

Rising concerns about use of nuclear arms

By Hank Klibanoff
Globe Staff

Brookline, the students were tennis-shoed ninth graders, born more than two decades after the mushroom cloud rose over Hiroshima on that clear summer day in 1945. Squeezed between English and math classes, they were attending a current course called "Law and Society - Decision-making in the nuclear age."

Francine: It's more acceptable now because it's been done before. Nobody wants to be first on something like that.

Rebecca: It's nothing to be proud of, to be first.

Jennifer: I don't think the US would have used it if they knew Japan had it.

Rebecca: But now everybody's got it. It's crazy. If one person drops it, then another will drop one, then another, then...

Francine: It's like a game no one's going to win. If one person pushes a button, then it's all over.

In Cambridge, the students were wing-tipped surgeons, many of whom were practicing when the A-Bomb was

dropped, attending a postgraduate course on gastrointestinal surgery. Squeezed between arcane seminars on esophageal surgery and upper gastrointestinal problems, was the luncheon address, "Medical Consequences of Nuclear War."

Dr. Howard Hiatt, Dean of the Harvard School of Public Health: Many [leaders], particularly those who speak of winning a nuclear war, appear not to understand the medical realities of a nuclear confrontation. ... We must inform the American people of the full-blown clinical picture that

would follow a nuclear attack and the impotence of the medical community to offer a meaningful response. If we remain silent, we risk betraying ourselves and our nation.

What the Brookline and Cambridge courses represent are growing efforts, in the Boston area and nationwide, to reach different constituencies in mainstream America with information about the threat of nuclear weapons and, in most cases, to arouse public opinion against the expansion of nuclear arsenals.

NUCLEAR, Page 20

New call for nuclear restraint

■ NUCLEAR

Continued from Page 1

The pilot course at Brookline High, taught by Principal Robert B. McCarthy, is also being offered in Needham and Cambridge. Hiatt's address is similar to the appeals he has made to the doyens of the American Medical Assn.

Both are reactions to a sharp upturn, here and elsewhere, of fears that a variety of international circumstances are

propelling the world closer to nuclear arms confrontation.

All the groups draw from the same pool of international events for their impetus, portrayed most dramatically perhaps by The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists' decision last January to move its doomsday clock, set at seven minutes to midnight since January 1980, to four minutes to nuclear annihilation.

Representatives of the various groups say the main events that have catalyzed the fresh concern are the current tension between the United States and the USSR, which rose with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and which effectively halted the ratification of the SALT II treaty. Additionally, various groups cite the improved accuracy and mobility of US and Soviet nuclear weapons (cruise, MX, Pershing and SS20 missiles and delivery systems), then-President candidate George Bush's statement about the winnability of a nuclear war, and what several arms control advocates called "bellicose statements" by the Reagan Administration and Soviet leaders.

The groups, formed as they have been in response to recent events, may be seen as a counterpart on the liberal side of the arms debate to conservative organizations critical of detente and arms control, such as the Committee on the Present Danger.

Some also cite Presidential Directive 59 issued by Jimmy Carter which, released in the heat of his campaign against Ronald Reagan, essentially called for reordering strategic planning by giving priority to attacks on military targets in the Soviet Union rather than on cities and industrial centers.

In the last 18 months or so, the most dramatic proliferation has been not of nuclear arms, but of groups and individuals advocating nuclear arms restraint.

The specific goals of the groups - some new, some old but with new agendas - are as varied as the fields from which they draw their memberships: physicians, former government officials, lawyers, nurses, peace activists, scientists and educators, among others.

Some of the groups are opposed only to the spread of nuclear weapons, others are lobbying against all nuclear development; some link nuclear arms increases to social services decreases, others claim to have only educational motives and eschew any public pronouncement of their views.

Most groups have carved out their own constituencies: physicians who see nuclear war as the ultimate medical problem, lawyers who believe negotiated arms reduction is the ultimate legal problem, and educators who view instruction on the consequences of nuclear war as the ultimate teaching need.

The swelling sense of alarm has not only reactivated longtime arms control advocates, but has also drawn previously uncommitted parties, such as Hiatt, into the fray on the side of arms control.

"The response is far exceeding our expectations, both in depth of feeling and breadth of feeling," said Alan Sherr, president of The Lawyers' Alliance for Nuclear Arms Control, which was formed in Boston in the fall of 1980, and went public a month ago with 100 members on board.

"In the last two weeks," Sherr added, "we've had calls from New Orleans, San Diego, San

Francisco, Chicago, San Jose and other places, and the response is that they want to do something, not just know more about it. It's a snowball effect and it's all we can do to keep up with it."

Also in recent months:

● The membership list of the Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), based in Cambridge, has jumped from 500 in January 1980 to 5000 now, and has been growing at a rate of 100 new sponsors a week for the past two months, said Abram Claude, PSR's chapter outreach coordinator.

● The Watertown-based Women's Party for Survival, nearing its first birthday, says it has attracted 3000 paid members in 31 chapters across the country.

● The Educators for Social Responsibility, organized recently in the Boston area, drew about 80 participants to each of its first three informal sessions.

● The Cambridge-based International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War held its

first Congress in March, drawing 73 doctors from 12 different nations, including Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev's physician, Eugene I. Chazov, who professed strong support.

● The Council for a Nuclear Weapons Freeze, based in Cambridge, has been holding well-attended public meetings and going door-to-door to gather of signatures on a moratorium petition in 20 to 30 cities and towns in Massachusetts.

● The Council for a Livable World, based in Boston, last year pumped nearly \$260,000 into 14 Senate races, helping elect its candidates to seven of those seats.

● The city of Newton three weeks ago (presented with 3000 signatures), and several New Hampshire communities last fall, endorsed petitions calling for a nuclear weapons freeze. Similar drives are underway in Needham, Wellesley, Dedham, Belmont and Cambridge, said Dr. Bill Caldicott, one of the organizers.

Continued on next page

An issue 'we can't ... be dim about'

Continued from preceding page

● Three state Senate districts last fall, and the Massachusetts House last week, endorsed resolutions asking Congress to reduce nuclear arms expenses and transfer the funds to civilian uses. The Boston City Council is now being pressed for a similar endorsement by Jobs With Peace, a nationwide coalition of disarmament and human needs groups.

There are few ties connecting all the groups. "If there is a common outlook among the groups, there is at the same time a surprising lack of close cooperation and coordination among them," Morton H. Halperin, a former State Department official, concluded following a recent survey he conducted of arms control and disarmament groups.

And there is the usual backbiting that emerges when different colors of the ideological spectrum are blended into the stripe of a common cause.

Ironically, the group that has come under the greatest criticism is the one with the least advocacy-oriented program. That group is Ground Zero, a Washington organization planning a week-long, nationwide nuclear arms education campaign scheduled for next April. The group is headed by Roger Molander, who worked on the SALT negotiations as a National Security Council staff member in the Nixon, Ford and Carter Administrations.

Except for stating that "the probability of nuclear war is unacceptably high and getting higher," Molander has taken no positions on the major issues of nuclear weaponry, and is taking no small amount of criticism for it.

Underscoring that lack of consensus is the problem all of the groups say they are facing: In the 36 years since bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the incremental growth and acceptance of the nuclear age in America has distracted the gut's eye view of the world from scenes of Hiroshima, has covered visceral memories

of it like sands concealing whole civilizations.

The challenge facing arms control groups is to punch through the block in the American psyche that has hardened into place since that time, to "begin thinking the unthinkable in a way that can give us options," said Bobbi Snow of the Educators for Social Responsibility.

If time and the aftershocks have sealed off memories of the nuclear horror of 1945 from the American conscience, there still remain legacies of that horror embedded in our culture.

The most dramatic, factual eyewitness descriptions of the first wartime mushroom cloud, exploding on that hot August day in Japan, came alive in John Hersey's book, "Hiroshima." The book, which has gone through 52 printings, producing 4,643,200 copies, is the foundation for Hiatt's speeches and the area's high school courses.

But there is a telling indication of how remote Hersey's holocaust images have become: The book today can often be found shelved in the fiction section of bookstores.

The blurring of that line between what is fact and what is fiction is further evident in letters Hersey now receives from the book's readers. "I get letters quite frequently from students saying, 'I've just read your novel, Hiroshima,'" Hersey said in a recent telephone interview.

"If the sense is given that this is something made up, it takes away from the purpose, from the reality... from the sense of immediacy," he added. "Children reading about it now think of it as something from quite a distant past."

While Hersey has not joined any of the many groups cropping up, he said he encourages their efforts. "I think we should be thinking clearly about this issue. There are several issues in this world that we can't afford to be dim about. And this is certainly pre-eminent among them."

