

Demonstrations in the United States and in Europe influenced Reagan. According to a 1982 public opinion poll, 57 percent of Americans favored an immediate nuclear freeze. Reflecting this sentiment, a 1983 television drama, *The Day After*, graphically portrayed the devastating horror of a nuclear attack on America. Reagan acknowledged that he was more inclined to reconsider deploying missiles abroad because European leaders felt pressure from protesters in their home countries. Ironically, the president credited Europeans' sentiments on the matter while claiming to ignore widespread efforts of domestic opponents such as Barbara Deming. However, the freeze movement inside and outside the United States created a favorable climate in which

the president and Soviet leaders could negotiate a genuine plan for nuclear disarmament by the end of the decade.

The Road to Nuclear De-escalation

As frightening as this massive arms buildup was and despite the continuation of peace protests, Ronald Reagan won reelection in 1984 by a landslide (see chapter 27). Following his enormous victory, the popular Reagan softened his militant stance and became more amenable to negotiating with the USSR. Like Nixon, Reagan came to office with a well-deserved reputation as a fervent anti-Communist and left the White House having eased tensions between the

DOCUMENTS 28.2 AND 28.3

The Nuclear Freeze Movement: Two Views

In 1982, 30 percent of American voters considered nuclear freeze referenda in ten states and thirty-seven cities and counties. The nuclear freeze movement called on the United States and the Soviet Union to mutually halt the production, testing, and deployment of nuclear weapons. A nonbinding referendum in New Jersey passed overwhelmingly in every county. In addition to initiating ballot measures, the nuclear freeze campaign won the support of the Catholic Church, which issued a pastoral letter in 1983.

Explore

28.2 New Jersey Referendum on Nuclear Freeze, 1982

Public Question No. 1: Freeze on Nuclear Arms Escalation

Do you support a mutual United States–Soviet Union nuclear weapons “freeze” and urge the government of the United States:

- (1) to propose to the government of the Soviet Union that both countries immediately agree to a mutual, verifiable halt of all further testing, production, and deployment of nuclear warheads, missiles, and delivery systems as a first step toward mutual, balanced reduction, and
- (2) to apply the money saved to human needs and tax reduction?

Interpretive Statement

“This non-binding referendum, if approved by the public, would demonstrate the voters’ support of a nuclear weapons freeze and would direct the Secretary of State to transmit the results of these voters’ opinions on this question to the President of the United States, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and President of the United States Senate no later than twenty (20) days after the conclusion of the election.”

Source: “New Jersey Nuclear Freeze Ballot,” 1982, <http://www.initiativeforchange.org/ProtestOnBallot.htm>.