'

The film then imagines a nuclear alert when civil defence corps are called up and wardens begin house to house visits to brief residents about preparing a special refuge room in the house, the same issue that Whitehall civil servants were grappling with. In an attempt to introduce a 'human interest' approach the film has a cautionary fictional story in which Mr White the warden alternates between friendly re-assuring advice and warnings for one family who refuse to take it seriously. Mrs Jameson asks what can be done if she only receives a four minute warning, to which Mr White replies rather improbably, 'A great deal. Above all you musn't be caught in the open.' At the end there is an echo of the Second World War when the warden tells a man in the street to be prepared. 'Remember the phoney war of 1939,

we all got ready after the war was declared and we were lucky to get away with it, we won't get another chance like that.'³⁶⁷

The Home Office looked to one particular company to produce this and the other films on nuclear civil defence, and the evidence is that it did so on the basis that it was able to closely control the end product. RHR Productions was named after Ronald H Riley who had spent two years in Hollywood when learning about film production before returning to the UK, where he formed his own company Technique Films Ltd, and then joined the Film Producers Guild.³⁶⁸ The FPG was a consortium of several film companies set up in 1944 that had all used Merton Park Studios during World War Two to make Ministry of Information propaganda films. Riley had produced two films on the atomic bomb and nuclear bomb for the Home Office in 1952 and 1956, and was therefore well placed to meet further demands.

The FPG's business model was attractive to government departments and film-makers alike for two reasons. First, a new production unit was formed for each film, led by a producer, and 'the Client confers directly with the Producer assigned to the film.'³⁶⁹ In other words, the Home Office had direct access at all times to the person producing the film it was sponsoring. Second, the FPG model was based on a complete partition between business and creative functions, 'thus freeing the creatives of many of the financial and administrative burdens that weighed down their counterparts in so many other documentary companies.'³⁷⁰ David Cobham directed five of the nine civil defence films, including *The Warden and the Householder* and *Radioactive Fallout*, and is credited as a writer on two of them. Cobham later recalled that he first worked as an assistant on a film for the Film Producers Guild called *Test Flight 263* (1957) sponsored by BP and directed by David Villiers of RHR Productions.

³⁶⁷ *The Warden and the Householder*, RHR Productions.

³⁶⁸ *The Times*, March 23 1968, BFI Library Press Cutting.

³⁶⁹ *The Film Producers Guild*, Illustrated pamphlet, 1940s (no date specified), BFI Library.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Cobham was later commissioned to direct *Radioactive Fallout* during which his work was overseen directly by the Home Office.³⁷¹

There is almost an unconscious echo of Free Cinema at the start of the film *Radioactive Fallout*, when the viewer is shown a pastoral scene in the countryside. The voiceover says that ‘the sun is shining, the bird is singing, and the clouds chase each other over hill and dale.’ But an air raid siren sounds to disturb this peaceful scene and a radar scanner is shown. The camera then zooms close to a small mushroom in a field which explodes into a nuclear fireball, to represent a world where, according to the narrator, ‘one of nature’s more humble creations has become a symbol for the most devastating of man-made catastrophes.’ This is a poetic introduction which could have been found in a CND film, but the remainder of *Radioactive Fallout* is more akin to an education lesson with a specific purpose.

According to the commentary, this message was to help people save their own lives and reduce the death toll and casualties from radiation sickness. It was in line with the other government-commissioned films by RHR Productions that the population could protect itself against a nuclear attack if provided with the right information. Much of the tone of *Radioactive Fallout* is classroom instruction using visual aids to explain the difference between immediate radiation in the blast area and residual radiation across a wider expanse. There is unconscious irony when the viewer is told using a visual diagram that a 10 megaton nuclear bomb would produce immediate radiation within two and a half miles but no further

³⁷¹ ‘David Villiers who previously made *The H-Bomb* film in 1956 offered me the chance to write three scripts and he said if you can do this well you can direct. I then took on directing *Radioactive Fallout* and it took three to four weeks to shoot, in Yorkshire I think it was where there was a Civil Defence training facility. I had a Home Office adviser with me all the time, to make sure I didn’t deviate from the script. We got on OK.’ David Cobham in telephone interview with the author, September 5, 2014.

significant effect up to four miles, ‘but since this is an area of total destruction the risk of immediate radiation is of secondary importance.’

As the film progresses, there are similar points made to the *Advice to the Householder* booklet when people are shown taking protective measures in their homes like boarding up windows and creating a slit trench with overhead cover in the basement, although improbably they are told ‘it is best to seek expert advice of a builder or architect first.’ The film cautions that warnings of imminent attack cannot always be guaranteed to come from civil defence sector operations, which means the ‘man on the spot’ normally the warden must give local warnings. There is then a camera shot of a warden blowing a whistle to alert the population, followed by people running in a kind of panic-stricken way past each other and into their houses or shelters. *Radioactive Fallout* ends with a sober statement that ‘some will not make this journey out of the damaged area’ and it is up to those still alive to show the way to others on how to prepare and protect themselves from radioactive fallout.

David Cobham also directed *A Hole in the Ground* which examined the work of the UK Warning and Monitoring Organisation, a body set up in 1957 to provide up to the minute data about nuclear explosions and forecasts of likely fallout across the country in the event of war. The organisation’s work is shown taking place in an underground bunker in the south east of England, and although not stated in the film, this reflects a change in the work of the Royal Observer Corps away from monitoring post-war air defences via overground posts, to nuclear warning and monitoring. In the six years to 1963 around 1500 underground bunkers were built.³⁷² The aim of the film is to demonstrate that a national network is spread over the whole country and can continue even if one or two links in the chain are disrupted. To reassure the viewer key personnel are introduced, a full-time chief sector warning officer, a

³⁷² Royal Observer Corps Association, *Heritage of the Corps*, <http://www.roc-heritage.co.uk/underground-posts.html>

scientist who is an air pollution expert in civil life, and desk assistants, who are mostly women volunteers who usually work in the local post office.

The tone of *A Hole in the Ground* was described by one film reviewer as conveying ‘a sort of desperate earnest calm reigning in the bunker.’³⁷³ Radar picks up enemy bombers flying towards Western Europe and an ‘air attack’ message is passed to the BBC for transmission. A somewhat incongruous moment follows in which someone takes a Long Playing Record out of a locked safe and the emergency announcement is made using the LP on a record player. The film shows air raid sirens sounding in ordinary streets and adults and children rushing indoors, almost in a panic. It is assumed that some nuclear bombs have been dropped on Britain, and the scientist tries to estimate radiation fallout in the region. The final commentary drives home the propaganda message that the aim is not only to warn and protect the civilian population but provide intelligence to defend the western alliance. ‘And finally to help support the deterrent which any would-be attacker knows is inevitable.’

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed in detail the propaganda formats selected by both the government and CND to justify their respective positions on the nuclear deterrent and survivability. It is an original contribution to the field of nuclear culture as it reveals the nature of their arguments in this field, and their perception of what the public should know about an existential threat to continued human existence. By examining posters, booklets, badges, leaflets and documentary film the official case becomes clear that Britain could

³⁷³ Graeme Hobbs, *MovieMail's Review*, April 29, 2010, www.moviemail.com/film/dvd

survive a nuclear attack if basic civil defence preparations were put in place. CND conversely used its materials, often produced by radical designers and artists, to make a moral argument that nuclear weapons were wrong in themselves and that Britain would be totally destroyed.

The chapter has also exposed difficulties that the government found when relying so much on the deterrent as the foundation of defence policy. Contradictions between official messages on posters and the 1957 Defence White Paper highlighted this confusion. Disagreements are also shown among civil servants about how much information ordinary people should be given related to preparing their houses for an attack. This connects to an ongoing theme in this thesis of the government's concern about alarming the public if it told them the full truth about nuclear weapons. Film as a propaganda tool around the nuclear deterrent is examined in some detail for the first time. Analysis of documentary films produced by both sides reveals very different commissioning environments and motivations. CND relied on volunteers and sympathetic film-makers to produce films like *March to Aldermaston*, with the aim of using them as mobilising tools at public meetings to stir up moral outrage. It was a stark unilateralist message of 'disarm or die.' Official public information films were produced at cost by a private film company which was closely supervised by the Home Office. Their aim was to reassure both civil service volunteers and the public that many lives could be saved after a nuclear attack. Preparations led by local wardens were key and there was a clear message that this was linked to supporting the deterrent policy.

Chapter 6 - Cuban Missile Crisis – case study

Introduction

The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 is examined in this chapter as a test case of the effectiveness of propaganda strategies employed by the government and CND around the nuclear deterrent during Macmillan's tenure. The crisis provides the opportunity to test, at a moment of profound Cold War tension, the British government's public position that having an independent nuclear deterrent gave it greater influence on the world stage. This was the official rationale for being a nuclear power but the evidence to be set out in this chapter is that during the crisis Britain appeared to both the media and the public to be a 'bystander.' This term is defined in the Cambridge dictionary as 'a person who is standing near and watching something that is happening but is not taking part in it.'³⁷⁴ Macmillan said after the crisis that Britain as a key NATO ally was kept informed of developments by President Kennedy but was not consulted over US actions. It is argued in this chapter that Britain's possession of a deterrent had no bearing on the conduct or outcome of the crisis, and Macmillan's government was unable to present a case to the public as to any influence it was exerting on the crisis.

The feeling that Britain was a passive observer was heightened as the Cuban crisis developed into the first 'televisual' world emergency. It will be shown that by 1962 communications technology was advancing rapidly, and British people watched helplessly as

³⁷⁴ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bystander>

the increasing threat of a nuclear conflict was relayed by satellite to television screens in their living rooms. The Cuban crisis was a challenge for the BBC, as well as other media, to be able to display a complex and fast-moving major event, but in the course of its coverage it also became clear that politicians required a grasp of television's appeal if they were to improve their standing with the public.

However, the British government was unable to sustain a coherent public relations strategy around its role in the events of that time and there were at least two reasons for this. One was a weakening of the powerful PR information machine that Lord Hill had established in the earlier years of the Macmillan government. The second was a consequence of Britain being unable to articulate an independent position because it was so closely tied to US policy. An example of the latter was US pressure on Britain to join a trade embargo against Cuba, which was criticised in British newspapers. Chapter 3 has already included a discussion of British sovereignty over the Thor nuclear missiles loaned by the US, and the doubts on how much control Britain had over their use. The Cuban crisis appeared to compound this British inter-dependence on, rather than independence from, the US as the dominant NATO power. Another feature of the official strategy to be analysed which is fully consistent with the years previous to 1962 is the maintenance of secrecy about any use of the British nuclear deterrent during the crisis, and a tight hold on information given to the media or the public. This echoed the Windscale accident cover-up referred to in Chapter 3.

CND for different reasons found that it could not command wide support for its strategy of persuading the government to abandon nuclear weapons. The crisis should have been a culmination of CND's campaign to expose the dangers of the nuclear arms race. But the chapter will show that the organisation was unable to convey this narrative effectively, due to internal divisions as to which of the superpowers was to blame and the absence of a broader disarmament approach. It failed to mobilise its supporters at a crucial moment. One

of the effects of the public, including CND members, being bystanders and feeling powerless to influence events, was that people's anxiety was 'privatised.' The chapter will draw on correspondence from people who lived through the Cuban missile crisis and preferred to make individual expressions of emotion about the crisis either in diaries or within the home. However, there were specific groups of students and young people who did appear fearful enough to demonstrate in public spaces and a vivid example of this will be provided. To set the context for the chapter a timeline of key events during the crisis will first be set out.

Timeline of the crisis

The timeline of the Cuban missile crisis shows the speed at which events unfolded. It began on 14 October 1962 when the Americans received photographic evidence from their U2 surveillance planes that the Soviet Union had installed Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) and Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) on Cuba 90 miles from the Florida coast. Previously Anatoly Dobrynin, Soviet Ambassador to Washington, had assured President Kennedy that there would be no ground-to-ground missiles or offensive nuclear weapons placed in Cuba.³⁷⁵ The US administration immediately convened what became known as ExComm (the Executive Committee of the National Security Council) which debated several options for action – a single surgical air strike on the missile bases, a comprehensive series of attacks and invasions, or a 'quarantine' or blockade by sea of Cuba.³⁷⁶ On 18 October the committee heard that 42 medium range nuclear missiles had been installed with sufficient range to reach New York, Chicago, Washington and other major US

³⁷⁵ Robert F. Kennedy, *13 Days: The Cuban Missile Crisis October 1962* (Pan Books, 1969), p. 21.

³⁷⁶ FO 371/162308-436, Publisher's Note - Foreign Office Files for Cuba, Part 3: The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962, British Library microfilm.

cities.³⁷⁷ According to Macmillan's own diaries, the Prime Minister only received a message from Kennedy on 21 October informing him of the discovery of the Soviet missiles.³⁷⁸ The next day 22 October the Prime Minister was briefed by the American Ambassador to London David Bruce, who told him that the photographs revealing the full extent of the Soviet missile deployment in Cuba had only become available about 17 October.³⁷⁹ This meant the Americans had waited three full days before telling its seemingly closest ally the UK about what they knew. Macmillan stated privately that, 'Now the Americans will realise what we here in England have lived through for the past many years.'³⁸⁰ He drew up a reply with Foreign Secretary Lord Home supporting Kennedy's plan for a blockade, although in his first draft Macmillan had the Suez fiasco in his mind when he said in his diary that 'I had thought of advising him to seize Cuba and have done with it,' but then decided it was too risky.³⁸¹

Macmillan's reply was sent hours before the President made his now-famous national television broadcast on 22 October describing the secret Soviet build-up in Cuba, proclaiming the quarantine, and demanding that the Soviets remove the missiles. A poll taken on 23 October showed that one in five Americans believed that the quarantine would result in World War III.³⁸² The British Cabinet met on 23 October to hear the latest developments and expressed anxiety over the legality of a blockade and whether it might extend from arms to oil and other goods in order to bring down the Cuban government.³⁸³ On 24 October Kennedy informed Macmillan by phone that some Soviet ships had turned back from the blockade and

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Peter Caterall (ed.), *The Macmillan Diaries Vol II: Prime Minister and After 1957-1966* (Macmillan, 2011), p. 508.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Foreign Office Files for Cuba, Publisher's Note.

³⁸¹ Peter Caterall (ed.), *The Macmillan Diaries Vol II*, p. 509.

³⁸² Foreign Office Files for Cuba, Publisher's Note.

³⁸³ CAB 128/36/61, TNA, Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at Admiralty House, S.W.1 on Tuesday, 23rd October, 1962, at 10.30 am, pp. 3-8,

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7664210#imageViewerLink>

that he believed they may have contained missiles.³⁸⁴ The next day 25 October Adlai Stevenson, the US Ambassador to the UN, presented the Security Council with ‘clear and incontrovertible’ evidence that the Soviets had installed nuclear weapons on Cuba.³⁸⁵ The Cabinet met again the same day and the Foreign Secretary said that ‘it did not seem that there was any action that the Prime Minister could usefully take at the present juncture; an early visit to Washington, for example, could easily be misinterpreted as a mission of appeasement.’³⁸⁶

On Saturday 27 October international tension was at its peak as US armed forces were placed on alert and four US tactical air squadrons were readied for an air strike on Cuba.³⁸⁷ But Khrushchev then sent two messages to the Americans – the first offered to withdraw the weapons if the Americans guaranteed never to invade Cuba, while the second offered withdrawal only if the Americans in turn withdrew their Jupiter nuclear missiles from Turkey, which were within range of Soviet cities. Kennedy accepted the first offer and ignored the second, as it might look like negotiating with the Russians. But secretly he informed the Russians that the Jupiter missiles were obsolete and would be withdrawn anyway within six months.³⁸⁸

On Sunday 28 October Macmillan decided on a personal initiative and wrote to Khrushchev saying that if the Cuban missile issue was resolved, this could clear the way for general nuclear disarmament talks. But this was overshadowed by a message from the Soviet leader defusing the crisis by agreeing to withdraw the missiles from Cuba on the basis

³⁸⁴ Harold Macmillan, *At The End of the Day, 1961-1963* (Macmillan, 1973), p. 196.

³⁸⁵ *13 Days*, p. 76

³⁸⁶ CAB 128/36/62, TNA, Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at Admiralty House, S.W.1 on Thursday, 25th October, 1962, at 2.45 pm, p. 6.

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7664211#imageViewerLink>

³⁸⁷ *13 Days*, p. 38.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

of the no-invasion guarantee.³⁸⁹ On 30 October during a Commons debate on the Queen's Speech, Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell referred to the Cuban crisis and said that, 'It was a matter of great concern, I think to us all, that the British government were not consulted before the decisions were taken.' Macmillan replied that given the speed at which the crisis developed the American government not only preserved diplomatic propriety but maintained the closest possible co-operation with their allies.³⁹⁰

Britain as a bystander to the crisis

The British government continued to argue right up to the Cuban crisis that its nuclear weapons helped to keep world peace and give it a voice with the superpowers. Lord Carrington, First Lord of the Admiralty, was reported in *The Times* of March 22, 1962 as declaring in a Lords debate that 'the nuclear stalemate on which the peace of the world depended, was not complete without the British deterrent. Possession of the deterrent enabled Britain to influence the course of world events much more widely than she could do otherwise.'³⁹¹ A Conservative Party pamphlet published that year called *The Deterrent*, claimed that the British nuclear capability gave NATO a psychological advantage over the Soviet Union, while acknowledging that Britain was in the direct line of fire.³⁹² However, when it came to the US informing Britain about the Cuban crisis, Britain's nuclear role did not appear to have any significance.

³⁸⁹ CAB 128/36/63, TNA, Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at Admiralty House, S.W.1 on Monday 29th October, 1962, at 10.30 am, p. 3

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7664212#imageViewerLink>

³⁹⁰ Hansard *HC Deb (30 October 1962) Vol 666 Cc4-142* [Electronic version]

³⁹¹ *The Times*, March 22, 1962, p. 18.

³⁹² 1962/100 Julian Amery – *The Deterrent*. 8pp (PY4627). Harvester/Archives of the British Conservative Party Series 1, Pamphlets and Leaflets. B 26 (Fiche) 1962 – Card 677 (Copy at LSE Library).

According to Peter Caterall's re-appraisal of Macmillan's role in the Cuban crisis, 'Apparently Kennedy decided initially not to consult the British because he felt "They'll just object" to the idea of a military response. There was agreement in ExComm that Macmillan and President de Gaulle of France should be given 24 hours' notice of action.'³⁹³ Gordon Brook-Shepherd, the *Sunday Telegraph's* diplomatic correspondent, writing on the lessons of the Cuban crisis, believed that the special Anglo-American relationship boiled down in practice to Britain being shown U2 spy pictures of Cuba 36 hours before the French. He added that, 'the NATO alliance of which Britain is a part was shown to be almost superfluous for all its tremendous value in American eyes as a political and social as well as military barrier to Communism.'³⁹⁴

Cabinet minutes for October 29, 1962 indicated ministers knew it looked from the outside that they seemed to be merely watching events like the rest of the world. The account claimed that the government had played an active part in helping resolve the crisis but had said little publicly 'and the impression had been created that we had been playing a purely passive role. It would not be easy to correct this without revealing the degree of informal consultation which had taken place, but this might be embarrassing to President Kennedy and perhaps an irritation to other European leaders.'³⁹⁵ Certainly Macmillan recognised the criticism and in his diaries set out the charge – that the Americans treated Britain with contempt, that the 'special relationship' no longer applied, that Britain gained nothing from being a nuclear power, and that the US risked total war 'without bothering about us or

³⁹³ Peter Caterall, 'Prime Minister and President: Harold Macmillan's accounts of the Cuban Missile Crisis', Chapter 3 in Len Scott, Gerald Hughes (eds.), *The Cuban Missile Crisis: a critical reappraisal*, (Routledge, 2014). Chapter published by Routledge in *The Cuban Missile Crisis: a critical reappraisal*, on 22nd April 2014, available online: <https://www.routledge.com/products/9781138840928>

³⁹⁴ *Sunday Telegraph*, Gordon Brook-Shepherd, December 9, 1962, p. 14 – 'Acheson tells Europe the Facts of Life.'

³⁹⁵ CAB 128/36/63, TNA, Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at Admiralty House, S.W.1 on Monday 29th October, 1962, at 10.30 am, p. 3
<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7664212#imageViewerLink>

Europe.’ He rejected these charges saying that the President and his officials were in continuous touch with Foreign Secretary Alec Home and himself.³⁹⁶

Despite this at least one US commentator, HA DeWeerd of the RAND Corporation, who examined British attitudes during the Cuban crisis, said Britain had little influence and ‘the crisis found Britain playing almost no role in an incident in which the major decisions were being made by other powers.’ He cites as evidence the fact that Kennedy sent a personal representative from Washington to explain the sea blockade to Paris and Bonn but not to London, which was resented by Britain. But he concedes that Kennedy and Macmillan spoke regularly by phone and the Prime Minister felt he did have a role in relaying opinion from Britain and Europe.³⁹⁷ Prior consultation over Cuba became a political issue. Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell was reported in the *Daily Mail* as regretting that the fateful decision to blockade Cuba was taken by the US without prior consultation with allies like Britain and before a meeting of the UN Security Council could be convened.³⁹⁸

The Times carried a story headed ‘Britain was told in advance’ which quoted a Foreign Office spokesman saying the government was informed just hours before the blockade was established.³⁹⁹ There was nervousness in Whitehall about press reaction, as revealed in a memo to the Prime Minister on 23 October. This said, ‘the Lobby [of Parliamentary journalists] will ask questions about the amount or degree of prior consultation or informing. The argument is that because Kennedy has said he would regard any attack from Cuba as an attack from Russia, the UK are now involved in the affairs of Cuba whether we like it or not. Were we consulted? I have talked to Harold Evans [Macmillan’s Press

³⁹⁶ *The Macmillan Diaries* Vol. II, p. 518.

³⁹⁷ H.A. DeWeerd, *British Attitudes in the Cuban Crisis* (The Rand Corporation, February 1963), p. 1.

³⁹⁸ *Daily Mail*, October 31, 1962, p. 11.

³⁹⁹ *The Times*, October 23, 1962, p. 10.

Secretary] and he will stick to the line that we were informed when Ambassador Bruce called to see you (not consulted.)'⁴⁰⁰

The *BBC Six O' Clock News* reflected the cautious line later that day when it reported that, 'While fully understanding American anxieties the government feel that Britain is entitled to think for herself about the implications of President Kennedy's decision. As the government were informed but not consulted they consider that the United States has acted unilaterally.'⁴⁰¹ Seaton and Hughes believe that the continued BBC coverage during this period 'reflected and reinforced the perception that Britain was a political spectator in a stand-off between Washington and Moscow.' The BBC and the British government 'were both more or less bystanders,' and this explained why there was no obvious friction between them, as there had been for instance over Suez.⁴⁰² This was the first international crisis in which television was a more important relayer of information and news than newspapers. Events during the crisis moved so fast that 'they [radio and television reports] had overtaken the newspaper reports before they hit the streets.'⁴⁰³ It was the first big international event in which news pictures from America could be beamed instantly by satellite across the Atlantic and this made television reporting of the crisis much more immediate for the British public.⁴⁰⁴

The impact on the public can be understood by the fact that the Cuban crisis was the lead item on *BBC News* reports from Tuesday 23 October all the way through until Monday 29 October, and this included sporadic news flashes as well as the main bulletins.⁴⁰⁵ One BBC

⁴⁰⁰ PREM 11/3689, Written memo to PM from IJB 23/10/62, Foreign Office Files for Cuba.

⁴⁰¹ Jean Seaton and Rosaleen Hughes, 'The BBC and the Cuban missile crisis: private worlds and public service,' in David Gioe, Len Scott and Christopher Andrew (eds.), *An International History of the Cuban Missile Crisis: a 50-year retrospective* (Routledge, 2014), p. 53.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁴⁰³ Seaton and Hughes, 'The BBC and the Cuban missile crisis: private worlds and public service,' p. 43.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

programme which tried to explain the crisis in more depth and epitomised the new authority that television was bringing was broadcast on Tuesday 23 October. *Flashpoint Cuba* presented by Richard Dimbleby and the *Panorama* team, was one of the first programmes to illustrate how television could make an immediate impact on the public's perception of politicians. The then Foreign Secretary Lord Home only agreed to take part if he was filmed making a speech on the crisis in an expensive London restaurant to an audience of British and overseas businessmen who were 'visibly puffing on their cigars.' He attacked the Russian deception and supported the US. In contrast, Harold Wilson the Labour spokesman on foreign affairs, was interviewed live in the studio and appeared statesmanlike as he said the US should have acted through the United Nations and Britain should have been consulted. According to Seaton and Hughes, Home's speech was a relic of a bygone age of political communications and 'Home failed to grasp the priority of communication, the conventions of live television and the importance of the new "politics of appearance."' Home was later defeated by Wilson in the 1964 general election and it was no coincidence that 'he (Wilson) demonstrated an astute understanding of how to behave like a modern statesman in a television studio.'⁴⁰⁶

As part of a belated PR offensive ministers attempted to argue that they were involved in decision-making over the Cuban blockade and confrontation. Christopher Soames, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food gave an interview to Alistair Hetherington, editor of *The Guardian*, which took place just after the crisis on November 6, in which he said Britain was 'fully informed' of US actions. Hetherington rejected this and contrasted the treatment of American politicians with that of European leaders. He argued, 'Senators had been flown back from California, Texas and Arizona to take part in a White House conference before the blockade was announced, whereas neither De Gaulle nor Macmillan

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 57.

was flown over from this side of the Atlantic. The distances were about the same,' he said. Soames disagreed saying Britain was told and could have objected if it had wished, although Hetherington countered that Britain would be objecting to a policy already agreed on while the senators were able to express an opinion before events had gone too far.⁴⁰⁷

The same questions were raised in other newspapers. The *Daily Mirror* was clear in a 'Crisis Commentary' of 30 October that 'The Washington-Moscow duel has excluded Britain' and for the moment, 'Mr Macmillan must resist the temptation to jump into the act.'⁴⁰⁸ In the same issue it gave space to a leading Liberal Party official George Scott to write a column headed 'Our Bomb didn't count.' With relish he laid into the government which 'had said time and again that we must have our own H-bomb because it makes Russia and the US think twice before going out on a nuclear limb. Cuba blew this argument sky-high, and we almost went up with it.'⁴⁰⁹ There was pressure for Macmillan to actively mediate in the crisis by flying to Washington, although the *Daily Mail* stated that 'Mr Macmillan has so far shown great reluctance to intervene as "honest broker."' But it added that he might still find himself thrust into mediation if it was seen as the only way out of the threat of conflict.⁴¹⁰

This question mark over the Prime Minister and Britain's influence was emphasised further with Kennedy's humiliating rebuff to Macmillan's offer to trade Thor Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) based in the UK as a negotiating ploy with Premier Khrushchev. There was no mention in the media of this but on October 26 the two spoke on the phone and the Prime Minister said, 'If we want to help the Russians to save face, would it be worthwhile our undertaking to immobilize our Thor missiles which are here in England

⁴⁰⁷ Hetherington 3/38, Note of a meeting with Mr Soames on November 6, 1962 5. Cuba. CND Archives, LSE Library.

⁴⁰⁸ *Daily Mirror*, October 30, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴¹⁰ *Daily Mail*, October 25, 1962, p. 2.

during the same period." Kennedy replied, "Well, let me put that into the machinery and then I'll be in touch with you on that."⁴¹¹ According to Twigge and Scott, 'There are no indications that Kennedy displayed any interest in the idea, and there was no discussion of the proposal in ExComm on the Saturday.'⁴¹² Another clear example of Britain failing to be consulted during the crisis is the fact that Macmillan and the British government were not told of President Kennedy's secret offer to the Soviets to scrap Jupiter missiles sited in Turkey once the immediate crisis was resolved. Caterall calls this 'the worst example of lack of consultation from the Americans.'⁴¹³

Harold Evans, Macmillan's Chief Press Officer at the time, defended the Thor offer saying that the Prime Minister felt he had to intervene in some way in case Cuba retaliated against a US attack on the island. Offering to neutralise the Thor missiles was his proposal to forestall this. But Evans said the US was strongly against extending the dispute to involve European countries and ruled the idea out.⁴¹⁴ This was not surprising given that US Defence Secretary Robert McNamara had previously criticised European countries such as Britain and France for having their own nuclear weapons in a speech in July 1962, which Macmillan called 'foolish' in his own diaries.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹¹ <http://microsites.jfklibrary.org/cm/oct26/doc5.html>

⁴¹² Stephen Twigge and Len Scott, *The Other Missiles of October: The Thor IRBMs and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Article 3, p 10. <http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/3387/#undefined>

⁴¹³ Peter Caterall, 'Prime Minister and President: Harold Macmillan's accounts of the Cuban Missile Crisis.' Chapter 3 in Len Scott, Gerald Hughes (eds.), *The Cuban Missile Crisis: a critical reappraisal*.

⁴¹⁴ Harold Evans, *Downing Street Diary*, p. 62.

⁴¹⁵ There is strong evidence that the Americans were completely opposed to Britain having a separate nuclear deterrent. This was highlighted by McNamara in his famous 'No Cities' speech of July 9, 1962, which set out a counterforce strategy in the event of a nuclear war. This rejected the former approach of massive nuclear retaliation in favour of 'flexible response' and attacking the enemy's military forces and not their cities. In the course of this speech he strongly criticised 'national nuclear forces' and said that 'limited nuclear capabilities, operating independently, are dangerous, expensive, prone to obsolescence, and lacking in credibility as a deterrent. Clearly, the United States nuclear contribution to the Alliance is neither obsolete nor dispensable.'
<http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/Deterrence/Nocities.shtml> That he was referring to Britain and France was evidenced by Macmillan's reaction in his diary calling it 'McNamara's foolish speech about nuclear arms (which) has enraged the French and put us in a difficulty.' (*The Macmillan Diaries Vol II*, p. 478).

Reasons for PR weakness

While Evans who was a key member of the government's public relations team was still there at the time of the crisis the role of propaganda overall appeared to be weaker than in preceding years. This was a factor in the lack of clear communications coming from the government during the crisis. Although the Cabinet met several times it issued few public statements and was continually on the back foot in policy terms. For example, the Cabinet of October 23 agreed a public line that it was 'deeply concerned' at the Soviet action and had been kept fully informed by the USA, which was only partly true and was a not particularly strong assertion of British interests in a world crisis.⁴¹⁶ Again, the government's decision to send a message to Khrushchev on October 28 through diplomatic channels and not release it publicly meant the government gained no PR advantage from it. As Macmillan commented in his diaries, 'This meant it was not published till the very moment when the Russian radio message of "climb down" came through. It almost seemed as if we had sent the telegram backing the horse after the race.'⁴¹⁷

One factor explaining this inaction/passivity in PR terms was that Charles Hill who was Macmillan's trusted co-ordinator of information for several years without any departmental distractions, was appointed Minister of Housing and Local Government in October 1961. As Ogilvy-Webb pointed out, 'Dr Hill now had departmental responsibility and could give less attention to information affairs.'⁴¹⁸ There was a PR hiatus until July 1962

⁴¹⁶ CAB 128/36/61, TNA, Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at Admiralty House, S.W.1 on Tuesday, 23rd October, 1962, at 10.30 am, p. 7.

⁴¹⁷ *The Macmillan Diaries* Vol. II, p. 514.

⁴¹⁸ Ogilvy-Webb, *The Government Explains*, p. 84.

when Macmillan sacked a third of his Cabinet in what was known as ‘The Night of the Long Knives’ and that included Hill. Information matters were given to *Telegraph* journalist William (Bill) Deedes as a Minister without Portfolio but in the Cabinet. He was in post at the time of the Cuban missile crisis and attended Cabinet meetings but there is no evidence he played any significant role.

This could have been for at least two reasons. Hill had been adept at maintaining smooth relationships with the Conservative Party via Central Office so the party did not intervene in government PR matters too much. According to Harold Evans, ‘when the political going became rough in 1962 and 1963’ Central Office wanted to exercise greater influence in arranging the Prime Minister’s activities. Bill Deedes was brought in and preferred to work independently of Number 10 which meant the previous system broke down.⁴¹⁹ Secondly, Deedes was brought in by Macmillan primarily to educate the British public on the benefits of the European Economic Community or Common Market as it was better known. According to Deedes’ obituary in the *Daily Telegraph*, ‘he did not take long to decide that a minister of information was alien to British political culture. “The longer I worked in the job,” he remembered, “the more clearly I came to see that I was superfluous.”⁴²⁰ His obituaries in the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* both state he only reluctantly agreed to take the information post, and this was a very different scenario from the one in which Hill virtually wrote his own job description in 1957.⁴²¹

A second factor behind Britain’s inability to influence the course of the crisis was the lack of a distinctive foreign policy of its own. In the months leading up to the crisis itself, the US constantly exerted pressure on Britain to threaten Cuba with economic and military

⁴¹⁹ Harold Evans, *Downing Street Diary*, p. 35.

⁴²⁰ *The Telegraph*, Lord Deedes obituary August 17, 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/politics-obituaries/1560496/Lord-Deedes.html>

⁴²¹ *The Guardian*, Lord Deedes obituary, August 18, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2007/aug/18/guardianobituaries.obituaries1>

sanctions, in the form of a trade embargo and military exercises in the Caribbean (see under Secrecy later in the chapter). It appeared that the US expected Britain as a NATO ally and nuclear force to comply with its requests. Despite misgivings Britain could not express disagreements in public with the US. Cabinet minutes for June 1962 show that Ministers were unhappy about following a trade embargo of Cuba which would have meant British ships refusing to deliver goods to the island. Ministers wanted to continue trading with Communist countries and the US should show ‘more consideration for legitimate British interests.’ However, in a sign of pressure Foreign Secretary Lord Home said that, ‘The United States Government felt strongly about Cuba’ and he recommended Britain agree to at least monitor its trade with Cuba.⁴²² Prime Minister Macmillan in his private diary confided, ‘The President [of the United States] is angry with us for not being willing to join in a boycott or blockade. He is either unwilling or unable to understand that we cannot give orders to British shipping, especially, ships on charter, to avoid going to Cuba without legislation. (In war, of course, it’s different. But we are not at war with Cuba.)’⁴²³

The government’s hands were tied in public criticism and it was left to British newspapers to express a wariness about the American pre-occupation, even obsession with Cuba as a constant threat. The fact that Britain was a nuclear power and could potentially have influence over the US government did not appear to feature as an argument in either the right of centre or left-leaning newspapers. A *Daily Mail* editorial in early October called for Britain to refuse to join an economic boycott of Cuba. ‘Britain has no quarrel with Cuba and should take no hostile position against her,’ it said.⁴²⁴ Independent voices attacked the singling out of Cuba for being a Communist base. Cassandra in the *Daily Mirror* said that

⁴²² CAB 128/36/42, TNA, Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at Admiralty House, S.W.1 on Tuesday, 26th June, 1962, at 11 a.m., p. 3 <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7664191#imageViewerLink>

⁴²³ *The Macmillan Diaries* Vol. II, p. 502.

⁴²⁴ *Daily Mail*, October 5, 1962, p. 1.

‘the White House seems to be getting a bit hysterical about the arrival of Russian technicians and the possibility of a hostile Communist base so near American shores.’⁴²⁵ James Cameron, a CND member but writing in the right- of- centre *Daily Mail*, used the same language arguing that, ‘The hysteria over Cuba has now reached a point of irrationality in which almost every articulate voice cries for the use of force against the Castro regime as a “Soviet outpost” and demands that Britain share in the sanctions.’⁴²⁶

CND inevitably saw the closeness of Britain’s defence posture to the US as a weakness not a strength. Peggy Duff, organising secretary of CND, writing in *The Guardian* in June before the body’s annual conference rejected the Prime Minister’s assumption that it was only by Britain possessing its own independent deterrent that it could effectively bring pressure on America and Russia. ‘Such pressure has been singularly ineffective so far in promoting any agreement or even any slackening of the nuclear arms race,’ she said.⁴²⁷ A resolution agreed at the conference argued that while she was tied so closely to the American nuclear system, ‘Britain remains impotent, insecure and ineffective.’⁴²⁸

Secrecy during the crisis

The secrecy surrounding operational matters and civil defence plans which characterised the nuclear deterrent between 1957 to 1962 continued through the Cuban crisis period. Little information came from the government about what might happen in the event of a nuclear exchange, and surprisingly, the media made hardly any mention of the UK

⁴²⁵ *Daily Mirror*, October 8, 1962, p. 6.

⁴²⁶ *Daily Mail*, October 15, 1962, p. 8.

⁴²⁷ *The Guardian*, June 12, 1962, p. 6.

⁴²⁸ CND/2008/4/3 Folder 2, LSE Library, Annual Conference 1962, Resolutions agreed – on policy.

deterrent during the crisis itself. It is necessary to briefly state that the deterrent at the time of the Cuban crisis consisted of two features. One was the 60 Thor IRBMs loaned from the Americans and installed at various RAF airfields, and the other were the three types of medium bomber aircraft, namely the Valiant, Vulcan and the Victor squadrons, known as the V-force. Woolven in his account of those who served in Britain's Bomber Command during the Cuban crisis says that, 'by October 1962, while the Valiants were equipped with either British or US atomic weapons, the majority of the force, the Vulcan and Victor squadrons, was armed with British megaton free-fall weapons.'⁴²⁹ The intention was that a warning of an impending Soviet attack would propel these bombers into the air to deliver their loads over Russia. However, the public were not given these details, and under the D Notice system in which the media was prohibited from publishing information considered to be in breach of national security, very little appeared in the press or on television about it.

As a result of previous D Notices, the media had been banned after the Second World War from disclosing the development, production and location of atomic weapons, and this was reinforced by further supplementary D Notices in the 1957-58 period when the 60 Thor nuclear missiles were installed in the UK. The British government's decision not to call up the Civil Defence Volunteer force of over 300,000 people during the crisis or even put it on standby was remarkable. In taking no action, Macmillan went against a NATO wish for all nuclear deterrent forces to be put on formal alert, as he thought full mobilisation could provoke a war. On the evening of 22 October 1962 the Prime Minister had a three-hour dinner with General Lauris Norstad, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. 'Washington, in rather a panicky way, have been urging a NATO 'alert', with all that implies (in our case, Royal Proclamation and call-up of Reservists.) I told him that we would not(underlined)

⁴²⁹ Robin Woolven, 'What Really Happened in RAF Bomber Command during the Cuban missile crisis?' in David Gioe, Len Scott and Christopher Andrew (eds.), *An International History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, p 177.

repeat not (underlined) agree at this stage.’ Macmillan added that it was absurd ‘since the additional forces made available by ‘Alert’ had no (underlined) military significance.’⁴³⁰

Equally surprising is to learn, from recent research by Woolven, that at least half of the 120-strong V-bomber force armed with thermonuclear missiles was at 15 minutes readiness to fly into combat in the second week of the crisis, and at one time crews were in their cockpits at five minutes readiness to go. According to Woolven, there is a big discrepancy between official military records which merely show some intensified activity among the bomber crews during the Cuban crisis, and the evidence of Bomber Command officers and pilots who confirmed they were in their cockpits ready to fly for several hours on 27 October.⁴³¹ The same work makes clear that secrecy was deliberate on Macmillan’s part in order not to provoke the Soviet Union, and the press and the BBC were either not aware of the military operation or did not ask.

Key evidence for this has come from Sir Michael Beetham who at the time was Group Captain Operations at Bomber Command. It is worth recalling his evidence to a nuclear weapons seminar held by the RAF Historical Society in 2001. ‘As soon as the missile crisis began to develop we got the message from the government, from Macmillan, that no overt action was to be taken. So, anything that we did decide to do had to be done quietly. We couldn’t for instance, use the BBC to recall people from leave as we would have liked to have done. In fact, we were so successful that nothing ever seemed to appear in the Press, despite the fact that we had generated the entire V-force to a very high state of readiness.’⁴³²

Jim Wilson, an author who has looked in detail at the military and political aspects of the Cuban crisis, talked to Denis Healey who became Secretary of State for Defence in the

⁴³⁰ *The Macmillan Diaries* Vol. II, p. 510.

⁴³¹ Woolven, pp. 180-181.

⁴³² Quoted in Woolven, p. 183.

Labour government two years after the crisis. Healey believed even senior politicians did not know what the airforce and military staff were doing. ‘One of the really striking things of that time was the quite exceptional and unnecessary secrecy in Britain. Bomber Command was able to prepare for a massive raid on the Soviet Union without even letting the Ministry of Defence know, let alone Parliament,’ Healey said. That was ‘shocking and absolutely disgraceful’, according to Healey.⁴³³ Wilson adds that the government explicitly told the British press that increased alert measures were not being taken. He says Macmillan made no mention of the British military stance when he told the Commons on 30 October, ‘The world has had a shock. We have been very near the edge.’⁴³⁴

Wilson believes there is a continuum with nuclear policy throughout the lifetime of the Macmillan governments. He sees a link between the Windscale accident of 1957 and the missile crisis, in the sense that Macmillan ‘had previous form’ in keeping disturbing news out of the public eye. ‘The really major accident of the nuclear age was the subject of a political cover-up not dissimilar to that which followed the placing of the UK’s deterrent forces on close to a wartime footing during the Cuban crisis.’⁴³⁵ It could be reasonably argued that this secrecy was justified and that it worked, but an equal case could be made for arguing that had a nuclear war broken out, the V-bombers might have taken off without the British public even knowing the action that was being taken in their name.

By way of perspective, it is instructive to note that the American press were even less questioning than their British counterparts. An example came when the BBC in its special *Flashpoint Cuba* programme on 23 October, referred to earlier, carried the first pictures of Soviet missile transporters and missiles in place on their launchers in Cuba, taken by US spy

⁴³³ Jim Wilson, *Launch Pad UK*, pp. 163-4.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

planes. This stole a march on the US media as these pictures had been shown to journalists in Washington on the day before but not released for publication.⁴³⁶ Aaronson, in his analysis of how the American press behaved during the crisis, thought there was a clampdown on the supply of news, and the US Administration saw the press as a successful weapon in the blockade of Cuba. The US media were subject to similar reporting restrictions as contained in D Notices. The Administration issued a directive listing 12 categories of information which publishers and editors were asked not to report and Alice L George said these included details of troop movements, levels of military alert, and estimates of US capacity to knock out targets.⁴³⁷

Whether it was official censorship or self-censorship, the press on both sides of the Atlantic failed to report attempts by both anti-Castro Cuban exiles and the Kennedy administration to instigate the overthrow of Fidel Castro's government in Cuba before the crisis erupted. Only the *Daily Mail* of the British press in the sample period even made mention of the efforts of Cuban exiles to attack Cuba and kill Castro. This may have been because they appeared to have a specific journalist Keith Morfett who was based in Miami. In August 1962 his story headed '*How we shelled Castro's hotel*' described how a group of young Cuban exiles drove a gunboat into Havana Bay and fired shells into a waterfront hotel where they believed the Cuban leader was going to be at that precise time. The attack failed as Castro must have been tipped off.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁶ Seaton and Hughes, p. 58.

⁴³⁷ James Aaronson, *The Press and the Cold War* (Monthly Review Press, 1990), pp. 172-3; Alice L. George, *Awaiting Armageddon; How Americans faced the Cuban Missile Crisis* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), p. 98.

⁴³⁸ *Daily Mail*, August 27, 1962, p. 1.

Macmillan shared Kennedy's wish to overthrow Castro and secretly sympathised with his 'tricky operation' at the time of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961.⁴³⁹ What was not covered in Britain or the USA the following year was the commissioning by President Kennedy, under the direction of his Attorney-General Robert Kennedy, of a US Air Force General Edward Lansdale to mount a major covert military operation called Mongoose. This would involve the CIA assassinating Castro, leading to a people's uprising on the island, and then a military occupation of Cuba followed by a new government favourable to Washington. Len Scott says that following the trade embargo the US conducted large scale military exercises in the Caribbean during 1962 aimed at overthrowing a fictional dictator, Senor Ortsac, which was Castro spelt backwards.⁴⁴⁰ These covert activities only emerged from hearings of the Church Committee of the US Senate published in 1976.⁴⁴¹

CND Response

The intense pressure on Cuba followed by a world crisis over the Soviet missiles should have been a moment when CND achieved a peak of influence, as it justified the assertion that nuclear weapons posed a great danger to peace. John Cox in his history of the nuclear arms race argues that there was a sense that by 1962 CND had influenced government attitudes in some key areas. These included a genuine commitment to halt atmospheric nuclear tests, an acceptance that Civil Defence was a waste of money and a

⁴³⁹ *The Macmillan Diaries*, p. 374. 'CIA planning for operations had begun the year before, Macmillan writing to Eisenhower on 22 July 1960: 'I feel sure Castro has to be got rid, but it is a tricky operation for you to contrive and I only hope you will succeed.'

⁴⁴⁰ Len Scott, *The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Threat of Nuclear War: Lessons from History* (Continuum, 2007), p. 31.

⁴⁴¹ Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (The Church Committee), April 29, 1976, <https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=1344>

greater fear of nuclear proliferation. ‘Every one of these points was contested by the Macmillan government when first raised by CND, so the organisation may fairly take some credit for the changes,’ he wrote.⁴⁴² The problem was that CND had not moved opinion on the central issue of Britain unilaterally renouncing the bomb. The Cuban crisis offered the chance to change this.

But because of divisions over whether the US or Russia was to blame for the crisis CND’s stance lacked credibility. This was not apparent at the start of the year when its chair Canon John Collins gave a warning in the *New Statesman* magazine predicting about ‘six months to Armageddon’ and answered his critics in the Committee of 100 who favoured direct action by arguing that ‘mass civil disobedience will not avert the disaster,’ only persuasion could do that.⁴⁴³ CND republished a US research paper called *The Mershon Report* in March 1962 which warned that nuclear war could break out through diplomatic or military miscalculation at a time of acute international tension. Bertrand Russell, by then President of the Committee of 100 which had split off from CND, said in a foreword that added to this risk of an ‘accidental war’ was the mentally unbalanced nature of some of the military leaders in the US who ‘are likely in a time of tension to act with fatal rashness.’ He added that unless the superpowers changed their policies ‘the chances of human survival are very slight.’⁴⁴⁴ Canon Collins began a letter in *The Times* of 26 October with the words, ‘Assuming that we are all alive next week,’ and thought the crisis should stimulate fresh thinking. At that stage he said it seemed clear that the US, the Soviet Union or Cuba had not been deterred by the risks of nuclear war.⁴⁴⁵ This was later undermined by statements from

⁴⁴² John Cox, *Overkill: The Story of modern weapons* (Pelican Books, 1981), p.202.

⁴⁴³ *New Statesman*, January 12, 1962, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁴⁴ Bertrand Russell, Introduction to *Accidental War: some dangers in the 1960s – The Mershon Report* (The Campaign in Oxford University for Nuclear Disarmament and Housemans Publishers and Booksellers, March 1962).

⁴⁴⁵ *The Times*, October 26, 1962, p. 11.

the US and Soviet leaders that the risk of a nuclear war had led them to pull back from the brink.

Journalist Herb Greer, who in 1963 summarised a history of CND for the *Spectator*, said Cuba should have been a breakthrough for the organisation. ‘Through the course of an increasingly tense week the Cuba crisis grew, along with the horrifying realisation that Britain was stuck in it, like it or not. The possibility of abrupt extinction for this country was no longer metaphysical but frighteningly real. At long last CND and the Committee of 100 had their ripe and golden chance. Mounting a wave of history, they could sweep the British public into the arms of the anti-nuclear cause.’⁴⁴⁶ The reality was that CND members like the rest of the population were watching and waiting to see what would happen thousands of miles away. The deception exercised by the Soviets to deny even as late as 26 October that they had missiles on Cuba, followed by the agreement to dismantle them, brought problems for CND and the left of the Labour Party, which had largely been blaming the US for increasing tension by imposing an economic embargo on Cuba.

It handed a propaganda victory to the government as one minister Peter Thomas explained. ‘The actions of the Soviet government in Cuba have exposed to everyone the folly of accepting verbal assurances, even when they are solemnly given by Russia’s most exalted representatives.’⁴⁴⁷ The case of Philip Toynbee, who was a leading CND intellectual and writer, has been cited as illustrating the dilemma that Cuba brought. According to Greer, ‘Philip Toynbee pointed out that CND disciples had argued for IRBMs in Cuba as a defence against America, ignoring their own statement that such rockets were useless to England. He also eyed with trepidation the strong anti-American bias in the ‘Hands off Cuba’ shouting

⁴⁴⁶ Herb Greer, *The Story of CND – Tremble, Dammit!*, *The Spectator*, April 11, 1963, p. 462

<http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/12th-april-1963/11/the-story-of-cnd>

⁴⁴⁷ Quoted in DeWeerd, p. 9.

even after it was obvious that plenty of the hands on Cuba were Russian.⁴⁴⁸ DeWeerd quotes Toynbee as having to execute an embarrassing about-turn. He initially believed that the US blockade was ‘a monstrous and cold-blooded election stunt; that there were no Russian missiles on Cuba, and that the physical invasion of Cuba was the next step in this wicked United States plot.’ He then realised that Kennedy was right about the rocket sites and had to make an immediate volte-face. ‘Being a unilateralist disarmer of the most extreme type, I was outraged by the extension of nuclear arms and nuclear tension into a new area.’⁴⁴⁹

Initially CND tried to blame both superpowers for the crisis. CND chairman Canon Collins wrote to the UN Secretary-General U Thant on 22 October arguing that nuclear war might result from failed policies based on deterrence. If the Soviet Union had set up bases on Cuba it had failed to be deterred by US threats of retaliation, while the US by its sea blockade was undeterred by Soviet threats. It urged Britain not to support any action which might increase the risk of nuclear war.⁴⁵⁰ But the attempt by the CND leadership to be even-handed in blaming both sides in the crisis was offset by the choice of the US Embassy in London as the main object of protests by CND demonstrators carrying ‘Hands Off Cuba’ posters. This appeared to indicate that CND members felt a natural sympathy for Cuba which was being threatened by an aggressive American campaign. *The Guardian* reported there were 124 arrests outside the embassy on 24 October, with two thousand people demonstrating.⁴⁵¹ The *Daily Mail* reported that ‘nearly 3,000 shouting, screaming, banner-waving demonstrators tried to invade the US Embassy in Grosvenor square last night’ and running fights broke out between police and retreating demonstrators. The impression of bias against the US is somewhat tempered, however, by the same report that ‘several hundred demonstrators

⁴⁴⁸ Greer, p. 462.

⁴⁴⁹ Quoted in DeWeerd, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁵⁰ Quoted in Driver, pp. 143-144.

⁴⁵¹ *The Guardian*, October 24, 1962.

marched to the Russian Embassy. There, several small deputations were allowed in to present batches of letters.⁴⁵² CND archives show that a Cuba Crisis Committee was set up on 28 October, with the impetus appearing to come from a body called CUCaND (Colleges and Universities' Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). In a note headed 'No War Over Cuba' it announced a national one-day strike on 30 October and 'urges people to call an extraordinary meeting of your union or student society, and calls upon all members of all societies to support the strike. Get members of staff to join in,' it exhorted.⁴⁵³

In a separate note marked urgent CUCaND said that, 'This is the worst crisis the world has had to face since 1939. This weekend, we hope that the people of Britain will come out in their thousands and show what they feel about the grave position over Cuba. There is little we can do at the moment except demonstrate but we CAN and we MUST show how we feel. If we don't now, we may not have another chance.' While the note was ambiguous as to who should be blamed for the crisis, a postscript added that there would be a demonstration outside the US Embassy every day.⁴⁵⁴ *The Times* for 25 October said 65 senior members of academic staffs in universities and research institutions sent a letter to the Prime Minister, appearing to cast doubt on the photographic evidence of Cuban missiles presented at the UN. This said the US action, 'whatever the truth of President Kennedy's allegations, opens what threatens to be the first phase of World War III. At this moment of extreme crisis, it is imperative for the people of Britain and for her Majesty's government to state in the plainest terms that they will refuse to be drawn into a world conflict on this issue.'⁴⁵⁵

There were some street protests around the country, for instance in Bristol 500 people marched to the local BBC studios on 23 October demanding that their letter be read on air,

⁴⁵² *Daily Mail*, October 24, 1962, p. 7.

⁴⁵³ CND 8/15 p. 6, CND Archives, LSE Library.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁵⁵ *The Times*, , October 25, 1962, p. 8.

which it was the next day.⁴⁵⁶ But it can be argued that CND was in some disarray over the crisis, as both Driver and Purcell commented, citing the Cuba crisis as a watershed event which began the campaign's decline. Purcell said CND admitted they had misread the crisis, 'underestimating American restraint as well as the Russian rashness.' The *New Statesman* which was normally a strong supporter of CND, published a leader supporting the US action, which upset some staff for whom 'Anti-American feelings over nuclear escalation could not be eradicated that easily.'⁴⁵⁷

Driver said the peace movement conceded the street demonstrations at the time 'did the campaign little credit'.⁴⁵⁸ Nigel Young, however, who analysed CND's actions during the crisis felt there were other reasons for CND losing its appeal after 1962, such as the movement simply running out of steam, and the absence of a wider political strategy. But he acknowledged a 'sense of impotence and irrelevance' in the street protests.⁴⁵⁹ Cox also referred to the Cuban crisis as a watershed for the movement which had shocked governments into a true appreciation of the dangers posed by nuclear weapons. But he added there was 'sheer physical and mental exhaustion after four years of intense campaigning.'⁴⁶⁰

Cox was the youngest member of the CND national executive at the time of the missile crisis and commented in an interview that while CND had warned of the arms race it did not itself benefit from the moment when a nuclear war almost resulted. 'The significance of the Cuban Missile Crisis was that it made people realise that war had come close. For years CND had said we could have nuclear war and no-one believed it, then we nearly did and people felt something should be done to lessen the tension,' he said.⁴⁶¹ The Americans

⁴⁵⁶ Driver, p. 147.

⁴⁵⁷ Hugh Purcell, *Learning to love the bomb*, *New Statesman*, March 21-27, 2014, p. 37.

⁴⁵⁸ Driver, p. 145.

⁴⁵⁹ Nigel Young, 'Cuba '62: That Was the Week that Was (almost our last)', in Minnion and Bolsover (eds.) *The CND Story* p. 62.

⁴⁶⁰ John Cox, *Overkill*, p. 212.

⁴⁶¹ John Cox phone interview with the author, 3.10.2011.

and the Russians set up a telephone hotline to improve communication and talks about a partial Test Ban Treaty, eventually signed in 1963, became more serious.

Organisational failures were acknowledged after the crisis had passed in a note sent out by the CND leadership, although these were attributed more to the speed of events than a strategic mistake. 'It was impossible to get a quick response at short notice. Whilst we hope that such a serious crisis will not occur again, we nevertheless do not want to be caught unprepared again.'⁴⁶² However, there were those in CND who did feel the crisis had exposed the lack of a broader approach to disarmament. A paper called *After Cuba: Steps Towards Peace* was published in November 1962 which originated from a prominent member and academic Stuart Hall, although the archive record is untitled. It argued that CND needed to reach out to many people outside its ranks who, because of the Cuban crisis, now agreed that the nuclear arms race was a danger to world peace and 'the British independent deterrent is neither a protection nor a guarantee of influence abroad. Britain, with her commitments to NATO and her bases, is inevitably involved in any nuclear crisis.'

The paper put forward a minimum programme to be achieved during a limited period of time. This covered Britain renouncing nuclear weapons, tests and bases in Britain; stopping the spread of nuclear weapons through nuclear free zones in Latin America, Africa and elsewhere outside the main superpowers; reducing tension in Europe by 'disengagement between East and West Germany;' and strengthening the UN so that obligations to its charter took precedence over alliances like NATO and the Communist bloc.⁴⁶³ But according to Young, this approach of graduated disarmament was criticised by others in CND 'as throwing out the unilateralist core of a new foreign and defence policy.'⁴⁶⁴ While CND's warnings of a

⁴⁶² CND 8/15, p. 44, CUCaND – note to all groups, CND Archives, LSE Library.

⁴⁶³ CND/2008/4/5, *After Cuba: Steps Towards Peace – A brief summary*, CND Archives, LSE Library.

⁴⁶⁴ Nigel Young, p. 63.

nuclear Armageddon may have influenced the politicians to stand back from the brink, at end of the crisis CND remained a largely reactive and single-issue campaign which had not won over the Labour Party for unilateralism as it had set out to do.

Protest

CND favoured public protests on the streets and at meetings but the relatively small scale of demonstrations around the Cuba crisis raises the question of whether the traditional CND methods of marches and rallies were valid any longer in the face of global anxiety. One reaction of people in Britain was a sense of powerlessness over world events and a turn inwards to themselves and their families. Driver believed that until the crisis CND 'had lived on demonstration: the mass assembly was the fibre of its being. After Cuba, demonstrations began to be left to people who happened to enjoy them.'⁴⁶⁵ That did not mean people agreed with what the government was doing. Letters and diaries were often a way of expressing fears. One teacher wrote to the *New Statesman* just after the crisis complaining that the government had given no advice to the public as to what action they should take in the event of a nuclear war. He said there would be no provision for protecting people therefore, 'Britain will enter a war which, for the first time, most of its citizens will hope not to survive but will hope to die quickly and quietly.'⁴⁶⁶

The Cuban crisis appears to be an example of an event when people's fears confided to diaries, families or schoolteachers convey a more urgent sense of historical occasion than official records. Christopher Andrew certainly believes that 'the experiences of both the

⁴⁶⁵ Driver, p. 148.

⁴⁶⁶ Letter from John White, *New Statesman*, November 23, 1962, p. 739.

adults and children who lived through it [the Cuban missile crisis] provide vivid evidence of the importance of basing histories of the crisis on memories of it – whether recorded in memoirs, researched through oral history or embodied in lieux de memoire – as well as on the documentary record.⁴⁶⁷ Inevitably these memories can be fragmented and anecdotal and come from a minority of those who lived through that crisis. But they do convey a sense of what living through it might have been like.

One couple wrote to the author that ‘we were living in the Somerset countryside at time of the Cuban missile crisis. We followed the activities of CND in the newspapers. We had no TV or radio so only learned about the stand off between Russia and America towards the end. But it was a frightening time.’⁴⁶⁸ The BBC collected similar memories of the crisis in 2002 for the 40th anniversary, the general tenor being that people, many of whom were teenagers, experienced a sudden cloud over their lives accompanied by ‘desolation’ and ‘terror’.⁴⁶⁹ Contrasted with this experience the historian Eric Hobsbawm took a more rational view at the time, getting married in the middle of the crisis and flying off to Argentina for a conference, but leaving his wife money for the fare ‘in case things began to look really drastic.’ He said that ‘though it was quite evident that the Cuban missile crisis was a matter of global life and death, I cannot actually have expected nuclear world war to break out.’⁴⁷⁰

Veronica, an 18 year school student in Devon about to apply for university, kept a diary during the crisis which said, ‘Oct 24 – Oh it is all so worrying. America is blockading Russian ships going to Cuba and there is going to be a war. I don’t want to die, not yet when Im just beginning to have more fun. Every time I hear a lawn-mower or a plane I think the H-

⁴⁶⁷ Christopher Andrew, ‘Remembering the Cuban Missile Crisis: Memoirs, oral history and lieux de memoire’, in David Gioe, Len Scott and Christopher Andrew (eds.), *An International History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, p. 9.

⁴⁶⁸ Thalia and Ian Campbell, email to author May 21, 2009.

⁴⁶⁹ BBC News, Talking Point - *Missile crisis: Your memories*, Tuesday October 29, 2002

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/2317931.stm>

⁴⁷⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (Abacus, 2002), p. 220.

bomb is coming.⁴⁷¹ Most of the Bristol protestors, referred to earlier, were under 30 and at least half were students. Sixty young women at Glanmor grammar school in Swansea walked out in protest at the US naval quarantine of Cuba.⁴⁷² *The Times* reported on 25 October that 700 Manchester students attended a meeting in the student union.

The paper also referred to the school strike at Midhurst grammar school in Sussex in which 40 sixth formers refused to attend lessons and marched to the town.⁴⁷³ That event appeared to capture many people's imagination and was also reported in *The Times*. It said that the Midhurst students sent a petition to the Prime Minister stating, 'We deplore the way in which the world situation is being allowed to degenerate into one in which war is imminent, and demand that Her Majesty's government take every possible step to end this state of affairs.' The headmaster Norman Lucas took a diplomatic position on the strike. 'I told the sixth formers I could not approve their decision. I do not intend to take any disciplinary action.'⁴⁷⁴ According to Driver, the several strikes by school children around the country 'were a reminder of the profound, yet often neglected, impact of the Bomb on the minds of adolescents.'⁴⁷⁵

Neither side in the propaganda war appeared to be able to allay people's fears about the nuclear shadow over Britain. The possession of a nuclear deterrent did not reassure those worried that Britain could become a target, while a call to abandon such weapons did not motivate traditional campaigners to come onto the streets to protest. The one exception were young people, who seemed particularly disturbed and shocked by what was happening. A personal account of someone caught up in one of those strikes is worth examining in detail. Midhurst sixth-former Penny Cloutte has written an account of what happened which

⁴⁷¹ Veronica Porter, email to author May 25, 2009.

⁴⁷² DeWeerd, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁷³ *The Times*, October 25, 1962, p. 8.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁵ Driver, p. 146.

provides an insight into what a young person was feeling at the time, and brings together the public and the private family elements of being involved in a sudden protest.⁴⁷⁶ She was 17 and her family expected her to go to Oxford University. On 25 October 1962 she and friends, several of whom were CND members, were sitting having lunch, ‘discussing the possibility of imminent extermination. I remember the talk of how long we would have after the alarm went off – four minutes – and how quickly we would disappear, because after all the human body is made up of 80 per cent water...The threat to the beauty of the world was unthinkable, unimaginable – and yet it was a threat we had known all of our lives.’ Robin the Head Boy then called a meeting of sixth formers and said they decided on action after watching the news on television the previous night. He said that, ‘old men declare wars and young men fight them, but this time it could be the end of everybody, not just the combatants. I remember the surge of rage and excitement,’ she said.

They told the headmaster they were going on strike, and he admitted they had a right to protest but begged them to consider the consequences. ‘Our next action was to march up the High Street with placards improvised out of coathangers and hockey sticks, and send delegations to local schools who were known of through CND connections.’ The *Daily Mirror* carried a photo-story showing the students lined up at the town’s war memorial, with the heading ‘No-War Strike in the Sixth.’⁴⁷⁷ Penny and her group were interviewed on a BBC regional programme in Southampton, but due to her own family location her mother did not see the interview but was told about it by people in the village. Her father was furious, ‘he shouted that I had put my academic future at risk, that I should have thought of his hopes for me, that I should have to leave school and work in a shop.’ She didn’t see him the next day,

⁴⁷⁶ This account headed *Memories of the Cuban missile crisis* was emailed to the author from Penny Cloutte on February 21, 2011.

⁴⁷⁷ *Daily Mirror*, October 25, 1962, p. 15.

‘and then in effect I barely spoke to him again for the 20 years remaining of his life, though we continued to live under the same roof until I went to Oxford.’

She added, ‘It was a wonderful moment when I heard on the TV news that Khrushchev had backed down, I really did feel as if a weight that had been oppressing me and us had lifted, flown away.’ The Midhurst strike was the subject of an article by Canon Collins in the *Daily Mail* of 5 November, based on his comments from the pulpit of St Paul’s Cathedral. He said the pupils deserved ‘honour and praise’ for their moral discernment. He said the Cuban crisis must have made countless thousands of young people, who were made by their elders to stand ‘on the brink of nuclear annihilation,’ seriously question all those values they had been taught in school. ‘What right have we to ask youth to behave sensibly when we deliberately and irresponsibly deny to young people the right to live, expect them to connive with us in the indiscriminate destruction of millions of innocent people with whom they have no possible quarrel, and teach them by our deeds to depend upon the power of threat and counter-threat based upon military strength?’⁴⁷⁸

Conclusion

While the Cuban crisis appeared to begin suddenly and only lasted two weeks, explanations for the parts played by the British government and CND during it can be traced back not just to the preceding months but to several years prior to it. In that sense the crisis is a case study of how the two sides’ propaganda had developed but in another sense it reflects the weaknesses in their positions. Macmillan’s government had made possession of its own

⁴⁷⁸ *Daily Mail*, November 5, 1962, p. 12.

nuclear force as a deterrent into a central feature of its defence policy after 1957, due to the influence it brought and the protection it might afford the domestic population. But it also allied its defence policy very closely with the USA, so that Britain prior to the crisis had difficulty in setting out a distinctive position or influencing the Americans. When it came to the missile crisis itself it has been argued that Britain was a bystander and not a key player in the superpower confrontation, it was not consulted before key decisions were taken, and its efforts to play a role in negotiation with the Soviet Union through the Thor missile offer were rebuffed. Ministers did claim they were consulted by the Americans as the crisis developed, but there is little evidence that the fact that Britain was a nuclear power made any difference to the decisions that President Kennedy and his ExComm group took.

Television came of age during the Cuban crisis and was the main source of news that the public had as they watched with rising anxiety the possibility of Britain being caught up in nuclear war. This fundamentally changed politics as the visual power of seeing the crisis unfold made it much more immediate. Politicians had to adapt quickly to the new medium and react to fast-moving events. At the same time, the chapter has also shown that the role of propaganda in the Conservative government was weakened by the exit of Charles Hill from the Cabinet and the appointment of William Deedes as information-co-ordinator. There was a lack of a consistent message about the British role in the build up to the missile crisis and during it, even if it is conceded that Macmillan felt that anything said publicly might undermine the western alliance. The government also maintained secrecy in nuclear matters which had characterised its approach from 1957 in the Windscale affair and its denial of public debate. A blanket cover of secrecy for both the press and the public applied to the preparedness of the nuclear deterrent through Bomber Command in October 1962, even when some pilots were cockpit-ready to take off with their nuclear payload.

The Cuban crisis presented equal difficulties for CND, just at the point when it would be expected that its warnings about the nuclear arms race would be vindicated. These were due to the strand of anti-Americanism in CND and the British Left, sympathy for the underdog Cuba, and Khrushchev's decision to keep the missile installation on Cuba secret for more than two weeks. This compromised CND's ability to be even-handed in the crisis. There was also an apparent failure to mobilise street protests, perhaps due to the way the crisis erupted quickly and also because of exhaustion over political campaigning from the previous four years which has been noted by some CND commentators.

The chapter has explored the phenomenon of anxieties about nuclear war being experienced privately by families and individuals, as they felt powerless to influence the actions of world powers. It also discussed the politicising effect on students and young people who appeared to express more than their elders did about the fear of dying in a nuclear war involving Britain. One school strike in particular seemed to embody those fears, during a brief dangerous period in 1962 when conventional politics and propaganda revealed its weaknesses rather than its strengths.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

This thesis has sought to examine the propaganda-of British governments between 1957 to 1963 which was intended to justify Britain's nuclear deterrent, and the management of alternative views which might jeopardise that policy. It reveals the scale of Cold War culture in Britain and the wide impact that it had on people's experiences and cultural consumption. Nuclear weapons rose rapidly to become either the number one pre-occupation of British people for a few years or close to the top of concerns.⁴⁷⁹ How the state and its opponents argued their case and the methods they employed are - of historical significance in making sense of mid - to late 20th Century Britain. This concluding section will underline five original contributions of this research. The section ends by suggesting what the implications of the study might be for future work.

Research contribution

The first new area of insight from the research is the influence that propaganda specialists Charles Hill and Harold Evans brought to the Macmillan government to reorganize the existing public relations machinery. Chapter 2 shows how they introduced a more rigorous co-ordination of the messages from the various government departments, encouraged rebuttal of negative media coverage, and put resources into the Parliamentary

⁴⁷⁹ *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls* – polls taken between 1958 and 1962 show that when people were asked what was the most urgent problem facing the government, the H-bomb and disarmament was the leading concern over all items through 1959 and 1960 ahead of cost of living, pensions and unemployment. At other times it was the second or third leading concern.

Lobby seeing that as a key influencer of public opinion through the press. The evidence presented in this thesis adds weight to the argument, also referred to by John B. Black, that these appointments marked the return of propaganda specialists to the centre of government, following a period when their influence was minimal. Black argued that between 1951 and 1956, culminating in the Suez debacle, propaganda specialists were not involved in forming policy and were not even told about policies when they had been decided. Propagandists were literally sidelined making it very difficult for them to present government policies to the outside world. In contrast, the period covered by this thesis has Hill and Evans being consulted at an early stage and therefore being able to develop a range of techniques to communicate policies. For example, they provided briefing on how to present the case for the nuclear deterrent, gave advice on how to use television interviews to best effect and successfully promoted the image of Macmillan as a trusted elder statesman.

The thesis chimes, too, with the work of Marjorie Ogilvy-Webb on the history of the information services in Britain. She argued that the transformation that Hill and Evans brought about was due to Hill being given a Cabinet post with no other departmental responsibilities and having what might be called ‘the ear’ of the Prime Minister. Hill was able to consider policies before they were implemented and to put his stamp on presentation. Cockerell et al also argued that Hill’s work in expanding support for the Parliamentary Lobby was groundbreaking and that it laid the basis for future government policies in this area.

The second important conclusion from the research is that the everyday lives of people in Britain were profoundly influenced by Cold War propaganda and by imminent threats to existing ways of life. Britain’s reliance on its nuclear deterrent as the centrepiece of defence policy polarised the messages to people. These were to either support the role of nuclear weapons or abolish them completely. Young people expressed their anxieties during the Cuban Missile Crisis by confiding their fears in private diaries, in marching to radio and

TV stations or by going on school strikes. These were unprecedented acts in response to a nuclear culture which seemed more concerned with national sovereignty and technological superiority. Women were another group who tried to articulate profound concerns about nuclear weapons and fallout from tests in the atmosphere. The thesis shows that women took their fears into the heart of government but ministers were happy to listen on the basis that they could manage it as a PR exercise which would not change policy.

Third, profound developments in newspapers and broadcasting had a major influence on the propaganda battlegrounds for the nuclear debate. The pursuit of advertising for newspapers, and the emergence of television as a powerful visual mass medium meant that increasingly entertainment became a sought-after commodity. News and current affairs were not immune from this process, and an added feature was a stress on the appeal of personalities, including politicians who faced new kinds of challenges.

For national newspapers, television posed a serious challenge, but the press could still argue that with its huge circulations it was able to potentially influence millions of people. By and large newspapers, run by a few powerful owners and editors, subscribed to the view that Britain was still a world ranked power and that having its own nuclear deterrent was a critical symbol of that. The thesis provides substantial detailed evidence to support this belief, ranging from Bingham's analysis of nuclear weapons coverage in the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mirror*,⁴⁸⁰ to the *Daily Telegraph's* coverage of nuclear weapons policy between 1957 and 1963. Commentators such as journalist James Margach who was active in the Parliamentary Lobby at the time, believed that the support given by most national newspapers

⁴⁸⁰ Bingham, 'The Monster'? The British Popular press and nuclear culture, 1945-early 1960s', pp.609-624.

to the British nuclear deterrent was partly due to the skills of Hill and Evans, as well as Macmillan himself in manipulating press and public opinion.⁴⁸¹

The thesis shows that the BBC experienced a series of pressures, both externally and from within the Corporation, which impacted on its ability to reflect the debate around nuclear war. Chapter 4 shows that the nuclear issue was a regular theme of current affairs programmes like *Any Questions?* and *Panorama*. But the BBC was forced to respond after commercial television displayed a willingness to pioneer new ways of reaching the public, such as covering the 1958 Rochdale by-election, and broadcasting the play *Doomsday for Dyson* which centred on Britain caught up in a nuclear exchange. Political pressure on the BBC to follow an official line on nuclear matters was always in the background ready to be exerted if necessary. Under internal pressure from staff but also from the viewing public, the BBC developed a more liberal interpretation of long-standing rules on impartiality, political balance and tackling controversial issues. Despite these changes CND found it hard to gain a hearing for its radical unilateralist position and strong moral case. The period presented a complex information market place, and although CND attracted innovative designers to produce its publicity materials the thesis presents evidence that it did not resolve long standing weaknesses in its media relations strategy.

The fourth key research finding of this thesis is that documentary film was an important propaganda tool for both sides. It was seen as delivering a powerful emotional impact that the written word lacked. This is the first time that films produced by both the CND and government have been analysed in the academic sphere. The analysis reflects the strengths and weaknesses of both cases and also the different commissioning environments, with the government able to hire professional companies which had previous experience of

⁴⁸¹ Margach, *The Abuse of Power: the war between Downing Street and the Media from Lloyd George to Callaghan*, p. 115.

government work, while CND relied on film-makers and technicians to donate their time. The best example of the latter was the 1959 documentary *March to Aldermaston* which was made partly by radical Free Cinema film-makers Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz and also by more orthodox television producers who tended to favour straight interviews. While the film is an uneasy mix of styles it does have memorable images and conveys the quiet moral anger of CND marchers, which made it an ideal way to begin CND meetings around the country. Government films such as *The - Warden and the Householder*, and *Radioactive Fallout* had a different aim of providing information on nuclear survival while emphasising to the civil defence community and emergency services that the government was serious about civil defence. There were nine films commissioned on this theme between 1961 and 1964 but only some were shown publicly on television or at cinemas. The majority were seen by civil defence volunteers and emergency staff alone, reflecting the uncertainty already alluded to of not trusting the ordinary public to see what a nuclear exchange might mean. The fifth finding from the research is the systematic nature of the information control by the government. Chapter 3 argues that there was a pattern of decision-making relating to the nuclear deterrent in the Macmillan governments which was marked by a refusal to entertain alternative views and a desire to either suppress them or impose an official narrative. In some cases this approach was prompted by tactical considerations and in others by a fear of alarming the public. An example of the former was Macmillan's cover-up over the Windscale inquiry report due to anxiety that its findings might upset the US government, just when it was considering sharing nuclear technology. With the latter an example was rejecting Lord Hailsham's request for a Parliamentary debate on nuclear fallout on the basis that it might increase public concern and lead to further questions. The thesis also tends to reinforce Hogg's assertion that from its origins the British nuclear state was shaped by cultures of secrecy and characterised by top-down histories which tended to stress only the official

version.⁴⁸² Westad described this approach as ‘rule by experts’ and as indicated in the Introduction the fear of sharing information became in effect a lack of democratic control.⁴⁸³

Implications for future work

In relation to how this research could provide a potential for future investigation, the specific time period of 1957 to 1963 was chosen as the locus for research for a number of reasons. These included spanning the terms of Conservative governments under Harold Macmillan and reflecting the high point of CND campaigning for unilateral nuclear disarmament. It has enabled a convenient concentration on policies, speeches and opinion polls within a short historical period. But it is clear that the issues around the nuclear deterrent were developing in the period both before and after this, and it would be fruitful to examine these. For example, taking 1945 to 1957 as a possible timeline, research could ask how government policy on building a British deterrent evolved after the war and what propaganda instruments were employed to gain public backing for it. In particular, one theme could be how the public’s experiences in the Second World War and the Blitz were mobilized to justify building a nuclear deterrent as the Cold War developed. Christopher Hill refers to the government vetting a BBC radio documentary in 1954 on the history of bomb in order to ensure only ‘reputable atomic scientists’ were involved. According to Hill, the then Director General Ian Jacob produced a policy document with guidelines on how the BBC should treat nuclear issues, which said manufacture of the H-bomb was in the national interest.⁴⁸⁴ This has

⁴⁸² Hogg, *British Nuclear Culture: Official and Unofficial Narratives in the Long 20th Century*, p. 6 and p. 10.

⁴⁸³ Odd Arne Westad, ‘The Cold War and the International History of the Twentieth Century’, Chapter 1 in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol. 1 Origins*, Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.) (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 17.

⁴⁸⁴ Hill, *Peace and Power in Cold War Britain*, pp. 92-95.

clear similarities with ministers questioning the choice of scientists chosen to speak in a series of radio talks on the H-bomb and fallout in 1957, referred to in Chapter 4. Similarly, after 1963 there was the election of a Labour government in 1964 and the question could be asked as to how a justification for continuing the nuclear deterrent was generated and did the propaganda differ in any way from the previous Conservative approach?

There are a number of other more specific areas in this thesis where a closer scrutiny would result in benefits to historical explanation and provide an even richer account of social and political history in Britain in the post-war period. Firstly, there is the potential for more detailed research into how the Parliamentary Lobby worked and the interaction between governments and the press. This thesis has argued that the Macmillan government gave greater attention to 'feeding' the lobby with its messages and was relatively successful in influencing supportive coverage of the nuclear deterrent. This implies that the press failed to hold the politicians to account but more in-depth research would be needed to accurately assess the relationships between ministers and journalists. This could provide further examples of announcements and rebuttal similar to the one quoted in Chapter 3 from May 1958, in which Charles Hill gave the lobby his response to a petition and letter from Lord Russell. It would also be necessary to study in greater detail how the government messages were then interpreted by journalists and editors.

Secondly, D Notices were an important tool employed by the government to restrict press coverage of nuclear weapons but it is not clear what exactly the relationship was in this period between government ministers and the D Notice committee otherwise known as the Defence, Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee. Nicholas Wilkinson in his official history of the D Notice system does make cursory reference to nuclear matters but there is scope to investigate how and why specific nuclear-related D Notices and statements came from the committee, and how much pressure there was from the government of the day. It

appears from the attack on the *Guardian* editor Alistair Hetherington by the then acting secretary of the D Notice Committee Colonel Sammy Lohan in May 1963, referred to in Chapter 3, that such civil servants had a degree of independence but research might shed light on how much ministers were aware of this or their opinions of it.

A third approach flowing from this thesis would be to expand on the discussion earlier in this chapter on the role of propagandists in government. Ogilvy-Webb does detail how the strict departmental responsibility for information services was managed within British governments in the post-war period. It seems clear that Macmillan chose to elevate propaganda to a higher level, following the communication failures around the Suez crisis. There is the potential to examine more closely why he did this, and to study the importance given to propaganda generally around nuclear policy after 1945.

Two further areas of research flow from work in this thesis. One is to devote resources to oral history which brings together the actual experiences of particular groups in Britain during the Cold War. This approach is touched on in the thesis, such as Penny Cloutte's account of a school strike during the Cuban Missile Crisis in Chapter 6. There are clear difficulties in taking this route, such as moving away further in time from key events of that period. But it is possible to envisage obtaining stories from young people, women and those involved in civil defence, for example, and it may be that some archive interviews already exist. The oral history approach is an alternative way of giving importance to how ordinary citizens experienced the threat of nuclear war.

Lastly, there is scope for further research on the background to CND's lack of success in communicating its message to the media. As a single-issue campaign it was able to generate huge enthusiasm for its cause for a limited time, and capture the imagination both of activists and professionals such as film-makers and designers. But the thesis argues that CND

was held back by an inability to clearly communicate its aims to the press and the public, something which Holger Nehring has looked at in terms of the social composition of the movement and disagreements over strategy.⁴⁸⁵ It would be fruitful to examine whether the seeds for this problem were sown from the early 1950s onwards, and whether lessons were learnt from the experience of 1957-63 for later anti-nuclear incarnations of CND, such as opposing the deployment of cruise missiles in Europe in the 1980s.

⁴⁸⁵ Holger Nehring, *Politics of Security: British and West German Protest Movements and the Early Cold War 1945-1970* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

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The following people were interviewed as part of this project.

David Cobham – this was a telephone interview on September 5, 2014. He was a British film and TV producer and director, best known for his film *Tarka the Otter*. The relevance in this field was that he directed public information films *The Warden and the Householder* (1961), and *Radioactive Fallout* (1961). These were commissioned by the Home Office to reassure the public about Civil Defence planning. The interview concerned the close supervision of the Home Office in making the films and the commissioning environment at the time. He died in 2018.

John Cox – this was a telephone interview on March 27, 2013. He worked as a consultant engineer, and lectured and wrote about the nuclear arms race, including publishing *Overkill*, a well-known history of nuclear weapons. He was the youngest member of the CND national executive at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis and was able to recall discussions within CND at the time.

Ernest Rodker – this was a face to face interview on September 21, 2016. He was a conscientious objector who was at CND’s founding meeting in 1958, and made badges and posters for the Aldermaston marches alongside designers Robin Fior and Gerald Holtom. He provided materials for art exhibitions around CND protest, in 2008 at The Horse Hospital and in 2017 at the Imperial War Museum.

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