



# THE PEACE MOVEMENT AND NEW DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

*Ned Crosby*

**The Vietnam War was a watershed in American politics. A recent study<sup>1</sup> shows that more Americans list this as the main event shaping their political views than any other event. This was when the American peace movement came of age, leading the protests which played a significant role in the American withdrawal from Vietnam. But although the peace movement viewed itself as vindicated by history, the American public ignored its basic message. Five years after the war, a president was elected who believed deeply in "peace through strength" and who promoted policies in the Third World very similar to those which the peace movement had opposed in Vietnam.**

Of course, there were significant historical events which thwarted the hopes of the peace movement. The election of Reagan was helped considerably by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the hostage-taking in Iran. But these events should not obscure a more basic problem faced by the peace movement. The aim of this article is to show why the peace movement may want to consider the use of significant new strategies in order to get its message to the American public. Although this article is addressed only to an American situation, if the

solutions are valid here, they should be relevant to other political systems as well.

The Jefferson Center in Minneapolis has created and tested a democratic reform which should be useful to the peace movement, as well as any other group which feels it has a majority of the public potentially on its side, yet is unable to advance its basic agenda. The Center uses specially convened juries of average citizens to review an issue and suggest a solution, or to review the candidates in an election. The aim is to allow citizens, in a

set of hearings structured to be fair to all points of view, to learn enough about issues or candidates to be able to exercise their democratic duties wisely.

The jury reforms have been used several times in Minnesota, with considerable success<sup>2</sup>. The problem, however, is to get public officials and those who care about political issues to be willing to use it. Its major drawback is that since it is conducted in a fair way, no one can be sure which side of an issue, or which candidate in a campaign, will be supported.

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The aim of this article is to indicate why the peace movement, or possibly any other new social movement, should seriously consider supporting the jury reforms developed by the Jefferson Center, in spite of the risks involved.

### The Problem

The complaint of most groups which hold strong issue-stands is that they do not receive the public support they need and deserve. Even support from a majority of the public may not be sufficient for a group to advance its basic agenda. A majority of the public may oppose aid to the contras, yet still support some action by the government to prevent "the communists" from taking over in Nicaragua. A majority may give strong support to environmentalists, yet be unwilling to support the taxes needed to make their programmes work.

This situation is made more distressing by the fact that many elected officials depend more on media image for their re-election than an informed electorate. The problem is that American voters are being manipulated in ever more sophisticated ways. Manipulative politics is certainly not new: many ancient demagogues had a fine appreciation of the art.

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What is new are the scientific tools used in the manipulations. Scientific surveys are conducted to identify the likely swing voters. Then focus groups, a tool developed for marketing purposes, are used to learn what they care about most and what symbols can elicit these concerns. If possible, an attempt is made to create an "us vs. them" situation, linking one candidate to symbols which are important to swing voters and defining the opposition candidate as "one of them" whom the swings do not like. Ads are then created and market-tested to be sure that the symbols have been used effectively to appeal to the swing voters. The ads are run on TV at a time, and with a frequency, likely to produce the best results.

The combination of these two problems means that elected officials, even when well motivated, find it difficult to respond to the desires of the public. Not only are some of the tough choices

about how to solve issues not made clear, but they owe their jobs to those whose money and manipulative skills are needed for re-election rather than to the considered judgement of their constituents.



*"We don't have to fool all the people all the time — just the 30% who bother to vote".*

### A Solution

Is it possible to use public opinion polling and the insights of small groups to rectify this situation? We at the Jefferson Center in Minneapolis believe so. Since 1974 we have been working with small groups which are intended to empower people rather than manipulate them. Since the most familiar and widely trusted form of small group now used in public affairs is the jury system, we have used this as the foundation of our work.

The main technique is called a "Policy Jury". This is a method of citizen participation in which randomly selected citizens are paid to attend a series of meetings to learn about a specific issue and render their verdict on what should be done. These proceedings are organised to represent the major points of view on the issue in a fair and respectful manner, and to minimise staff biases. If at all possible, Policy Juries are conducted at the request of those public officials charged with making the decisions on the issue under consideration.

A Policy Jury usually meets for five days, with the jurors paid an average day's salary for attending. In large geographic areas, several juries may be

used on the same issue. In this case, there is usually a second level jury, made up of delegates from the original juries, to resolve disagreements between the original juries and issue final recommendations.

The other process based on the jury system is an Electoral Jury. In most ways it is conducted like a Policy Jury, but it concentrates on a specific electoral contest. The leading two or three candidates are given the opportunity to present their positions on a few major issues and to say why they believe they are qualified for the job. At the end of the hearings the jurors release conclusions about each of the issues covered and the personal qualifications of the candidates, offering reasons for their conclusions.

Great care is taken in selecting the jurors. First, we conduct a survey, making sure that our sample closely matches the population in terms of age, sex, education, and race. Then from the sample we select one or more juries, depending on the geographic area to be covered. For a city, one jury of 24 people will do. For a nation, there might be one or two dozen juries drawn from regions of equal population. Each jury will be balanced on political attitudes or demographics so that it is representative of the city or region from which it was drawn.

The Policy Jury process was developed over ten years of research and then was used in three major projects in Minnesota. A project on agricultural impacts on water quality had eleven organisations as sponsors, including four state agencies. A project on organ transplants was conducted for a steering committee of leading physicians and health care providers in Minnesota. Finally, we conducted a statewide project which used eight Policy Juries to examine whether there should be clinics in Minnesota's high schools to help prevent teen pregnancy and AIDS. This was performed at the request of the Health and Human Services Committee of the Minnesota Senate.

Our original research on Electoral Juries was conducted in 1976 when a group of randomly selected jurors reviewed the race between Carter and Ford to become president of the U.S. The project was found to be very valuable by the jurors, but it did not stimulate much general interest at that time. In 1989, however, we received considerable

support for the idea and are conducting a pilot project for the current mayoral race in St. Paul, Minnesota, with the co-sponsorship of the League of Women Voters of Minnesota. This group's support is significant because it is nationally known for its fairness in sponsoring electoral debates. In 1988, the League withdrew from the final presidential debate because it felt the process was being manipulated by those involved.

### **Will the Idea Catch On?**

The jury methods will gain significant power only if a major portion of the public trusts them and demands their use. There is reason to believe the public will trust them if they can be used with some frequency. The response of jurors of all political persuasions to the process has been very positive. They enjoy it and give the process very high ratings for fairness and for being a valuable experience. If the public is exposed to Policy or Electoral Juries with some frequency, they have the potential to become a powerful influence in the political arena.

The difficulty comes in getting the method used. Those who see the majority of their programmes supported by the current system are quite unlikely to support a wide use of the jury methods. If you are coming out ahead under the current system, then something novel whose outcome you cannot control is certainly not worth the risk. Since these are the groups exerting most influence on elected officials, most of the latter are also not eager to support the jury reforms, although sometimes a combination of frustration and idealism leads them to request a project.

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Therefore the activists most likely to support the method are those who currently are not getting what they want from government, even though they believe they have the (potential) support of a majority of the public. The peace movement finds itself in this position. It has had significant accomplishments over the past decade or two, yet it has not come close to achieving the core programmes which it feels are

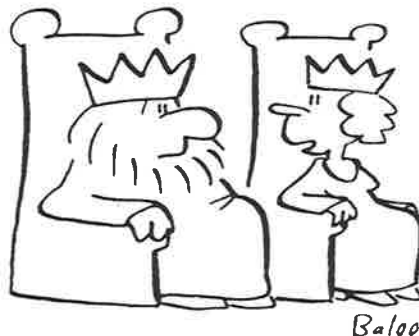
of critical importance. (The same holds for those who care about earth stewardship, but there is not space in this article to cover this.)

But it will not be easy to get the peace movement to support the jury methods. First, there is no guarantee that its agenda will be supported. The most that can be guaranteed is that the process is conducted fairly. Also, even if the methods do lead to the desired results, there may be less favourable results on other issues which the activists care about. If people in Policy Juries support capital punishment, how many in the peace movement will support the method?

Finally, a major problem would be created if the Jefferson Center used normal sales techniques to promote its services. If we were to write for "peace journals" using the rhetoric of the peace movement, we might be convincing to peace activists, but we would completely disqualify ourselves as neutral facilitators capable of conducting Policy Juries in a fair way. The most we can do in terms of "sales" with any activists is to compare their current situation with what might occur if their issue were reviewed in a Policy Jury or Electoral Jury setting. Let us turn, therefore, to a discussion of the peace movement.

### **The Peace Movement**

To make judgements about the success of the peace movement puts one in the centre of often emotional discussions about how full or empty the glass is. If one believes that peace is the norm, then the peace movement looks weak indeed. If one believes that empires are never thwarted in their expansion by internal protest, then the peace movement has had magnificent successes.



*"I know you're an absolute despot, but are you a Democrat or a Republican?"*

However, even if one judges the peace movement successful with Vietnam, the Nuclear Freeze and Central America, it cannot be judged successful in get-

ting its view of the world adopted by those in charge of making U.S. foreign policy. During the time of Vietnam, the protesters were at the forefront of the effort to get the nation to realise the futility of the war and the need to get out. That was a considerable accomplishment, but the price was high. A majority of the public throughout the war remained sceptical about the views and methods of the protesters<sup>3</sup>.

At the end of the war only about one quarter of the public had accepted the arguments of the peace movement about **why** the war was wrong and the U.S. should get out. The vast majority of Americans wanted their country out of Vietnam, but for differing reasons. Indeed more of the public wanted the U.S. to end the war by upping its military efforts to win it than to end it along the lines favoured by the peace movement<sup>4</sup>. Yet the protests stirred up enough turmoil so that the public began to insist on getting out of Vietnam. It was tearing the nation apart.

But once the nation was out, the public ignored the peace movement and its ideas. Much of this stemmed from the way the peace movement was covered by the media, which devoted much more attention to the oddities and foibles of the movement than its arguments. Indeed a significant reason for the large demonstrations was that this was about the only way of ensuring media coverage. Hence the pyrrhic victory of the movement: the majority of the public did not perceive the end of the war as a time for reorienting America's approach to the Third World along the lines favoured by the peace movement. Instead, they were more influenced by those who believe in peace through strength.

The two major efforts since then by the peace movement have met with similar results. In both the nuclear weapons freeze campaign and the attempt to stop aid to the contras, the peace movement was able to modify Reagan's policies, but not able to move its own agenda very far. In both cases they operated with a majority of the public supporting them; in both cases they ended up in a situation where they had no clear mandate for carrying on their efforts and no organisation capable of doing it.

The crux of the situation is that until the peace movement can get a majority of the public to vote in support of its agenda, it will be limited to stopping

the worst abuses, but with little hope of going beyond that. Unlike the anti-abortion movement, the peace movement is rarely able to influence the swing voters in an election.

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It is ironic that the peace movement cannot do better, given the broad support it has. During 1982-84 the Freeze received support from about 70% to 80% of the public; in 1984-88 the effort to stop aid to the contras was supported by about 60% of the public. In order to see why this support does not translate into votes, it is instructive to examine a recent extensive study of the American voter done by Gallup for the *Times Mirror* organisation<sup>5</sup>. This is revealing because the issue-stands of Americans have been put in the broader context of their world view, where and how they have gathered their information, and how they have voted.

The study showed a strong identification with the peace movement. Respondents were given a list of viewpoints and asked to indicate on a scale ranging from 1 to 10 how closely that viewpoint described them. Forty-six percent of the sample rated themselves at 8, 9, or 10 on the scale with regard to the peace movement. This meant that of the sixteen viewpoints presented, the peace movement fell into fourth place, just behind identification with the civil rights movement and identification as a religious person. But in first place, far outdistancing any other identification, was the 70% of the sample which placed themselves at 8, 9, or 10 as anti-communists. There were 52% who chose 10, the absolute top of the scale; the peace movement was next highest in selecting 10, but with only 23% of the sample.

One of the interesting things done in the *Times Mirror* study was to divide the electorate into eleven categories. There is not space to describe these in any detail. But in only five of the groups are there less than 70% who strongly view themselves as anti-communists. One of these groups, the "Bystanders", is a group of non-voters. Another, the "Followers", are generally young, blue collar, and are the only group whose

information level is characterized as "very low". The "Seculars" are a white, well-educated, middle-age group largely located on the East and West Coasts. The "60's Democrats" are an upper-middle class, heavily female (60%) group of mainstream Democrats who have a very high information level. Almost certainly this group makes up the backbone of the peace movement. The "Passive Poor" is older and poor, tending to live in the South, with 31% black. They are heavy TV watchers and their information level is low. (See Table 1).

**Table 1:** Voting groups less anti-communist than average, according to *Times Mirror* survey conducted by Gallup.

	Percent of Adult Population	Percent Likely Voters	Percent Strongly Anti-communist
Bystanders:	11%	0%	57%
Followers:	7%	4%	46%
Seculars:	8%	9%	46%
60s Democrats:	8%	11%	58%
Passive Poor:	7%	6%	57%
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>30%</b>	

It seems safe to assume that the anti-communist attitude in the U.S. is the major barrier faced by the peace movement in getting its ideas understood and accepted. This means that if the peace movement is to target any audience for their arguments, the best two are clearly the Seculars and the 60s Democrats. But they make up only 20% of the voting public. If the movement tries to go beyond this, it faces tough odds: three groups which do little reading and are not very interested in the kinds of arguments which the peace movement has to offer.

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This data goes a long way to explaining both the success and the failure of the peace movement. Given the strong desire for peace which is held by the public, the peace movement is able to move with success against those policies which most obviously seem contrary to the promotion of peace. However, the even stronger attitude of anti-communism (and the attendant views which go along with this) means that broader

messages of the peace movement about how to deal with the Third World and the Soviet Union are simply not picked up by the large majority of voters.

How then can the peace movement hope to get its long-range views accepted by the public? If the Vietnam war, where the peace movement saw itself vindicated by history, did not get peace views more widely accepted, then what kind of educational effort can succeed? Certainly manipulations of the public through the media are unlikely to succeed. The peace movement views itself as financially weaker than its opponents and sees its long-term views as not being properly covered by the media. In light of this, what new strategies are available to peace advocates?

**What Can Policy and Electoral Juries Do?**

How can the peace movement use Policy Juries or Electoral Juries to advance its long-term agenda?

First, it needs to learn what support it can get from average citizens in the Policy Jury setting. It would be possible to conduct a Policy Jury simply as a test, just as corporations use focus groups to check out their products. If the results turned out badly, then they could be suppressed. The Jefferson Center, however, does not run Policy Juries without making the results public. To do otherwise would mean that we would be empanelling citizens not to empower them, but to use them to promote the agendas of those who pay for the research.

What we do suggest, therefore, is approaching a member of Congress with a request for a Policy Jury on some significant aspect of the peace agenda. This might be done with a member of Congress who would like to side with that policy, but fears opposition from constituents for doing so. The agenda would have to be set so that equal time would be given to those who oppose the policy under consideration. If several such Policy Juries were run for different members of Congress and average citizens supported the policy under consideration, that would be powerful evidence that all Americans, if only they understood, would also favour that policy.

Of course, it is possible that the Policy Juries would not favour the long-term agenda of the peace movement. Although this would be very disappointing to the movement, it would provide important

insights into its positions. Is there anything about the long-term agenda which should be changed? One of the benefits of Policy Juries is that the jurors offer reasons for their decisions and point out what they like and dislike about the alternatives they considered.

But even if there is broad support through Policy Juries, this alone is unlikely to be enough. Members of Congress will be unlikely to vote for the policies even with Policy Jury support unless they can be reasonably sure that this will not hurt them at election time. This is where Electoral Juries come in. So long as the American public continues to be vulnerable to modern manipulative techniques, politicians will concentrate more on the games they need to play to be re-elected than on the policies they should be enacting to meet the nation's needs. If Electoral Juries start to be used with frequency and if this cuts down on manipulative politics, then members of Congress will be much more willing to follow the advice they get through Policy Juries.

### Conclusions

For almost two decades the peace movement has had strong support from the general public, but has been unable to advance its basic agenda with much success.

From the point of view of elected representatives, this is hardly surprising. Any elected official who really takes a leadership role on the peace agenda is likely to be accused of being weak on communism. Given the attitudes of a large majority of the public, these are risks which most elected officials are willing to take only when they are running from safe seats.

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If the peace movement wishes to

change this situation, it will need a two-fold strategy:

1. It must find a way to educate the public to support its long-term programmes. The Policy Jury is a unique way to give average citizens the opportunity to reflect on how their desires for peace and their anti-communism can be reconciled. It is highly unlikely that this will change the public into pro-communists, but it is quite possible that average citizens will decide that the long-term agenda of the peace movement does not conflict with their views on communism.
2. It must be able to show that this support for the long-term programmes will hold up in the rough and tumble of an election campaign. Here the Electoral Jury can give a cross section of the public enough information on candidates and the campaign so that they are not as easily swayed by the manipulations currently in use.

There is no guarantee that the long-term goals of the peace movement will be supported by people in Policy Juries. Also Electoral Juries at this stage of their development are only a hope for how to move the American political system beyond manipulative politics.

But the beginnings of the "Freeze" in Western Massachusetts in 1980 can serve as a model for experimentation. A handful of people tested out a novel idea using local referenda as the vehicle. It was obviously an odd, if not outright foolish, idea. But when the Freeze gained popular support in three counties where a majority of the citizens voted for Reagan for president, the peace movement seized on the idea and it became the most successful expression of peace sentiments in the 1980s. Small experiments, carefully planned and executed, can release tremendous amounts of energy when successful.

The peace movement is very unlikely to succeed with its long-term agenda until it can give a clear description of how it is going to win the support of the

American people. Those who engage in manipulative politics can cite compelling data to show how they are able to win the game at election time. We know of no such compelling arguments by the peace movement. In light of that, Policy Juries and Electoral Juries are certainly worthy of serious consideration.

### NOTES

1. Norman Ornstein, Andrew Kohut, and Larry McCarthy, *The People, The Press & Politics* (The Times Mirror Study of the American Electorate) New York: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1988. The project was carefully conducted by The Gallup Organization; face-to-face interviews with an unusually large sample it comprised of 4,244 adults.
2. The idea of using randomly selected groups of citizens as a major reform of democracy is not unique to the Jefferson Center. Peter Dienel has used the method extensively in Germany to deal with issues ranging from city planning to future energy paths (see *Die Planungszelle*, Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen, West Germany, 1978). John Burnheim, Alan Davies and Fred Emery in Australia have devised a number of ways in which randomly selected groups of citizens might be used (see, especially, John Burnheim *Is Democracy Possible? The Alternative to Electoral Politics*, London, Polity Press, 1985; and his article, "Democracy by Statistical Representation," in this issue of *Social Alternatives*.)
3. See Milton J. Rosenberg, Sidney Verba, and Philip E. Converse, *Vietnam and the Silent Majority* (New York, Har/Row Books) 1970 pp44,45. They note that at the peak of the antiwar demonstrations in 1970, the largest problem facing the nation was seen as student strikes and demonstrations rather than the war itself. Howard Schuman, in "Two Sources of Antiwar Sentiment in America", *American Journal of Sociology*, v 78, 1972, pp513-536, presents data indicating that "public disillusionment with the war has grown despite the campus demonstrations, not because of them". This is supported in Rosenberg et al., p26.
4. For American attitudes at the end of the war, see William Watts and Lloyd A. Free, "Nationalism, Not Isolationism", *Foreign Policy*, v 24, Fall 1976.
5. Ornstein et al., *op. cit.* There have been some objections to the way that the voters have been divided up into categories. But the basic findings of the survey are supported by many other surveys — meaning that the implications for the peace movement are basically the same even if one prefers different ways of categorising the American electorate.