

Norway's Fight Against New European Nuclear Weapons

by Jon Grepstad

During October and November 1979 a massive opposition developed in Norway against the NATO plans for new nuclear weapons in Europe. A very intense debate erupted and more or less flooded the media for six weeks.

Although the NATO plans had been mentioned in two or three major newspapers in the summer 1979, concrete information about the plans became known to a larger Norwegian public only in the middle of October. And it was only then that the import and probable consequences of the proposed deployment of cruise and Pershing II missiles were recognised by larger groups, and the plan to some extent was also perceived as a link in a comprehensive programme for nuclear rearmament.

In a somewhat simplified perspective, two events in particular sparked off the public debate: the visit of US arms control experts Arthur M. Cox and Herbert Scoville (former CIA deputy director for science and technology), and the spontaneous launching of the campaign "No to new nuclear weapons".

The two US arms control experts visited Oslo on about 10 October as guests of the International Peace Research Institute (PRIO) and the Norwegian Pugwash Committee. Cox and Scoville warned that a deployment of new nuclear weapons might open up a new and uncontrollable arms race in Europe. If, on the other hand, no decision for production and deployment was made by the NATO Council, the possibility would exist of using the threat of future deployment as a bargaining card in negotiations with the USSR. The latter might agree to negotiate a withdrawal of its forces and reduction of its medium-range missiles, provided no pre-empting decision on deployment of the new weapons were made by the NATO Council.

On 20 October preparations for a campaign against new missiles started, and the campaign was publicly launched on 25 October, the day of the comprehensive autumn term debate on foreign policy in Parliament. The initiative of a campaign was taken by a couple of activists in the Norwegian peace movement and the head of the information office of the Norwegian Directorate for civil defence and civil emergency planning. Although the initiators of the campaign had followed this matter for some time in newspapers etc. abroad, the campaign was a spontaneous enterprise, and did not originate as a result of debates in any organisation. The initiators were soon joined by other people, some of whom had been active (as had two of the initiators) in the Campaign against the neutron bomb.

The first step of the campaign was the publishing of an appeal in some of the major Oslo newspapers on 25 October, when the Foreign Minister was to present the question of new missiles to Parliament. The appeal was signed by 100 persons, most of whom were well known in different sectors of Norwegian society, and who could not easily be stigmatised as "professional protesters". The signatures had been collected over the telephone in the course of two days. At the same time as the appeal was published in Norwegian newspapers it was presented to the Prime Minister by a delegation from the campaign.

The campaign and the appeal was directed explicitly against nuclear weapons in both West and East Europe (as the campaign against the neutron bomb had been directed against both the neutron bomb and USSR arms build-up).

After the Foreign Minister's speech in Parliament on

25 October, it was clear that the Government probably would support a NATO decision in favour of Pershing II and cruise missiles, even if the Minister's speech was couched in cautious terms. But it was also obvious that the Government would meet considerable opposition in its own party, the Labour Party. How strong that opposition would be was not yet known.

The Foreign Minister's speech was to be debated in Parliament on 1 November. The campaign launched a telephone relay, asking people through leaflets, letters, advertisements etc., to telephone their support of the appeal to the campaigning office and to ask friends and colleagues to do the same thing. Since time was limited, this was the best way to spread the campaign. In the course of 3½ days, the campaign received about 1,500 statements of support over the phone. These were presented to the Speaker in Parliament on 1 November. The day before the campaign had presented all MPs with a 6 page statement arguing against the NATO plans, and with reference to a number of authoritative sources. The statement may be summarised as follows:

1. A decision in favour of NATO's long-range missiles will most probably lead to new increases in nuclear armaments in the coming years.
2. The nuclear weapons will not increase NATO's capability of deterrence.
3. NATO has even today at its disposal nuclear systems that may be compared with the Soviet Union's SS-20.
4. A decision in favour of new long-range missiles will make negotiations difficult and will be an obstacle to arms control.
5. The Government has not presented an analysis of the probable consequences of introduction of new missiles.
6. A decision in favour of new nuclear weapons will conflict with statements that the Government has made earlier. (This last point referred, for example, to statements about the necessity of halting the nuclear arms race, e.g. the statement by the Foreign Minister in connection with the neutron bomb.)

The statement to the MPs concluded with an appeal to each Member of Parliament to make efforts to ensure a decision in Brussels that would not lead to production and deployment of new long-range missiles in Europe. The statement further asked "that initiatives be taken for effective and gradual dismantling of the nuclear systems of the Warsaw Pact and NATO in Europe".

The campaign continued the collection of signatures for the appeal, mainly through leaflets and signature forms, partly received over the phone, partly through advertisements in large newspapers. From time to time large advertisements were published with a selection of names of signatories. Throughout November local groups sprung up throughout the country which organised public meetings and campaigns for signatures based on the appeal. The campaign had 15-20 local groups and a large number of individual contacts.

A press service was developed with regular press bulletins either giving factual information on the question (and information about developments abroad) or making political statements on current developments.

At an early stage the campaign appealed to the President of the USSR to abstain from further production and

deployment of the SS-20 missile.

One of the main functions of the campaign was that of a catalyst of opposition. The campaign concentrated on the collection of signatures for its appeal and the spreading of information. The campaign made efforts to maintain a certain standard or quality with regard to technical arms control and disarmament issues, and was successful in this attempt. Unlike the campaign against the neutron bomb, contacts with leading politicians were mostly limited to formal delegations. Lobbying was left to opposition groups within the various parties. On the whole, the campaign was only part of a broad movement, but as a catalyst a very important part. An indicator of the intensity of the debate in newspapers is the fact that the campaign, which subscribed to a newspaper clipping service, in the course of 7 or 8 weeks received more than 6,000 paper clippings on nuclear weapons, most of them dealing with the current issue.

The campaign was a campaign of individuals, organisations could not be affiliated with the campaign. Thus the members of the steering committee functioned as private persons, not as representatives of organisations or political parties that they might be members of. This structure was chosen partly for practical, partly for political reasons. Since time was scarce, (the campaign was a constant and nearly inhumanly tough fight of deadlines and time limits), it was crucial to avoid a structure that involved time-consuming formal debates, as a campaign consisting of organisations so often entails, and on the other hand a campaign of individuals would function far more effectively vis-a-vis groups and political parties where opinions were divided on the issue. It may be an indication of the extreme time pressure that the steering committee never had the time to minute their meetings. Many decisions had to be taken after consultations on the phone.

Altogether the appeal of the campaign received 69,000 signatures in the course of 6 weeks. During the final week public meetings and marches were organised in several larger towns and cities. A delegation was also sent to the demonstrations in Brussels on 9 December. In a final full

page advertisement in the principal Labour Party newspaper, and also published in another leading Oslo newspaper, the campaign summarised the opposition to the NATO plans by listing major organisations, political parties and sections of political parties that had adopted resolutions against the new missiles.

11 out of 20 county boards of the governing Labour Party opposed the plans, and only one county board of representatives of the Labour Party passed a resolution supporting the Government's position. 10 out of 20 county women's organisations of the Labour Party protested against the plans (and probably none supported the plans). A large number of local sections of the Labour Party were against the plans.

The Radical Liberal Party and the Socialist Left Party (both of which received 4-5 per cent of the votes in general elections) opposed the plans, as did the Communist Party. All political youth organisations, except the Conservatives, opposed the plans for Pershing II and cruise missiles. 7 large trade union federations opposed the plans, and a large number of individual trade unions. Further, a large number of peace organisations, student organisations, women's organisations etc., were against the plans (as was the Association of war veterans 1939-45).

In the latter half of November probably more than one third of the Labour Party MPs were against the plans, so were one third of the board of representatives of the Christian People's Party (it should be noted that the Church Council's Committee on Socioethical Issues had strongly opposition in the agrarian Centre Party).

After the Brussels decision to introduce the new weapons attention was averted from this issue by the possibility of a government crisis over a domestic issue. The intense debate therefore subsided. But there is abundant evidence that both the intense nuclear debate and the Government's conduct in this issue made a lasting impression on Norwegian politics that may show its effects in future work for nuclear disarmament.

Further coverage of Norway's struggle for nuclear disarmament will follow in the next Bulletin.

Support for Poland

At a public meeting held in Newcastle-upon-Tyne to discuss European Nuclear Disarmament (Speaker: E.P. Thompson; Chairman: Eric Robson) on August 20th, and attended by some 700 people, the following message was agreed to:

"This public meeting of citizens of Newcastle-upon-Tyne sends greetings to the citizens of Gdansk and to fellow trade unionists in Poland now on strike. We wish them success in their struggles for better conditions, for a democratic trade union movement, and for the abolition of censorship. We call upon NATO and Warsaw powers to refrain from any intervention in Polish affairs, and to

leave the Polish people to settle matters in their own way. At the same time we express our hope to our Polish friends that, when their current problems are resolved, they will join hands with us in a common campaign for European nuclear disarmament and for the establishment in Europe of a nuclear-weapons-free zone."

Voting was by show of hands. The message was passed by an overwhelming majority: in the region of 550 in favour, 40 against, and a few abstentions. (Some persons had by that time already left the hall.)

Every Kind of Exchange

The poet and teacher Christopher Hampton first responded to the END campaign by endorsing the appeal for a nuclear-free zone from Poland to Portugal. He then mobilised the multinational communities of the School of Languages, Polytechnic of Central London and of the North London Whittington Hospital to put their names to a statement

in the spirit of the movement for European Nuclear Disarmament. His MP, Hugh Rossi, has so far ignored his constituent's approaches, Frank Allaun replied in friendly and supportive style. And six months after END's birth Christopher has written some verses in support of the new struggle (see page 18).