Peace Movements

Marco Giugni, University of Geneva, Geneva Switzerland

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Abstract

The origin of peace movements can be traced back to the early nineteenth century, with the foundation of the first peace societies in the Anglo-Saxon world. Issues addressed by the movements include the general fight against war and promotion of peace (including internationalism), antiwar mobilization, nuclear disarmament (including nuclear test ban), mobilization against military infrastructures, and for civil service. Different phases can be discerned in the Western context: the rise of pacifism as a collective and public issue during the nineteenth and early twentieth century; the Cold War era; peace movements as part of the new social movements from the late 1960s to the late 1980s; and the post-Cold War era. The strength and specific features of peace movements vary both across time and across space depending on the specific features of each national context. Today, peace movements are seen as part of the broader family of the new social movements. Scholarly works have characterized the profile of participants in these movements as being rooted in the new middle class, displaying left-libertarian values, and sharing a common concern over social issues, but have also stressed important difference across countries in their social bases. Peace movements find their most important effects at the societal and cultural level rather than at the political level.

Peace movements can be tackled from different angles. Three such angles deserve mention. First, one may look at their underlying ideology and values. Most obviously, this involves fighting war and all the means leading to it (such as weapons or more generally armies) as well as promoting peace in a variety of ways (such as opposing war efforts, sensitizing the public opinion, and educating the younger generations). Second, one may focus on the actors involved. Since social movements are a collective endeavor, this means mainly examining the organizations – both formal and informal – involved in collective efforts to fight war and promote peace. Third, one may stress the actions carried out to fight war and promote peace. Since social movements can be seen as public displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment (Tilly, 1999), this implies looking at the public expression of the struggle against war and the promotion of peace.

Peace movements, in fact, are all three things at the same time: ideas, people, and actions. In order to get a grasp on their rise and development over time, we then need to consider a broader definition. In this vein, Della Porta and Diani (1999) argue that social movements are informal networks, based on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about conflictual issues, through the frequent use of various forms of protest. This qualifies peace movements and a special instance of contentious politics, which is a broader analytical category. As stressed among others by Tarrow (1998: 2), "[c]ontentious politics occurs when ordinary people, often in league with more influential citizens, join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities and opponents … When backed by dense social networks and galvanised by culturally resonant, action-oriented symbols, contentious politics leads to sustained interaction with opponents. The result is the social movement." This also distinguishes peace movements from pacifism, which is best confined to the realm of ideas.

From a thematic and substantial point of view, we may distinguish between different branches or, perhaps more accurately, thematic foci of peace movements. The most prominent are probably general fight against war and promotion of peace (including internationalism), antiwar mobilization, nuclear disarmament (including nuclear test ban), mobilization against military infrastructures, and for civil service. To that, we might add the nonviolent movement, which is, however, both narrower and larger than peace movements themselves. The relative strength of each thematic focus varies both across time and across space depending on the specific features of each national context.

From a historical point of view, peace movements have gone through a number of phases, at least in the Western context. Here we address four such phases: (1) the rise of pacifism as a collective and public issue during the nineteenth and early twentieth century; (2) the Cold War era; (3) peace movements as part of the new social movements from the late 1960s to the late 1980s; and (4) the post-Cold War era. Peace movements display specific features in each of these historical phases. The latter are not neatly delimited and sometimes overlap. For example, the peace mobilizations for nuclear disarmament that took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s were at the same time conducted in the context of an exacerbated Cold War climate.

Early Peace Efforts

Peace movements are undoubtedly among the major societal forces that have characterized the twentieth century. Their roots, however, can be traced back to the early nineteenth century. The first attempts to create an organized effort to promote peace emerged in the Anglo-Saxon world, in particular in Britain and the U.S. For example, the New York Peace Society and the Massachusetts Peace Society were founded in 1815, while the London Peace Society was created only 1 year later, in 1816. This early peace reformism, however, has little to do with the peace movements of the mid- and late twentieth century. It is more a matter of movements of ideas led by a small number

of intellectual elites, rather than popular movements involving thousands of middle-class citizens. We can thus talk of pacifism more than peace movements.

Some prominent pacifist associations were founded in the following decades in most Western countries, both nationally, such as for example, the American Peace Society (1928), and internationally, such as for example, the *Ligue internationale et permanente de la paix* (Paris, 1863) and the *Ligue international de la paix et de la liberté* (Geneva, 1867). As their names often suggest, many of these associations worked in the frame of an internationalist approach to peace, that is, based on the assumption that the latter could be reached only through a dialog across national actors and governments. Other transnational associations emerged from wartime pacifism, such as the British and US Quaker service committees (by 1917), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (1919), and the International War Resister League (1921). Although many efforts by peace movements have later focused on influencing national governments and public opinions, such an internationalist approach remains alive within the movement until nowadays, and has in fact found new vigor with the rise of the global justice movement in the 2000s.

An important feature of early efforts to fight war and promote peace consists in the strong religious background of peace associations. Often such associations were created that have a strong religious background, in particular of the Christian religion. More generally speaking, often national peace movements divide in two main orientations: a Christian (either Catholic, Protestant, or both) orientation and a leftist (either Socialist, Communist, or both) orientation. The relative strength and importance of each stream depends among other on the cleavage structure in each specific country. Other streams have emerged later on, in particular with the rise of the new social movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Peace Movements under the Cold War

During and in the aftermath of World War II, peace activism and movements continued to flourish within a changed context. This is the context of the Cold War, where the Soviet Union and the U.S. engaged in a tug of war largely based on the nuclear arms race. As a result, peace activism in this period has often focused on nuclear disarmament not only in the U.S., but in Europe as well. At the same time, a peace coalition was formed during World War II around the United Nations ideal, thus continuing the strong internationalist perspective of peace movements. In this context, peace issue and human rights issues were put together in a broader effort to promote peace.

Yet peace activism during this phase mainly focused on the nuclear arms issue. Particularly in the U.S., a number of campaigns were launched which targeted nuclear weapons. This includes the nuclear test ban movements, led by a coalition of organizations that included the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (Katz, 1986). More generally, a grassroots transnational movement formed around opposition to nuclear tests and nuclear arms more generally. This opposition also got the support of leading intellectual figures, such as for example, the British philosopher Bertrand Russell.

A major phase of peace activism occurred during the U.S. intervention in Vietnam and the war that stemmed from it between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s. Obviously, the American peace movement was at the forefront of this cycle of protest. Indeed, opposition to the Vietnam War represents the peak of the U.S. peace movement, and the Vietnam War also spurred a wealth of protest activities in other countries. In the U.S. the antiwar movement gained momentum starting from February 1965, when American troops began Operation Rolling Thunder in North Vietnam. Opposition started with teach-ins in colleges and then evolved in a wide range of activities involving a broad coalition of congressional critics, liberal intellectuals, radical pacifists, New Left students, as well as disillusioned war veterans. Opposition escalated along with the war, both in terms of the number of events and the number of participants and in terms of the radicalization of the protest. The protest radicalized especially among students within university campuses, leading to what some have qualified of 'campus wars' (Heineman, 1993). At the same time, large mass demonstrations were staged across the country, such as for example, two demonstrations held in Washington: one on 15 November 1969 attended by nearly 500 000 people and another one on 24 November 1969 mobilizing between 200 000 and 500 000 people.

The 'New' Peace Movements

The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed the emergence of the so-called new social movements. This term refers to a specific type of movements that emerged in Europe after World War II as a product of the shift to a postindustrial society and post-material age, stressing demands that moved away from instrumental issues relating to the class conflict toward post-materialist issues concerning the quality of life broadly speaking (Inglehart, 1977). As such the new social movements are seen as qualitatively different from 'old' movements, most notably the labor movement (Melucci, 1981), in terms of their social basis, ideology, value orientations, and organizational structure, but also in terms of their tactics and action repertoires.

Although some scholars have pointed the environmental movement as being the new social movement par excellence (Touraine, 1978), peace movements are seen as major component of this movement family. In this sense, the advent of the new social movements brought a new impetus to peace movements, bringing a younger generation of activists as well as novel forms of protest. Moreover, the mobilization of the 'new' peace movements reflected the changing structure of social and political cleavage that crossed the European societies in the decades after War World II.

Peace movements have indeed been a protagonist of the wave of protest that has characterized the Western world in the early 1980s. In particular between 1981 and 1983, pacifists across Europe as well as in the U.S. have gathered around the issue of nuclear disarmament, an issue that had been on the agenda of the movements for a long time, but that was took on a new dimension following NATO's decision in December 1979 to base 572 cruise and Pershing II missiles in five West European countries (Belgium, Great Britain, Italy, the