

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is alive and well and gaining members

by Bruce Kent

DESPITE REGULAR REPORTS of its demise, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament has entered the eighties alive and well, with a renewed sense of purpose and a growing membership. The time has gone for nostalgia and has come for facing the challenges of today's militarists.

With a global annual arms expenditure of more than 420 billion dollars, with nuclear weapon proliferation proceeding apace, with first-strike possibilities on the way, military accidents occurring with increasing regularity, those with positive ideas about ending the arms race are getting a more attentive hearing.

Unilateralism, which once produced such convulsive spasms in the thinking of CND opposition, now makes simple common sense, especially as two new British contributions to the arms race, the Polaris replacement and American Cruise missiles, seem to be Government policy.

The Polaris decision underlines the solid irrationality of what passes for serious defence thinking. Those who press for this £5,000 million enterprise no longer try to explain what the next nuclear generation, let alone the present one, is actually *for*. Clearly the independently unusable can hardly present a credible independent threat, and certainly it cannot be squared with our obligation "in good faith" under Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty to reduce our nuclear arsenal.

There has been a significant public response to these British escalations, especially to the Cruise missile proposal. Constructive

signs of public outrage have been evident in East Anglia and Oxfordshire, although the British response is still well below that of Holland and Belgium. There is much to learn from activists in those countries.

Perhaps it is a sign of things to come that Eldon Griffiths, Conservative MP for Bury St. Edmunds, should think it worthwhile to weigh in with legal threats in an attempt to prevent a local poll from being taken in the village of Brandon which is likely to have Cruise missiles dotted around its beautiful countryside.

Over recent months the number of inquiries at the CND office has risen steeply and the orchestrated campaign about alleged civil defence has made many realize that the name of today's game is not deterrence but nuclear war fighting.

Two substantial champions have appeared to press a more rational and less dangerous approach. It is unlikely that the late Earl Mountbatten would have added the CND circle to his many other decorations, but his Strasbourg speech of May 1979 ("Wars cannot be fought with nuclear weapons. Their perils...") has produced re-thinking in areas light years away from the traditional CND constituency.

Champion number two is Edward Thompson whose pamphlet, *Protest and Survive*, brilliantly exposes the inhumanity and irrationality of the nuclear war fighting concept.

The new movement for a nuclear-free Europe which, with much Thompson input, has just been launched by the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, restores an international dimension to CND thinking.

In short, CND, preserved through hard days by a determined group of sloggers, now faces challenges and opportunities as great as those which first brought it into being.