



A History of CND Cymru

This September marks CND Cymru's fortieth anniversary. Although this is a significant milestone, its celebration is somewhat met with irony. The movement was formed specifically to campaign against nuclear weapons. With the continuous presence of nuclear weapons worldwide, it is with great sadness that we see the movement grow older. Wholehearted celebrations are due when the movement will cease to exist; once the very last nuclear missile has been decommissioned, making the world free of weapons of mass-destruction. In the meantime, we shall turn our attention to the movement's achievements over the last forty years – the successful steps taken by everyday people towards a world without nuclear weapons.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was founded in 1957. A Welsh branch for the campaign, the Welsh Council for Nuclear Disarmament, was established soon after in 1958. However, the need for a Welsh, semi-independent branch of CND was brought by the intensification of the Cold War at the end of the 1970s. The Soviet Union began deploying intermediate-range SS20 missiles in 1977.¹ In 1979, NATO announced its decision to locate Cruise and Pershing II land-based missiles in Western Europe by 1983.² Europe became the new battlefield of the Cold War, and as a result, a new wave of protest was born.³ In the wake of this, CND Cymru was founded in 1981 and its first major achievement was quick to come. Following campaigns in each of the then eight Welsh County Councils to pass "Nuclear Free Zone" motions, the Nuclear Free Wales Declaration was signed on February 23rd 1982, making Wales the first country in the world to declare itself a Nuclear Free Zone.



¹ April Carter, *Peace Movements: International Protest and World Politics since 1945* (London, 1992), p.110; John Cox, *Overkill: The Story of Modern Weapons* (London, 1981), p.85, 93.

² Carter, *Peace Movements*, p.110-111.

³ *ibid.*

CND Cymru drew upon support and participation from a diverse range of Welsh society. This was because nuclear war was far removed from traditional warfare in that it threatened all life on earth. The existential threat posed by nuclear war became interpreted through different channels of beliefs and thoughts. Consequently, supporters in Wales entered the campaign through many different doorways: political, environmental, philosophical, religious, Welsh nationalist and anarchist.

Although Wales was meant to be a Nuclear Free Zone, throughout the 1980s, the land and its people were continuously used to facilitate the plausibility of nuclear warfare. These came about in the form of armament factories, military bases and bunkers all being spaces and physical constructions where CND Cymru targeted their protests. During the 1980s, five major anti-nuclear campaigns were launched at United States Naval Facility (USNF) Brawdy, United States Air Force (USAF) Caerwent, Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Llanishen and nuclear bunkers being built by Mid Glamorgan County Council and Carmarthen District Council.

During the Cold War years, USNF Brawdy in south Pembrokeshire served as a processing centre for a system of hydrophones designed to monitor the activities of Soviet submarines in the Atlantic Ocean.⁴ The American base attracted widespread protest during the 1980s including a march by Women from Life on Earth (WFLOE) from Cardiff to Brawdy, a year after their march to RAF Greenham Common that led to the establishment of the world-famous Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in 1981. Upon their arrival at Brawdy, WFLOE successfully managed to blockade the main entrance of the base for four days. Other protests by members of CND Cymru included the appliance of the public civil disobedience UK-wide Snowball Campaign that consisted of one person cutting the perimeter fence of a military instalment with pliers with the number of protesters increasing each time the act was carried out – thus snowballing in its effect. Breaking into the base was also a tactic applied by the Welsh peace movement to the US base at Brawdy, which was, in part, implemented to demonstrate the base's ineffective security.



March from Newgale to Brawdy, 1981

⁴ *Subterrenea*, 'Brawdy American Naval Facility', <http://www.iusscaa.org/art26.pdf>, accessed 6 January 2016; *Wales Online*, 'A New History of Wales: Dr Charlie Whitham asks "What part did Wales really play in the Cold War?"', <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/new-history-wales-dr-charlie-1889835>, accessed 6 January 2016.

Another US base located in Wales during this period was USAF Caerwent which lay in the very south east of the county of Gwent. Caerwent was one of the largest ammunition stores in Europe, having stored up to 80,000 tonnes of weapons. It was unclear, and remains so, as to the very nature and description of such weapons. Nevertheless, in 1982, campaigners felt it necessary to establish a peace camp outside of the base purely as an opposition to US military presence in Wales. The peace camp was robust and unyielding, having survived a physical attack by local people as well as opposition from Caerwent Community Council and eviction threats from the Welsh Office. The camp was succeeded by many a colourful demonstration and rally outside the US military base throughout the rest of the decade.

A major focus of protest within Wales was the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Llanishen, Cardiff, where beryllium and depleted uranium were used to manufacture parts of nuclear warheads. The workforce of 400 also serviced and disassembled components for nuclear warheads until the work was transferred to ROF Aldermaston. The Llanishen site was subsequently closed in 1997. Protests at Llanishen were wide and various, retaining a strong female presence. These included a 10-year Friday morning vigil outside of the factory's gates as well as a week-long 24/7 vigil – both of which were instigated by WFLOE who monitored the comings and goings of the factory as well as distributing leaflets to the workers. In addition to many break-ins and rallies, the anti-nuclear campaign at AWE Llanishen managed to execute a mass-blockade of the factory for one day in 1983.

In the 1980s the Westminster government insisted that all county councils should build nuclear bunkers where a select few would shelter during a nuclear war before emerging to re-establish local government. There were massive campaigns against the building of two of these bunkers in Wales: one successful, in Bridgend, which ended in the partially built bunker being abandoned after protesters were covered in concrete by the builders⁵, and an ultimately unsuccessful campaign in Carmarthen, which delayed the construction for months. The Carmarthen Anti-Bunker Campaign was met with violence at the hands of Carmarthen District Council. Carmarthen still stands as the most violent event that anti-nuclear protesters in Wales have faced. Many injuries were sustained by the sheer aggression of the security guards hired by Carmarthen District Council to protect the bunker. One young female protestor lost her little finger amongst the brutality.

⁵ “No Bunkers Here”, Tony Simpson, 1982, available <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1398981>

The Carmarthen Anti-Bunker Campaign, 1985-1987



Sustained protests by the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, and widespread anti-nuclear protests across Europe eventually led to the signing of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 1987, which resulted in the destruction of both the American Cruise missiles and the USSR's SS20 missiles. Protests against nuclear weapons began to dwindle following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986 led to an increased focus on opposing nuclear power.

In the early 1980s, there were two nuclear power stations operating within Wales, at Trawsfynydd and Wylfa, and three more across the Severn Estuary, at Berkeley, Oldbury, and Hinkley Point. Trawsfynydd ceased producing electricity in 1991, and is about 20 years into a predicted 125-year decommissioning process. This involves the creation of a "safestore" for the reactor and an Intermediate Level Nuclear Waste dump the size of a football stadium. Reactor 2 at Wylfa ceased operating in 2012; reactor 1 closed down at the end of 2015. The proposed new Wylfa B nuclear power station, sometimes called Wylfa Newydd, fiercely opposed by Pobol Atal Wylfa B (PAWB), now seems unlikely to be built, but the threat of "Small" Modular Nuclear Reactors at both Wylfa and Trawsfynydd remains.

Berkeley was the first nuclear power station in the UK to start the decommissioning process after it closed in 1989. The next step in its decommissioning will be the care and maintenance stage of the nuclear reactor structures, scheduled to commence in 2026, then there will be a pause until radiation levels reduce sufficiently so that the power station can be demolished and the site completely cleared between 2070 and 2080. In the meantime, it is the preferred interim store for Intermediate-level waste from the Oldbury nuclear power station which closed at the end of 2012.

Hinkley Point B continues to produce electricity, with closure planned for July 2022 (Hinkley Point A nuclear power station ceased producing electricity in 2000), and a new Hinkley Point C station is planned to start generating in 2026. Opposition to the new nuclear power station is being led by the Stop Hinkley. As part of the construction, dredged contaminated sediment dredged was dumped off Cardiff Bay in 2018; following protests and a legal challenge, further contaminated dredged sediment will be dumped off Portishead. Hardly a victory, as radiation doesn't respect borders; Welsh farms were under restrictions for 25 years after the Chernobyl accident over 1500 miles away.



Hinkley Point, 2020

CND Cymru members helped set up Chernobyl Children Project groups in Wales, bringing children from radioactive areas of Belarus to Wales to breathe uncontaminated air and eat uncontaminated food. In 1996, CND Cymru raised enough money to provide an ambulance, packed full of medical equipment, and deliver it, overland, to the Chernobyl area (along with other ambulances provided by Irish CND and other Chernobyl related groups).

CND Cymru's campaigning has not been limited to opposing nuclear weapons and power, the movement has also staged protests against nuclear waste dumps. An attempt to establish a nuclear waste dump in the tunnels of the former Royal Navy Armaments Depot, Trecwn, Pembrokeshire in 2002 was defeated by active local campaigners. In 2019, the Welsh Government launched a consultation on potential sites for an underground nuclear waste store, called a GDF (Geological Disposal Facility) alongside a similar consultation in England. CND Cymru persuaded 6 county councils, 19 city and town councils, and 57 community councils to oppose these plans, and because "too many people wanted to attend" both planned public consultations were cancelled and replaced by webinars.

CND Cymru also voiced its opposition to the Iraq War in 2003. Despite mass protests in Wales and worldwide, resistance of this kind did not stop the war. These protests, however, led to the US government affirming that they would not use Britain as a base for bomber aircraft in future wars because of the level of protest at airbases. Protests also resulted in the power to go to war being shifted from the Prime Minister to Parliament, and was a key factor in Parliament's vote against a military attack on Syria in 2013.

Although CND Cymru has branched out in its campaigning against nuclear power and nuclear waste dumps, the campaign has never swayed from its primary goal of disarmament. In 2018, the "Defence Procurement, Research, Technology and Exportability" arms fair was last held in Cardiff. Following protests by CND Cymru and other peace groups, it was announced it wouldn't occur again in Cardiff.



Cardiff Arms Fair, 2018

In recent years, CND Cymru has acted as the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear weapons (ICAN)'s partner in Wales. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which entered into force in 22 January 2021, prohibits states from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, or allowing another state's nuclear weapons to be stationed or deployed on their territory. The treaty also prohibits states from assisting, encouraging or inducing anyone to engage in any of those activities, including financing nuclear weapons production. ICAN was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 for getting the UN to adopt this treaty. 55 states have signed and ratified this United Nations treaty; a further 33 countries have signed the treaty and are in the process of ratifying it. At the UN, 130 countries voted to welcoming this treaty, showing the degree of international support for this treaty. Unsurprisingly, none of the nuclear weapon states have signed this treaty. Despite this, local authorities in Wales are beginning to show their support for the treaty. So far, Bangor City Council, Nefyn Town Council and Gwynedd County Council have adopted the resolutions supporting the treaty. CND Cymru will continue to promote the treaty amongst Welsh local authorities in the hope that Wales will re-affirm its nuclear-free status of 1982.

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