



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Scottish anti-nuclear power campaign in Torness, 1977

- Anti-Nuclear Power Movement (1960s-1980s)

May  
1978  
to: May  
1979

**Country:** Scotland  
**Country:** United Kingdom  
**Location City/State/Province:** *Torness*

**Goals:**  
To stop the construction of the Torness nuclear power plant

### Methods

#### Methods in 1st segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 038. Marches
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

#### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 048. Protest meetings

#### Methods in 3rd segment:

- 048. Protest meetings
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

#### Methods in 4th segment:

- 171. Nonviolent interjection
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

#### Methods in 5th segment:

- 048. Protest meetings

### **Methods in 6th segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 170. Nonviolent invasion
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

### **Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television

## **Classifications**

### **Classification:**

Defense

### **Cluster:**

Environment

### **Group characterization:**

- UK citizens of various ages and from various fields of activity

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

### **Leaders:**

The Scottish Campaign to Resist the Atomic Menace - SCRAM (headed by Pete Roche); the Torness Alliance (nationwide network of activists).

### **Partners:**

Lothian and Borders Anti-Nuclear Group

### **External allies:**

Students Against Nuclear Energy (SANE); the London Greenpeace; the Socialist Workers Party; hybrid groups containing mixtures of Friends of the Earth (FOE) and anti-nuclear activists, anarchist groups, pacifist, environmental and other direct action groups; friends and acquaintances

### **Involvement of social elites:**

Not Known

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

### **Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Torness Alliance

### **Groups in 2nd Segment:**

### Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Students Against Nuclear Energy (SANE)
- anarchist groups
- friends and acquaintances
- hybrid groups containing mixtures of Friends of the Earth (FOE) and anti-nuclear activists

### Groups in 4th Segment:

### Groups in 5th Segment:

### Groups in 6th Segment:

- London Greenpeace
- Socialist Workers Party

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 2 months*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### Opponents:

Scottish Government

### Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

### Campaigner violence:

Not Known

### Repressive Violence:

November 1978: the destruction of the Half Moon Cottage (activist property); arrests

## Success Outcome

### Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

### Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

### Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

### Notes on outcomes:

Although the campaign represented an important anti-nuclear protest action, it failed to stop the construction of the Torness nuclear power plant.

the infrastructure and networks created by the SCRAM (as well as the SCRAM itself) persisted after the Torness campaign and became active in the context of other similar protests.

SCRAM successfully recruited thousands of members and developed a vast network of alliances with varied groups and organizations across the UK.

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In 1976, Pete Roche and a few other activists founded the Scottish Campaign to Resist the Atomic Menace (SCRAM). Aimed at protesting the construction of the Torness nuclear power station in the South-East of Scotland, as well as opposing nuclear power in general, SCRAM organized some of the largest anti-nuclear power demonstrations in the UK in the 1970s and 80s. The

organization was composed of eight full time volunteer workers, plus vacillating numbers of members. The decision-making process was mainly represented by consensus reached during public meetings.

In the autumn of 1977, SCRAM held its launching public meeting, which brought together the activists who would turn SCRAM into one of the country's most dynamic and successful anti-nuclear protest groups. A few representatives of the nuclear industry were present in the audience and one of the main speakers was the new Labor Member of Parliament for Edinburgh Central, Robin Cook (the Labour government was SCRAM's main enemy, as they had approved the construction of the Torness power plant).

After the meeting, SCRAM began organizing a rapidly escalating campaign against the South of Scotland Electricity Board's plans to build a nuclear power station at Torness in East Lothian. SCRAM members lobbied MPs, councilors and local people, they used the local and national press for publicizing their campaign and goals and launched a publication of their own, the SCRAM Energy Bulletin, aimed at presenting the progress of the campaign and disseminating information about the anti-nuclear struggle. However, conventional lobbying soon proved ineffective, and SCRAM soon moved to other forms of protest, first in May 1978, when 10,000 people occupied the Torness site, and then in 1979, when tens of thousands of people all around the country joined the campaign. Printing and distributing leaflets, displaying posters with anti-Labor slogans and catch phrases, as well as engaging in illegal activities (such as occupying the Scott monument in Edinburgh and hanging an anti-Torness banner on it) were part of the SCRAM collection of actions. The May 1978 occupation took place on a festival site established by SCRAM. Those attending were grouped according to geographical region of origin in order to maximize local network building and solidarity.

The Torness Declaration, a commitment made by the 4,000 people who attended the march and occupation in May 1978, outlined SCRAM's profile as a social movement organization and presented its main goals. According to the Declaration, SCRAM was an affiliation of groups and individuals united by a total and uncompromising opposition to the construction of a nuclear power station at Torness, as well as to nuclear power in general. The demands featured the immediate and permanent halt to the construction of any further nuclear power stations; an urgent and vigorous energy conservation program; cleaner, safer and more efficient use of fossil fuels; the radical re-channeling of resources into wave, wind, and solar power and other forms of renewable energy and the provision of socially useful work for all in energy and other fields.

Announcing the members' commitment to nonviolence in achieving the main goal of preventing the construction of a nuclear power station at Torness, the Declaration was also instrumental in giving birth to the Torness Alliance, a nationwide network of activists whose first action was to occupy and start renovating Half Moon Cottage in the North East corner of the Torness site in September 1978. A small number of activists established a permanent presence at Torness with support from a local farmer and SCRAM. The mixed gender group included a number of small children. The occupation became a focus for the wider Torness Alliance and groups throughout the UK visited the site, donating materials and labor. Visiting groups were diverse, ranging from Students Against Nuclear Energy (SANE), hybrid groups containing mixtures of Friends of the Earth (FOE) and anti-nuclear activists, and anarchist groups to friends and acquaintances. After six weeks, the cottage had become an important and vibrant symbol of opposition.

On November 14, 1978, the day after contractors started worked on access roads, the South of Scotland Electricity Board (SSEB) ordered the Half Moon Cottage to be destroyed, together with all the protesters' belongings inside. A few days later more than 400 people converged on the site to prevent any work from taking place. After various confrontations with the bulldozers and diggers, 38 people were arrested.

The next action of the Torness Alliance was the Torness Gathering, in May 1979, one of the campaign's most important protests. Organized by the Alliance, SCRAM, and the Lothian and Borders Anti-Nuclear Group, the mass occupation of the construction site was joined by the London Greenpeace, the Socialist Workers Party, as well as by anarchist, pacifist, environmental, and direct action groups. Over 10,000 people camped in a field close to Torness for a weekend of talks, music, and discussion. Through discussions and "affinity groups" they decided to occupy the construction site and hold a day of direct action intended to halt construction work. The site was protected by a six-foot barbed wire fence. One early Monday morning, enjoying wide

media coverage, the protesters filed over the fence using bales of hay as steps. This resulted in several hundred members of the Torness Alliance confronting workers, security personnel, and police. According to press entries that followed the actions, it was one of the largest acts of civil disobedience ever seen in the UK.

Occupying buildings on the site, the group pioneered what Pete Roche called "polite direct action," avoiding violence and destructive protests. Notable individuals, some of whom became political figures years later, were involved in the protests. Robin Cook, future cabinet minister, was one of the activists who took part alongside Roche. As chair of the Lothian Regional Council's transport committee, Alistair Darling provided free buses to carry protestors to Torness from Edinburgh for the major demonstration.

The protests, however, were not able to prevent the building of the Torness power plant. However, no other initiatives linked to building new nuclear power stations in Scotland have been discussed since. SCRAM was directly involved in the successful campaign against dumping high-level nuclear waste in the Mullwharrier hills in Galloway. In the 1970s and 1980s, SCRAM successfully campaigned against Dounreay, the fast reactor complex in Caithness, opposing its planned new European reprocessing plant. The site was ultimately closed.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

This campaign influenced similar campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s (in the Mullwharrier hills in Galloway; Dounreay – Caithness; etc.); according to some sources, SCRAM's work contributed to the rebirth of the anti-nuclear weapons movement in the early 1980s and to the revolution in green consciousness which has taken place since the late 1970s. (2)

### Sources:

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### Additional Notes:

For more information on the anti-nuclear movement see Bill Moyer. *Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2001.

Edited by Max Rennebohm (03/06/2011)

### Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Adriana Popa, 03/10/2010

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[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/wave-campaigns/anti-nuclear-power-movement-1960s-1980s>