

CIVIL DEFENCE

BY Alastair Polson

Civil Defence has provided CND with its most notable real successes up till now. It hardly needs saying that we have substantially failed to communicate the importance and scale of our battles and victories in this area. That, however, is not the point of this paper. The time is right to look at why we have been so successful.

The reasons are the classic ones that are promoted throughout the campaign - in the Civil Defence area they dovetailed perfectly and produced really valuable results.

The first point is the overall strength and coherence of the CND argument: while this may seem obvious, it is an important point because it was recognised that our arguments were correct, and many people in areas where CND was not automatically strong realised and accepted the arguments, having done which they are ripe for further arguments to be put to them and attaining a position in line with that of CND.

The second point was that Civil Defence provided a focus for every CND group, supporter and organisation in the country. The arguments could be used on a person to person basis, on local authorities, councillors, MPs, WRVS volunteers, Red Cross, police, etc., etc. The targets for action, both direct and indirect, were every area of our society, exactly where all CND groups should be operating anyway! But the point is that each group targeted their attacks or discussions where they saw fit, and in so doing, the strength of the campaign was shown in action, and shown winning, most notably in Wales, but elsewhere as well. The flexibility of Nuclear Free Zoning has provided a most effective tool.

I write all this because, especially at this time, it is crucial to be aware of the fact that when the full muscle of CND was flexed, all be it in a spasm, that victory was ours in the form of government climb down over "Hard Rock" and the substantial success of "Hard Luck".

It is also important to recognise this because the Civil Defence issue is about to rise Phoenix-like from the ashes as the government's new statute to force local authorities to participate. There is thus a lot to be done, and the rest of this paper will take the form of a discussion and personal view of this campaign (probably getting into full swing in the winter).

The first thing to decide about such a campaign is its importance - i.e. its rank along with the numerous other campaigns which are currently on the go.

I wish to argue that this campaign is crucial for a number of reasons.

- (1) Civil Defence has provided us with our major past success as said earlier. We should thus concentrate on areas which remain useful (and Civil Defence is not just useful but crucial) and where we are strong, i.e. in decentralised activity pressurising at every level.
- (2) In my judgement, the political make up of the country (England more than Scotland - but the same goes for both) make it inconceivable that local authorities will move into confrontation with government because in such situations they will inevitably lose and the government will win. We must take up the oppositional stance, and we should recognise from the start that local authorities are this time going to be very hard if not impossible to persuade to actually stand and fight.

(3) /

(3) There will be a ready amount of political support from NALGO, STUC, TUC, Labour Party, SNP and perhaps the Alliance. In fact, if we don't lead on this issue at least one of them are bound to ^{do} something about it themselves. it must be us.

The Civil Defence legislation must be represented by us as a major attack, a major initiative against the Peace Movement primarily. This is crucial in order that we can clearly define the wider issues of the disarmament campaign which follow from Civil Defence (i.e. that the enemy is the weapons themselves) and their issues concerning the erosion of local democracy (which we will use in discussions with local authorities) do not become paramount in this issue. We must keep it primarily as a defence issue, a nuclear weapons issue. That is why (3) above is so important, we must get the support behind us, which will happen by a mixture of initiative and co-operation (always a difficult balance).

The question of local authorities is a thorny one. My personal view is that the oppositional stance necessary to fight what is soon, in fact, to be law will be very difficult to achieve. It is for this reason that we must fill that oppositional role and look for ways that local authorities can support us. This may be letting local authorities off the hook, but I think it is realistic. I should say that this kind of attitude to local authorities is not envisaged as a public attitude - that would remain one of demanding non-co-operation with all civil defence measures.

The stakes are high in this area. Organisationally this issue suits us down to the ground, we have won here before. But the fight will be rougher, we will be fighting a more confident government, and a law, a fact which is very important. Success really would affirm CND is here to stay as a major movement, it will strengthen and give heart to groups as they see, as many of them have seen, real, effective successes coming from their work. It would also provide the chance of CND leading a major campaign again. It would clearly be ridiculous if any other organisation led it.

Failure would be a serious blow indeed, and should not be dwelt on at present.