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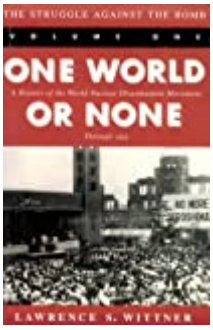

Lawrence S. Wittner. *The Struggle against the Bomb, vol. 1: One World or None: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement through 1953.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. vii + 456 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-2528-6.

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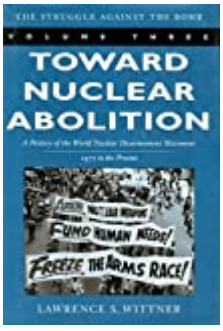

Lawrence S. Wittner. *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. 657 S. $80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-4861-2.

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The People's Peace

Peace researchers, nuclear specialists, and historians of international relations should congratulate and thank Lawrence S. Wittner on the completion of his three-volume study of the world nuclear disarmament movement. With the publication of *Toward Nuclear Abolition*, scholars now have the best comprehensive history of the grassroots effort to end the nuclear arms race that we are likely to see for quite some time. As in his previous two volumes that covered the period from 1945 to 1970, Wittner provides his readers with an account of the non-aligned and communist-led antinuclear movements throughout the world along with an examination of various governments' responses to the movement and its demands. He moves beyond previous studies that have looked at single organizations or just one period of antinuclear activism. He also gives attention to all areas of the world, even trying to explain why some countries and areas, such as Africa, never produced a widespread grassroots antinuclear movement.

His key themes remain constant throughout the trilogy. The world disarmament movement marshaled enough pressure on the two superpowers and other nuclear states to prevent the use of nuclear weapons during the numerous Cold War crises and proxy wars. Antinuclear activists also deserve credit for inspiring the arms control and disarmament agreements that emerged during the Cold War and after. These accomplishments loom as all the more impressive when one reflects on Wittner's findings regarding government reactions to the movement. The United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union largely viewed the various waves of disarmament activism as threats or political forces to be manipulated for propaganda purposes. When individual leaders did reach out to the movement because they saw its goals as dovetailing with what they defined as the national interests of their state, the world saw major progress toward reducing superpower tensions or the nuclear arms race (for example John F. Kennedy and Nikita S. Khrushchev in the 1960s). But these were the exceptions. More often, nuclear peace activists became the targets of official harassment and accusations of national disloyalty. Wittner also notes that the movement remained heavily dependent on the public's sense of nuclear danger; thus, when public fears subsided, the movement lost energy and influence (such as the period after the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963).[1] Success, whether real or imagined, in slowing the nuclear arms race, thus, paradoxically often weakened rather than strengthened the movement.[2]

Of Wittner's three volumes, *Toward Nuclear Abolition* provides the clearest evidence for the world nuclear disarmament movement's strength and influence. At the beginning of the 1970s, antinuclear activism had faded into the background. Because the movement drew on the same base of activists who supported other peace and reform causes, the campaign to end the Vietnam War absorbed most of the attention of its natural constituencies. The superpowers did negotiate and ratify some important arms control agreements during this period, including SALT I and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.[3] But these accords attempted to manage the arms race and actually allowed Moscow and Washington to continue to improve and increase their stockpiles of nuclear weapons. From 1971 to 1979, antinuclear efforts focused on curtailing the construction of nuclear power plants and ending the French nuclear tests in the South Pacific, but received little attention and minimal success. When the Cold War reignited after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the apparent death of SALT II, the movement began to grow in strength.[4]

But the issues that the movement emphasized in the West varied according to location. In Western Europe, the proposed deployment of U.S. cruise and Pershing II missiles, and the presence of Soviet SS-20 missiles, provoked the reinvigoration of existing organizations such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in Great Britain and the creation of transnational campaigns such as European Nuclear Disarmament (END). In the United States, the Nuclear Freeze movement, the drive to freeze the superpowers' nuclear arsenals at current levels, absorbed the majority of activists' energies. Although the two strands of the movement were in sympathy, their stated goals conflicted. A freeze would eliminate the prospect of new cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe, but it would leave any SS-20s already deployed in place.

Yet, despite this tension between its U.S. and Western European branches, the movement inspired greater grassroots support than in any previous period, prompting the largest public demonstrations in U.S. and Western European history. In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, antinuclear sentiment also increased. With

the Soviet-sponsored World Peace Council in clear decline because of its subservience to the Soviet state, space opened up for the creation of nonaligned organizations in these countries. In some cases, their goals meshed with the Western movements, but in many instances these groups offered different arguments about the nuclear arms race and how to halt it. With such clear demonstrations of public support, governments on both sides of the Cold War divide had to react.

According to Wittner, this response initially followed a familiar pattern. The nuclear hawks of the Reagan administration asserted that the Nuclear Freeze movement and END bore clear evidence of Soviet sponsorship. When that strategy failed to mute either campaign, Reagan attempted to distract public attention from nuclear disarmament with the technological fantasy of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). Arguing that a space-based missile defense would allow the United States unilaterally to end the nuclear threat, Reagan hoped to defeat calls for nuclear disarmament. Despite arguments from eminent scientists that SDI would never work, Reagan did succeed in blunting the appeal of the Nuclear Freeze movement in some quarters. His proposal, however, had the opposite effect on public opinion in Europe, since it raised the specter of the United States, protected by its high tech shield, initiating a first strike while the superpowers turned Europe into a nuclear battleground. Reagan had greater success with European public opinion when he adopted END's "zero option"–complete removal of all U.S. and Soviet missiles from Europe–as his negotiating stance in the intermediate nuclear forces (INF) negotiations. Most activists, however, saw the proposal as the cynical ploy that it was–an offer meant to place the onus on Moscow for the failure of arms talks. The Soviet and Eastern European governments also viewed nonaligned antinuclear activists, such as the Moscow Trust group, as threats to state authority and often arrested them or placed them in psychiatric facilities. In the face of the superpowers' hostility and repression, the antinuclear movement witnessed some of its support wane, but it still remained stronger and more influential than in previous periods. To have a material effect on the nuclear arms race, it just needed a champion at the helm in either Washington or Moscow to heed its warnings and advice.

The ascension of Mikhail Gorbachev to leadership of the Soviet Union in 1985 provided the movement with the final ingredient necessary for its success. He sought to end the arms race for both practical and ideological reasons and was willing to make the initial concessions to speed the arrival of true nuclear disarmament.[5] Reagan quickly found himself on the defensive, facing the three-pronged threat of a powerful antinuclear movement at home, pressure from NATO allies who wished to quiet their own antinuclear activists and preserve their domestic political standing, and the propaganda blows exerted by Gorbachev's appeals for nuclear abolition. When the Soviet leader accepted the "zero option" as the basis for negotiations, the United States could not reject its own proposal. The INF Treaty quickly followed and with it a milestone was reached–the elimination of a whole class of nuclear weapons.[6]

The world antinuclear movement could rightly take credit for the treaty on a number of grounds. The United States had lifted the "zero option" directly from END's demands, Gorbachev's speechwriters liberally borrowed arguments and language from the movement's publications, and the pressure European activists had placed on their home governments led to demands within the alliance that Washington prove more amenable to substantive talks on Euromissiles. But more important for the overall goals of the movement, the INF Treaty was the first real disarmament of the nuclear age. Its success raised hopes that other agreements affecting strategic weapons could be crafted.

But progress on the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) slowed after George H. W. Bush succeeded Reagan as president. The new administration initially harbored suspicions of Gorbachev's sincerity and had to be convinced that he could be counted on to honor any treaty. When the Soviet Union stood to the side in 1989 as its Eastern European dependents collapsed under the weight of dissident political movements that the European antinuclear movement had helped inspire, most doubters faded into the background. With the end of the Cold War, START I and START II soon followed, as did the collapse of the antinuclear movement.[7] With the disappearance of public pressure, START II languished and remains unimplemented, and the world has witnessed no further progress in nuclear disarmament. During the early 1990s, some called for the abolition of nuclear weapons by 2000, but those hopes quickly faded. Instead, India and Pakistan joined the ranks of declared nuclear weapons states, the U.S. Senate rejected the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty that had been a goal of the movement since the 1950s, and nuclear weapons remain central to the defense doctrines of both the United States and Russia.[8] Currently, the nuclear arsenals of Moscow and Washington are smaller than at the height of the Cold War, but they still remain large enough to devastate each

other or any other target nation. If past is prologue, Wittner's history suggests little change until a renewed sense of nuclear danger reanimates the mass support that the antinuclear organizations need to influence policy.

Wittner's trilogy leaves little doubt that the antinuclear movement had a measurable impact on the nuclear arms race and that it deserves a substantial amount of credit for the Cold War's peaceful end. But other important insights that move beyond the central argument of his study can also be gleaned from his findings. From the beginning of the nuclear age to the present, public opinion regarding nuclear weapons has been extremely volatile and open to government manipulation. This pattern can be explained in part by the U.S. and Soviet governments' systematic reliance on censorship and disinformation. Washington withheld photographic and film evidence about the destructive force of nuclear weapons in the immediate aftermath of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, a policy that helped limit the outcry against atomic weapons in 1945 and early 1946. But as eyewitness accounts of the carnage in those Japanese cities began to spread, the United States had to draft a proposal for international control of atomic energy, the Baruch Plan, that at minimum looked fair and reasonable, even as it contained provisions designed to be unacceptable to Moscow. The Soviet Union, for its part, tried to make itself into the champion of peace, and lavished money and attention on its sanctioned peace organization, the World Peace Council. Because Moscow manipulated the issues of peace and disarmament for its own purposes, it allowed Western opponents of nuclear disarmament to redbait both the communist-led and nonaligned movements. The existence of the World Peace Council made charges that the antinuclear movement consisted primarily of Soviet dupes and stooges plausible to some segments of the U.S. public. When the World Peace Council was at its peak strength, the movement was at its least influential in the West. As the World Peace Council declined, the movement gained greater influence throughout the world.

The campaign to end nuclear testing which began in the mid-1950s sparked another wave of government propaganda and disinformation. The U.S. government first lied about the position of the Japanese trawler, *The Lucky Dragon*, when its crew was exposed to radiation from a U.S. test and then repeatedly misrepresented the health risks of atmospheric tests thereafter. But the continued discovery of radioactive isotopes in the food chain sparked public outcry around the world, which eventually persuaded the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union to conclude the Limited Test Ban Treaty. That agreement exposed both the strengths and the limitations of the movement. It did nothing to end or even slow the arms race. All three powers continued to test underground and the number of tests conducted in the years immediately after the treaty's ratification actually exceeded the number of tests in the years immediately prior to its conclusion. Despite this fact, the movement against testing faded, because the health risks from tests appeared to diminish. In addition, the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and other domestic reform movements drew energy and followers away from the antinuclear movement, at least in the United States.

The antinuclear activism of the 1980s and 1990s produced a similar result. The INF Treaty proved to be a major breakthrough, but its effects could very well have been merely symbolic if not for the surprising and rapid end to the Cold War. Plans were already in place to modernize short-range nuclear weapons unaffected by the treaty to maintain nuclear force levels in the European theater. Those plans were scrapped once Soviet forces were withdrawn from Eastern Europe in the aftermath of the revolutionary events of 1989 and 1990. START I and II also marked major breakthroughs but the forces of opposition to nuclear arms agreement in both the United States and Russia have prevented the implementation of the second agreement and its far more significant cuts in nuclear munitions. The most recent agreement concluded between Moscow and Washington, the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (2002), looks promising on the surface, but it allows each state to store the warheads from its dismantled delivery vehicles, resulting in little to no real disarmament. In the last decade, the most dynamic efforts at reducing the number of nuclear weapons in the world has come in the form of neoconservative calls for counterproliferation policies and military actions against "rogue states," such as Iraq and North Korea. Current U.S. nuclear policy actually expands the number of states and the types of conflicts in which national security managers believe that the use of nuclear weapons would be required. In the end, present circumstances make the title of Wittner's final volume painfully ironic. The world does not seem to be moving toward nuclear abolition, but instead seems to be mired in a state where nuclear weapons are deeply entrenched and dangerously commonplace.

Despite the fact that the world nuclear disarmament movement has not achieved its maximum goals, Wittner's thesis remains persuasive and is supported with impressive evidence from numerous countries. While

many scholars continue to look only at the nation state and the national security bureaucracy, Wittner has firmly established the importance of a mass transnational movement in Cold War history. In a world without antinuclear activism, the Cold War would have been a much more dangerous era. The movement moderated the superpowers' behavior, kept geopolitical competition from spinning dangerously out of control, and ultimately sped the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Wittner also deserves praise for offering a corrective to the distorted version of Cold War history that argues that Reagan's nuclear arms spending and toughness led to the Soviet collapse. Instead of U.S. Cold War triumphalism, he gives his readers a people's peace.

Notes

[1]. The Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963 banned nuclear tests in the atmosphere, under water, and in outer space, but allowed countries to continue to test underground.

[2]. Paul Boyer first noted this pattern in his article "From Activism to Apathy: The American People and Nuclear Weapons, 1963-1980," *Journal of American History* 70 (March 1984): pp. 821-844.

[3]. These two treaties were signed in 1972. SALT I (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, also known as the Interim Offensive Agreement) froze ground-launched (ICBMs) and submarine launched (SLBMs) at the levels already deployed and operational for five years until a more detailed agreement could be negotiated. It, however, did not ban multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles (MIRVs), devices that allowed each country to load numerous warheads on a single missile. The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) banned all anti-ballistic missile systems except those specifically allowed within treaty guidelines. Initially the agreement allowed for one ABM system to be deployed around national capitals and one ABM system around an ICBM field. That was later modified in 1974 to one ABM system deployed around either a national capital or an ICBM field.

[4]. SALT II was signed in 1979 but never ratified by the U.S. Congress. But the Soviet Union and the United States agreed to adhere to its ceilings on different strategic delivery vehicles. It was far more complex than previous treaties, with distinct limitations on total vehicles (2,400), MIRVed vehicles, air-launched cruise missiles, ICBMs, SLBMs, and the types of qualitative improvements a power could make to its nuclear arsenal. It also had strict guidelines on size and lift capacity of ICBMs and separate limitations on the number of warheads one could place on a single ICBM (ten) or SLBM (fourteen). It also contained very detailed clauses on verification.

[5]. Here Wittner echoes and reinforces the findings of other scholars such as Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

[6]. The INF Treaty, signed in December 1987, eliminated all intermediate and medium-range nuclear delivery vehicles in the U.S. and Soviet arsenals. Such missiles are defined as having a range of 300 to 1,000 nautical miles.

[7]. START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) I was signed in July 1991 and limited each country to under 7,500 strategic delivery vehicles (tactical weapons remain uncontrolled). START II, signed in 1993, still has not been ratified. It would limit total strategic delivery vehicles to fewer than 4,000 for each side.

[8]. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty would halt all nuclear testing. The Clinton administration signed the treaty, but the Senate rejected it in 1999, and the George W. Bush administration took the rare action of removing the U.S. signature from the treaty.

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