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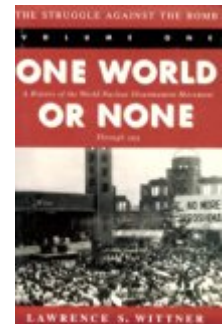
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Lawrence S. Wittner. *The Struggle against the Bomb, vol. 2: Resisting the Bomb: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1954-1970*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. vii + 641 pp.

Lawrence S. Wittner. *The Struggle against the Bomb, vol. 3: Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. vii + 657 pp.

Lawrence S. Wittner. *The Struggle against the Bomb, vol. 1: One World or None: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement through 1953*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. vii + 456 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-2528-6.



Lawrence S. Wittner. *The Struggle against the Bomb, vol. 2: Resisting the Bomb: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1954-1970*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. vii + 641 pp. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-3169-0.

Lawrence S. Wittner. *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. 657 S. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-4861-2.

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The Impact of Activists on Nuclear Disarmament

Larry Wittner's trilogy on the history and impact of the antinuclear movement surpasses the goal he set for himself. In the preface to volume 1, *One World or None*, Wittner comments that despite some previous research, "most of the story is located in a vast, uncharted wilderness," and, he says, as a result of this and other impediments, "this study cannot be definitive. Rather it is meant to serve as a trailblazing work, beginning the process of uncovering the history of the worldwide struggle against the bomb and of its effects on public policy" (pp. xi-xii).

The trilogy is extraordinarily useful as a trailblazer for two reasons. First, its scope is truly comprehensive. It covers the entire period of thought and action about nuclear weapons, from 1945 to the present, and it covers

activism and government policy in all parts of the world—not just in the United States, the Soviet Union/Russia, and Western Europe, but also in Japan and in other regions. Second, equally important or perhaps more so, the trilogy works hard to unearth and delineate the impact of activist efforts on government policies (and, where relevant, the impact of government policies on activist efforts). In the area of nuclear armaments, most histories to date have focused either on popular culture or on government policy. They have not attempted to look in a careful, detailed, well-documented manner at the interaction between the two.

Wittner's effort to assess the impact of public protest on government policy is particularly important for the

period of the Reagan presidency, 1981-89, the centerpiece of volume 3, *Toward Nuclear Abolition*. During this period the scale and intensity of activist-government confrontation reached a peak, both in the United States and in Europe. At the same time, in the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev came to power and made radical changes in many aspects of Soviet policy, including a reduction in military spending, the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan, and deep cuts in nuclear weapons. As a result of the convergence of these two sets of developments, there is a major political and historical controversy, still alive today, about what caused the end of the U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms race and the subsequent deep cuts in their nuclear arsenals.

In the concluding paragraph of chapter 16 (“Breakthrough for Nuclear Disarmament, 1985-88”), Wittner sums up his case that the prime mover in this development was the massive worldwide antinuclear movement:

“Yet the bulk of the credit for the new course—or, as Gorbachev liked to call it, the “new thinking”—lay with the nuclear disarmament campaign and the tidal wave of antinuclear sentiment that it generated. So powerful was the antinuclear pressure that it began transforming Reagan’s approach to nuclear weapons even *before* the advent of Gorbachev, thus setting the stage for their later agreements. Once Gorbachev appeared on the scene, it became irresistible. Reagan—still uneasy with the nuclear disarmament movement but swept forward by the antinuclear *Zeitgeist*—broke loose from his old moorings. By contrast, Gorbachev was enamored with the movement, and—like his closest advisors—repeatedly adopted its ideas and proposals.” (p. 403)

The diametrically opposing view, still widely believed and frequently articulated by conservative commentators, is that the prime mover in ending the arms race was the U.S. military buildup under Reagan in the early 1980s, which forced the Soviets to stop competing with the United States militarily because they could no longer afford to do so. Gorbachev’s capitulation proved, they argue, that “Peace through Strength,” the approach advocated by Reagan’s right-wing supporters and administration officials, was correct.

Wittner shows in convincing and fascinating detail that the Reagan administration’s support for the “zero option” on intermediate nuclear forces—ultimately accepted by Gorbachev as the basis for the INF Treaty—was a concession to the demands and the political clout of the activists, as was the administration’s 1982 announcement of a willingness to hold negotiations on re-

ductions in strategic intercontinental arms (START). In chapter 13 (“Public Policy Wavers, 1981-85”) and chapter 14 (“U.S. Policy: The Hard Line Softens, 1981-85”), Wittner paints a gripping picture of the disputes regarding these arms control initiatives among conservatives in government in the United States and Western Europe. Supplementing published memoirs and unclassified government papers with interviews of Reagan’s senior security officials—Kenneth Adelman, Richard Allen, James Baker, Frank Carlucci, Edwin Meese III, Robert McFarlane, Richard Perle, Caspar Weinberger—Wittner confirms a startling point suspected by many but not previously documented: the official U.S. positions on START and INF, while intended to placate the public and members of Congress and European parliaments, were at the same time deliberately designed to be so one-sided as to be unacceptable to the USSR. In both cases, the initial positions were developed by the most hawkish members of the administration, Perle and Weinberger, who opposed all arms control agreements. Other officials, such as Secretary of State Al Haig, opposed the U.S. policy initiatives on the grounds that they were patently “not negotiable.” This is important because it shows the degree to which the Reagan team opposed arms control and disarmament treaties, even those that, from a narrow military viewpoint, were extraordinarily favorable to the United States. (In a chance meeting with another ultra-conservative Reagan official, Richard Pipes, the National Security Council specialist on the USSR, in the mid-1980s, I asked whether it was true that he held this view, and if so, why. He responded that it was true that he did not favor any treaties with the USSR, even if completely one-sided, because the Soviet dictatorship was so terrible and untrustworthy that it was better not to have any agreements with them at all.) Wittner also cites direct statements opposing more or less all forms of arms control by a number of conservative Republican leaders both at the outset of the Reagan administration and again at the close, when the INF Treaty was signed. The implication of this is that the INF Treaty and the START Treaty, concluded under Reagan’s successor George H. W. Bush, would never have been signed by the United States had it not been for the popular antinuclear protest movement. Other concessions to public opinion, wrenched out of the Reagan administration bit by bit during the 1980s, included a proposal for limits on underground nuclear tests, a revision of the START proposal to include more cuts on the U.S. side, and a public reversal of the official view of whether a nuclear war could be fought and won.

Regarding Gorbachev, Wittner cites personal inter-

views, memoirs, and speeches in which Gorbachev describes the times and ways in which his approach to nuclear policy was influenced by American and European popular antinuclear movements and by pro-arms-control Western scientists and policy experts. Two speeches made in 1983 show that Gorbachev was by then committed to nuclear arms control and disarmament due to his own beliefs about the danger of a nuclear holocaust. Wittner overlooks an important aspect of Gorbachev's "new thinking," however. Gorbachev's primary goal as leader of the USSR was to change the Soviet economy. For some years economic growth had been slowing and by the mid-1980s, when Gorbachev took office, the GDP had started to decline. This dire situation gave Gorbachev license to undertake radical measures to turn the economy around. His view of how to do so was to create a form of socialism with a "human face," with open communication instead of repression, in which reform (*perestroika*) and the free exchange of ideas and information (*glasnost*) would lead to innovation and increased productivity, while "new thinking" in foreign affairs would lead to positive relations with the West that, in turn, would generate Western investment and permit the import of Western technology.[1] One component of his plan for economic reform was to make deep cuts in military spending, a step which Gorbachev was persuaded by Western peace-oriented analyses would in itself generate economic growth. (Unfortunately, in the absence of a planned conversion program, it had the opposite effect.) Alexei Arbatov, a former member of the Duma's Defense Committee and a long-time arms control advocate and negotiator, reviewed post-Gorbachev efforts to reconstruct the true level of military spending, as distinct from the publicly reported military budget. Though inconclusive, studies suggested that the figure could have been anywhere from 25 to 40 percent of the GDP over several decades; and that it was this terrible distortion of economic infrastructure and priorities that had led, ultimately, to the decline in GDP that Gorbachev was trying to reverse. This, of course, does not support the view that Reagan's military buildup drove the USSR into abandoning the nuclear arms race and the Cold War: it suggests a much longer-term domestic economic problem that affected the military policies of Gorbachev and his cohorts.

In this context it is important to note a few key facts regarding military resources. First, nuclear weapons have always taken only a small part of military budgets, on the order of 20 percent or so in the 1950s and 1960s and declining toward 10 percent or less in the 1970s and 1980s. So eliminating certain components of the

nuclear arsenals would not have had a significant economic impact: that would have required deep cuts in conventional military forces and weapon production, which Gorbachev also made. This means that Gorbachev's nuclear initiatives could have been made even if he were not preoccupied with improving the economy and with improving relations with the West as a supplementary means to that end.

Regarding the conservative view that the Soviet's inability to match Reagan's military buildup forced the Russians to end the arms race, it must be admitted that the buildup was so huge that the Russians could never have matched it. Between 1981 and 1985 Reagan increased the U.S. military budget to a figure that was 50 percent above the norm, in constant dollars. There was no precedent for such an increase in peacetime; the only comparable increases were those that occurred during the Korean and Vietnam wars. Not surprisingly, the U.S. military had a hard time finding ways to employ a sudden growth of this magnitude, and in some cases they were driven to absurd extremes. For example, they refurbished two World War II-era battleships at enormous cost, and then re-retired the ships just two years later because they had no real military value.

The Soviets could not have matched the Reagan buildup economically, but that is something they would not have tried to do in any case. The overall composition and cost structure of the U.S. and Soviet militaries were so different—their deployments, numbers, and roles so lacking in mirror-image qualities—that Soviet military commanders would not have wanted to model their military growth on that of the United States. The one area where the USSR did specifically try to match the United States was in the number of "survivable" strategic nuclear weapons that it could deliver to the other side of the world in thirty minutes. The U.S. deployment of "MIRVed" multiple warhead missiles starting in the early 1970s eventually gave the United States an advantage of about 5:1 in that area. A Soviet effort to match that specific buildup began in the late 1970s and was largely completed by the time Reagan's buildup was in full swing.

In sum, the evidence suggests that the Reagan buildup had no impact on Gorbachev's policies leading to the end of the arms race, and that Western protest movements and arms control advocates did have a significant impact. In addition, however, it would be reasonable to conclude that Gorbachev's concerns about the Soviet economy played an important role in his thinking about security matters and nuclear weapons. At

the least, concerns about the impact of excessive military spending on the economy would have confirmed or reinforced the “dovish” pro-disarmament positions Gorbachev might have been inclined to support in any case. At most, concerns about revitalizing the domestic economy and the political system may have been an important motive behind his foreign policy “new thinking.” This is an issue that Wittner does not address. In fact, the words *glasnost* and *perestroika* do not appear anywhere in volume 3 (except in references to passages to Gorbachev’s book entitled *Perestroika*). “New thinking” on security matters is presented more fully than I have seen in any other source, but completely in isolation from the domestic elements of Gorbachev’s drive to reform the USSR.

The Reagan period is only one of the many policy junctures over the last seven decades where Wittner looks carefully at both published works and unpublished documents to illuminate the impact of public protest on policymakers. In every case, there are new insights and information, filling in the kaleidoscope of interaction between public policy and individual action.

Another special strength of the trilogy is the consistently balanced overview of the organizations that played a central role in the public protest movement, the key individuals in those organizations, their most important public actions, and some of their internal history, growth, strife, and decline. This requires a detailed knowledge of the activities of hundreds—perhaps thousands—of individual activists, and more than one hundred activist organizations, operating independently in all parts of the world over a period of decades. What makes this aspect of Wittner’s work truly extraordinary, in my view, is his fine judgment regarding the relative importance of particular individuals, organizations, and actions—knowing which to give many pages and which to compress to one or two sentences. Similarly, his judgment regarding the significance of particular conflicts, choices, events, and turning points in the life of the protest movement is very fine. Time and again in reading sketches of people, organizations, and events that I knew well from my own participation as an activist leader, I felt that the presentation was fair, not giving too much or too little credit, blame, or attention, but an appropriate amount, given the implications of the situation for the larger picture of how activists influence policy. One case in point concerns the roles and interactions of members of the Physicians for Social Responsibility and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, and in particular Helen Caldicott and Bernard Lown. This is an important but

turbulent story that Wittner tells deftly, indicating the problems briefly but giving far more attention, appropriately in my view, to the extraordinary growth and positive contributions on all sides.

When reviewing a trail-blazing study of largely uncharted territory, especially a book with this scope, it is unreasonable to discern no omissions. However, from my own experience as an activist-scholar, I find only two gaps in Wittner’s trilogy. First, he gives little attention to what is generally called the “arms control community,” or the scholarly practitioners of studies of peace and security that focus on arms control and disarmament. This is a relatively small group of specialists and experts whose political positions and roles typically lie somewhere in between those of activists, on the one hand, and policymakers, on the other. Since this is my own professional reference group, the omission was glaring. Of course, Wittner does not set himself the task of covering the triangular relationships among policymakers, arms control experts, and activists—nor, for that matter, does he attempt to explore the role of the mass news media, or the role of citizen education. The largest and most difficult of these sectors to cover comprehensively is the activist segment, and we should be thankful for Wittner’s groundbreaking work there. Just as in the case of Gorbachev’s domestic concerns, I would argue that an explanatory effort that omits key factors altogether cannot provide a satisfyingly complete explanation. Since the arms control community has had an enormous impact on activist efforts as well as government policies, neither can be fully understood in the absence of this larger discussion.

For instance, in the late 1960s, at the initiative of Alva Myrdal, Swedish ambassador to the Geneva disarmament talks and author of *The Game of Disarmament: How the United States and Russia Run the Arms Race* (1976), the Swedish government created an independent research center, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), with Swedish government funding but an international staff and governing board. The main purpose of SIPRI was to contribute to worldwide efforts for nuclear disarmament by providing a source of impartial information on the U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms race, independent of the alarmist, worst-case analyses that might be put forward by the governments concerned. Among the original staff members at SIPRI in 1968 were Mary Kaldor and myself. Around 1980-81, Kaldor was instrumental in creating the European Nuclear Disarmament initiative (END), while, at about the same time, I was helping to launch the U.S. Nuclear Freeze campaign. With-

out the support and specialized education that work at SIPRI provided each of us, neither might have gone on to help shape and lead the popular antinuclear protest movements in the United States and Europe.

Another quite different case involves Philip Morrison, a young physicist in the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos and then, after World War II, one of the founding members of the Federation of Atomic Scientists (later Federation of American Scientists), which tried to stop the nuclear arms race at the outset. Because of his outspoken support for nuclear disarmament after the war, Morrison was blackballed as a communist. With the support of physicist Hans Bethe at Cornell, however, Morrison obtained a job there, became a tenured physics professor and, eventually, moved to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) where he became a distinguished “Institute Professor,” free to spend his time as he wished. While his paid work was in astrophysics and cosmology, Morrison has publicly supported nuclear arms control and disarmament efforts in many ways throughout the period from 1950 to the present, serving repeatedly as president or chairman of the Federation of American Scientists, giving lectures about nuclear weapons, writing books and articles on the topic, supporting other public interest organizations, and encouraging physicists and other scientists to become involved in science-related public policy issues. In his trilogy, Wittner mentions only a handful of scientists and academics by name; yet, like Morrison, many, many more social and natural scientists have contributed to educating and supporting antinuclear activists and protests over the past half century.

Yet another example is provided by professional arms control analysts who served in government positions for a certain period, but for most of their lives earned a living in other ways, most often by teaching at Harvard, MIT, Stanford, and other U.S. universities. Some prominent members of this group in Cambridge who were active more or less throughout the period covered by the trilogy are George Rathjens, Jack Ruina, Paul Doty, George Kistiakowsky, and Charles Zraket. Jack Ruina and Charles Zraket, members of the electrical engineering department at MIT in the 1950s, worked on the computers and radars for the first U.S. continental air defense system. Zraket took the research off campus and formed the MITRE corporation (MIT research and engineering); Ruina remained at MIT. George Kistiakowsky, a senior chemist at Los Alamos, supervised Ph.D. work in chemistry at Harvard in the 1950s by Rathjens and Doty, introducing both to the world of nuclear weapons and arms control policy. Later, Doty headed a Harvard

center specializing in security and arms control studies (Center for Science and International Affairs), while Rathjens and Ruina taught nuclear policy and arms control at MIT. As teachers, these scientists trained a generation of arms control experts who went on to government, activism, teaching, journalism, and other professions. As experts, they participated in Pugwash meetings and other conferences with physicists and chemists from the USSR, where issues relating to antiballistic missile defense and strategic nuclear arms control were broached and debated prior to being finalized by diplomats in the official negotiations. Moreover, these scientists shared with others, such as MIT’s Jerome Wiesner and Harvard’s Thomas Schelling, credit for the ground-breaking Fall 1960 issue of the quarterly journal *Daedalus* (published by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences), which was dedicated to and actually launched the concept of “arms control” agreements. Specifically they supported the view that “partial” arms limitation agreements could lower the risk of nuclear war and permit gradual progress toward nuclear disarmament following the failure of the proposals for general and complete disarmament and international control of nuclear weapons that had been debated in the UN between 1946 and 1960. In these and other ways, arms control experts who published their studies openly, used mainly or exclusively non-classified material, and were not supported by government grants or contracts played a key role in shaping and leading public protest movements; but the history of that interaction is yet to come.

A second, small but significant, “sin of omission” from Wittner’s trilogy merits mention. This concerns the means of support for activists. Almost by definition, an activist organization is one that has no formal institutional source of support. Colleges and universities are supported by endowments, government grants, and tuition payments. Profit-making businesses sell products to the public. Government agencies are supported by taxes. Most nonprofit organizations receive charitable contributions from individuals and foundations.

Like other nonprofit groups, activist organizations rely on a combination of membership dues, foundation grants, and individual donations; but like poets, painters, and dancers, they are notoriously plagued by underfunding to the point of starvation. If an activist group is trying to alert the public or the government to a little-recognized problem, then it is likely to be underfunded. Once the problem is widely recognized, funding to study it will be forthcoming—but by then it is no longer as sorely needed. Frank von Hippel, a physicist arms control ex-

pert and activist leader, once remarked to me that in our field “a foundation grant is like a life preserver thrown to a drowning man just as he reaches the shore.” What Wittner may assume needs no mention, and what history of the kind he has written may not require, but what I believe is too central to go unstated is the tremendous degree of self-sacrifice that infuses the work and lifestyle of most disarmament activists. Policymakers, think tank scholars, and professional experts on security matters tend to be well paid and respected; though vital to the political process, grassroots activists are not.

Note

[1]. See for example, Edward A. Corcoran, “Pere-

stroika and the Soviet Military: Implications for U.S. Policy,” *Cato Policy Analysis* 133 (May 29, 1990). See also Celeste A. Wallander, “Lost and Found: Gorbachev’s ‘New Thinking,’” *Washington Quarterly* 25 (Winter 2002): pp. 117-129. Wallander points out that in Gorbachev’s three-pronged initiative, *perestroika* (restructuring) was meant to “eliminate inefficiencies and break up sclerotic administrative structures”; *glasnost* (openness) was meant to “erode the influence of the state and Communist Party interests that were powerful obstacles to economic reform”; and new thinking in foreign and military policy—stressing the common security posed to all nations by the threat of a nuclear disaster—was “conceived and deployed in a secondary role to support the urgent need for domestic political and economic reform.”

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