

# H-Net Reviews

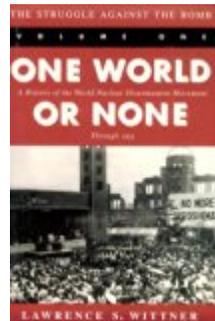
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



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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## From Swords to Ploughshares: Beating the Bomb

Larry Wittner's magisterial trilogy on the world nuclear disarmament movement is unparalleled in the peace literature—popular and scholarly—of any language. Wittner does what many of us thought nigh to impossible: he chronicles the development, mobilization, and ongoing struggle of campaigners against the bomb, since the dawn of the Nuclear Age, and everywhere across the globe.

My own peace movement scholarship focuses on the United States and Germany. My sources include interviews with influential policymakers and activists, archival materials, survey data, periodical literature, and the work of other scholars. Wittner too draws on these sources, but on an awesome scale. He interviews vir-

tually every important U.S. arms policy and antinuclear weapons movement figure from the past generation. He pores through archives that until recently were closed to Western researchers. He draws on the research of hundreds of scholars, in several languages, from more than a dozen countries. Wittner's definitive study will stand for decades as the touchstone for future work on humanity's efforts to match moral development to the development of military technology.

Wittner chronicles the development of antinuclear weapons activism from a handful of atomic scientists and visionaries at the dawn of the Nuclear Age to the mass formations of the 1950s Ban the Bomb movements and the 1980s Freeze, nuclear-free-zone, and anti-missile

movements, and beyond. In between the periods of red-hot mobilization, Wittner shows that the movements never completely disappeared. Even when overshadowed by citizen efforts to end the Vietnam War and other wars, to decolonize Africa, Asia, and Latin America, to gain civil rights for ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities, to advance equality for women and the disabled, or to protect our endangered natural environment, a core of steadfast antinuclear campaigners remained.

The three volumes see the movements over the years as more than simple negotiations. While their focus was on reversing the arms race and preventing nuclear war, activists stood for positive and progressive agendas of peace, cooperation, justice, and equality. The books illustrate the extent to which the bomb infiltrated and colored modern culture. The preparations for nuclear war reached into movie theaters, infant's teeth, schools, religious institutions, basement bomb shelters, and countless workplaces. Hysteria over covert enemies and foreign agents was (and is again) manipulated by elites to control people and their political choices. Nuclear physicists came to dominate scientific establishments. Trillions of dollars better spent on health, education, or ecological sustainability instead went to weapons laboratories, armed services, and nuclear defense contractors.

Wittner's research directly contradicts the now widely accepted triumphalist view that American "hanging tough," "staying the course," or "standing up to the Soviets" enabled the United States to "win" the Cold War and vanquish its long-standing enemy. Indeed, Wittner shows that, if anything, the nuclear arms policies of the great powers slowed rather than hurried the end of intense nuclear competition. While Wittner, perhaps, gives too much credit to Gorbachev for the end of the Cold War (I assign more to the disarmament movements themselves), he clearly shows the remarkable steps that the Soviet leader took to resolve superpower conflict.

There are several reasons why the importance of Wittner's work transcends the small group of activists, historians, and social scientists writing on peace and disarmament movements. First, Wittner's findings illuminate current debates over the future of nuclear weapons. At the moment when the Bush administration is developing "bunker buster" nuclear warheads and "mini-nukes" (ca. 5 kt., about a third or quarter the size of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima) and apparently is readying itself for a renewal of nuclear testing, Wittner's study provides a cautionary tale. It has not been the wisdom, vision, or rationality of our leaders that has so far saved us from

nuclear holocaust. Instead, it has been the determined efforts of millions of ordinary, and not-so-ordinary, organized citizens across the globe and across the decades that forced restraint upon reckless leaders.

Second, Wittner provides a model for careful, comprehensive, and exciting research on social movements across time and space. Graduate students and young scholars interested in the history of collective action should carefully study these books. Stanford University Press, too, deserves our appreciation. Rarely these days does one find a publisher willing to issue the definitive work on any subject, much less to print three volumes in the process. Instead, university presses now pay the same attention as their commercial counterparts to "marketability" and the "bottom line."

Third, Wittner's trilogy shows peace campaigners that their activism matters. Some protest nuclear weapons because it is the right thing to do. They do not require evidence that their petitions, letters, and demonstrations have any payoff either in the short term or over the long haul. Then there are the rest of us, who are busy people. We have diverse political and social concerns, and are members of multiple coalitions and movement organizations. We want the investment of our time, effort, money, and souls to hit pay dirt. We want to know that we stopped a weapons system. We want assurance that our protests moved leaders to the negotiating table. We want to see for ourselves, and for our children and grandchildren, that we brought our churches, political parties, and professional associations into line with our demands for peace and justice. We now have ample evidence from across the generations of how nuclear disarmament movements mattered in real terms, and in real time.

Governments rose and fell due to nuclear weapons politics. Political parties changed their platforms and appeals. Religious leaders condemned nuclear deterrence in the 1950s as morally tolerable only for the brief time they thought the nuclear powers needed to overcome it. By the 1980s, the position of many leading clergy had evolved: bishops and rabbis around the world described deterrence as carefully planned genocide-in-the-making. Former generals and government officials contracted "nuclear retirement syndrome." Once out of uniform or office, they joined with critics of nuclear weapons and strategies. Dentists, lawyers, metal workers, and schoolteachers came together as professionals to declare their disgust with the defense policies of their politicians and militaries. Public opinion, never enthu-

siastic about the prospects for nuclear war, came to demand an end to the nuclear stand off.

The three volumes highlight more than the movements' victories and achievements. They also demonstrate the weaknesses, foibles, and failures of the movements and their leaders. Coalitions and groups were frequently split over tactics, strategy, and goals. Conservatives and communists found it difficult to work together. Just because they were fighting the deadliest technology of all time—one capable of ending all life on Earth—did not make movements immune from petty personality and political squabbles. Peace groups frequently lacked sufficient money, activists, and other resources needed to press their cause. Indeed, peace movements have generally not been able to prevent wars, change defense doctrines, or stop new weapons systems.

What is critical to recall is that while the nuclear competition today may no longer be as keen, it is by no means over. The United States still harbors dreams of ballistic missile defense. The Pentagon moves ahead with plans and forces for “full spectrum dominance,” including the control of outer space. Current U.S and Chinese energy policies call for building additional nuclear power plants,

a source of bomb-making ingredients. Pakistan not only tested its own nuclear device, it now has a missile capable of delivering nuclear weapons deep into India. And Dr. A. Q. Khan, the celebrated father of the Pakistani bomb, shipped bomb-making knowledge and components to Libya, Iran, and North Korea. Pyongyang remains outside the observation of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and may already have developed one or more nuclear weapons. Iran, too, has poor relations with the IAEA. One lesson to take away from the U.S. invasion of Iraq is that leaders uncertain of their standing in Washington may develop weapons of mass destruction to deter the Americans. Scenarios for nuclear terrorism remain ridiculously easy to imagine. Finally, the poisonous detritus of the Nuclear Age, scattered from the bottom of the Arctic Ocean to the Rocky Mountains, will require additional decades and billions of dollars to reduce if not eradicate.

The “struggle against the bomb” has not ended. While we have made remarkable progress “toward nuclear abolition,” we have not achieved it. Let Wittner’s opus stand as a monument to our past efforts, and an inspiration to our future struggles.

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