

Peace Movement has too much faith in politicians?

by Cathy McDonald
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Demonstrations express political ambitions before the political means necessary to realize them have been created. Demonstrations predict the realization of their own ambitions and thus contribute to that realization, but they cannot themselves achieve them.

John Berger, British philosopher

"Half a million people marched in Brussels today," the speaker announced to great cheers. "Two hundred thousand marched in London, 200,000 in Rome ..." he looked out over the 5,000 peace protestors assembled in front of the Parliament buildings. "I guess we can't match those numbers, but for Ottawa-Hull, this is pretty good."

For the 50,000 Canadians who protested the arms race on Oct. 22, singing and chanting down the main streets of 45 municipalities across the country,

spirits were up, but the feeling of strength and purpose was beginning to wane.

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After all, their main message, "refuse the cruise", was an improbable demand. The Canadian government had already agreed last July to test the American cruise missile in Alberta, despite a year of building protest.

Along with the Pershing II, the cruise is the target of increasingly large and militant protest in Europe. One and a half million people demonstrated over the weekend of Oct. 22, International Disarmament Day, culminating a week of protest actions. The movement is determined to stop the deployment of 572 of the nuclear arms missiles in Europe, scheduled to begin this December.

In Ottawa, the march was quiet. A few chants and songs rippled down the column of people, and soon after arriving on Parliament Hill to listen to speeches, the crowd dissipated.

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"This is one of the most disempowering marches I've been to in my whole life," said participant Derek Rasmussen later that afternoon in his home. "I came out of it totally depressed."

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His house is cold, and 22-year-old Rasmussen lies on his floor-level mattress, looking tired. The former Trent University student now devotes all of his time to being a peace activist, and he is disillusioned with the Canadian movement.

"We're farting around," he said. "Look at the European example. They hit the streets. The media are down-playing it, but since when do you see thousands getting arrested? They're filling the jails in West Germany. People aren't writing (letters) politely anymore...."

Rasmussen is part of a small but steadily growing movement in Canada

that is frustrated with traditional forms of protest and is looking to more militant ways of making its voice heard. He belongs to the Alliance for Non-Violent Action, an Ontario-based coalition of peace groups.

The group has organized many acts of civil disobedience, including a Remembrance Day, 1981, blockade of Litton Industries plant in Toronto. Rasmussen's first arrest occurred at that sit-in, where he and 22 others were dragged away from the plant where cruise missile guidance systems are produced.

The alliance repeated the event last year, where 150 were arrested in front of 1,000 supporters. This year, three days of actions are planned for the week following Nov. 11.

Civil disobedience has also become popular in Montreal. For two days after the Oct. 22 demonstration, protestors set up blockades at the American and Soviet embassies and successfully closed the Canadian Armed Forces recruitment centre for a day.

McGill University student Normand Beaudet, one of 45 people arrested, said he participated because demonstrations are not effective. "When you get 20,000 people out on the street in Montreal demonstrating against nuclear buildup and the government doesn't listen, you have to take further steps that are still non-violent," he said. "CD (civil disobedience) is one of them."

Rasmussen echoed that frustration. He said the cruise-testing agreement signed last July shows the futility of demonstrations, petitions and letter-writing.

Even though a December Gallup poll showed 56 per cent of Canadians opposed testing of the cruise, the issue was decided by cabinet without parliamentary debate, and was endorsed by

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both the Liberal and Conservative parties. Trudeau's office reported receiving the second-largest number of letters on any single Canadian issue.

People are outraged the government can thumb its nose at popular opinion, Rasmussen says, yet the peace movement will not admit that their tactics may educate people, but are not effective in achieving political power.

The Canadian peace movement seems to have admitted losing its battle over the cruise-testing issue. Except for Toronto, where 25,000 people have created the biggest march in that city's history,

the size of the Oct. 22 demonstrations were down from anti-cruise protests last year.

In Vancouver, NDP MP Pauline Jewett vowed to continue the fight to reverse Canada's cruise agreement. But spokesperson Helen Spiegelman said the march of 4,500 was purposefully downplayed by organizers, and in fact was merely a show of support for the European struggle. The previous April, 60,000 Vancouverites marched against the cruise.

A peace camp erected last year at Co-Lake, Alberta where the cruise will be tested, has closed for lack of popular support.

With the cruise issue gone by the wayside in Canada, so has a more fundamental question been ignored by the peace movement: Canada's political sovereignty. American pressure to test its missile was quiet, but no doubt played an integral role in Canada's decision.

"We've got to do something or we'll get blown up," said Dan Miller. "If everyone takes the attitude that nothing can be done, nothing's going to happen."

Trudeau countered anti-cruise protests in an "open letter to Canadians" last July, placing the decision in the context of Canada's commitment to the 1978 American Treaty Organization. The peace movement argued the testing agreement does not fall under the NATO charter, but shied away from talking about Canada's relationship to NATO and the United States.

Even the NDP, whose standing platform to oppose Canada's membership in NATO, would not voice that politically unpopular position in Parliament.

As for opposing the cruise missile, the peace movement protests the arms race in general, emphasizing the horror of nuclear war. And to an extent the message has hit its mark. One participant at the Ottawa Oct. 22 rally said the fear that moved him to march was the possibility of nuclear war.

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The movement has grown rapidly in the two years, with coalitions forming in every major Canadian city, and reporting a wide range of public opinion.

But the size of the October rallies could be a sign that momentum is being lost. Rasmussen says the peace movement has grown largely because of a successful death scare—warning of the imminent destruction of the planet. And he predicts a movement based on fear will only motivate people for a limited time, unless it can show that change is possible.

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In Europe, the cruise protest is not just a question of defense strategy, but of political sovereignty. "The cruise is not an important weapon militarily, but politically," Rasmussen says the threat to NATO solidarity presented by popular protest is actually a threat to American control over western countries.

The cruise and Pershing missiles are launched at the sole command of the United States, therefore their deployment in Europe shows the surrendering of sovereignty.

And the cruise is not just a European issue. "They're putting 3,000 cruises on battle ships around the world. They're not Euromissiles, they're Third World missiles. Most of them will be aimed at the Third World—it's the most important weapon for oppressing third world countries."

The Canadian peace movement is now looking for a focus for the upcoming national election. "Make Canada a peacemaker" is the general thrust of a \$300,000 Peace Petition Caravan campaign, aimed at making Canada a nuclear weapon free zone. Rallies, concerts, a cross-country caravan and election-work will all be part of the campaign to stop Canadian research, production and testing of nuclear weapons systems.

The attitude of the Canadian peace movement is clearly to put faith in elected politicians, even though the government effectively by-passed parliament in order to ratify the cruise-testing agreement.

Canadians are not as politicized as Europeans over the lack of say in matters of national defense, but the peace movement is certainly not helping them understand that powerlessness.

But people like Rasmussen represent a change in attitude.



In Europe, and in pockets in Canada, people are taking power over their destiny through civil disobedience, he says. For example, in Grand Valle, Quebec, the people took over the town for 11 days in October to demand action from the provincial government over chronic unemployment.

"I don't think it's far off that people are going to get politicized ... in the next five years there's going to be a recession. It's going to get worse—there's a slight upturn now. People are going to get politicized and take to the streets and take power into their own hands."

Civil disobedience for peace

by Danielle Comeau
and Stephen Downes
Canadian University Press

CALGARY—The 13 defendants in suits and dresses sat quietly on the front bench of the courtroom. None wore political buttons, unusual for this group. Good manners were the order of the day in court.

Occasionally, a defendant broke for the door, presumably to go for a walk or to the bathroom, only to be stopped by a bailiff.

These people, including two University of Calgary students, had strolled into a local armed forces recruitment centre June 8 with children and provisions. They wanted to talk about the decision to test the cruise missile in Alberta announced the same day.

They got a cool reception from the army recruiters, who called the police and had them carried off. All were charged with public mischief, punishable by up to 14 years imprisonment.

Similar actions in Edmonton resulted in the removal of protestors, but no charges were laid.

Members of Calgaryans for Non-

Violent Action, including U of C students Eric Bellows and Kevin Coleman, are on trial for their alleged act of civil disobedience.

The crown charged that the defendants "did wilfully obstruct ... the operation of a public place" when they occupied the recruitment centre, a breach of section 387 of the Criminal Code.

Although the armed forces officer said the group "effectively occupied the office" by sitting on the floor and blocking the door, defense witnesses and a photograph revealed that the group sat peacefully in chairs when they arrived.

Police said the demonstrators had been quiet throughout the action.

The armed forces officer admitted locking the office door to prevent more demonstrators from entering the room and "to confine the people who were already there."

"Our intention was not to disrupt or disturb the office at all that day," said defendant Kathy Duncan.

She said the group sat on the floor only after the door had been locked behind them. This way, they

could talk without shouting or moving furniture, she said.

"There was no substantial interference in the work of the centre caused by them going in," Rynd said. If they were not wanted there, it was a case of trespass, not mischief, he said.

The crown questioned the group's intent. "Surely, you must have known that the army didn't want you there?" asked crown prosecutor Harold Haggland.

He said the defendants must have known they would disrupt the office by arriving together with provisions and children.

"In other words, you forced your presence on them," he said.

Rynd surprised the court by invoking the Canadian Charter of Rights, in addition to the defense arguments. This move will attempt to hold the military accountable to the Charter.

Some onlookers believe this move may endanger the defendants' chances as the crown is likely to appeal a decision which involves the Charter.

Proceedings, which began Oct. 20, continue.

