The propaganda war game

DUNCAN CAMPBELL reveals how the government is sponsoring the current attack on CND.

AS THE CAMPAIGN for Nuclear Disarmament and its partners grow in strength, they are receiving a remarkable - and inevitable - barrage of abuse, accusation, and smear. A primary source of this campaign has been the Ministry of Defence. And whilst the BBC bans Edward Thompson from lecturing on the air and plans a 'more objective' remake of the War Game film (see box), the government has enlisted the help of sympathetic reporters and commentators, Tory MPs and Young Conservatives in the propaganda war with CND.

The battle has changed in tempo and style since February this year, after John Nott took over as Defence Secretary from Francis Pym. In both open and 'off the record' interviews. Nott has made it clear that combatting CND is to be a principal target of his ministry. The way in which that is being done is becoming clear.

Inside the Defence Ministry, the campaign was dubbed the 'spring offensive'. The phrase first reached public ears after a Guardian report in February. But no offensive forces appeared. Indeed, if anything, the government appeared to have withdrawn from public debate, and concentrated on a highly manipulative and tightly controlled media strategy. It became explicit policy that no Defence Minister or Ministry representative would go to public meetings before neutral or CND-oriented audiences. On a few occasions, when the debate was

Colchester Evening Gazette 9.6.81

before 'suitable' audiences, the organisers were instructed to ban TV coverage and minimise press interest. Despite the heralded new 'openness' on nuclear weapons policy, when this journal asked for a briefing on 'theatre nuclear weapons', we were refused.

Equally rigid control is applied to TV reports. In the numerous programmes made recently on the subject, the Defence Ministry has insisted that Nott, or his assistants, must have 20 unedited minutes at the end of the programme, with no-one putting an alternative view.

In place of public openness has come a series of slurs focussed not on issues, but on motives; these slurs are now being repeated with increasing stridency, and, inevitably, more carelessly echoed in the press. CND supporters and pacifists, Nott told the Annual Conservative Party Conference in Perth this May, are 'innocent victims of a Soviet conspiracy to make us drop our guard'. 'Mr Brezhnev', Nott alleged, benefits from 'the assorted band of Marxists and Communists who sing his song', and they take along with them 'many genuine and frightened people . . . Most but not all' are 'innocent, well meaning people.'

Nott's theme has recently been echoed by Lord Chalfont in the House of Lords: 'CND has a very significant element in it of men and women with Communist affiliations'; by reporters in the Daily Telegraph: 'The antinuclear movement . . . serves the purposes



A new War Game THE BBC already has 'a project afoot' to

make a new version of David Watkins's spectacular and powerful film, the War Game, which the BBC continues to ban from television showing. This was revealed by Richard Francis, the BBC Director of News and Current Affairs, during a private meeting of the News and Current Affairs staff on 7 July. Minutes of the meeting have been leaked to the New Statesman.

Over 30 senior BBC staff attended the discussion, which immediately followed a showing of the film. A majority of those at the meeting appeared to favour showing the film, and were told that BBC Governors thought the same.

However the Director General's Ghief Assistant, David Holmes, warned that showing the film might well be interpreted. as acceding to pressure from CND'. He, like several others, wanted it only to go out with warnings that it was 'of historical interest' and 'propagandist'. Richard Francis noted that some of his colleagues favoured showing the original War Game before a new film was ready to show alongside 'if properly signposted and in an appropriate context not least because it might prepare public opinion for the shock of a new, contemporary programme'. But he made no promises that this would happen. The new War Game, however, should be of a 'more objective kind'.

of the Soviet Union'; and by the Young Conservatives, who are planning a campaign of their own in September called Peace and Defence.

The YCs are worried that many of their members seem to have sympathy with the CND case but planned their campaign to be covertly run by the YCs. Their own internal documents - leaked to the CND magazine Sanity, and passed to the NS, stress the importance of working closely with the MoD and, indeed, in June this was one of the first moves.

TWO MEN IN the MoD play a critical role in the campaign against CND. One is David Hunt, who has maintained the links between the MoD and Conservative Central Office, the YCs and so on. The other is Ian Mac-Donald, the MoD's deputy director of public relations and a caretaker civil servant. He has worked closely with Nott's private office in orchestrating the ministry's campaign and the CND aspects of this are now his highest priority.

MacDonald claims that the press invented the term 'spring offensive' - 'we like to think it's an all seasons offensive.' The centrepiece of his approach to public argument is to ensure that the MoD control what goes on. Hence, no public debates, as they are just 'gladiatorial contests', and not edited interviews on TV

A good example of the techniques was a public meeting at Newbury racecourse, addressed by Francis Pym last July. Admission was by ticket only and questions had to be submitted in advance. At the same time an 'exclusive' interview was faked up in the local Reading Evening Post. There had been no interview: the reporter submitted a list of questions to the MoD, whose public relations department drafted replies of remarkable clarity and fluency. This was presented in the paper, with a picture of Pym, as though it had all taken place faceto-face.

The local press has also been used successfully in the smear campaign. On 9 July, the *Colchester Evening Gazette* announced:

Revealed: how KGB are trying to use the Peace Campaigners. CND AND THE RUSSIAN LINK

The article coupled details of CND's local activities with details of KGB structure and misinformation operations. The information on the KGB came from a document circulated by the Foreign Office: Soviet external propaganda: themes and targets. The article did make the rather unfortunate mistake of inaccurately branding the World Disarmament Campaign as having a history of 'covert KGB activities' — a charge which has produced a legal action.

In the Daily Telegraph two weeks ago, reporter Blake Baker analysed 'CND and the company it keeps' in a manner entirely in keeping with the MoD line. 'Ecologists and clerics march as the Trots and Marxists plot', it claimed, following the familiar theme of evil manipulation of well-meaning persons by lefty demons.

I, LIKE MANY others, have tranped around dozens of CND meetings and found thousands of ordinary well-meaning people bitterly angry about the government's smear tactics and, on other occasions, downright lies about things nuclear. It is an observable fact that at all levels CND has a considerable distaste for the pro-Soviet apologists of the World Peace Council and its affiliates. It is an arrogant and ignorant defamation to suggest, as Lord Chalfont has done, that it would be strange indeed if the CND was not substantially

assisted from Communist sources since the Soviet Union spends vast sums of money on its so-called 'peace campaigns.'

Although such talk is generally part of the smear, we have obtained a set of internal documents of the International Marxist Group, which reveal their clear intention to 'win' the recent Labour Movement against the Missiles Conference.

The IMG 'delegates briefing', marked 'Do not leave lying around', set out plans for four floor managers to organise every supporter present to try and make one of four standard speeches, pre-selected by the IMG. The aim of this was to back 'our fight for the leadership of the movement as a whole . . . this conference is not spectator sport.'

The tactic was, of course, entirely obvious. It ruined the conference by polarising instead of unifying labour movement opposition to Cruise. In a singularly unfortunate phrase, the IMG memo noted 'this conference is an unparalleled opportunity . . . there is no such thing as overkill from this point of view.'

From an organisation campaigning for 'more open and democratic structures' such behaviour is grotesque. But there is clearly no Moscow interest in the IMG, to whom they are implacably opposed. Nor, indeed, are the IMG out of step with the objectives of CND. But they have given the supporters of Cruise and the architects of the smear strategy an unnecessary weapon.

Ending simple slogans

JEREMY BRAY brings some good news from America. In a frank and open atmosphere, where — in contrast to Britain — one agency does not dominate thinking, economists are working towards an alternative to floating exchange rates.

ECONOMICS

IN AMERICA'S system, the Federal Reserve Board (the 'Fed') briefs the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC), which has to implement monetary policies. Compared to Britain, the apparatus is more elaborate, but also far more open.

I began in Washington by trying to discover why the Fed briefings don't yet employ control theory - the branch of economics that borrows heavily from the engineering of devices like auto-pilots, and therefore has much to say about what can and cannot be done towards seeking stability within dynamic systems. Professor David Kendrick, one of the leaders in this field, accompanied me.

The Chief of Staff, being unable to answer the question fully himself, simply arranged for me to see those who could, and give me the Fed's 600-page study on monetary procedures. This appears to have been seen (if not read) by most US Treasury officials. It has not prevented Milton Friedman, in his Newsweek column, from demanding that the Fed do more to control the money-supply. But when he goes there, he admits they could not do much better.

In America, unlike Britain, domestic monetary questions dominate international ones thoroughly: therefore, new econometric techniques are likelier to emerge on the domestic side, and those employed on the Fed's international models seem to have a 'care and maintenance' brief.

But pioneering work on control-theory applications is going on in Dr Peter Tinsley's Special Studies Section. There, forecasts are being produced which distinguish between uncertainties due to the structure of the model employed, and uncertainties resulting from random disturbances added to its behaviour.

Existing procedures encourage policymakers to think that the effects of a policy *change* will be predictable, however uncertain the results of base-policy. ('We don't know what we're going to get. But if we do X, whatever we get will be better by X'.) Given a more realistic apportionment of uncertainty, the over-vigorous use of policyregulators will become less seductive.

Dr Tinsley's contribution to the Fed staffstudy was to see whether the new volatility of the US money-supply might be the effect of the new administration's control procedures. He concluded that probably they weren't. But there is a trade-off which ensures that money-supply stability is paid for in volatility of interest-rates (or vice versa). Although such work surpasses anything done in Whitehall or the Bank, it is less than Tinsley's potential. He is on record as having shown that direct targetting on inflation, output and unemployment produces better results for inflation — and for the other two — than can be done by working through the money-supply*. Why aren't such results included in FOMC briefings?

The FOMC is not composed of 'state-ofthe-art' econometricians. Many of its members are briefed by the old monetarist school of the Federal Reserve Bank in St. Louis, and others by the new 'rational expectations' monetarists of Minneapolis. Until recently the Federal Reserve had a chairman (Arthur Burns) who was explicitly hostile to control-theory: clearly, Dr Tinsley feels that his section should not produce work too far in advance of what the FOMC will listen to.

And, within the Washington office, briefing comes from many sources — the moneytrading desks, traditional modellers, industry analysts, judgmental forecasters and others. Against such a background one line of briefing doesn't readily stand out.

Tinsley therefore sought to formulate the objectives required for policy optimisation in ways not requiring interaction with policymakers. He took the annual numerical goals for income-growth, priceinflation and employment set by the Humphrey-Hawkins Act in 1978, and chose a criterion which maximised the probability of achieving them, given the uncertainties of the model.

This is not the best use of control-theory, because it maximises the probability of achieving unlikely targets, instead of ordering the priorities short of achieving those targets. The latter approach, which implies close inter-action with policy-makers, is the one set out in evidence to our own Parliamentary Select Committee on Expenditure by a team from Imperial College. I like Dr Tinsley's treatment of uncertainties: he liked the way the Expenditure Committee' evidence dealt with ordering of priorities.

Given the interest of the Governors of the Federal Reserve — and one of them, Lyle

*Journal of Econometrics 15,1981.

SOMETHING YOU OUGHT TO KNOW ABOUT

The pressures of modern life tend to distract our attention from fundamental realities. There is a spiritual basis to life which many of us are now ignoring at the cost of our happiness and security. There are some eternal verities behind the teachings of all religions. In your own interest, learn something about these from THEOSOPHY, the Ageless Wisdom Religion.

Write for information to: THE BLAVATSKY TRUST (B) P.O. Box 16, London W3 6HS