

Duncan Campbell reports on the new Council for Arms Control

NATO funds 'disarmament' body

A NEW 'Council for Arms Control' is to be launched early in the autumn, as another campaigning body on nuclear weapons and disarmament issues. Two of the organisation's three present sponsors have previously run organisations committed to disseminating government and NATO views and propaganda. At present, the organisers of CAC are recruiting members for their Council and have not publicised plans for its launch.

Behind the new campaign are Ray Whitney, a Conservative MP who formerly headed the secret Foreign Office propaganda unit, the Information Research Department, and Alan Lee Williams, a former Labour MP and Director General of the English Speaking Union, who runs a NATO-funded 'Labour and Trades Union Press Service' from the ESU offices. The third man, Mr Michael Davis, who has been organising the campaign from an accommodation address in Windsor, claims the campaign is his idea and he personally has paid all the expenses so far.

Politicians and leading church figures have been approached to join the campaign. The presence of two leading propagandists for NATO on the initial list of founders strongly suggests that the idea behind the Council is to win moral support for NATO's so-called Arms Control Proposals,

which were launched at the same time as the decision to instal new Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe, in December 1979.

Few observers have any illusions that these proposals were anything other than a cosmetic measure to win public acceptance for the new missiles. A series of unilateral US decisions to step up the nuclear arms race, the US refusal to ratify the SALT 2 treaty, and the stalemated Security and Co-operation talks have left the NATO proposals threadbare.



Mr Davis, in an interview this week, refused to describe or hint at the line he or his prospective colleagues would be taking in the debate. 'I'd not like to get too deeply into talking about it', he said. Asked if he thought the SALT 2 treaty should have been ratified by the US, he said: 'I don't know what the contents of SALT 2 are.'

Co-sponsor Alan Lee Williams has recently been at the centre of controversy over the funding of the NATO press service he runs. After US and NATO officials suggested that NATO only supplied 'a few hundred pounds' and that the rest came from 'unions and foundations', he admitted in February 1980 that the bulk of '£5,000' a year came from NATO. A parliamentary question a few days later elicited the news that NATO had paid £32,000 to the Press Service since 1976, and never less than £6,000 a year. A few months later he admitted that the organisation was in fact 'entirely funded' by NATO.

Ray Whitney was the head of the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office in 1976-77, when David Owen, alarmed at the right-wing network of which it was a central part, ordered its dissolution and replacement by the overt and more moderate Overseas Information Department. Whitney resigned soon after this and was rapidly adopted as Conservative candidate for High Wycombe. The department had been set up by Chris Mayhew in 1948, as, he later admitted, 'black propaganda' in that our work was all undercover' and to do that IRD's existence was secret, and paid for by the Secret Vote. Its propaganda output was, until the end, unattributable to government sources, heavily slanted and aimed at creating 'helpful political attitudes'. It secretly subsidised anti-communist books and a magazine for trades unionists called 'Freedom First'.

Mr Davis claimed this week that the final Council membership would be much more 'balanced'. But he could not disclose any more names at present. He says Whitney and Williams joined him in the initial recruitment drive in order to add 'respectability'. □