



NEW ZEALAND NUCLEAR FREE ZONE COMMITTEE

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AFTER NUCLEAR WAR?

The Nuclear-Free Zone Committee has from its inception in 1981 publicly advocated planning for the aftermath of any nuclear war, including a 52,000 signature petition to this effect (1). So naturally the Committee warmly welcomes the recognition given to the problem by the Planning Council's report New Zealand After Nuclear War, published today. This report develops the theme of the 1982 NZ Commission For The Future study group's Nuclear Disaster, headed by Dr. George Preddy (2).

The Committee also strongly endorses the Planning Council's call for public discussion on "the part New Zealand can play in nuclear war prevention strategies" (page 152).

The Report is a very readable account of a mass of important information that all New Zealanders should acquaint themselves with.

Nonetheless, the omission of some points made by the Nuclear-Free Zone Committee to the Planning Council is disappointing.

The Planning Council by-passes the problem of rival nuclear-armed submarines and other naval vessels coming to New Zealand. The Report mentions nuclear armed vessels coming, but omits to say they could be from rival powers, and quickly changes the subject (pages 127-8).

The Committee has from its beginnings drawn attention to this problem, which underlines the need to become an internationally recognised - neutral - zone of peace. Dr. George Preddy (above), in his book Nuclear Disaster: A New Way Of Thinking Down Under, also advocated the Committee's "Positive Neutrality" as New Zealand's best way to help prevent, or survive, a nuclear war.

Only if naval crews know New Zealand clearly and unambiguously as a neutral, unaligned state - with arrangements to meet their needs peacefully and regardless of their nationality - will they have any clear motive to cease their hostilities here.

Otherwise they would automatically continue fighting, and with a vengeance after their homelands were devastated. New Zealand would then risk being caught up in direct nuclear exchanges (3).

Similarly, the risk of Harewood airport being used, say, by B52 bombers fleeing their more exposed Island bases amidst rising international tension needs attention. Washington could pressure New Zealand to accept them, including through the Canberra Government if we were closely tied to Australia. A Harewood open to such flights would risk being wiped out to prevent its use by the Americans.

Again, being a clearly recognised neutral zone of peace, which any potential combatants have incentives not to involve in hostilities, is essential. It would not be in their interest to so involve a neutral New Zealand seen as one of their last few potential havens in the event of a nuclear war.

(1) The Jan/82 Peacemaker Petition of the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone Committee with 52,000 signatures presented to Parliament August 5, 1983, requested that New Zealand develop a policy of nuclear war prevention or cessation and a civil defence programme and aid to survivors; declare itself a nuclear free zone, withdraw from military alliances, and adopt a policy of "Positive Peacemaking Neutrality".

(2) The Muldoon Government ignored the report and dissolved the Commission, while offering NZ ports, airfields and territory for United States' nuclear-armed craft during the lead up to, and during, a nuclear war (1982 Memorandum of Understanding; and Defence Minister Thomson on "Eye Witness" TV, August 10, 1983. Transcript available from NZNFZC on request).

(3) A Nuclear-Free Zone Committee paper written in May 1984 drew attention to this problem, and was given to the Planning Council in response to its request for written information. I.e., International Peacemaking for New Zealand in a Framework of Positive Neutrality, May 1984, pages 3-4. The relevant sections were highlighted.

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