

Stirring time for campaigner



By Marta Steeman

Mr Ron Smith, a veteran anti-nuclear campaigner, expected a stir at his anti-nuclear warships protest at a Wellington National Party election rally.

But the World War 2 air force navigator had not bargained for being punched, held in a headlock, hit over the head with a handbag and forcibly ejected from the gathering of faithful on Saturday night (above).

Mr Smith, a 66-year-old retired economist, from Island Bay, said he believed the threat of nuclear war was "the most important question facing mankind."

He has laid a complaint with the police. They were looking into it and deciding if they could successfully identify his assailants from a video taken by one of the protesters at the rally.

He has been an anti-nuclearist since World War 2. Scenes of destruction of towns and cities in Germany witnessed as a Royal New Zealand Air Force navigator, and the shock of the Hiroshima atomic bombing shaped his anti-nuclear ideals.

A dozen members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) had planned to raise the issue of nuclear ships visits at the meeting because of the difficulty of confronting the

National Party on the subject, he said today.

"We knew we couldn't get a rational debate about it." Sharp interjections and heckling should be expected at a political rally, he said.

But he had not expected a national party crowd to be so violent. They had expected to be asked to leave after calling questions to Mr Bolger on the nuclear ships question, but not to be attacked, he said.

"The American-style razzmatazz . . . entertainers, cheer leaders had gone on for a full hour and got people hyped up a bit."

He said an uproar broke out when he stood up and shouted to Mr Bolger; "Are you going to let nuclear warships back in? "Isn't that your hidden agenda?"

Everything happened so fast it was hard to remember what went on. So many people were wearing boater hats it was hard to know who was an official and who not, he said.

A member of the audience "walloped him," another held him in a headlock and someone hit from behind on the head with a handbag, he said.

At no time did he resist, he said.

During the scuffle he threw leaflets (about National's nuclear agenda) into the air.

Today he was nursing a bruised cheek but no other injuries, he said.