

A Night at the Movies, Part 2

Last time's column pointed to how deeply embedded love of war is in American popular culture. Like it or not, many of us embrace weaponry for security's sake, and that's a stubborn, ongoing obstacle for the peace movement. Fortunately, it's not the entire story. For the past several years, people both here and around the world have been letting go of that embrace, and more and more of them are insisting on nuclear disarmament. Even if the nuclear weapons states ignore those people, they are not going away.

Here's the evidence, starting with some old stuff. Despite mounting friction between the United States and Soviet Union during the early Reagan years, the peace movement got enough mass support behind it to secure a nuclear freeze. That happened in 1982, and led to a seventy percent reduction in nuclear weapons worldwide over the next decade. Was that enough to assure the planet's safety? Not entirely; what had been a quantitative arms race eventually changed shape into a qualitative one, but at least the effort had been a step forward, and for the moment, global tensions eased.

Then there was a shift. After September 11, 2001, the global trend toward nuclear rearmament began, and accelerated during the Obama and Trump years. It still continues. While it has made the nuclear arms race more dangerous than ever, there has been a response. Consider the past five years.

On July 7, 2017, 122 members of the United Nations, representing a majority of the world's population, brought forth a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, submitting it for signatures and ratification by the world's nations. That same month, the US Conference of Mayors passed a resolution calling for nuclear disarmament, a call it repeated in 2019. Even earlier in 2017, there were six local resolutions calling for the same thing, in New Haven, Connecticut; Charlottesville, Virginia; Fayetteville, Arkansas (yes, you read that right-Arkansas); Montgomery County, Maryland; Ithaca, New York; and New London, New Hampshire (full disclosure: this writer was the author of the New London resolution). On May 3 this year, the Rhode Island state senate passed the Back from the Brink resolution, which also calls for strengthened arms control, arms reduction, and disarmament. And over the past two years, Massachusetts Peace Action has been working hard to get a similar resolution passed in that state's legislature.

The TPNW required ratifications from 50 nations to go into force, which it did on January 21, 2021, the day after president Biden was inaugurated. Biden himself declared his support for no first use of nuclear weapons. Whether he or anyone else makes good on that declaration remains to be seen, but at least the idea is out in the open. Keep in mind, though, that the TPNW is now international law. As of this writing, 86 nations have signed it and 65 have ratified it. Just last month, the states-parties to the treaty met in Vienna and issued an official declaration and action plan on June 23. They'll meet again in New York during the winter of 2023. Beatrice Fihn's International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017, Joe Gerson's Campaign for Peace, Disarmament, and Common Security, and Gensiukyo, the

Japan Council against A and H Bombs, are following these developments closely and working to reinforce them.

So it grows. This is serious business, because by the treaty's terms, any government which retains, harbors, or continues to develop nuclear weapons is an outlaw regime. None of this has made it to the movies, but it's now the show, and it's up to those of us in the peace movement to make good on the performance. Nothing is guaranteed; rather than depending on the hope of success, it's wiser to stick with necessity instead. Progress will take long, hard work, which is all the more reason to start now.

How do we in the peace movement build on this foundation? The next column will offer some suggestions while being fully aware of their limits. And if you've guessed those ideas are being offered in time for the coming anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, and in hopes of far better ideas from anyone reading these words, you're absolutely right.

Which is good reason to proceed.