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## THE CAMPAIGN FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Along with the other members of the Leeds branch I became active in CND (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). My first activity was to take part in the first Aldermaston March in April 1958. I was immediately made part of our sales team. Comrade Hendrie (the Major) and I were top of the sales chart with approximately 500 hundred items of literature each. This became my role for all the future Aldermaston Marches.

At the end of each day the sales team was exhausted. If the day's march was fifteen miles, then we would walk 30. I remember one year at the end of one of the days I sat on a wall and when the transport arrived to pick me up I could not get off; I had literally moulded to the shape of the wall. Because of this I was taken to a comrade's house close to where the march was to restart the following day to have a night's rest in a proper bed, with an added bonus of the following morning off. This dream was shattered about 08.30 that morning. There was a phone call from Bob Pennington telling me to go to the Royal Festival Hall and sell at the Paul Robeson concert that was taking place there.

At one of the rest points on the Aldermaston March in 1963, I was selling our literature when I was approached by a member of one of the other left-wing organisations. He said that he had in his possession a document that had been leaked from one of the government departments. He asked if I would like to read it. My first reaction was to be careful; was I being set up? I decided that if

this was a leaked document, set up or no set up it would be worth reading. The document made reference to the existence of RSGs (Regional Seats of Government). These were deep bunkers positioned in strategic positions around the country. It outlined the importance of these RSGs if central government was out of action for any reason. This was the first day of the march and the *Newsletter* was due out the following morning (Saturday). I immediately sent one of our messengers with this document to the London office. An extra page was put into the paper with a reprint of the document. We never sold so many *Newsletters* in one day as we did that Saturday. We sold it on the slogan 'Wanna Buy A Secret?'

One year on the march on a very hot sunny day a crowd of building workers was standing on the side of the road as I walked past a pub. What caught my eye was the pint that one of them was holding. The sun was shining on it and making it sparkle; it was love at first sight. He must have noticed me looking longingly at the glass, for he held it out and told me to drink it. I put it down in one. Now that's what I call working-class solidarity.

The marches were very hard and strenuous, but very exhilarating. Tens of thousands took part. One year, on the last day of the march, we had a very large contingent with the Socialist Labour League banner leading it. As we rounded the corner at Parliament Square to go down to Trafalgar Square, our contingent was stopped and held up. As soon as the end of those in front had started to enter the square we were allowed to continue, so in fact we were leading a section of the march down to the square. The public address was introducing the contingents into the square. You could almost detect it choking him when he had to say, 'And here comes the Socialist Labour League'. That day there were an estimated 100,000 at the rally in Trafalgar Square.

No one who took part in the Aldermaston Marches could fail to pay tribute to the excellent organisation that made the marches possible. When the march arrived at its destination at the end of the day the marquees were already erected and sections of the march were directed into their allocated marquee. Food stalls were waiting, portable toilets erected and medical facilities ready for anyone who needed attention. The following morning as soon as the march was

under way the clearing up squads went into action. One team started the mammoth task of taking down the marquees, loading them into trucks and then going off to the day's finishing point and re-erecting them. The latrine squad had a specially equipped tanker and the disposal was by arrangement with the appropriate council. The catering squad loaded all their equipment into their truck and headed for the lunch-break destination. The final act was for the clearing-up team to spread themselves across the area each with a plastic waste bag and collect every piece of litter in the area. The fields were always cleaner when the march left than when it arrived. A truck collected the bags and disposed of them at the dump. This operation was repeated at every stopping place. The population along the route had been told to expect a march consisting of dropouts, and to expect the fields to be left in a mess. The locals were impressed and that made it easier for the future marches. Mind you the enemies of CND were angry because they could not use rubbish and bad organisation to denigrate the march and so had to concentrate on the aims of CND. By the same token the media tried to create the impression that the march was one big drug and sex orgy. This type of opposition is, of course, still going on whenever young people get together in mass activity.

We were soon to be involved in turning CND towards the trade-union movement and unilateral disarmament. This inevitably brought us into conflict with the Communist Party and the 'left' in the Labour Party. At the annual conference of the Labour Party at Brighton in 1957, Nye Bevan, leader of the left-wing group organised around the weekly newspaper *Tribune*, had just returned from Moscow convinced that their policy of calling for Britain to keep nuclear weapons was the correct one. The thinking behind this was that if Britain did not have the Bomb we would be at the mercy of American imperialism. He threw in his lot with the Communist Party demand for summit talks to bring about disarmament. Bevan spoke at the conference in support of the National Executive opposition to Norwood's resolution, moved by Comrade Vivienne Mendelson, calling for unilateral disarmament. His call was 'we must not go naked into the conference chamber'. Then came the spectacle of Bevanites heckling Bevan.

The Communist Party went full steam for the policy of summit talks. In fact they judged your socialism by your attitude to summit talks. Believe me, using this as a yardstick there were many strange socialists around. We also experienced the nauseating nationalism that the Communist Party plunged themselves into. The Leeds Trades Council, under the influence of the Communist Party, organised two busloads to go and demonstrate outside the American airbase just outside York. John Walls and I went along to the demonstration. The CP members had Union Jacks pinned to their hats and/or their coats. A number of them carried Union Jacks and waved them as though they were fighting the American War of Independence all over again. The favourite slogan was 'Yanks Go Home'. This type of thing went on for a number of years.

Yorkshire CND organised a demonstration in Scarborough on the east coast. Leeds Trades Council had agreed to take part, which meant of course that the Communist Party was preparing to take part, even though the main theme was to be for unilateral disarmament. They turned up with their Union Jacks and summit talk posters. The Trades Council had agreed that its banner should be carried on the demonstration. Yorkshire CP full-time organiser Bert Ramelson and I were to carry it. It was a very large and successful demonstration, with many people calling for unilateral disarmament. The only remark that I remember making to Ramelson was that 'there were a lot of American imperialists on the demo'. (One of the reasons why the Communist Party opposed unilateral disarmament was that this would 'leave us at the mercy of American imperialists'.)

At the next May Day demonstration in Leeds I saw what could only be described as Stalinism personified. Once again the Communist Party turned up with their Union Jacks, but this time with large flags of many of the UN countries. The scramble was not around the Soviet Union's flag. It was to see who would have the 'honour' of carrying the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack at the head of the other flag carriers.

Bert Ramelson, by far the most able of the CP members, used to hold an open-air meeting in Victoria Square outside the Town Hall every Friday lunchtime, which was a feature of Leeds political

life. One such lunchtime he was speaking on summit talks. I kept interrupting and asking him questions. At a certain point an old lady who had been listening turned on me and started to berate me something shocking. There was always a policeman near at hand to keep the peace and he came over to see what the trouble was, and so did Ramelson. She told the policeman that I must be 'one of them communists' because I was having a go at the speaker, pointing to Ramelson.

There is a very serious point to this story because the media, along with the right wing, were running a campaign to convince everyone that the Communist Party controlled CND. Unilateral disarmament was linked to the CP and Moscow. The idea that CND was a CP front organisation was used quite deliberately by the state machine and not without some success. In many discussions on the question of 'ban the bomb' I was accused of being a stooge of Moscow. But it was always easy to prove to them that they were the ones who supported the policy of the Communist Party, opposed to unilateral disarmament.

It would be naïve to think that the government and the media did not know or understand the struggle against the CP's efforts to swing the CND away from unilateral disarmament. That they did know was confirmed in October 1999 when a TV programme exposed Vic Allen, a Leeds university lecturer, as an agent in CND acting for the Stasi secret police of East Germany.

But it wasn't just East European security agencies which spied on CND. On 10 May 1958 the *Newsletter* had a report that Harry Newton, the shop steward for the Leeds electricity meter-readers' branch, had been dismissed instantly, accused of insolence to a 'superior'. Harry Newton had a letter published in the *Newsletter* on 2 August informing the readers that his dispute had come to a successful conclusion. He thanked his workmates for their solidarity in standing by him and supporting him financially and campaigning for his reinstatement. He finished his letter by saying, 'I think my case illustrates once again that whenever we workers unite together almost anything is possible.'

During the late 1950s and the early 1960s Harry Newton was around CND and the Communist Party. Later he did some work

with the NUM and became a Workers' Educational Association lecturer. While watching the spy programme on BBC television in 2002, featuring Vic Allen, a familiar face appeared on the screen: Harry Newton. The viewers were told by the narrator that Mr Newton spied on CND in Leeds on behalf of MI5. So we had two of them in there, one for the East and one for the West. I wonder how closely they worked together. Any financial contributions that came our way from Mr Newton were very welcome. Like everyone else he had to pay his way. Newton died some years ago so unfortunately we are not able to pursue him for compensation. As for Vic Allen, his activities have to be looked at. He made a visit to Nigeria and finished up in a Nigerian jail but he took two of our comrades in with him. They were both leaders in the national union that represented workers on the waterfront. Both of them would have been known to the authorities as Trotskyists. Allen was an Stalinist agent, reporting to the Stasi of East Germany. The question has to be asked, what happened in Nigeria?

The family that lived next door to my father's parents asked Dad to be godfather to their young son. That youngster grew up to be Detective Sergeant Harold Robinson of the Leeds CID. I first met him in his official capacity when he led a raid on a Leeds pub where many of the Leeds left gathered on a Thursday night to listen to Eddie O'Donnell's Trad Jazz Band. I assured him that Biggs (the train robber who was on the run at the time) wasn't in the pub, and he told me all they were interested in was under-age drinking.

Leeds CND organised a rally outside the Town Hall as part of a propoganda and recruitment drive. Not long after we had started members of the Young Socialists selling *Keep Left* pointed out that they had noticed a couple who looked out of place. I moved around watching them and noticed that they did not seem to know anyone. I approached and asked if they would like to buy a copy of the *Newsletter*. They declined saying that they already supported the cause. I responded by asking them to buy one for the *Police Gazette* and their files. I moved away and asked someone who had a camera to go and take their photographs and tell them that it was for our files.

Shortly after this a figure appeared from around the corner of

the Town Hall: Detective Sergeant Harold Robinson. At that moment the two would-be Pinkertons moved away and made their way round the Town Hall to come up behind the chief. I followed them at a discreet distance. The three of them were talking on the corner near the police station. Have you ever been in a situation where you know that you are really going to enjoy a situation, a moment that you want to savour and implant in your memory forever? That's how I remember feeling. I crept up behind them and I said, 'Hello, hello, hello, what have we here?' As I walked past them I said to Detective Sergeant Harold Robinson, 'They're no use to you now; we have their photographs.' After that messages were got to my parents via a relative telling them that I was heading for trouble. One such message said that I was involved in dangerous and illegal political activity. This had the desired effect on my parents, who became very concerned and tried to convince me that I had come under the influence of troublemakers.

Jack Gale and I were both convinced that our phones were tapped. One night we were discussing the question of the police activity around the CND. I can't remember how we got on to the idea but we decided to try and put one over on the police, especially Detective Sergeant Harold Robinson. Only Jack and I knew of this, not even Jack's wife Celia knew. We planned a telephone discussion where we would discuss the details of a bogus previously-arranged CND Rally in Victoria Square in front of the Town Hall. Jack and I telephoned each other from different parts of Leeds. We had a series of telephone conversations which suggested that contingents would be coming from various areas, such as Bradford, Huddersfield and Sheffield. On the allotted day Jack and I went into Leeds and stood on the top of the Town Hall steps. I think we had arranged the time of 13.00 hours for people to start arriving. One or two police officers kept walking past the bottom of the steps. This was normal as the police station was just on the corner. Then we noticed that the same copper started to pace up and down. He was joined by two more; I think one was an inspector. We went into the Town Hall and walked round until we arrived at the back door. There were no signs of activity outside. Then we spotted the peaked-cap bobby who was at the front of the Town Hall walking past the end



*Talking to Leeds University students in the Fenton Pub, Woodhouse Lane*

of the street; we followed him past the entrance to the library and turned the corner into Great George Street. There it was: a bus full of police officers, and just behind it a minibus with half a dozen of the CID branch of CND with their branch secretary Detective Sergeant Harold Robinson.

I must say I was very surprised that the plan had worked. I thought that they would be too sophisticated to fall for it. I would have expected them at least to be able to check it out one way or another. It is also possible that the police did not know of the activities of Harry Newton.

There they were as large as life. We went back to the front of the Town Hall and noticed that the police stationed there were becoming very restless. So back we went to the buses. Three or four of the occupants were standing on the pavement deep in discussion. One of them was our favourite Detective Sergeant Harold Robinson. As we approached he spotted the two of us. As we made to pass I asked him what was going on. He said something like, 'You tell me; where are you going?' 'To the library', I replied, 'There is nothing happening today so we thought we would do some research.' We did not look back, so I can't say what happened next.

Through the auspices of the Young Socialist newspaper *Keep Left* we organised a weekly jazz night at the Old Red House public house. There was a nice big room upstairs with its own private entrance making it easy to take entrance fees from those attending. There was also a bar so people could be contained in the one room. One night we had Dominic Behan as the star guest, but mainly it was a Trad Jazz night, usually with Eddie O'Donnell. We had these jazz nights for six or eight weeks and in that period of time we built quite a regular attendance from around the labour movement. Then one night we were raided by the police. We should have seen this coming at least an hour before. There were two couples sporting sweaters and wearing CND badges. They had not been before and were not known to anyone there. Also before the raid someone pointed out to me that a bloke with ginger hair was trying to encourage a member of the Young Socialists to have a drink of beer by offering to buy him a pint. The YS member, Barry Brier, did not drink, but more than that he was under age. Ginger was downing pints as though there was no tomorrow, and when the raid came he was well under the influence of drink. As soon as the inspector led in the might of the Leeds police force the police spies went over to where they thought there was an under-age drinker. I realised that I had considered the jazz night as a night out. As Leeds Area Secretary I felt that I should have spotted the tell-tale signs.

The first thing I did was to point out to the inspector that the only person who was under the influence was one of his own men. I also explained to him how Ginger had tried to encourage Barry to drink beer and had failed. I said that this was a lousy way to get a result and smear a young man's reputation. To my surprise he agreed with me and asked who it was, so I pointed out the Ginger cop to him. I went over to Ginger with the inspector and others confirmed that my accusations were correct. Ginger was told to take no further part in the proceedings and that he would be dealt with later. Ginger let me know that he wasn't very pleased with me.

We were all told to stand in two lines and give our names and addresses to a police officer. In the room were two young students from the Middle East who were obviously very uneasy and when it was their turn they refused to answer the questions. The police officer

reported this to the inspector who in turn brought them over to me. I explained to him that these two young men lived under a very repressive regime and this type of thing frightened them. The inspector told me to tell them to give a name and address, and repeated 'a name and address'. So a couple of students who were members of ours sorted them out with a name and address. The inspector then closed down the night's entertainment, apologising for spoiling the night for everyone. He muttered something as we left about how ridiculous the whole thing had been. 'There must be someone got it in for you lot.'

When we got outside I was on the pavement with Cliff Slaughter and I saw Ginger on the other side of the road with two of his mates, pointing at us. The two mates ran across the road, bundled Cliff into a car, and took him off to Millgarth police station. A few of us went to the police station to see if there was anything we could do. We were in luck; our 'liberal' inspector was there. We explained to him what had happened, and thought that it was a case of Ginger's mates getting the wrong man. Cliff was let out a little later. After that whenever I was on a demo I kept my eyes open for a copper with ginger hair.

Over the years our work in Leeds was to take as active a part in CND as we could, helping to organise and taking part in demonstrations, outdoor and indoor public meetings, leaflet distributions at factory gates and the Leeds city centre, and getting resolutions about ending the manufacture of nuclear weapons raised in as many organisations as we could, especially in trade union branches. Not one ward or constituency of the Labour Party was left untouched. We played a big part in turning CND to the labour movement. The main opposition to this turn came from the Communist Party. At one Leeds meeting of CND and supporters a representative of the Communist Party said: 'If we don't stop this concentration on the labour movement we will scare away our supporters from other areas, such as church groups and the middle class supporters.' Say no more.