

‘CIVIL DEFENCE GIVES MEANING TO YOUR LEISURE’: CITIZENSHIP,
PARTICIPATION AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN COLD WAR RECRUITMENT
PROPAGANDA, 1949-53.

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Abstract:

In the early cold war the British government founded a voluntary civil defence service designed to protect the nation and the population from the effects of enemy attack in the event of war. Although civil defence was a site of massive voluntary effort - around 500,000 people joined – it was also considered a ‘failure’. This article examines the propaganda utilised to recruit these volunteers in the ‘atomic age’, and argues that the messages used reveal a range of concerns about the conflict, patriotism and voluntarism in the early postwar years which existed in tension. In particular, it analyses the tensions between duty and service on the one hand, and leisure on the other, symptomatic of the wider debates surrounding citizenship and participation in the period. It also explains the importance of the Second World War and the gendered perceptions of civil defence in attempting to mobilise potential recruits. The article concludes that civil defence propaganda succeeded in mobilising significant levels of participation, but was perceived as failure due to an understanding of patriotic citizenship rooted in the cultural context of the Second World War. In a period of cultural change, propaganda began to emphasise leisure as well as duty, but struggled to reconcile the two messages in a way capable of convincing recruits in large enough numbers.

Key words: cold war, citizenship, propaganda, civil defence

During the early cold war, the British government developed a civil defence organisation as a vital part of its cold war policy. Central to this policy was an organisation of civil defence volunteers created along the lines of the Air Raid Precaution (APR) services from the Second World War.¹ Between 1949 and 1968 the British public were ‘protected’ by these individuals who had signed up for training to enable them to provide rescue and welfare services in event of an enemy attack, whether that consisted of conventional, atomic or thermonuclear weapons. Such protection was in reality of doubtful worth, but the civil defence services were testament to a significant level of popular participation in Britain’s cold war defence. The numbers of

¹ See M. Grant, *After the Bomb: civil defence and nuclear war in Britain* (Palgrave, 2010); P. Hennessy, *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War*, (London, 2003);

people involved were impressive, rising throughout the early 1950s to amount to more than 500,000 people by the end of 1953.² Recruitment faltered from 1954 as the potential horrors of thermonuclear warfare undermined the credibility of civil defence, and after 1960 numbers declined sharply as untrained or ‘inefficient’ members were purged from the different organisations and new recruitment struggled to make up the shortfall.³ The hydrogen bomb threw civil defence into crisis and recruitment propaganda from 1954 onwards was designed to forestall criticisms of the government’s nuclear policy by promoting the idea of civil defence as a worthwhile response to the nuclear threat. Voluntary civil defence during the ‘atomic age’, a period of rapid if uneven expansion between 1949 and early 1954, can be seen as a site of significant public engagement with the cold war. It was a period when the rich propaganda developed to inspire voluntary recruitment conveyed a variety of diverse and changing messages reflecting the changing social and cultural discourse surrounding participation and citizenship.

The recruitment propaganda produced in atomic age Britain reflected the assumptions within political culture about the nature of the cold war and the role of the individual in fighting it.⁴ In seeking to attract recruits the value of civil defence was emphasised: the need for it, and its ability to undertake its allotted task. The messages and representations selected for these purposes are repositories of meaning and by analysing this material we can illuminate both how cold war service was constructed by the government in early 1950s Britain and the cultural space it occupied. Initially, the assumptions built into recruiting propaganda were characterised by notions of duty and patriotism, with civil defence represented as part of the individual’s obligation to defend the nation. In projecting these messages, the government borrowed heavily from ideas of service current in the Second World War.⁵ Although designed to establish the need

² Home Office, *Second Report of the Advisory Committee on Publicity and Recruitment for the Civil Defence and Allied Services*, Cmd.9131, (HMSO, 1954).

³ M. Grant, *After the Bomb*, pp.165-8.

⁴ For the American experience in mobilising voluntarist responses to the cold war threat in a very different national context see: G. Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, (Oxford, 1994); L. McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, (Princeton, 2000); and K.D. Rose, *One Nation Underground: the fallout shelter in American culture*, (New York, 2001).

⁵ The process and method of mobilising the wartime citizenry is examined in: D. Morgan and M. Evans, *The Battle for Britain: Citizenship and Ideology in the Second World War* (London, 1993); S.O. Rose, *Which People’s War? Citizenship and National Identity in Britain, 1939-45* (Oxford, 2003).

for patriotic voluntary action, these wartime-inspired messages also served to destabilise the idea of civil defence as a necessary part of Britain's *atomic* defence. Moreover, to construct civil defence in this way was to put forward a citizenship discourse which was contingent on the public identifying with these motifs of self-sacrifice and duty and associating them with the cold war threat. As became clear in the early 1950s, such a citizenship discourse was in fact divorced from popular conceptions of the role of the individual in post-1945 Britain. In fact, civil defence can be seen as an indicator of changes effecting Britain as a whole, with people retreating from the national and local, and concentrating instead on the domestic, 'apolitical' issues of home, family and wealth.⁶ Given these factors, it was unsurprising that recruitment failed to live up to the government's high expectations.

We can see how changes made to the message after the initial push, reducing the emphasis on patriotism and the duty of citizens, were reactions to the 'failure' of civil defence recruitment. Adapting propaganda to broaden the appeal of civil defence reflected the broader shift within British popular culture away from the 'national' and towards the individual or domestic. Civil defence from 1951 was represented as inclusive, providing associational opportunities and leisure satisfaction. Its core message of participation in national defence was also adapted, stressing 'patriotism' less and emphasising that to serve in civil defence was to fight for peace and to protect the local community. In constructing civil defence as a valuable and rewarding pursuit, messages became increasingly gendered in order to appeal to both sexes. Although the focus on leisure improved recruitment levels, the attempt to construct civil defence simultaneously as a fun activity *and* a vital plank in the nation's defence proved as problematic as the previous emphasis on duty had been. Overall, then, the article will conclude that the government's various attempts at inspiring recruitment were fundamentally unstable in the early cold war. At first there was a failure to understand the contingent nature of the link between citizenship and service in the Second World War and assuming its applicability after 1945. Once this was understood, messages designed to have more appeal were produced, but these struggled to reconcile the needs

⁶ For these cultural changes, see B. Harrison, *Seeking a Role: the United Kingdom, 1951-70*, (Oxford, 2009). R. McKibbin, *Classes and cultures: England, 1918-51* (Oxford, 1998), D. Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-51* (London, 2007); P. Thane, 'Family life and "normality" in postwar British culture', in R. Bessel and D. Schumann (eds), *Life after death: approaches to a cultural and social history during the 1940s and 1950s* (Cambridge, 2003).

of nuclear defence with the cultural pressures emphasising leisure and consumption. Even before the development of the hydrogen bomb forced a total reconceptualisation of civil defence in 1954 it is clear that recruitment was in crisis, a result of the failure of a citizenship discourse based on service and self-sacrifice to resonate sufficiently in the face of a cold war threat within a rapidly changing popular culture.

Recruitment strategy and the idea of ‘failure’

The strategy aimed at recruiting volunteers during 1949-1953 was far from static, although throughout it relied on a strong lead from the central government and relied on certain key messages which consistently ran through the propaganda even as they were adapted and rephrased. When the recruitment campaign began in 1950, it rested on three elements: calls by Ministers, press advertising, and cinema films. Ministerial radio broadcasts and press conferences were a central cog in recruitment campaigns throughout the period. They usually inaugurated campaigns and emphasised the fact that service in civil defence was officially sanctioned, an approved participation in the nation’s defence. Ministers delineated the threats to the nation, the necessity of civil defence in meeting them, and the need for individuals to sacrifice their time for this end. Such leadership rhetoric helped set the discursive boundaries of recruitment propaganda, which in turn borrowed from and reinforced such rhetoric. National and local press advertisements, posters, and in 1950-51 cinematic efforts continued this process of encouragement, emphasising certain themes and messages designed to chime with the population. This effort was concentrated in annual autumnal recruitment campaigns, with the budget focused on a six month period between late September and spring the following year. The budget, never large, actually declined over the period – from £49,968 in 1950/51, to £35,624 in 1951/52, then £32,480 in 1952/53.⁷ This decline, matched by the axing of cinema production after 1950, was driven by the curtailing of spending on government information by first the Attlee Government and then the incoming Conservatives.⁸

Civil defence, however, was essentially a local service. Members were recruited and trained by local authorities, meaning local initiatives were central. Local press advertisements were produced centrally, as was advice on how to garner favourable

⁷ TNA, HO 303/3. ‘Press Advertising: Civil Defence, 1950-53’.

⁸ See W. Crofts, *Coercion or persuasion? Propaganda in Britain after 1945*, (Routledge, 1989).

local press coverage. Local papers were considered powerful instruments ‘for creating local interest and local pride in a subject of local as well as national importance’.⁹ As the period progressed, the emphasis was increasingly placed on local efforts. One key method was the parade or demonstration, a staged local event where civil defence could be ‘performed’ for the local population.¹⁰ These ranged from small displays of equipment, a national touring exhibition and full pageantry.¹¹ The apogee of local recruitment attempts, however, was the ‘house-to-house’ canvass, tried in pilot areas in 1951/52, seen as a massive success in 1952/53, and adopted as the mainspring of the entire campaign in 1953/54. These local methods meant that the national campaign, with its broadcast by the Home Secretary and national advertisements, was increasingly seen as softening up potential recruits, aided by local advertising, with the personal approach from canvassers clinching the deal.¹² This emphasis on the local basis of recruitment was encouraged by the budgetary constraints on civil defence advertising: with less money, the authorities relied more on the efforts of volunteers, and national propaganda itself was seen in Whitehall as a means of encouraging local efforts.¹³

Materials were produced for the Home Office and local authorities by the Central Office of Information(COI), which continually reviewed both the content and methods of propaganda in order to improve the overall campaign in the face of budgetary constraints.¹⁴ Although there is very little contextual information on the material produced by the COI, with only a couple of ‘guidance’ documents sent to local authorities at the beginning of specific campaigns and no information at all on how propaganda material was produced within COI, we can see a clear ‘feedback’ effect as the reception of messages was collected in a variety of ways and used to adapt the

⁹ BN 10/202. ‘Recruitment for Civil Defence and Allied Services: Campaign Guide. Local Publicity’, June 1951.

¹⁰ T.C. Davis views the civic ‘performance’ of civil defence as central to American understandings of nuclear war: see her *Stages of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense* (Durham, 2007), pp.105-220.

¹¹ Grant, *After the Bomb*, pp.64-76.

¹² HO 303/6. ‘Campaign Guide: Recruitment to Civil Defence Corps and Auxiliary Fire Service, 1953’, prepared by the Central Office of Information’.

¹³ TNA, HO 303/3. ‘Civil Defence and A.F.S.’, Memorandum by Everetts Advertising Ltd, no date [1954].

¹⁴ See Crofts, *Coercion or persuasion?*, pp.231-42.

messages.¹⁵ In this way, propaganda was intended to keep pace with cultural change.¹⁶ First there were formal reviews: in 1950-51, before the body was scrapped, these were undertaken the government's own Social Survey.¹⁷ Afterwards, the Home Office sponsored an inquiry into recruitment chaired by William Mabane, a wartime junior Home Office Minister.¹⁸ In addition to these formal reviews, feedback came from individual local authorities, who sent reports and press clippings back to the Home Office, providing insight into how recruitment methods worked on the ground.¹⁹ This feedback clearly allowed that the conclusions drawn from one campaign were implemented in the next, although sadly there appear to be no archival records detailing how this information was processed.

In attempting to evaluate the mechanisms and messages by which the call for volunteers was issued, a key consideration is government the perception that recruitment failed. A review of recruitment in 1954 emphasised that more than 500,000 people served in the civil defence services.²⁰ This is an enormous number, and the fact that it was perceived as a failure tells us much about the assumptions of political culture in cold war Britain. The overwhelming majority of these half million volunteers, some 322,845, were in the Civil Defence Corps; 19,974 were in the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS); 41,047 in the National Hospital Reserve Service (NHSR); 72,892 in the Special

¹⁵ On the importance of the idea of a 'feedback' or 'loop' affect involving official or press narratives and their popular reception, see D. LeMaheu, *A culture for democracy: mass communication and the cultivated mind in Britain between the wars*, (Clarendon, 1988), pp.17-22.

¹⁶ D. Clampin, "'The war has turned our lives upside-down': the merit of commercial advertising in documenting the cultural history of the British home front in the Second World War", *Visual Resources*, 24:2 (2008), 145-58.

¹⁷ TNA, RG 23/157. 'Enquiry into opinions and attitudes of people eligible to join the new Civil Defence Services, for the Home and Scottish Offices'; TNA, RG 23/167. Second enquiry to estimate the effect of the 1950 recruitment campaign, to discover useful themes for the 1951 campaign and the characteristics of those likely to join the Civil Defence Services.

¹⁸ Home Office, *First Report of the Advisory Committee on Publicity and Recruitment for the Civil Defence and Allied Services*, Cmd.8708, (HMSO, 1952); Home Office, *Second Report of the Advisory Committee on Publicity and Recruitment for the Civil Defence and Allied Services*, Cmd.9131, (HMSO, 1954).

¹⁹ See TNA, HO 303/5. 'Interdepartmental committee on publicity and recruitment'. This file contains press cuttings and reports submitted by local authorities on previous campaigns.

²⁰ Home Office, *Second Report of the Advisory Committee on Publicity and Recruitment for the Civil Defence and Allied Services*, Cmd.9131, (HMSO, 1954).

Constabulary. This total of 456,758 was supplemented by those ‘serving’ in the Industrial Civil Defence Service (ICDS) – approximately 150,000 people. Even allowing for some duplication, with members of the ICDS also serving elsewhere, there were clearly ‘well over’ 500,000.²¹ But when the success of civil defence was discussed, this total number of civil defence activists was not the measurement used: much more common was the single figure of the Civil Defence Corps, occasionally supplemented by the AFS. The reasons for excluding other services were varied. The ICDS was recruited in the workplace and designed to protect various firms in an attack – its ‘membership’ was loose and service in it was not considered as playing a full role in civil defence. The Special Constabulary had many other peacetime roles and so the ‘specials’ were not seen as especially engaging in civil defence activities. The NHRS is more complex, and seems mostly to have been excluded from discussions because it was organised and recruited by the Ministry of Health rather than the Home Office.

When politicians or the press discussed civil defence, then, it was usually the Corps they were discussing. The Corps was divided into five sections, reflecting the different roles recruits were expected to undertake: ‘Welfare’ (to care for evacuees and the bombed-out homeless), ‘Rescue’, ‘Ambulance’ (both designed to save lives in attack conditions), ‘Warden’ (to give street-level warnings and instructions), and finally ‘headquarters’ (to co-ordinate). Its total UK membership of 322,845 in 1954 was well below its target of 470,000, and so it was considered a failure. Moreover, it reached that level from very low beginnings. In England and Wales, which accounted for some 94 per cent of recruits, only 31,809 had joined by June 1950, eight months after recruiting began (See Table). The outbreak of the Korean War in the summer of 1950 improved recruitment dramatically, but the 147,464 members by June 1951 was still less than a third of its full strength. Civil defence’s tardy progress up to this stage created the view that recruitment had ‘failed’. Later appeals based on the a set of more diverse messages, however, saw the Corps grow even after the immediate shock of the Korean scare had faded: by September 1953 the Corps was 62 per cent of its desired size and there was more confidence about its eventual success than ever before. The following six months, however, those proceeding the thermonuclear shock of March 1954, failed to bring in significantly more recruits, suggesting that civil defence had reached saturation point before 1954.

²¹ Ibid.

The failure of civil defence recruitment must then be seen as relative to the expectations current within cold war British culture. Home Office ministers and officials were not alone in arguing that recruitment had failed: the press and the volunteers themselves lamented the lack of engagement among the public.²² The periods when civil defence recruitment was at its most successful show that although the temperature of the cold war was an important factor, it was the resonance of representations of civil defence service within popular culture, or the lack of it, which ultimately determined the success of recruitment. High tension typified the period before the Korean War,²³ but civil defence recruitment failed dismally. After 1951, when the shock of Korea had subsided, tensions remained high but on an even keel, more care was devoted to constructing civil defence in a way designed to appeal to ordinary people. Ultimately, however, it was the fundamental tension between the core message of civil defence and cultural attitudes towards participation and citizenship which meant it could never succeed to the level the government wanted it to. This does not mean we should see civil defence recruitment as a failure, or argue that the public were apathetic regarding either it or the cold war threat – the numbers involved were too high for such a crass summary – but it does mean that we can argue that the culture of civil defence, and the assumptions of political culture concerning its popular appeal, were increasingly divorced from the realities of British culture.

‘Dare you shirk it?’ Patriotism and individual responsibility

When civil defence services began recruiting in 1949 the threat to British security from global communism had been well established within British culture. Historians of the British press have shown that although newspapers were initially less likely than the government to see the Soviet Union in ‘cold war’ terms, by early 1948 there was a consensus within the media about the threat posed by Russia. Key to this was the Czechoslovakian coup of February 1948, a watershed when general sympathy for

²² See ‘Apathy in Civil Defence’, *The Times*, 9 Feb 1951; and ‘Whose Fault?’, *Civil Defence*, 1:4, (April-June 1950), p.4.

²³ For the importance of Korea, see P. Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain, 1945-51*, (London, 1992), p.415; M.J. Selverstone, *Constructing the Monolith: The United States, Great Britain and International Communism* (London, 2009), pp.171-95.

Soviet aims turned into 'outright hostility'.²⁴ John Jenks has stressed that there was a general trend towards portraying the Soviet Union as a 'brutal, untrustworthy adversary' in opposition to Britain's 'defensive virtue'.²⁵ Public opinion followed this trend of wartime admiration becoming postwar ambiguity and turning in early 1948 into a clear 'anti-Soviet stance'.²⁶ Public awareness of the cold war threat was obviously a key aspect of civil defence recruitment. Yet the formal messages used to encourage recruitment only rarely discussed the threat to British security in explicit terms and never identified the Soviet Union as the potential enemy. At the outset, in 1949 and 1950, the threat was seen as direct, immediate and aimed at the British homeland. Later, when the risk of immediate war had diminished, the cold war threat was constructed as more implicit threat to worldwide 'peace'. Either way, propaganda sought to encourage the same response from volunteers: the recognition that it was the duty of the individual – the 'you' of the propaganda – to take an active part in tackling the threat.

Given the position of the Soviet Union within British political and popular culture by the time recruitment began in November 1949 it is perhaps surprising that the initial attempts at inspiring recruits were so reluctant to use the threat posed by the Russians explicitly. In fact, the first national advertising campaign from Spring 1950 gave few positive reasons to join civil defence at all, stressing that civil defence was 'a call to duty'.²⁷ In a speech in March 1950, the Home Secretary James Chuter Ede argued that 'enrolment in the Corps should be regarded as a duty by able bodied citizens over military age'.²⁸ The main reason for this unexciting approach was the marked desire not to present civil defence as a 'panic' measure or as a prelude to all-out war: in July it was stressed that 'civil defence is an organisation of men and women coming together as neighbours to defend each other as neighbours... it is a local service'.²⁹ It was this fear

²⁴ T. Shaw, 'The British Popular Press and the Early Cold War', *History* 83:269 (1998), p.80; see also A. Foster, 'The British Press and the Coming of the Cold War', in A. Deighton (ed.), *Britain and the First Cold War* (Macmillan, 1990), pp.11-31.

²⁵ J. Jenks, *British Propaganda and the News Media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh, 2006), p.27.

²⁶ T. Shaw, 'The British Popular Press and the Early Cold War', *History* 83:269 (1998), p.83.

²⁷ TNA, INF 2/118. 'Of course I'm patriotic..', national advertising, 1950/51.

²⁸ 'More Civil Defence Recruits Needed: Home Secretary's Appeal', *Manchester Guardian*, 20 Mar.1950.

²⁹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 478, 24 July 1950, 51.

which had prevented civil defence activities from beginning in 1948, as the government feared its impact on the international situation.³⁰

The outbreak of the Korean war transformed the landscape of cold war Britain. It was widely believed that the invasion of the South by the Communist North was merely a prelude to the wider onslaught of global communism on the West. In a broadcast in July 1950, Clement Attlee warned the nation that Britain faced a ‘world wide’ conspiracy. He stressed that ‘all could play a part in the fight to make Britain safe by volunteering for service in the Forces or the Civil Defence service’, adding that ‘the fire that has been started in Korea may burn down your house – it is well worth while to make some sacrifice of leisure now to prevent war’.³¹ The advertisements of the first concentrated national campaign, starting in November 1950, echoed the themes of Attlee’s July speech and directly mobilised idea of the nation under attack. In one national advert, people were asked ‘Have we to face another war? What’s your view?’ (Fig. 1). The choices were: ‘Never Again’, ‘In Five Years’, ‘In Two Years’, or ‘In One Year or Less’. ‘If’, the advert continued, ‘in your heart of hearts, you don’t think the first answer’s right, then you *must* ask yourself, “What am I doing about it?” ... Your duty’s quite simple. It’s to get yourself trained Now in civil defence’.³² The issue of family was also introduced in strikingly similar terms in an advert from the same campaign. Underneath Attlee’s ‘fires in Korea’ words, the individual is asked: ‘Are you ready to give a few hours a month for training on which your family’s life may depend? ... Dare you risk shirking that responsibility? Think it over, and act quickly’.³³ Themes of duty and shirking were also prevalent in a series of local advertisements, which asked: ‘Civil Defence: dare you shirk it? Will someone else defend you?’³⁴ and ‘Will you just talk – or act?’³⁵ Civil defence propaganda was appealing to the values of the ‘normal’ citizen – patriotic and self-sacrificing, prepared to do his or her bit.

³⁰ Grant, *After the Bomb*, pp.26-31.

³¹ ‘Attlee: We Fight a World Conspiracy’, *Daily Mirror*, 31 July 1950;

³² TNA, INF 2/118. ‘Have we to face another war?’. 1950/51 National Press Adverts.

³³ Ibid. ‘The fire that started in distant Korea may burn down your house’, 1950/51 National press advertisement.

³⁴ Ibid. ‘Civil Defence: dare you shirk it? Will someone else defend you?’, 1950 Scottish Press Advert

³⁵ Ibid. ‘Civil Defence and You? Will you just talk – or act?’. 1950 Scottish Press Advert

*Figure 1. 'Have we to face another war?', national press advertisement, 1950.*³⁶

These messages retained the central themes of patriotism and individual duty. They attempted to convince individuals of the need for *immediate* patriotic action by including civil defence within the wider framework of British defence. This was done in two ways: recalling the last war, and linking civil defence with Britain's other defence preparations. In referring back to the war, propaganda was building on the assumption widely held before recruiting began that civil defence veterans would flock to the colours.³⁷ The war was also used as an example to inspire future recruits. In his speech calling for recruits, Attlee stressed 'How did we defeat the blitz in the last war? By the skill, devotion, courage and self-sacrifice of thousands of ordinary citizens. If war should come again, which God forbid, we must be ready'.³⁸ As we shall see below, civil defence propaganda drew heavily on the war years to stress the comradeship and fulfilment people would gain from service in civil defence.

Using the war to promote cold war civil defence in this way had its drawbacks, however. Linking the two periods together was intended to provide an uncontentious exemplar of patriotic civil defence activity, but it also served to strengthen the idea that civil defence remained essentially unchanged in character. In late 1949, the *Daily Mirror* ran a story about the sole volunteer for civil defence in the rural area around Dartford in Kent. In the story the volunteer tells the reader that 'I am surprised to find myself standing alone like this. I was proud to do my bit in the war', also that she possessed a suitcase full of wartime 'relics.... My family pull leg about it, but I don't mind'.³⁹ Here cold war civil defence was a direct reconstruction of the Second World War, and a comical one at that. This view that civil defence was unchanged from the war was resisted within the propaganda. Attlee concluded his recruitment speech by declaring that 'We must have volunteers now to join those who have already started training. Many people are still saying "I will be there on the day", but that won't be good enough'.⁴⁰ Using the war to encourage recruits, then, was problematic and

³⁶ Ibid. 'Have we to face another war?', national press advertisement, 1950.

³⁷ TNA, HO 322/158. 'Memorandum on Publicity for Recruitment to Civil Defence', Note by A. B. Ashbourne, 5.7.1949.

³⁸ 'Appeal for Civil Defence Recruits: Mr Attlee's Broadcast', *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Oct 1950

³⁹ 'Their C.D. Corps is just Mrs. T', *Daily Mirror*, 12 Dec 1949.

⁴⁰ 'Appeal for Civil Defence Recruits: Mr Attlee's Broadcast', *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Oct 1950.

contradictory, illustrating that within popular culture civil defence was firmly associated with the Second World War, and its place as a sophisticated part of the fight against the cold war was unstable.

In addition to referring back to the legacy of the war, recruitment messages placed civil defence volunteers within the wider system of national defence. The principles of recruitment' outlined by Ede explained that 'the fit man under thirty should be in the Territorial Army or one of the auxiliary services.... A man between thirty and forty should be regarded as either a fighting man or suitable for a suitably strenuous form of civil defence such as rescue work.... The man over forty should be regarded as primarily available for civil defence'.⁴¹ For people of a certain age, civil defence was the 'proper place' for patriotic activity. Younger men were excluded because, as Ede put it, 'I do not want Civil Defence, important as it is, to be a softer option for people who ought to take a more active share in the defence of their country. This is why I have said "no men under thirty"'.⁴² The division along age lines between civil defence and more active service has to be seen in the light of contemporary anxieties about the size and strength of the armed forces and the continuation of conscription into peacetime,⁴³ but it did mean that the construction of civil defence as a patriotic duty contained an ambiguous message – it was fitted into the frame of national defence which emphasised the military or quasi-military duties of all in the face of the cold war threat, but simultaneously represented as a 'softer' option unsuitable for younger, more 'active' men.⁴⁴

Despite these attempts to promote civil defence, it was clear that the recruitment campaigns were not achieving the desired results. Before the Korean war a mere 31,809 had signed up for the Civil Defence Corps in England and Wales, out of a target of 470,000. By March 1951, that figure was 131,369 – a vast improvement, but still way below the desired level. Government reviews stressed the purchase patriotism and 'a sense of duty' still retained for civil defence volunteers, but highlighted the need to

⁴¹ House of Commons, *Official Record*, 478, 24 July 1950, 51

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ See L.V. Scott *Conscription and the Attlee Governments: The Politics and Policy of National Service 1945-51* (Oxford, 1993).

⁴⁴ Much the same division between 'activity' and 'passivity' was noticeable in representations of the Home Guard in the Second World War: See P. Summerfield and C. Peniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women and the Home Guard in the Second World War*, (Manchester, 2007).

supplement these messages with an attempt to tackle the two main causes given by the public for not joining: ‘Lack of spare time’ and ‘Had enough in the last war’.⁴⁵ These concerns were directly addressed in subsequent COI material, leading to a diversification of the content and style of recruitment propaganda which would adapt the core concerns of patriotism and individual service (See Fig. 2). Such replies suggested a process of cultural change in which the emphasis on duty, self-sacrifice and delayed gratification was receding in favour of leisure opportunity, consumer choice and the gratification of jam today rather than tomorrow. In this sense the feedback process on civil defence chimed with the ‘set the people free’ rhetoric of the new Conservative Government – which itself has been seen as a beneficiary of growing levels of discontent with ‘austerity’, especially among the middle classes.⁴⁶

By constructing voluntary civil defence service as the ‘duty’ of all eligible citizens, the propaganda of 1950-51 established a discourse of citizenship which presented patriotic service as its normative behaviour. In doing so, cold war recruitment propaganda echoed the definitions of citizenship widespread within British culture during the Second World War. As Sonya Rose has shown, adhering to notions of patriotism and self-sacrifice was part of a set of obligations individuals had to meet in order to be considered as ‘full citizens’,⁴⁷ and the leadership rhetoric and propaganda surrounding cold war service can be seen as an extension of such a citizenship discourse. This extension of wartime ideas of citizenship into the post-1945 period was part of a wider tendency of the Attlee Government to mobilise ideas of a participatory citizenship which owed a great deal to wartime patterns of behaviour, as other historians have noted.⁴⁸ That they did this is unsurprising. Ideas of citizenship were fluid,⁴⁹ and Britain

⁴⁵ NA, RG 23/167. Second enquiry to estimate the effect of the 1950 recruitment campaign, to discover useful themes for the 1951 campaign and the characteristics of those likely to join the Civil Defence Services.

⁴⁶ See I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: rationing, controls and consumption, 1939-55* (Oxford, 2000).

⁴⁷ Rose, *Which People's War?*, pp.11-26.

⁴⁸ For two contrasting discussions of the public response to the government's policies in this field, see S. Fielding et al, *England Arise!: The Labour Party and popular politics in 1940s Britain* (MUP, 1995); J. Hinton, ‘“The Tale of Sammy Spree”: Gender and the Secret Dynamics of 1940s British Corporatism’, *History Workshop Journal*, 58:1 (2004), 86-109.

⁴⁹ On the importance of seeing notions of citizenship in this way, see B. Beaven and J. Griffiths, ‘Creating the Exemplary Citizen: The Changing Notion of Citizenship in Britain 1870-1939’, *Contemporary British*

had just emerged, after all, from a conflict in which self-sacrificing participation was *the* defining aspect of full inclusion in the national community.⁵⁰ It could be said to have been more surprising if such ways of conceptualising state-individual relationships had *not* proved influential after 1945. In short, the government constructed civil defence as a duty of its cold war citizens and assumed that this would secure widespread agreement in the form of volunteers. Of course, it did not fully succeed.

‘My best friends are in civil defence’: Leisure, choice and ‘peace’

The civil defence recruitment campaign of 1951-52, although launched with less fanfare than its predecessor or its successors due to the 1951 General Election, saw a new focus on civil defence as a site of leisure satisfaction. In September 1951 a civil defence meeting of the London County Council concluded that the ‘recreational side of defence duties’ needed to be emphasised. When local authorities were told by the COI about the new strategy it amounted to a new emphasis on local initiative and a new style of advertising. Instead of generic figures, each advertisement would now ‘feature real-life characters typical of those now giving voluntary service.... Each of the advertisements gives a brief human case-history, and a good reason for joining’.⁵¹ Building on the public feedback, the advertisements for 1951-52 had two rather blunt slogans – ‘spare time for civil defence’, and ‘you can’t be certain – you can be ready’. The narratives produced in each advertisement certainly took great pains to emphasise the space ‘ordinary’ people had created for civil defence in their lives. For example, Albert Curtis ‘puts in one night a week on training, uses the the rest of his time for church work... and for gardening, painting and cinema-going’,⁵² and Thomas Alderson ‘trains for an hour or two each week and devotes the rest of his spare time to his home or his hobby – pig and poultry breeding’.⁵³ Miss Barbara Barton ‘attends one lecture a week, leaving herself plenty of time for her own job and for dancing, swimming and cycling’.⁵⁴ (See

History, 22:2 (2008), 203-25, p.204; R. Weight and A. Beach, ‘Introduction’, in their (eds), *The right to belong: citizenship and national identity in Britain, 1930-1960* (I.B. Tauris, 1998), 1-18

⁵⁰ Rose, *Which People’s War?*, pp.5-11.

⁵¹ TNA, BN 10/202. ‘Recruitment for Civil Defence and Allied Services: Campaign Guide’, September 1951.

⁵² TNA, INF 2/118. ‘To the Rescue’, national advertising, 1951/52.

⁵³ *Ibid.* ‘The First Civilian G.C.’, national advertising, 1951/52.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* ‘Driving Ambition’, national advertising, 1951/52.

Fig. 2.) Civil defence is promoted as something that can be fitted in around other, more traditionally 'fun' leisure activities. Civil defence is highlighted as worthwhile, but its status as a rewarding leisure activity in and of itself is rarely stressed.

Figure 2. 'Driving ambition', national press advertising, 1951/52.⁵⁵

To convince people to join, a 'good reason' was provided, and they were often related to events in the war which have inspired the volunteer. A housewife joined because in the last war she 'drove an ambulance in the Coventry "blitz"; in Coventry's worst raid she was sent on an incident which turned out to be her own home – destroyed'.⁵⁶ A van-driver 'returned one night' from work 'to find his own home destroyed. Others helped his family then and he feels it is his duty to be ready to help others now'.⁵⁷ Further highlighting the centrality of the war in the 1951-52 campaign, all the people featured (apart from the youngest women) had excellent war records. They served in the military, or in civil defence, and many were decorated. By tying their previous service to the need to take part in civil defence 'today' the 'good reasons' for joining were of course strengthened. Practical or 'commonsense' reasons were also provided such as 'in case the balloon goes up',⁵⁸ or because 'she has always believed in the saying "work for peace, prepare for war"'.⁵⁹ These might appear vague, but when combined with the wartime service of featured volunteers it serves as another reminder that the lessons of the last war were valid for the cold war confrontation. In short, they were exemplifying the 'you can't be certain – you can be ready' slogan.

The veterans of the last conflict, committing themselves to this one, were represented as the exemplars of good citizenship. For those without the experience of war, stronger motives for joining up were provided. One young woman stressed the 'worthwhile' nature of the work whilst another 'knows that she can be of help to Liverpool's citizens if the need arises'.⁶⁰ If these 'good reasons' focus on providing help to others – the community, or neighbours – the comradeship experienced by many during the war was

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 'Housewife cum Instructor', national advertising, 1951/52.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 'To the rescue', national advertising, 1951/52.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 'Croix de Guerre', national advertising, 1951/52.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 'Front line front seat', national advertising, 1951/52.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 'Driving Ambition', national advertising, 1951/52.

occasionally used to inspire recruits. Of Joseph Robins we are told that ‘when the war ended, he missed the company and activities of civil defence’.⁶¹ Kathleen Ferry, on the other hand, ‘finds the training... gives her a chance of recapturing the real comradeship of the war years’.⁶² The messages of 1951/52 tended, then, to emphasis civil defence as a ‘duty’, albeit one that was ‘worthwhile’ and fully compatible with the citizen’s other activities. This shift towards representing civil defence as being part of people’s leisure time rather than as competing for it was vital for civil defence recruitment, which managed to sustain its momentum after the surge in recruits inspired by the Korean War. On the eve of the recruitment campaign there were 155,642 recruits. Nine months later this had increased to 201,349 – a healthy increase considering the general easement in cold war tension, but still seen as a disappointment. The lack of major progress prompted the Home Secretary Sir David Maxwell Fyfe to announce a three-pronged attack on the issue in a speech to the House of Commons on 18 July 1952.⁶³ The first was the formation of the William Mabane’s committee into recruitment. Fyfe’s second prong was the growth of a ‘personal approach’ strategy to recruiting. Fyfe appealed for ‘leaders of local opinion and thought... to help us in this recruitment campaign’.⁶⁴ It was becoming clear to the authorities that local efforts determined the success of recruitment – something borne out by a pilot scheme which conducted a house-to-house canvass to drum up recruits. This had proved a great success and it was announced at the same time as Fyfe’s speech that the strategy would be applied nationwide.⁶⁵ When Mabane reported in November 1952, it was merely to echo the importance of local initiatives. The final prong of Fyfe’s strategy was to widen the constituency from which civil defence could recruit: 18-30 years olds who were not likely to be required on the outbreak of war would now be eligible, as would all men between 30 and 40. This created a million more potential recruits, and was inspired partly by the general disgruntlement with recruitment levels, but mainly because of the particular failure to recruit people to the most ‘active’ of sections – rescue. Membership of the Rescue Section was limited to men, and the inability to find volunteers led to a strand of the recruitment campaign beginning to emphasise male attributes such as ‘strength’. In

⁶¹ Ibid. ‘Steel-worker warden’, national advertising, 1951/52.

⁶² Ibid. ‘Welfare worker’, national advertising, 1951/52.

⁶³ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 503, 18 July 1952, 2501-18

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ ‘Man at Door may be C.D. recruiter’, *Daily Mirror*, 19 July 1952.

February 1952, Fyfe had made an explicit call for men to come forward for the rescue section, asking ‘are we showing the necessary determination to be strong?’⁶⁶ Local advertising also asked ‘can you do a man’s job?’, appealing to men with ‘the courage and resourcefulness to save those who are trapped in burning or collapsed buildings’.⁶⁷

When the 1952/53 campaign was launched the design of civil defence advertising changed only marginally, but in terms of content there was a radical break with the past – the emphasis on experience gained in the Second World War was jettisoned. In addition to the emphasis on local recruitment and explicitly gendered messages, there was a greater stress on civil defence as a ‘going concern’, and the positive contribution civil defence was making to cold war easement. The new slogan, reflecting these concerns, was ‘Join your neighbours in Civil Defence. We must be strong to preserve peace’. The notion of civil defence as an important part of the community was strongly stressed, and individuals were invited to become part of this association – to be enveloped in the associational bosom. Under the heading ‘My best friends are in civil defence’, Charles Sowerby explained ‘there’s a fine sense of comradeship in doing a job that needs doing. It’s part of our effort for peace. It’s work which brings you into contact with all kinds of people. When you’re wearing the C.D. badge, you know you’ve got a real place in the community’.⁶⁸ In other advertisements, civil defence was described as a ‘band of good neighbours’,⁶⁹ full of ‘people who know their neighbours, who take part in the fun – and the responsibilities – of community life’.⁷⁰ An integral part of this focus was to depict civil defence as up and running, with people already taking part and enjoying themselves. Whereas before it was duty, a chore even, now it was fun and a place to find ‘new interests, new friends’.⁷¹ Nor was the reason for civil defence neglected, although it had been transmuted – much less was said about defence, and virtually nothing about attack. Instead, the advertisements emphasised peace, and the role the volunteers were playing in it. As one advertisement put it, ‘men and women, old folks and young, there’s need of them all. For Civil Defence gives meaning to your

⁶⁶ ‘Only one in 90 in civil defence’, *Manchester Guardian*, 6 Feb 1952.

⁶⁷ TNA, INF 2/118. ‘Can you do a man’s job?’, Local advertising, 1951/52.

⁶⁸ Ibid. ‘My best friend’s are in Civil Defence’, national advertising, 1952/53.

⁶⁹ Ibid. ‘We’re in this together’, national advertising, 1952/53.

⁷⁰ Ibid. ‘We’re a team of all ages’, national advertising, 1952/53.

⁷¹ Ibid.

leisure. It makes you part of the effort for peace'.⁷² This emphasis on the contribution civil defence made to 'peace' became an important component of the 'positive' civil defence message being projected during this time. Just as choosing to sign up was now constructed as the act of someone joining a fun and rewarding community rather than doing their 'duty', the notion of positively building towards peace was designed to be more appealing than passively waiting for an attack. Moreover, it was a motif consistently stressed by Ministers during 1952 and 1953,⁷³ and chimed with wider discussions within cold war political culture which emphasised peace and détente over confrontation and aggression.⁷⁴

The images produced in these years (1951-53) were noticeable for their portrayal of women as well as men. The initial wave of recruitment to civil defence had been overwhelmingly male, with women accounting for less than 40 per cent of members by the end of 1950, but by the beginning of the 1951/52 campaign women were gradually overtaking men as the main source of recruitment. Over the following two years – covering the 1951/52 and 1952/53 campaigns – women numbered two thirds of all recruits. The changing character of the campaigns from 1951/52 helps explain this turnaround. Early efforts were resolutely aimed at men. Not only were 'patriotism' and 'duty' seen as male character traits, the iconography of civil defence was overwhelmingly masculine. The earliest images showed men taking centre stage: the three national advertisements produced in late 1950 featured only one rather passive woman compared to nine men.⁷⁵ In the recruitment film *The Waking Point* (1950), it was a man who joined, and the main female role was his wife who attempted to dissuade him from joining. After 1951, the production of advertising emphasising individual narratives allowed a more diverse set of images. Whereas the previous 'general' appeals had emphasised maleness, the more specific appeals featured numerous women. These exemplars of civil defence – many veterans of the war – persuaded women to join in a way that other appeals did not. Narratives featuring

⁷² Ibid. 'Don't leave it all to us', national advertising, 1952/53.

⁷³ 'Only one in 90 in civil defence', *Manchester Guardian*, 6 Feb 1952; 'Home Secretary at Crawley', *Civil Defence*, 5:1 (July 1953); 'More Civil Defence Volunteers Needed', *The Listener*, 17 August 1953, p.453.

⁷⁴ For an analysis of the shifting language of confrontation, see A. Kaldor, *The Imaginary War* (Oxford, 1990), pp.77-103.

⁷⁵ TNA, INF 2/118. 'Of course I'm patriotic..', national advertising, 1950/51.

women in 1951/52 also emphasised the differing roles offered in civil defence, from the 'traditional' caring role ('can you look after people?'⁷⁶), to the need for clerical workers ('Can you send a clear message?'⁷⁷) and more active roles such as ambulance driving, emphasising the opportunity to learn to drive.⁷⁸ In doing so, cold war civil defence did not challenge the conventional roles deemed suitable for women, but rather reinforced trends visible in the Second World War.⁷⁹

This conflict between creating exciting roles for women and the refusal to countenance any innovation in this area is highlighted by a curious set of exchanges between the Home Office and regional civil defence offices about women joining the all-male preserve of the rescue section. Some local groups had allowed women to join the rescue section, prompting a discussion about whether they should be officially 'banned'.⁸⁰ The imbedded attitudes can be seen from the attitude of one civil servant who argued in 1954 that 'the full work of the rescue section is beyond the capabilities of a normal woman and I hardly think it advisable that the Home Office launch a campaign to recruit those who are not normal'.⁸¹ In general, however, the Home Office sought to reconcile the issue quietly, perhaps mindful of the wartime debate about female members of the Home Guard.⁸² Reluctant to rule that women could join the section, but also reluctant to punish the women in question by excluding them, on reading the exchanges one is left with the impression that the Home Office would be happy to turn a blind eye to it, which considering that the issue was raised intermittently without a firm decision being made until the early 1960s, seems to be what they did.

In addition to including more women in propaganda images, these years also saw highly gendered advertisements aimed at specific sections of the Corps. For example, one poster and local advertisement declared in unambiguous terms 'this is man's job', and featured drawings of manly activities such as rescuing people and operating

⁷⁶ Ibid. 'Can you look after people?', local advertising, 1952/53.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 'Can you send a clear message?', local advertising, 1952/53.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 'Front line front seat', national advertising, 1951/52.; 'Driving Ambition', national advertising, 1951/52.

⁷⁹ See Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Roles* (Manchester, 1998), pp.197-249.

⁸⁰ TNA, HO 322/110. A.R. Hutchings to E. Wilmot, 21 Feb 1952.

⁸¹ Ibid, F.L.F Devy to C.C. Hutchinson, 11 Nov 54.

⁸² See Summerfield and Peniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defence*.

machinery (Fig.3).⁸³ Such images suggest a desire to separate male civil defence service from notions of passivity, as does the stress on civil defence's contribution to national 'strength'. Likewise another poster from the same series which aimed to encourage volunteers to the welfare section rather than rescue declared 'where a woman's help is needed', and in the place of the manly activities showed cooking, caring and form-filling.⁸⁴ A poster was also produced which cried 'there's a job for women too!'.⁸⁵ Considering that by the end of December 1952 women actually outnumbered men in the Corps, this message must have seemed to some hardly worth stressing. It does illustrate, however, that for all the numbers of women in the Corps, it was still represented mainly as a 'male activity'. Despite making up a third of the section, for example, men were very rarely portrayed in advertisements aimed at the ambulance section.

*Figure 3. 'For men of skill, resource and courage', local press advertisement 1952/53.*⁸⁶

The 1952/53 campaign was also the first to encourage the house-to-house canvass as a method of recruiting, and there can be no doubt that the representations of neighbourliness and community spirit were designed to encourage a positive response to the house-to-house call. Moreover, it was an approach that appeared to deliver results. In the full year of the 1952/53 campaign, the strength of the Corps increased 76,123, compared to 58,090 in the previous year – and in a period when cold war tensions were easing. Little surprise, then, that the civil defence authorities were congratulating themselves on the success of the recruitment campaign and on the canvassing strategy in particular. The Corps was now at 61 per cent of its strength, and had shown, moreover, that it could recruit people on a message of inclusion and neighbourliness rather than fear of attack or by appealing to the memory of the war. As Fyfe put it when launching the 1953-54 campaign, 'the public have made a striking response to the

⁸³ TNA, INF 2/118. 'This is a man's job', press advertisement, 1952/53.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 'Where a woman's help is needed', poster 1952/53.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 'There's a job for women too!', poster 1952/53/

⁸⁶ Ibid. 'For men of skill, resource and courage', local press advertisement 1952/53.

recruiting campaign of the past year and particularly to house-to-house canvassing. The Civil Defence Services are growing in numbers, in efficiency and in public esteem'.⁸⁷

'Shouldn't you be doing the same?': Responsibilities and neighbourliness

As the house-to-house canvass, linked to the emphasis on community, was perceived to have paid real dividends in terms of securing recruits, the 1953-54 campaign was dominated by these two strands. Yet within this campaign there was a return to older narratives of citizenship and duty which appear hard to explain, but which became entrenched in the new appeal. The importance of the canvass can be gauged from the advice sent to local authorities. National and local advertising was designed to soften up potential recruits, but 'in the present climate of public opinion only a personal interview will persuade them to enrol and start training'.⁸⁸ This guidance issued by the COI allows us to analyse advice to canvassers although we cannot reconstruct the face-to-face meetings of canvassers and potential recruits. In particular, the characteristics deemed necessary for the 'suitable' canvasser in the advice can shed light on how civil defence was constructed by the COI and provide hints as to the interaction taking place on the doorstep. The 'qualities' needed were 'personality, patience, perseverance, sincerity and courage'.⁸⁹ However, 'only a small proportion of volunteers' would actually be suitable. The suggested qualities were redolent of the projection of the 'average' civil defence volunteer in the advertising, but were obviously sadly lacking in the real-life volunteers. Also suggested were ideal 'openings' to conversation and ways of overcoming reluctance.

To open, potential recruits were to be told 'we have a number of people already enrolled but we still need willing hands to come forward. We need men for the warden, rescue and headquarters section, and we are particularly in need of ladies for the welfare section and the ambulance section'. So despite the fact that women made up a third of the headquarters section and men some 39 per cent of the ambulance section,⁹⁰ both were assigned to specific genders on the doorstep. In answering possible objections,

⁸⁷ TNA, HO 303/6. 'Campaign Guide: Recruitment to Civil Defence Corps and Auxiliary Fire Service, 1953', prepared by the Central Office of Information'.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ 'Nearly 280,000 Recruits: Average monthly increase 2,000 more than last year', *Civil Defence*, 5:1 (July 1953), p.3.

three arguments were discussed: ‘had enough last time’, ‘not enough spare time’ and ‘why do you need recruits now the international situation has improved?’ There was no suggestion that people might question the ability of civil defence to tackle an attack. If confronted by ‘had enough last time’ canvassers were told to ‘appeal to his patriotism and his pride in his old service and stress the urgent need for his services now to carry over the fine tradition of the old service into the new Corps’. To those without spare time, either weekend training should be suggested or, if they have families ‘try the “children” angle’. Lastly, those who believed declining international tension lessened the need for civil defence should be informed that ‘the chances of peace have improved because we and other free nations have shown our determination to defend ourselves. If we want the situation to improve we must continue our efforts and not relax them. If we relax now we may well throw away all we gained’.⁹¹

These suggested approaches illustrate that although civil defence in the two years up to the 1953/54 campaign had been constructed as a site of rewarding leisure and associational behaviour, at this moment in time these motifs were absent. Instead of emphasising opportunities for civil defence, canvassers were advised to use appeals to patriotism and the threat of war to families – messages that recall the initial, failed, attempts of recruitment in 1949-51. Moreover, the national advertising produced to accompany this effort echoed the return to what we might call ‘traditional’ values of patriotic citizenship – albeit in terms which existed in tension with the recent emphasis on neighbourliness and community. The aim of these advertisements, according to the campaign guide, was to ‘feature the Civil Defence Corps as a permanent part of the responsibilities that fall on us as citizens of a free country’.⁹² This is highlighted by jettisoning the inclusive tone and smiling, encouraging photographs of real volunteers which were such features of the previous two campaigns in favour of an ‘authoritative’ narrative and simple drawings. Such drawings did serve a point, as each featured a small group in location like a bus stop or a train station, with the emphasis on the fact that the volunteer was ‘just like everybody else’.⁹³ The reader was asked to spot ‘which one was the good neighbour’: these people, the reader is informed, ‘are more or less like the rest of us... But the good neighbour takes a wider view. He’s helping to make the

⁹¹ TNA, HO 303/6. ‘Campaign Guide: Recruitment to Civil Defence Corps and Auxiliary Fire Service, 1953’, prepared by the Central Office of Information’.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ TNA, INF 2/118. ‘Which of these is a good neighbour’, series of adverts, national campaign, 1953/54.

world a safer place for the rest of us'.⁹⁴ Although the advertisements conclude by arguing that civil defence is 'fun... exciting too', and asking 'you don't want to be left out?',⁹⁵ the advertisement is again constructing civil defence in terms of ideal citizenship – the volunteer is doing something the rest of the population should be. As one advertisement asks – 'shouldn't you be doing the same?'⁹⁶

This highlights the shift in the message back to representing civil defence as the duty of an ideal citizen, in this sense the 'good neighbour', and the concomitant suggestion that those outside the Corps were at fault. In the previous two years civil defence was shown as a positive choice made by happy, rewarded people living a rich and varied associational life. If the messages of 1951-53 seemed to run parallel to general trends within British culture which emphasised leisure over obligations, then the appeal of 1953/54 reversed this trend to some degree. It did not turn the clock back fully, but there was more emphasis on what people *should* do rather than attempting to convince them of what they would *like* to do. This might explain why the 1953-54 campaign was a failure. In the six months between its launch and the Bikini Atoll explosion only 17,000 extra people signed up, compared to nearly 50,000 in the same timeframe the previous year. There were other factors, however. We can see from the anxieties of both Fyfe and the recruitment guide that the civil defence authorities were concerned about the impact of the decline in cold war tension for recruitment. This would have undoubtedly affected people's belief in the necessity of civil defence, but tension had been declining ever since the peak of 1950 and fluctuations of the cold war climate do not explain the success of the 1952-53 campaign compared to the previous year. Another factor was the damning criticism of the House of Commons Select Committee on Estimates,⁹⁷ which reported just before Christmas in 1953. This attacked the whole swathe of civil defence activity and was widely seen as damaging morale in the Corps and deterring recruits.⁹⁸ Certainly the recruitment figures for the quarter following the report were very poor – just 4,516 recruits, the lowest quarterly figures since before the

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ 'From the Select Committee on Estimates, Session 1953-54: Civil Defence', *Reports from Committees. Session 3 November 1953-25 November 1954*, (HMSO, 1953); see 'The C.D. Muddlers Shock M.P.s', *Daily Mirror*, 23 Dec 1953; 'Civilians Defenceless', *The Economist*, 9 Jan 1954.

⁹⁸ 'Mixed Reception for Report', *Civil Defence*, 6:2 (March 1954), p.2.

Korean War, and just 18 per cent of the figure from the same period the year before. But the revelations about the poor state of civil defence, however damaging, cannot explain the poor recruitment in the quarter between the launch of the campaign and the report's publication, which was down 50 per cent on the previous year. Perhaps civil defence has reached saturation point. Certainly, the change in recruitment strategy ushered in 1953 did not help matters. In retrospect the shift in strategy appears to go against the general trend of Britain's cultural experience, and certainly it could be argued that given the decline in the risk of war, continuing the message of associational choice and 'leisure' satisfaction would have reaped more rewards than returning to the emphasis on responsibilities. The experience of civil defence recruitment after 1954 is illustrative here. Although the advent of the hydrogen bomb largely destroyed the credibility of civil defence as a life-saving organisation, it still proved able to recruit significant numbers of recruits well into the 1960s. For example, in the final quarter of 1962, the Corps recruited 16,419 new volunteers (not enough to replace the older volunteers who were being 'weeded out' of the service).⁹⁹ Although the level of new recruits in the hydrogen bomb era was typically only half that of the atomic age, it does suggest the messages of self-improvement and associational benefits used to sell civil defence from the late 1950s overrode, at least for some, the sustained criticism the Corps received at this time.¹⁰⁰ In short, although civil defence's role in the nation's defence was of major importance in motivating recruits, it seems that the leisure opportunities it provided were equally central in encouraging recruits.

Conclusion

The various appeals for civil defence volunteers contained basic contradictions which explain why the Corps struggled to achieve its target membership levels. From 1949 until early 1954 the civil defence authorities had been attempting to encourage popular participation in an emergency organisation whose function, after all, was to defend the nation and the community from atomic attack. The surge in recruits after the outbreak of the Korean War seemed to suggest that if the nation was in genuine peril then the public would flock into the ranks. At no time, however, did Britain face the immediate prospect of war, requiring different methods to inspire recruits. As we have seen, these

⁹⁹ 'Civil defence loses 30,000 members', *The Times*, 9.3.1963.

¹⁰⁰ Grant, *After the Bomb*, pp.132-6.

methods contained messages which allow us to interpret how civil defence, and the ideal civil defence volunteer, was constructed within 'official' culture. The characteristics of this ideal recruit developed over time in a way which illustrates the influence of cultural changes in the period. In short, there was an initial emphasis on participation and duty, based on a notion of citizenship which drew heavily from debates current in the Second World War. This emphasis, however, failed to chime with the cultural preferences of a population which beginning to put the war behind them – namely, it failed to tackle the need for people to have full and rewarding leisure lives and the fact that such leisure would not be sacrificed for the 'duty' of civil defence. From 1951, then, a newer emphasis on 'spare time' was developed which constructed civil defence as compatible with other spare-time activities as well as providing rewarding leisure and associational activities. The decision to drop the emphasis on the Second World War is illustrative of the general trend towards emphasising the current, fun, nature of the Corps and distancing it from an 'old fashioned' image. At the same time, the role of the Corps underwent a subtle but important change – not to 'defend' the nation, but to 'contribute' towards peace.

There were always tensions in this approach, however. Civil defence could never compete with other leisure activities for the spare time of potential recruits – and there was always an awareness that it was among the patriotic that civil defence would find its recruits. Moreover, the idea of civil defence as something the ideal citizen should be doing was always present, although in relative abeyance during the 1951-53 period with its emphasis on leisure. The 1953/54 campaign, with its noticeable return to the notion of 'responsibility' wrapped in its focus on 'neighbourliness' was an attempt to square this circle – only those who felt this responsibility were ever likely to join. The previous campaigns had been built on the assumption that people understood the need for civil defence but required a little push, and perhaps the final campaign of the atomic age recognised that such a sense of responsibility was declining and was itself in need of a shove. Civil defence recruiters were facing an uphill battle and for all their attempts at polishing the message, the basic core values of civil defence were becoming increasingly divorced from the core values of British citizens as the 1950s wore on. In the 1940s the threat of enemy invasion and the experience of attack had helped bring about a paradigmatic shift in the relationship between state and citizen – and the unstinting service of the people in wartime was a corollary of that. In the 1950s, cold war tensions, simmering but never boiling over, could not replicate those conditions.

More than that, it can be argued that they could *never* again be replicated, that the Britain of the 1950s was decisively different from the nation of the wartime years. The new cultural emphasis on home, family, privacy and affluence (and the security of those, rather than the nation) were harbingers of a major shift in the relationship between the individual, the nation, and the local. The shifts in civil defence propaganda hint at these changes, but in a way which obviously existed in tension with the patriotic and communitarian rhetoric implicit in all civil defence activity. In many ways, the volunteer cohort imagined within civil defence propaganda was illusory, the patriotic and the individualistic seemed hard to reconcile. Yet, as we know, the messages were powerful and persuasive enough to persuade hundreds of thousands of people to join. For these people – whether they were patriotic ‘cold warriors’, veterans who wanted to recreate the blitz, or simply bored individuals who wanted to do their bit or learn new skills – the Civil Defence Corps was a site of leisure activity, friendly association, and patriotic engagement. Although service in civil defence was rejected by the vast majority of people, it was still a popular success, with many people finding deep satisfaction in what others might see as its peculiar mix of nuclear defence and camaraderie.