

# The peace movement

Is it beginning to wane?

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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, 100,000 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.

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 in a week of protest actions. The movement is determined to stop the development of 72 of the nuclear armed missiles in Europe, scheduled to begin this December.

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

"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." "We're not going to change anything if we keep marching to Parliament Hill and asking Pierre Trudeau politely (not to test the cruise)".

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 downplaying 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 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 to the fight to reverse

Canada's cruise agreement. But spokesperson Helen Spiegelman said that 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.

And a peace camp erected last year at Cold 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 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.

Trudeau countered anti-cruise protests in an "open



"In Europe, and in pockets in Canada, people are taking power over their destiny through civil disobedience ..."

letter to Canadians" last spring, placing the decision in the context of Canada's commitment to the North 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 to the United States.

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

Aside from 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 expressed the fear that moved him to march.

"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."

The movement has grown rapidly in the last two years, with coalitions forming in every major Canadian city, and representing 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

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