

ACTION FOR PEACE



Winter 2025/2026 | Issue 125



FEATURING...

- Local news
- The loss of Nuclear Free Local Authorities
- The final part in our history of Sheffield's peace movement article trilogy by Richard Bakewell
- Local group revival plans

LATEST NEWS

Over the winter period, we held our AGM and went to a National CND demo at Marham. On top of this, there's been numerous local demos (e.g. at Menwith Hill) and events (such as a screening of 'Gentle, Angry Women' for International Women's Day and holding a stall at the University of York's sustainability fair).



Internationally, **we've become increasingly concerned by the continued bombing of Iran by the US and Israel.** We call on the UK government to stop its support for this illegal action. Now more than ever, **we need political leaders that will reassert international law, diplomacy and dialogue.**

REGIONAL UPDATES

Did you know that 22nd January marked 5 years since the Nuclear Ban Treaty (The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons) became international law?

We celebrated this important step towards nuclear disarmament that the TPNW provides us with, marking the occasion in Leeds and Keighley.

At a time of rising tensions and growing nuclear risks, this anniversary is a reminder that a different future is not only possible, it's already underway. **Following the expiration of the New START Treaty, it's vital that we keep campaigning to remind people that nuclear weapons should never be used. We now face the real prospect of no limits at all on the world's two largest nuclear arsenals.**

We're asking CND members and supporters to write to the Foreign Secretary and urge the government to press for the renewal of New START, and to show real leadership on nuclear disarmament.

We held our AGM on Saturday 24th January.



Before the voting on resolutions and coordinating committee positions, Mothin Ali (Green Party's Deputy Leader) gave an inspiring talk on what the Green Party are doing to work towards nuclear disarmament, and we hope to continue a working relationship with him in the future. Moving forwards, we decided to work towards making a podcast series focused on inter-generational dialogue about the past, present, and future of Yorkshire's CND movement.



Thanks to everyone who joined us at RAF Marham on Saturday 28th March to protest against Britain's purchase of nuclear-capable fighter jets, where there were around 300 people present. We had a full minibus and car full of campaigners join the demo, which was great!

The demo at Marham happened because of Keir Starmer's decision to buy F-35As and give the RAF a nuclear role for the first time in almost 30 years. This was made without any debate or vote in Parliament.

Local groups organised meetings in Bradford, Leeds and Todmorden. They are hoping to re-build their groups and bring in new members of the public who are becoming increasingly aware of the nuclear tensions worldwide. Bradford CND are now working with other local peace groups to organise an in-person meeting twice a year, and Leeds CND held a great talk with Richard Burgon (recording available on request). If you would like to get involved with any of these groups, please get in touch with us (info@yorkshirecnd.org.uk)!

CND and peace campaigners across the country have been showing their opposition to the attacks on Iran by the nuclear-armed US and Israel. This included demos in Leeds and London, with insightful speeches from groups including Leeds CND, Leeds PSC, Stop The War & Movement for the Abolition of War. The war with Iran has also raised questions over activities of US bases on British soil, such as Menwith Hill. **A recent article published in 'The Conversation' suggest that the space based infra-red satellites (SBIRS) could be used to track the missiles and one of the downlink stations for SBIRS is Menwith Hill.**

US heavy bombers are currently using RAF Fairford to launch daily bombing missions over Iran with support from planes at RAF



Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath. We're calling on Keir Starmer to end the use of British bases for these illegal attacks and to not drag Britain further into this disastrous conflict.

In Bradford, we were joined by Linda Pentz Gunter for a talk on her new book 'No Nuclear'. It was very insightful, and we are planning on stocking this book for sale on our web shop and on future stalls. This release is especially relevant, considering the UK government's push for nuclear power and the crack appearing in Runit Dome in the Marshall Islands. This includes planning legislation to block community opposition to new nuclear power stations.

To support the growth of our membership, we have created a new membership leaflet. If you would like any to distribute, please get in touch with the Yorkshire CND office. They provide key information about what we campaign about, alongside how to sign up.

INTERNATIONAL UPDATES

It's now been **4 years of war in Ukraine**, with little recent progress made with negotiations beyond the exchange of 157 prisoners from each side. Whilst there were talks held (between the USA, Ukraine and Russia), we are concerned that peace doesn't look like it's on the horizon.

It worries us that this has led to nuclear weapons being back on the table for discussion in Europe. We strongly believe that the answer to the war in Ukraine cannot be to double down on nuclear weapons, but to take action to rule them out. With **Finland planning to lift its long-standing ban on having nuclear weapons on its territory, alongside talks to boost France's nuclear capabilities (with support from 8 other European countries, including the UK).** President Macron explained that "The next 50 years will be an era of nuclear weapons".

On January 27th 2026, the **Doomsday Clock was set at 85 seconds to midnight**, the closest the Clock has ever been to midnight in its history. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists' Science and Security Board (SASB), which sets the Clock, called for **urgent action to limit nuclear arsenals, create international guidelines on the use of AI, and form multilateral agreements to address global biological threats.**



The Loss of Nuclear Free Local Authorities

BY DAVE WEBB

On 31st January 2026 the UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) ceased to exist, after over 45 years of promoting nuclear free zones to people and local authorities throughout the UK and beyond.

It is a sad loss to anti-nuclear campaigners in the north, especially as it is may not be so much due to a lack of support but because of successive national government cuts and austerity measures that have left local governments searching for ways to save money. The NFLA income has always been totally reliant on subscriptions from local and district councils.

It is worth looking back at the key events in Yorkshire and Manchester that initiated the project in the first place...

Leeds was the first city in the UK to formally take an antinuclear position when, on 30 July 1980, Leeds City Council adopted a resolution proposed by Councillor Michael McGowan expressing concern over the buildup of nuclear weapons and committing the city to contacting others to act against the threat that they posed.

Shortly afterwards, on 5 November in Manchester (the city where Ernest Rutherford first split the atom in 1917), the Council also passed a resolution, moved by Councillor Bill Risby, calling on the UK government to refrain from manufacturing or positioning nuclear weapons within city boundaries. It also appealed to other authorities to join them as Nuclear Free Zones. This led to the establishment of the NFLA. Manchester's Policy Committee on 26th October 1981 formally agreed to support the setting up of the Steering Committee and to act as Secretary to the Committee which it did until its recent demise.

Leeds officially became a Nuclear Free Zone on 24 June 1981 and they formed a relationship with local peace groups, promoted peace education and highlighted the possible local impact of a nuclear war.

In October 1981, Bradford Metropolitan Council declared itself to be a nuclear-free



zone and founded the Peace Action Group in 1982, to monitor progress made in establishing the zone, link with other nuclear-free zone local authorities and peace groups and generate new ideas in peace education.

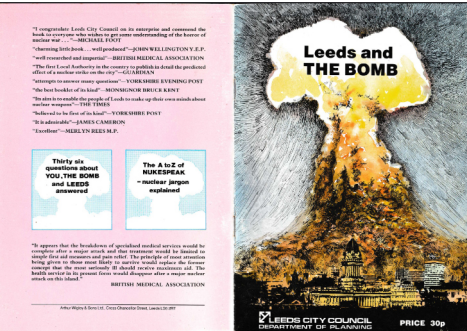
South Yorkshire County Council, along with the city of Sheffield, declared the region a Nuclear Free Zone in 1981 and a 'demilitarised zone'. Road signs were installed to inform visitors of its status and by the end of 1982, over 150 local governments with a total population of over 60% of people in England, Scotland and Wales had declared their areas 'Nuclear Free Zones'.

On 23 February 1982 Wales was declared a nuclear free zone after Clwyd County Council declared itself 'nuclear free'.

Also at the end of 1982, the Thatcher government was proposing to hold a national civil defence exercise called "Hard Rock". CND had built a strong campaign against the exercise, saying that a nuclear war would result in widespread devastation and tens of millions of deaths which could not be dealt with by local councils. They renamed the exercise "Hard Luck" and argued that any preparations were pointless and misled the public about the survivability of nuclear war. The NFLA councils agreed and 20 of them refused to take part with seven more saying they would only participate in a limited way.

As a result "Hard Rock" was postponed indefinitely and effectively cancelled. Rather than waste resources and time on Civil Defence, many councils instead created emergency planning teams to deal with domestic situations like flooding, local evacuations and chemical incidents.

Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and others created peace officer and peace education officer roles within their councils. They would help provide and distribute information on the effects of nuclear war and nuclear power on the people and the environment and support events held by peace and environment groups. Unfortunately, these posts gradually diminished as government funding and antagonism made them more difficult to sustain.



However, in May 1991 Leeds City Council produced a booklet "Leeds and the Bomb" which outlined the potential effects of a nuclear strike on the city and they also promoted various peace exhibitions. Another publication "Leeds and Bradford Under a Cloud" about what would happen in the case of a radiation leak from a nuclear power station, was produced by Leeds Peace & Emergency Planning Unit in 1995.

Manchester adopted the Peace Dove as the city's symbol of its nuclear-free status and the dove appears in several locations in the city. It was the first European city to formally support the TPNW, on 28 November 2018 when the council passed a unanimous resolution urging the UK government to sign and ratify this treaty.



In 2021, Leeds City Council passed a resolution proposed by Councillor David Blackburn (then also NFLA Chair) expressing regret at the actions of nuclear-armed states and backing the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) which had just come into force. A peace tree was also planted in Park Square in the centre of the city to commemorate the event.

1982 was also an important year for the international anti-nuclear movement. On June 24, at the United Nations in New York, then Mayor Takeshi Araki of Hiroshima called for cities throughout the world to transcend national borders and work together to press for nuclear abolition. The cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki then went on to establish "The World Conference of Mayors for Peace through Inter-city Solidarity" (now known as "Mayors for Peace"), composed of mayors around the world who formally expressed support for this call.

Today there are 8,563 participating cities in 166 countries and regions around the world, 87 of them in the UK. Manchester joined Mayors for Peace in 1984 and was appointed a Mayors for Peace Vice President in 2001 & Lead City in 2013. In 2015 Manchester set up the UK & Ireland Chapter of Mayors for Peace and in October 2024 they hosted the Mayors for Peace Executive Conference. Last November Manchester Council also marked the 45th anniversary of the 'Manchester Initiative' and reaffirmed its commitment to a nuclear free world.

Mayors for Peace continue to stand for a peaceful world free from the threat of nuclear weapons today and have representatives across the UK including in Bradford, Kirklees, Leeds and Sheffield. Thanks are due to Stewart Kemp, Sean Morris (who started as a Leeds City Council Emergency Planning Officer) and Richard Outram (who previously worked part-time for Yorkshire CND) for all their work as NFLA secretaries. Thanks too to all the Councillors who took the time to Chair the NFLA and thanks to NFLA Policy Advisor Pete Roche and to Jamie Woolley who acted as legal adviser to NFLA for many years in the early days.

Although the NFLA may continue in some form in Scotland and Wales, it will take a lot to fill the hole that the end of the NFLA has left in our campaigning for a nuclear free world.

The Rise and Fall of Nuclear Protest in Sheffield: part 3 (From a Nuclear Free Zone to Pioneer of Future Nuclear Technology, 1981-2025)

BY RICHARD BAKEWELL

The massive 'Don't Attack Iraq' demonstration of 15 February 2003, attracted protesters from every age group and background, who travelled from all parts of the UK, some attending a political march for the first time. Placards read: 'Not in My Name' 'Drop Bush, Not Bombs' and 'Make Tea Not War'. During the following months and years Stop the War Coalition continued to have large demonstrations in London, with a strong contingent joining from Sheffield, but numbers grew less and less. The marches sadly failed to stop the war and many who took part were left feeling let down, disillusioned, and angry that the politicians did not change course.

In Sheffield, during these years, we organised a march to our annual 'Peace in the Park' festival of political debate, and this helped Sheffield CND maintain a critical mass so we could continue to hold events at the Peace Gardens on Hiroshima Day, at occasional leafleting campaigns and street stalls in the city centre, having a presence at various local festivals and shows, and attending the Independence from America Day on July 4 at Menwith Hill. However, there was a problem: we failed to attract the younger generation. In an attempt to rectify this problem, I attended the annual 'Peace Week' at Sheffield University to keep a CND presence there, but students being students, they only wanted to be involved if the venue was the Students Union, also many other stu-

dent campaigning groups were evolving more concerned with environmental issues. Therefore we had to make do with less members, but even our own members were 'defecting'. Stuart Kemp, our treasurer, got a new job in Kendal working for nuclear free local authorities but kept our accounts up to date remotely. We had a succession of chairpersons, each of which left to join other campaigns they saw as more immediately relevant or, sadly, because they became too old and passed away. This was also the fate of many of our other members. A big think was necessary!

In September 2013, activists from Action AWE and 'Wool Against Weapons' thought to raise awareness of nuclear weapons they could create a scarf to link the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) sites at Aldermaston and Burghfield. This idea gained support from CND who asked members of local groups to each knit or crochet a square metre of pink scarf which would eventually be joined together to cover the 7-mile-long distance between the two AWE sites. Many members of local groups in Yorkshire, including Sheffield, took part in this project (needless to say I didn't because I can't knit!) It was estimated that 2,000



separate square metres were required, and in the event the knitted/crocheted scarf stretched over the 7 miles between the sites. On Nagasaki Day 2014, thousands of activists arrived from around the UK, Europe, and the rest of the world to join up and stretch this colourful scarf between the two AWE sites where Britain's nuclear warheads are made. It became a beautiful, joyful culmination of months of effort and reflected how much belief they had in nuclear disarmament. 69 years after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki CND was calling for Trident and its replacement to be scrapped, but the UK government was about to approve huge new spending on nuclear weapons.

Inspired by 'Wool Against Weapons', activists in Sheffield got together to form Sheffield Creative Action for Peace (SCRAP) to find creative ways to campaign against nuclear weapons, the arms trade, drone warfare, and to promote peace. To this end they take part in local and national campaigning events and hold an annual commemoration of Hiroshima/Nagasaki Day.

It is much easier to write about the past than it is to speculate about the future, but the past can be a guide to some extent. The German philosopher George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) wrote in his 'Philosophy of History', published in 1837, *"What experience and history teach is this: that peoples and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it"* and this sug-

gests that despite historical evidence, humanity consistently repeats past mistakes because each era is unique, rendering direct, practical lessons from the past in-applicable. Put another way, remember when Sheffield Council declared itself to be a Nuclear Free Local Authority in November 1980.



In 2001 Sheffield City Council withdrew from the Nuclear Free Local Authorities and now the city has significant links to the nuclear industry, including manufacturing components for nuclear submarines at Sheffield Forgemasters, now owned by the MoD, and research at the University of Sheffield's Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC) in conjunction with the AWE into the next generation of the UK's nuclear warheads. There is also a move to reopen Doncaster-Sheffield Airport (DSA), following its closure in 2022 due to its failure to make a profit, and it looks likely that if commercial flights resume from here in 2027-28 it could also be used for military purposes. Sheffield has been chosen as one of five regional hubs to benefit from the Defence Growth Deal, part of the drive to increase the level of GDP spending on the military. This will dis-proportionally benefit Sheffield compared to other parts of the country in terms of public money being used for military purposes and boosting Sheffield's local economy, but on a national level less money will be available for other public spending needs as the Chancellor does not have an unlimited pool of money.

Although at a very early stage, 'Demilitarize South Yorkshire' has made a tentative start to understanding these future developments and we need to keep on taking action. It pains me to realise Hegel's prophetic words being proved right yet again as we look forward to another chapter in the history of humanity, only this time we are not "gambling with World War Three" as Donald Trump told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on February 28 2025 during a tense meeting in the Oval Office, but we are "gambling with the future of the planet"...



UPCOMING EVENTS

May Day (Leeds and Bradford)

We plan to have a presence at the May Day rallies in Leeds and Bradford on 2nd May.

With Banners Held High (Wakefield)

9th May from 10:45am - Assemble at Smyth Street, WF1 1ED

UCU Congress 2026 (Harrogate)

May 27th-May 29th @ Harrogate Convention Centre, HG1 5LA

Weekly evening demos at Menwith Hill

Every Tuesday @ 6-7:30pm

**For more information, please contact: info@yorkshirecnd.org.uk
Or subscribe to our calendar for more: yorkshirecnd.org.uk/events**

LOCAL CONTACTS

Youth & Student CND (Yorkshire Region) – sam@yorkshirecnd.org.uk

Huddersfield Peace Group – fairbankcharles@gmail.com

Leeds CND – leedscnd@gmail.com / dave@space4peace.org

Keighley – tridentsylvia@gmail.com

MHAC (Menwith Hill Accountability Campaign) – mail@themhac.uk

Grassington & District Peace Group – strand@hawkswick.net

Sheffield CND – richardbakewell@yahoo.co.uk

Sheffield Creative Action for Peace – rachelrow@yahoo.co.uk

Calder Valley CND – kathypitt725@hotmail.com or Catherine on 07980 291478

