

**POLITICS OF THE AUSTRALIAN PEACE MOVEMENT  
1930s TO 1960s**

**LES DALTON**

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE  
WORKING PAPER 2011/1

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## Profile

Les Dalton, retired research scientist, has campaigned and written on world peace and nuclear weapons issues since the 1950s. He co-authored submissions to the Fox Inquiry on links between nuclear power and nuclear weapons. His special interest has been the preparation of information, written and visual, for community education.

## Abstract

Extant scholarship tends to depict the Australian peace movement from the 1930s to the 1960s, as too politically influenced, in its objectives and campaigns, by the Communist Party of Australia. Such judgement takes account neither of the diversity of activists, nor the range of issues on which the movement campaigned. The peace movement has always existed as a network of community bodies and individuals, who have a wide range of political, religious and philosophical leanings. The significant contribution of pacifists, often ignored, has been given the attention it deserves. Pacifist practice of non-violent civil disobedience, during protest actions, was adopted by the broader peace movement. This essay discusses the fortunes of the peace movement from the 1930s, which saw the rise of fascism, to the 1960s, and the signing of the Partial Nuclear Weapons Test Ban Treaty. The experiences of this time helped prepare the ground for the continuing anti-nuclear and anti-war activism of later years.



In 1937 christian groups marched with communists to demonstrate their opposition to the war that was looming in Europe. UMA, Alf Dickie Collection, Box 2.

## Keywords:

Peace movement, anti-war movement, anti-nuclear movement, atomic bomb, nuclear weapons radiation sickness, pacifism, Cold War, Disarmament.

## Introduction

Much of the writing about peace movement activities has been in the nature of analysis appraising the political effectiveness, or more often ineffectiveness, of the movement's major campaigns calling on Australia to free itself from its nuclear connections and to adopt a more peace-orientated foreign policy. The peace movement has been frequently described as 'marginalised, condemned and largely ineffective ... too beholden to CPA [Communist Party of Australia] patronage to break out of its own isolation and develop a genuinely mass movement.'<sup>1</sup> Such judgement takes no account of the diversity of campaigning by peace bodies active within the movement at that time. During the cold war promoting world peace was branded 'communist' by the government. Yet it was the pacifists who took the high moral ground and campaigned for a nuclear-free world while other activists, particularly those on the left of politics, accepted *realpolitik* visions of a bi-polar world.

The peace movement of the 1930s-1960s was a network of community bodies and individuals representing a wide range of political, religious and philosophical leanings. Post-war, the Movement's campaigns against nuclear proliferation provided the only significant counter to official policies; whether as the compassionate plea on behalf of Hiroshima victims against callous indifference and praise for the power of the bomb; or warnings about the fallout hazards against shameful cheers in our parliament for a British nuclear inferno; or standing up against despoiling Aboriginal traditional lands with nuclear fireballs.

For all its mistakes and internal disputation, the peace movement opened up the debate on the dangers and hazards of nuclear technology which, in the words of Rev. Frank Coaldrake, 'instead of coming with the promise of happy leisure for all ... hangs over us as a menace.'<sup>2</sup> The peace movement of the 1930s-1960s, laid the ground for effective anti-nuclear and anti-war campaigning in the 1970s and 1980s. This essay seeks to explore this legacy by examining the campaigning of the Australian peace movement, in the 1930s to the 1960s, and its efforts to rid the world of the nuclear menace and more widely from all war.

The main sources of this essay are the records of individuals and community groups involved in the Peace Movement that are held in archival collections. Additional sources are the publications by the peace activists themselves. Details of these sources are listed in the appendix.

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## Politics of the Australian Peace Movement 1930s to 1960s

Les Dalton

'Co-operating with Jews, Bahaists, agnostics and atheists, as well as people of all shades of Christian belief, one finds the revolt against war resting upon exactly the same qualities of hearts and minds in them all. The only difference is in certain terms of reference arising from cultural habits of thought. There is no divergence in essential principle'. —

Eleanor Moore, *The Quest for Peace As I Have Known It In*

Australia, p. 147, 1948.

Much of the history of the post war peace movement dwells on the political influence of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). Certainly in the immediate post-war years communists, with their tightly knit organisation, did at times exert undue influence on the movement's activities. However, quite diverse influences have interacted within the movement. Somewhat neglected have been the contributions of those who dedicated themselves to the cause of peace. The peace movement is a social movement mostly dependent on the contributions of like-minded individuals. Christians active in the movement saw themselves bringing a Christian understanding of peace. Socialists, including Christian socialists, also genuinely felt their world perspective had a legitimate place in the movement.

Two streams of the peace movement, which worked together in a loose alliance, were active from the 1930s: one from among Christians, many pacifist, and the other comprised of bodies such as the League of Nations Union (LNU). Activists in the Victorian Council Against War and Fascism (VCAWF) dedicated themselves to victory over the fascist nations as a first step to a lasting peace. The CPA played an active role in the anti-fascist movement, though it does not appear to have exerted quite the degree influence over the broader peace movement as has been supposed in many extant works. Eleanor Moore, a long time peace activist, thus argued that 'the greater part of the brains and conscience of the quest for peace in Australia has been supplied by the clergy'. Because they found attitudes to their peace activity inside the established church unsatisfactory it was 'easier to work with outsiders than with most of the members of their own communion.'<sup>3</sup>

The influence of the CPA in the peace movement, in the view of Summy and Saunders, 'has been much more subtle than the simple anti-communist explanation would have it.'<sup>4</sup> The influence of the CPA was 'exerted by communists working as individuals rather than in strict accordance with any party directive.'<sup>5</sup> Many communists themselves appear to have felt more comfortable when they were engaged in the broad activities of peace campaigns than they did working within the confines of party dogma. Activists from diverse background have brought to the Australian peace movement a great range of expectations about what the world order should be. This diversity of social, political and philosophical beliefs is characteristic of the country's peace and anti-nuclear movements.

### Peace movement responses to fascist aggression

The rise of fascism in the 1930s, and the subsequent world war, presented unique challenges to peace activists not faced before, especially among younger pacifists who began to embrace non-violent resistance. Minutes of meetings of the United Peace Council (UPC), active in the 1930s, illustrates how peace bodies of varied political and religious beliefs could in a time of crisis suppress their conflicting beliefs and work towards a common goal.<sup>6</sup> Delegates from church, pacifist, Christian socialist, communist, trade union and anti-fascist organisations came together to campaign for world peace. Conflicting beliefs existed not only between communists and pacifists, but also between pacifist and non-pacifist Christians.<sup>7</sup> Just as the dogmas heard coming from some communists were not adhered to by others of the same persuasion, so the absolute pacifism advocated by some pacifists was not adhered to by others. Eleanor Moore represented the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) at UPC meetings. She withdrew and insisted that her organization have nothing further to do with the organisation. Moore, an absolute pacifist, took exception to the support given by the UPC to collective military security of nations opposing fascist aggression.<sup>8</sup>

This steadfast adherence to absolute pacifism was soon to become an issue for WILPF in its relations, not only within the Australian peace movement, but with its sister bodies overseas.<sup>9</sup> When Japan invaded Manchuria in 1936, the Australian section of WILPF took their pacifism so far as to oppose a trade union call for a boycott of Japanese goods and an embargo on scrap iron for Japan. Other pacifists found fascism a greater evil than war, which could only be repelled by action, not by moral persuasion alone.

Younger pacifists especially, found Moore's absolute stand unhelpful to their cause. They felt fascist oppression called for a more nuanced response. Non-violent resistance and civil

disobedience could be effective and were a morally acceptable way to protest. Reverend Frank Coaldrake studied Gandhi's teachings on non-violent resistance and came to accept that 'boycotts, strikes, sabotage' were justified when those in power made 'intolerable encroachments on industrial rights or civil liberties.'<sup>10</sup> He applied Gandhian non-violent resistance with other young pacifists by opposing police in the eviction of tenants from their houses. The non-violent 'occupations' staged by war-resisters in the 1960s and later the 'blockades' of uranium mines staged by anti-nuclear protesters were guided by pacifist, especially Quaker, ideas on non-violent civil disobedience.

The absolute pacifism advocated by Moore was an extreme position to have taken in the face of fascist oppression. And yet her adamant stand made a significant statement against war, the more so with the revelation, post-war, of the potential of nuclear weapons to annihilate humanity. The advent of nuclear armaments is a consequence of the mentality that accepts war as a natural human activity. The elimination of nuclear weapons is bound up with renouncing war as a means of solving conflict. Ultimately the issue is a moral one, which Moore believed must weigh on the conscience of each and every individual. However, others believed that not only moral persuasion was called in the struggle to abolish war, but also a commitment to non-violent resistance.

In Britain, in 1935, the LNU conducted a ballot on disarmament and the strengthening of the collective security system against aggression by economic and, if necessary, military measures. Ballot papers were distributed to every household by half a million volunteers. An overwhelming majority of the 11,500,000 citizens who returned their ballot papers were in favour of strengthening the League of Nations. An outcome of this ballot was the formation of the World Peace Congress Committee led by Lord Cecil of Britain and Pierre Cot of France. A World Peace Congress was held in Brussels in 1937. The UPC sent three delegates: Mr Watt from the LNU, Mr Ife from the Australian Students Christian Movement, and Ralph Gibson of the Victorian Campaign Against War and Fascism.

On their return from Brussels their reports stimulated interest in the idea of holding an Australian congress. Held later that year, the Australian Peace Congress, chaired by Judge Foster, overflowed the Melbourne town hall. The *Argus* reported that in a street procession before the meeting 'Non-conformist churches joined with the Communist Party, and the Council Against War and Fascism with the YMCA. The march through the wet city streets was probably the strongest peace demonstration yet organised in Melbourne.'<sup>11</sup> It was the

pinnacle of campaigning for world peace that had among its aims building a common front against fascism while maintaining world peace,

Appeasement of fascist Germany with the signing, in September 1938, of the Munich agreement between British Prime Minister Chamberlain and Hitler began the disastrous slide towards World War II. Sentiment in the peace movement divided between pacifist persistence with international mediation, even to the extent of going along with the Munich Agreement, and mobilising into movements against war and fascism in non-fascist countries.

Pacifists could be torn within themselves between their principles of non-violence and feeling a need to resist fascist aggression. Marion Hartley records how, like many pacifists, she and her husband, Frank, who ministered to a country parish, 'changed their views as Hitler's ruthlessness became increasingly apparent'. They had both become pacifists, attending conferences and being completely anti-war 'since each war seemed to breed the hatred for yet another war'. However, when war broke out Frank felt the need to resist the march of fascism and sought to enlist as a private soldier. His church insisted 'he would go as a chaplain.'<sup>12</sup> In his book *Sanananda Interlude*, Padre Frank Hartley relates his experience in the life and death struggle with the invading Japanese army in New Guinea.

The same wavering of belief in pacifism was expressed at an Executive Committee meeting of WILPF in Geneva at the time of the German annexation of Sudetenland. Some members had come around to thinking that, in the absence of the democracies applying moral, political and economic pressures on Germany, countries facing invasion were justified in resorting to armed resistance. British Quaker, Edith Pye, a leading peace activist, confessed at a WILPF meeting: 'When I hear a sword rattle, I say thank God.'<sup>13</sup>

When Stalin signed the non-aggression pact with Hitler the international socialist movement divided, with many of its adherents, who had been active in the peace movement, drifting back to their respective patriotisms. With a feeling of the inevitability of war the world peace movement virtually dissolved. The sense of common purpose to resolve international conflict by peaceful means, that would be so much needed to face the coming challenge of the A-bomb, had dissipated.

### Planning for the peace

During the war years pacifist groups - Australian Peace Pledge Union (APPU), WILPF, Christian Pacifist Movement (CPM) and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) - were

the most coordinated and active in the peace movement. They formed a national body, the Federal Pacifist Council (FPC), in 1942.<sup>14</sup> They had courageously gone against popular feeling by calling for a negotiated peace, arguing against the Allied war strategy of obliteration bombing of cities until the enemy accepted unconditional surrender. A petition, not proceeded with after a court conviction, asked the government 'to treat with Japan for a negotiated peace.'<sup>15</sup>

The war generated a great deal of political ferment and hope of a better world, post war. Peace groups earnestly discussed ways to achieve a just peace. 'What Shall Pacifists do in the Post-War' and 'What Will We do with the Germans' were just two of a number of pamphlets dedicated to healing the social scars of a devastating war.<sup>16</sup>

The LNU - later the United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA) - held a conference in 1941 to discuss 'A New Order after the War' and another in 1942, entitled 'Australia's Obligations under the Atlantic Charter.' The Charter declared that *all nations of the world for realistic as well as spiritual reasons must come to the abandonment of the use of force.* The four freedoms written into the Charter - freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear - were earnestly discussed in forums organised by the peace movement.<sup>17</sup>

All these civil society efforts to prepare for a New World Order of peace and social justice were undermined by a secret decision by the Roosevelt government, on 6 December 1941, to proceed with the Manhattan Project to build the atomic bomb. The implications of this decision for the Australian peace movement will be discussed in the following sections.

### The Atomic Plague

Looking down from his plane on a great expanse of rubble that once was the City of Hiroshima, Jack Sennett thought how, at first sight, it appeared not unlike other fire-bombed Japanese cities he had just flown over. Sennett was a member of an Australian Air Force contingent about to join the Allied occupation forces. However when he looked again 'as the plane circled over the dead city, on that calm evening, the brain tried to absorb a simple fact - one bomb did that.'<sup>18</sup> Japanese workers were employed at the radar station set up by the contingent. A worker failed to turn up to work but as he had been listless he was not much missed. Later Sennett learned that he had died. Enquiry among other workers brought an evasive reply: 'picadon', which he found meant 'flash-bang'. 'Radiation sickness became evident in one of my friendly mechanics. He stopped work and several months later he too

was dead. An inquiry about someone, not seen recently, brought a quiet sad reply of 'picadon.'<sup>19</sup>

Australian war correspondent, Wilfred Burchett, avoiding US army tutelage on what reporters should write, found his own way to Hiroshima to see for himself. Overcome by what he did see Burchett, as he wandered the ruins, dispatched the first account of the Hiroshima tragedy to the outside world. 'In Hiroshima, 30 days after the first atomic bomb' he reported, 'people were still dying mysteriously and horribly - people who had appeared uninjured - from an unknown something, which I can only describe as atomic plague.'<sup>20</sup>

Dr Gen Kasuba, in charge of the only hospital left standing, told Burchett how 'people without a mark on them, fell sick and died...They lost their appetite, head hair began to fall out, bluish spots appeared on their bodies and bleeding started from the nose, mouth and eyes.'<sup>21</sup> In the first week of the Allied occupation Professor Tsuzuki brought reports of radiation casualties to the Allied headquarters of General MacArthur. He showed evidence, from his own research, of injury suffered by rats exposed to X-rays. The physicist Philip Morrison recalled Tsuzuki's cutting thrust: 'I did the experiments years ago but only on a few rats. But you Americans - you are wonderful. You have made the human experiment.'<sup>22</sup>

Any mention of the victims of *genbaku* - the bomb - was censored out of Japanese publications. It was to be a whole year before Australians read about the *Hibakusha* — 'explosion-affected persons'. The authorities were keen to say that blast and fire had killed many thousands. But, as Burchett reported, thousands were also killed by an 'atomic plague'. In his 1946 book 'Hiroshima,' John Hersey told harrowing stories of six survivors.<sup>23</sup> The editor of the *New Yorker* explained how an entire issue had been devoted to Hersey's story 'in the conviction that few of us have yet comprehended the all but incredible destructive power of this weapon.'<sup>24</sup> Albert Einstein is said to have purchased a thousand copies to distribute.

The authorities made every effort to keep people from comprehending the reality of atomic bombing. It was largely through the efforts of the peace movement and film makers Australians were able to experience visually the human ordeal of an atomic attack and the mockery of civil defence against it. The Japanese film 'Hiroshima and Nagasaki,' showing distressing images of the ravages of the heat and radiation on the human body, was confiscated by the US authorities and was only released in 1968. 'The War Game,' an enactment of an atomic attack, made by Peter Watkins for the BBC, was ordered by the British government to be locked away. The film was proclaimed alarmist, bad for the nation's

morale. It was almost 20 years before the peace movement could exhibit 'The War Game' publicly.

'Children of Hiroshima', based on a book of letters written by children, was made by independent Japanese film makers and community financed. When they became available, 'The War Game' and other films were screened in Australia by peace groups with no encouragement, if not discouragement, from authorities. The Peace Quest Forum in Melbourne and the Peace Convention Bureau in Sydney organised the importing and screening of the 'Children of Hiroshima' in church and community halls. Additional copies had to be imported to satisfy demand. In the classroom media teachers screened the film 'Atomic Cafe', which mocked civil defence as it was portrayed in official films.

In 1958, *Meanjin* and *Overland*, two literary journals, sponsored a national exhibition of the 'Hiroshima Panels' at state galleries. Created by two Japanese artists, Iri Maruki and Toshiko Akamatsu, the panels were the first major works to interpret the nuclear holocaust that had devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Intimidated by the government's Cold War rhetoric, some galleries were at first timorous about displaying the panels. However, the panels drew record-breaking numbers of people revealing how Australians, no matter how they saw the decision to drop the bomb, felt a need to experience, through these works of art, this overwhelming human tragedy.<sup>25</sup>

"War has become unthinkable"

Atomic holocaust was the very antithesis of the dawning of the kind of peaceful world for which pacifists had worked and prayed. Nonetheless hearing the news of Hiroshima, pacifists, who were opposed to weapons of all kinds, were paradoxically buoyed, if only for a brief time, by the very destructiveness of the atom bomb into thinking that war had become unthinkable. The pacifist *Peacemaker* headline 'The World Agrees at Last - There must not be another war' was their hopeful response when the news came. Atomic development 'which is causing such widespread fear may here be helpful ... Before long all armaments of the familiar kind and all conscription will look completely silly...This new development does open the way for world agreement on grounds cleared of all that impedimenta of the past because the atom bomb has, figuratively speaking, blown them away.'<sup>26</sup>

For a time, pacifists set great store on the idea that the tragedy of the war had left humanity no alternative but to move towards world government. However, world peace would be achieved through 'World Government — not UNO. They saw the United Nations as

constituted to accommodate two opposing military blocs. World government should be 'a legislature composed of members elected by direct vote of all peoples, not a council representing national governments.'<sup>27</sup>

This ideal of everlasting peace in a disarmed world flew in the face of a contemporary world of sovereign states arming to the teeth to fight an even more devastating war. But like other ideals it could inspire individuals to take a first step and this for many peace activists has been a dedication to the cause of nuclear disarmament. Eleanor Moore reflected on how 'the end of the war brought with it singularly little sense of release... It might be expected a great wave of gladness would sweep around the world. It was not so, as 'the Allied victory had come with new forms of ugliness and the shame and horror of the atomic bomb.'<sup>28</sup> These sentiments were of someone wholly devoted to the quest for peace from the time of World War I. But most Australians supported the use of the bombs on Japan with only twelve per cent believing it was wrong. Over 80 per cent of Australians, including most of those who thought it wrong to have used the bomb, expressed the opinion that the United States and Britain should keep the knowledge of how to make the bomb secret and not share it with the United Nations.<sup>29</sup>

Within the peace movement, pacifists (feeling more poignantly than many others the unimaginable violence of the atomic bombings), were the ones who perceived a deeper meaning for humanity that the first use of atomic technology was in an act of war. Reverend Frank Coaldrake writes in his 'Report of the Australian Pacifist Conference,' held in January 1946, just months after the bombings, that 'The release of atomic energy, long anticipated as the crowning glory of our scientific civilisation of the West has now occurred, but instead of coming with promise of happy leisure for all, it hangs over us as a menace not only of our civilised institutions but also of the mass of mankind.'<sup>30</sup>

Coaldrake seemed to sense the menace to be inherent in the contemporary scientific ethos, which had inspired the technology. The familiar emblem, the immaculate image of a mushroom cloud, rising out of a nuclear inferno, was technically contrived to portray the scientists' beautiful achievement. Indeed, to some scientists the bomb was an object of reverence and even engendered religious feelings. Laurence, science writer in *New York Times*, described how, at the first test of an atomic bomb in New Mexico 'it was like being witness to the Second Coming of Christ...it came to me that both 'Oppie' [Oppenheimer] and I, and likely many others in our group, had shared in a profound religious experience, having been witness to an event akin to supernatural.'<sup>31</sup>

Parliamentarian, W. C. Wentworth, was moved by the British test at Emu Plain, in October 1953, to say: 'In the whole history of mankind there are only two events of major significance - one spiritual nineteen and half centuries ago and the other in the material event today.'<sup>32</sup> Sir Ernest Titterton, nuclear scientist, told the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia, how uplifted he felt as he viewed a nuclear weapon just before firing. It was, he said, 'a very beautiful piece of highly sophisticated engineering. I think the only word to describe it is beautiful.'<sup>33</sup>

### Atomic Energy: Menace or miracle?

John Bowker, a Melbourne inventor, an ardent crusader for world government, recognised very early how *radioactivity* was a menace inherent in the whole of the technology whether applied to produce weapons or energy. He was familiar with the hazards of exposure to radiation having been involved in medical X-ray technology. In 1949 in the midst of atomic euphoria, he wrote *This Atomic Age and You*, in which he warned that deadly radiation released at Hiroshima would also be released in atomic power production.

Bowker tried to discourage 'the wild scramble for uranium' and to dispel the hopes being built up around atomic energy by scientists, as he saw it, either misguidedly or out of self-interest. Because plutonium is produced along with the generation of power 'an atomic power plant is, for all practical purposes, another name for an atomic bomb factory.'<sup>34</sup> The media ignored his warnings preferring to turn to more eminent and seemingly more informed scientists for their views.

In 1948 the major newspapers staged 'Atomic Age' exhibitions presenting a more hopeful future for atomic energy than Bowker. Tim Sherratt describes how 'The exhibition's pin-up boy was the atomic genie...having been released from his prison within the atom, the genie awaited our command, would it be for good or evil'. A signpost in the exhibition pointed one way to Destruction and the other to Progress. Destruction was represented by a model of the bombing of Hiroshima. The path to progress 'led through the commercial exhibits where all manner of consumer and industrial goods were arrayed as icons of the coming atomic utopia'. Implicit in the exhibit was the imperative to develop the technology. It did not inspire a person to make decisions about 'the priorities of human existence.'<sup>35</sup>

Within the peace movement the thinking was all about overcoming the menace of the bomb in order that people could enjoy the miracle of energy abundance. Ban-the-bomb

campaigners argued that nuclear weapon testing was wasting energy that could be better used for human benefit. Physicist, Harry Messel, predicted that Australia's arid lands 'would be irrigated and transformed into lush pastures and fertile fields.'<sup>36</sup> At forums held around the country under such titles as 'Menace or Miracle' and 'The Atom and You — How atomic energy can make life richer for us all,' scientists painted the wonders of atomic energy, while Christian ministers condemned nuclear weapons and spoke of peaceful coexistence. 'The poor of the world would be freed of their age-old drudgery and grinding poverty. 'Atomic magic', as Bowker called it, had taken hold.

What it would mean for Australians if atomic war broke out could not be entirely ignored, especially after Soviet Russia exploded an A-bomb in 1949. The Sydney Sun described how 'Central Sydney would be obliterated with 50,000 deaths and 100,000 injuries.'<sup>37</sup> But this was not to argue banning the bomb but rather to seek security under the deterrent power of the United States' nuclear umbrella.

### A question of morality

Mass killing of innocent civilians raised the theological question as to whether a 'just war' could ever be fought with atomic bombs. Dr. A.H. Wood, leading Methodist and school principal, was inspired to work for world peace with Australian church groups when he learned about the suffering of the people of Hiroshima. 'I felt the whole world had changed - war with atomic bombs could never be just.'<sup>38</sup> But not all Christians felt the same stirring of conscience. Dr C. Cockett, President of the Australian Council of Churches, believed that 'Unless the Righteous Powers retain control an Evil Power could extinguish humanity.'<sup>39</sup> Retaining control, in the name of being in the right was the same argument used by both major contestants in the nuclear arms race to justify trying to hold the lead position.

The British Council of Churches equivocated. In a report, *The Era of Atomic Power*, a Church Commission found there was the need to be ready to meet any external challenge which, by implication, would come from Russia. The Society of Friends criticised the church commission saying it had taken 'a predominantly British point of view' and went on to advocate 'the destruction of all atomic bombs now and the discontinuance of experiments and processes for producing them.'<sup>40</sup> In an open letter the Australian Fellowship of Reconciliation disputed the Commission's assertion that a nation was obliged 'to retain the atomic bomb on the grounds of necessity and security and as a deterrent'. The bomb did not accord 'with the classical principles of a just war.'<sup>41</sup>

Besides theologians and peace activists, questioning the use of the atomic bomb on Japanese cities came also from unexpected quarters. General Eisenhower thought 'it wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing.'<sup>42</sup> US Admiral Leahy reflected that 'in being the first to use it [the bomb], we adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the dark ages.'<sup>43</sup> Former US Congress member, Stewart Udall, asked: 'As the only nation in the world that has used nuclear bombs as weapons of war, why have U.S. citizens and their leaders refused to view the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a grievous lack of American morality and as an American tragedy?'<sup>44</sup>

When the Smithsonian Institute, in New York, planned to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima it was forced to indulge in a 'historical cleansing' to eliminate questioning of the military need to drop the bomb. US psychologist, Robert Lifton, says people's denial of Hiroshima 'comes from a combination of systematic distortion, concealment and censorship over these years, on the one hand, and psychological resistance on the part of all of us on the other.'<sup>45</sup> What happened at the Smithsonian 'can be understood as an expression of what we call the American raw nerve ... the only way to overcome a raw nerve is to get at its cause. And that is to confront what really happened at Hiroshima.'<sup>46</sup>

The same ambivalence pervades Australian thinking on their country's involvement with nuclear weapons. A feeling of insecurity in our region led us to seek protection under the US nuclear umbrella and provide a range for Britain to test its nuclear weapons. Australians apparently see nuclear weapons as a deterrent to war and opposed the *first* use of the weapon. They opposed a proposal by General Macarther, in 1951, to drop the bomb in the Korean War. A majority opposed the stationing nuclear-armed aircraft in Australia and later the testing of MX missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons. With growing hands-off sentiments (though not without a counter-current) about nuclear weapons, Australia would later take the lead in negotiating the Nuclear-Free South Pacific Treaty outlawing the stationing of nuclear weapons in the region.

The first anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima was commemorated in the Assembly Hall in Melbourne. This early initiative for a public commemoration probably reflected a relatively strong pacifist presence in Melbourne. The meeting, called by the Combined Women's Organisations Protest Committee, demanded 'that all nations outlaw the atomic bomb'. Weapons of mass destruction should be outlawed and atomic energy should not be used 'for destructive ends.' Speakers from the scientific and church communities called for an end to

the secrecy that had surrounded the building of the first atomic bombs in the Manhattan Project. High hopes were expressed for the benefits of atomic energy. But scientific research would have to be freed from the grip of 'military, and political, control and scientists should not be hindered from making known to one another and to the public the results of their investigation.'<sup>47</sup>

### Early Cold War politics

During the war, left groups and liberal intellectuals, with the encouragement of the Labor government, promoted understanding and friendship with the Soviet Russia. Jessie Street recalls how, after Hitler invaded Russia, a wall of media silence burst and 'the press began making references to my speeches on the USSR. Then they were more than generous with their publicity.'<sup>48</sup> Until the defeat of Germany the media enthusiastically reported the exploits of 'our great and glorious Russian ally'. Russia, commented the *Argus*, 'had won herself a place among the senior nations as a co-champion of civilisation.'<sup>49</sup>

As the war drew towards its end conservative political forces began playing on fears Australians held of invasion by the teeming millions of 'Asiatics' inhabiting countries to the North and, closer to home, communist subversion from within. Anyone suggesting sharing atomic 'secrets' between nations brought accusations of subversion down on their head. Even the 'most reputable scientists and students of world order' were met with accusations that their opposition to official atomic policies was being made at the behest of a 'Foreign Power' or at the direction of Moscow. Even Sir David Rivett, chief executive officer of the CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research) did not escape. He was called upon to resign in the Federal Parliament for insisting that atomic research carried on in his organization should *not* be done in secret but be freely available to all other scientists.<sup>50</sup>

In the UNAA liberal internationalists found themselves under attack by members from 'The Movement', an anti-communist Catholic organisation, if they so much as questioned US nuclear policies.<sup>51</sup> Mr B.A. Santamaria, who headed 'The Movement, advocated planning Australia's civilian defence to meet the needs of atomic war. Addressing a Christian colloquium Santamaria described nuclear weapons as 'no different from artillery, although their explosive force is much greater'. They are suited to 'the type of defence against overwhelming superiority of manpower on the part of potential aggressors.'<sup>52</sup> Without quite saying so, Santamaria was putting the case that Australia should arm itself with nuclear weapons, a position that found support in the Liberal coalition cabinet.<sup>53</sup>

The CPA, like The Movement, was concerned not so much about the morality as the politics of the use of nuclear weapons. The atomic bomb 'was perceived exclusively in political terms...It was not seen, and admittedly could not easily be seen, as the commencement of an era soon to be characterised by the possibility of homicide.'<sup>54</sup> In the years immediately after the war the CPA saw the problem not so much as the bomb itself but 'the dangers of the bomb only in the hands of opponents.'<sup>55</sup> This was the view of Dr Cockett except that the mantle of righteousness was conferred on the other side.

### The rocket shooting range

Within months of the tragic news of the atomic obliteration of Hiroshima, Prime Minister Chifley and Foreign Affairs Minister Evatt had secretly committed Australia to making its open spaces available to test British missiles. Evatt was convinced of the necessity for the United States, and presumably Britain, to have the bomb. Oliphant recalls how, during UN negotiations with Soviet Russia, Evatt, in private consultation with him and the Australian Ambassador, Paul Hasluck, rejected any idea that the US should dismantle its bombs (two at the time). The gist of Evatt's response was that the weapons could not possibly be incapacitated, even temporarily, since no one knew when they might be needed for use against Soviet Russia.<sup>56</sup> Evatt's impassioned appeals for nations to resolve their conflicts by collective negotiation in the spirit of the UN Charter sound like empty rhetoric given his government's eagerness to facilitate Britain's development of rockets capable of delivering atomic bombs.

David Stead, conservationist, pacifist and socialist, had thrown himself into 'movements for world peace and understanding' and served as president of the LNU. Stead expressed the concerns of many when he wrote to Prime Minister Chifley saying 'This letter is prompted by the statement in today's papers about an "Empire" project for Rocket Experiments in Central Australia. Undoubtedly this also means "atomic" investigations since the two are now intimately connected.'<sup>57</sup>

He told the Prime Minister: 'You are of the Common People of Australia. I am also of those Common People. I feel sure that you are just as interested in the present and future welfare of those Common People as I am...none can be kept out of the running [to make the bomb] for long'. Security will be for all nations or none. Here is an opportunity to insist 'that all these experiments must be done by the United Nations Organisation independent of every separate government and protected by a UNO force of World Police'. Prime Minister replied promising 'appropriate authorities' would keep in mind Stead's plea for the project [to] be

under the control of a United Nations Organisation.<sup>58</sup> The response gave no hint that a Guided Missiles Committee in the defence department continued their planning of Australia's role in Britain's entry into the nuclear arms race. The authorities had already agreed on a British military mission to survey our open spaces for their shooting range.

Australians were first to learn of the location of the range at Woomera, not from the government, but from Dr Charles Duguid, President of the South Australian Aboriginal Advancement League. He believed people had a right to know what was going on behind their backs. In a letter to the press he asked whether having driven Aborigines 'from all the good country are we now to sit back and see them treated as human guinea pigs in atomic tests...Without delay we citizens of Australia must raise ourselves to stop this crime.'<sup>59</sup> Dr Duguid had for three months been seeking details of the proposed rocket range experiments in the desert areas in which Aboriginal settlements were located. It would still be several months before the responsible minister announced publicly the area over which the shooting would take place.

The government, fearing public debate getting out of their control, had deliberately restricted, as long as possible, the availability of information. Concerned individuals and community groups had then to set about researching and disseminating information, which is essential, if there is to be an informed public debate. This has never been more so than for nuclear undertakings either civil or military.

In February 1947, a Rocket Range Protest Committee was brought together by the Presbyterian Board of Missions and the Women's Christian Temperance Union for the prime purpose of demanding the range be relocated to a site where it would do no harm to Aborigines. Pacifist and other peace groups, among the 47 groups represented on the committee, pressed for widening the objection to oppose the range being anywhere on Australian soil. Troubled though it was by conflicting aims, the committee worked up to a public meeting of 1300 people in Melbourne Town Hall. To make their point, at the public meeting, pacifists handed out a leaflet contending that while Aboriginal interests were good reason to oppose the rocket range 'it is not the only one, or the most important'. The rocket range should be abandoned for the wider reason that 'It is a danger to peace and Australia.'<sup>60</sup>

A leading Presbyterian, Dr McCauley, chaired the meeting. In the main address Dr Duguid passionately opposed rocket testing on Aboriginal reserves. He also sought common ground: 'I would ask you all to maintain with unswerving hostility your opposition to the rocket range

in Central Australia. To some of you, who are pacifists, it violated a sacred principle; to others it is an offence against commonsense and progress towards security under the United Nations Organisation'. However, Duguid's primary concern was Aboriginal people, who could now 'be finally sacrificed and hurried to extinction by sudden contact with the mad demands of twentieth century militarism.'<sup>61</sup>

Mrs Blackburn, member of Federal Parliament, told the meeting the scheme had not come before parliament until she had moved a motion, opposing the project. Her motion had received no support from either side of the house. Reflecting on Evatt's passionate espousal of peaceful coexistence she told the meeting 'Australia spoke with one voice abroad and another voice at home. This is not the way to world peace'. The meeting resolved to protest to the government against the setting up of the rocket range 'as being inimical to the welfare of the aborigines' and because 'the project represents a great disservice.

But APPU representatives still felt there were 'undercurrents of tension between two points of view' over what the protest should be about.'<sup>62</sup> Before the next organising committee meeting the Presbyterian Board of Missions and the Temperance Union issued a circular urging that 'protest should be specifically against wrong to Aborigines and not the wider issue. When it next met the committee decided by majority vote to limit the protest to the harm done to Aborigines. At a public meeting held a few months later in Melbourne's Princess Theatre, attended by 600 people, the chairperson disallowed any resolution from the floor put by pacifists to widen the issue. Nonetheless the committee published, as a pamphlet, Duguid's speech with its strong opposition to Australian involvement in atomic weapons programs. The committee also published 'A Letter to President Truman', a strong criticism of US atomic weapons policy, written by Henry Wallace, Truman's Secretary of Commerce and previously a Vice President to Roosevelt.'<sup>63</sup>

The Building Workers Federation joined the protest in May 1947 with a threat to black ban the project. The rockets would be used in an imperialist war and would be harmful to Aborigines said communist union secretary, Don Thompson. However the union stepped back to announce that it saw nothing wrong with Australia testing rockets so long as it had no adverse effects on Aboriginal welfare. The CPA, preoccupied with union struggles in the coalfields, had few resources to engage in another confrontation with the government over a peace issue. Also the CPA was ambivalent about atomic weaponry, being more concerned about who controlled it.

Despite the retreat by the union, Evatt went ahead with his *Defence Projects Protection Act*, which made it an offence so much as to speak, or write, against anything the Minister for Defence chose to declare 'prohibited'. In a government booklet *Hands off the Nation's Defences* Evatt warned Australians not to be misled by communists, working in the interests of the Soviet Russia, even though the defence of Australia may be imperilled. Observed *The Peacemaker*, 'when Evatt put his foot down with a bang...the Communists were not beneath it'. Only the pacifists 'remained steadfast in their protest...We must make it clear that we oppose all preparations for war...no matter against whom they are directed.'<sup>64</sup> In their opposition to atomic weapons pacifists kept to the moral high ground. The political left was drawn by default into the *Realpolitik* of a bipolar world and keeping the peace between the two blocs through a nuclear balance.

With the Menzies' Coalition government in office from 1948, campaigning to 'ban the bomb' became immersed in the stultifying politics of the Cold War. Peace activity like any activity supporting social or political reform was labelled the work of communists. In 1951 Prime Minister Menzies justified a *Defence Preparations Bill* on the grounds that Australia must prepare for a major war within three years and this meant Australians giving up many civil liberties.<sup>65</sup> Pat Ranald reflected on those times when 'anti-communism could be used to smear every kind of work for reform or social change. If communists were involved then others working in the area were dupes. If they were not directly involved the work could be accused of being communist inspired.'<sup>66</sup>

### World Peace Council

In 1949, as international tensions were being exacerbated by the race for nuclear superiority, peace activists from almost every country around the world, including Australia, gathered in Paris to attend a World Peace Congress. The World Peace Council (WPC) was launched. WPC campaigns were directed towards mobilising world opinion in support of the United Nations, banning the bomb, peaceful coexistence between different social systems, and discouragement of racial hatreds.

The Australian Peace Council (APC) also had *local* origins. On a homeward-bound ship from the war in New Guinea, Padre Frank Hartley was disturbed to hear the view expressed in the officers' mess 'that the Soviet Union would be our next enemy'. Vanquished foes, Germany and Japan were to be forgiven.<sup>67</sup> To Hartley it all sounded as though he was coming home to a country preparing for another war. 'The struggle against the assumptions of the Cold War

led me' wrote Hartley, 'into the struggle for democratic rights in Australia and into participation in the movement for peace.'<sup>68</sup>

When Melbourne Town Hall was refused for a communist, John Rodgers, to speak about his stay in Soviet Union, Hartley felt the need to act. He canvassed other clergy about the restrictions being put on free speech. He and about forty others formed a Democratic Rights Council to campaign against this stifling of dissent and open debate. In February, 1949, the council called a one-day meeting in the Assembly Hall to discuss 'Peace and how to achieve it'. After six months campaigning on free speech, and with the crucial help of a union black ban on the building of a city bridge, the town hall doors were reopened to peace groups for their meetings.<sup>69</sup>

A grassroots struggle can prosper a community movement by bringing together like minds sharing a common social concern. So it was that during the struggle for free speech Methodist Frank Hartley joined with Presbyterian Alf Dickie and Unitarian Victor James in their ecumenical work for peace that would span whole decades. In July 1949 these three 'peace parsons' met with a small number of other people including Jim Cairns, Doris Blackburn, and John Rodgers in the manse of the Unitarian Church to start moves for the formation of the APC. In September 1949, the APC was launched at a meeting, chaired by Jim Cairns, of 2000 people in the Melbourne Town Hall. The APC committee elected was representative of church communities, unions, intellectuals, Christian youth and women's groups.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the broad nature of its membership the Australian Labor Party (ALP) executive decreed that members withdraw from any association with the APC or face expulsion. Cairns resigned in March 1950. He gave as his reason that the APC was too pro-Soviet.<sup>71</sup> Given the web of friendships and feelings of common cause that reached among the ordinary members of the labour and peace movements the ruling was observed in breach more than observance. The APC responded to the ban by publishing the broadly representative list of founding members of the council while welcoming 'support of any section of the community'. However, the council '[did] not apologise for the fact that the Communist Party and its paper have urged their members to support our activities.'<sup>72</sup>

The APC, at times, was influenced unduly by the CPA. Ian Turner, APC secretary, at the behest of his party, the CPA, took it on himself to publicly condemn the United States as the aggressor in the Korean War. The three 'peace parsons' wanted the APC to adopt a neutral

stand.<sup>73</sup> When the CPA pressured the APC to refrain from condemning the Soviet Russia for intervention in Hungary in 1956 it was the last straw for many communist peace activists. Many, including Ian Turner, resigned from the CPA but remained active in the peace movement.

Menzies thundered about 'pink parsons' and 'communist dupes' and warned them 'to abandon their treasonable opinions while there was still time.'<sup>74</sup> 'These were the days', Victor James reflected some years later, 'of the beginning of the "Cold War," the days when America believed that she, and only she, possessed the atom bomb and could therefore hold it as a threat to other nations of the world. These were the days of the Korean War, of the Peking Peace Conference, of the banning of passports, the banning of halls, days when those who spoke for peace were regarded, and accused, as traitors of their country.'<sup>75</sup>

### The peace parsons

The peace parsons, Dickie as president, Hartley and James as joint secretaries, were at the centre of APC campaigning. Contrary to accusations of 'communist dupes' the three ministers needed no tutelage about the nature of war or the social and economic injustices of the capitalist system. Growing up in the town of Wonthaggi, Hartley witnessed the struggles of coal miners for better wages and conditions. James was familiar with the similar struggles of coal miners in his home country, Wales. Dickie worked as a fitter and turner before answering the call to the ministry. A social awareness led them quite naturally into joining forces with peace activists in the Labour movement to work against war and for social justice. Still, their work for peace was carried on in the light of their Christian precepts as well as a deep sense of what was their civic duty.<sup>76</sup> Though Eleanor Moore would not have approved of the APC, their work within that organisation was nonetheless an example of her belief that 'the greater part of the brains and conscience of the quest for peace in Australia has been supplied by the clergy.'<sup>77</sup>

Dickie saw in the creation of the bomb and other weapons of mass destruction how science had given 'the power to shake the foundations of the earth'. Continuing to use this power 'would bring doom on God's creation.'<sup>78</sup> People could choose not to go down this path and Dickie felt the need to organise ordinary people to oppose governments having this power of mass destruction. Ian Turner recalled how every new crisis Dickie encountered in his work for peace 'was a moral dilemma, which had to be resolved in doubt and uncertainty.'<sup>79</sup> And in the embattled APC during the Cold War crises were many.

At a celebration of his 75th birthday, in 1978, Dickie recalled how 'the spell had been broken. Former allies were being cast as enemies and former enemies were being cast as friends. These rumours led me to publish a booklet *Should such a Faith Offend?*'<sup>80</sup> Dickie was deserted by many of his North Essendon parishioners believing him to be disloyal. He was helped to weather the storm by peace activists adding to the number in his Sunday congregation. In the end his calm persistence and integrity in pursuit of his mission for peace won him the respect of fellow Christians. He was elected to act as Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, 1965-6.

As in war, so in peace, Hartley was a person of action. Unlike Dickie who pondered over each problem, Hartley took everything at a gallop. Though he believed 'peace movements should deal with moral principles, not [be] party political', he was adamant that they 'must carry out action for peace which is political.'<sup>81</sup> He supported dialogue between Christians and Marxists but for the exchange of views not for subversion of one belief by the other. Central to his strategy for world peace was coexistence of the capitalist and socialist systems. Hartley firmly believed that only by working with ordinary people could the peace movement achieve its goals of nuclear disarmament and universal peace with justice for all people. After first questioning his work for peace, his church demonstrated its trust in him by appointing him Superintendent of the Prahran Methodist Mission. Under his guidance the mission came to have a central place in the social life of the city. Elected a councillor on the Prahran City Council, he passionately represented the rights of the local citizens.

James, like Hartley, had seen war service. He served as an officer in the Royal Air Force. Deeply impressed on his memory was hearing the news of the dropping of the atomic bomb. His troopship was halfway between Honolulu and Eniwetok when 'news came over the Tannoy system that the atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. The news was received in silence, as though the listeners were overawed by the sheer intensity and tragedy of the disaster.'<sup>82</sup>

Like the pacifists, James thought the overwhelming tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki could lead us to embrace higher ideals. If we could overcome our immediate selfish aims, we might 'mark the beginning of that ascent which will ultimately, perhaps in our time, lead us to an era in which the fruits of the earth will be gathered in abundance everywhere by men in peace'. For this to happen 'We must acquire a conception of freedom that is all embracing, economic as well as political.'<sup>83</sup>

In the years that the three 'swam against the cold war current' James performed as the 'cool, sophisticated and wily politician who examined the likely consequences before he made up his mind'. He did not hide that 'in politics I am a socialist...I would like to be convinced capitalist society is disintegrating.'<sup>84</sup> For listeners to his regular Sunday broadcast for the Unitarian Church over 3XY, he was one of the few independent voices coming over the airwaves to be heard during the height of the Cold War. Philip Adams, who later became a broadcaster himself, reflected on how James' broadcasts 'were exhilarating and, in the best sense, subversive...He made me realise I was not alone in my questioning...I cannot convey the gratitude I feel for this extraordinary man and his paradoxical church where debate replaces dogma.'<sup>85</sup>

### The Australian Peace Congress

The fledgling APC took its chance and booked the Melbourne Exhibition Building for an Australian Peace Congress. 'This was in April 1950...It was a total venture in faith and its fulfilment was exhilarating in the extreme.'<sup>86</sup> Reverend Hewlett Johnson, the Dean of Canterbury, was one of the guest speakers. The 'Red' Dean had published *The Socialist Sixth of the World*, in 1939, in praise of socialist society in the Soviet Union and faced hostile questioning by the media. In those days the building had seating over its tremendous length as well as its balconies and it was filled to capacity for the opening meeting.<sup>87</sup>

The congress was attended by 10,000 people. The Dean launched the Stockholm Appeal, which called for the total banning of the atomic weapon and international control to ensure the implementation of the ban and for any country using the bomb to be dealt with as a war criminal. Applied retrospectively this would mean that those responsible for the decision to drop the bomb on Hiroshima should be tried as war criminals. The appeal was finally signed by 200,000 Australians and 500 million people worldwide.

'We were greatly indebted to the Melbourne newspapers especially the *Herald* for its publicity' was Victor James's ironic reflection on the acrimonious reporting of what, for the peace activists, was their very successful first congress. 'All the newspapers were arraigned against us charging us with being communist financed and supported by the Soviet Union.'<sup>88</sup> Those who are sympathetic to an oppositional group or movement often get 'the message' by turning on its head the reporting they read in a patently hostile media. From its inception the APC campaigned strenuously through state branches and local groups, by petitioning, publishing pamphlets and holding a succession of congresses.

Through the fifties peace congresses were held every three years. After the Stockholm Appeal two other WPC peace appeals were canvassed across the country by the APC. One was for a Five-Power Peace Pact. The other was the Appeal Against Preparations for Atomic War, launched in Vienna in 1955, which demanded 'the destruction of all stocks of atomic weapons wherever they may be and the immediate stopping of their manufacture'. On Hiroshima Day, it was announced that 656 million signatures had been collected, including 276,000 in Australia.

The success of the ban-the-bomb petitions and surveys in those difficult times must go to the credit of those peace workers who were prepared to 'knock on any door', distribute leaflets and demonstrate in the streets with their placards or, when these were banned, wearing aprons carrying their slogans. Barbara Curthoys recalls how, among this coterie of peace workers, there were members of the Union of Australian Women in each state, who took petitions and surveys 'to neighbours, to their friends and to women in their homes.'<sup>89</sup> As one member described her experience as a canvasser in the cause of peace: 'It is nearly one o'clock and I've knocked on 62 doors and got 21 forms filled in. I decided to canvass to the top of the hill and go home. My dream of 50 forms filled in during the morning was only a dream – but I'll go out tomorrow and see if I can do better.'<sup>90</sup>

One canvasser recalled that many of those approached to sign were worried that their names might be misused and 'thought that such a ban would disarm the West and allow the Soviet Union to gain in the atomic race.'<sup>91</sup> Even so, the signature tallies were indicative of quite significant support for APC campaigns.

Oppositional community groups only ever have limited resources to canvass workplaces and households and to maintain a presence at tables set up in shopping centres. This was at a time when Australians were being harangued by Menzies to give unquestioning support to the United States, if necessary all the way to a nuclear Armageddon. Any association with the APC could lead to victimisation.

A meeting of the leaders of the US and Soviet Union in the mid-fifties led to a lull in the cold war. An Atoms for Peace Conference called by the UN was attended by representatives of the East and West blocs. In Australia, the splitting off of the far right faction from the ALP led to a renewal of relations with the peace movement. In 1956, Evatt sent a message of goodwill to the World Peace Congress held in Stockholm.

Scientists from East and West met in 1957, to discuss nuclear disarmament. They had been inspired by the Einstein-Russell Manifesto, issued in 1955. The manifesto began: 'In the tragic situation which confronts humanity, we feel scientists should assemble in conference to appraise the perils that have arisen'. The first meeting was held Pugwash, Nova Scotia. 'Pugwash' meetings became an annual event. Professor Mark Oliphant represented Australia at the second meeting. Branches were formed in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.

### Congress for International Cooperation and Disarmament

The APC metamorphosed in the late 1950s - a process not infrequent in community movements. There had some rapprochement among peace groups opening the way for launching a broader movement' not connected directly to the APC, nor to other existing peace bodies. In 1959 a Congress for International Cooperation and Disarmament was held in Melbourne. Dorothy Gibson records in her diary how the congress 'brought in new streams of support from trade unions, the Labour Party, intellectual and church circles. Professor Linus Pauling and his wife Ava, expressing a great release of the human spirit after the defeat of McCarthyism, brought a fresh wind of inspiration to our country, similar to that brought by the Dean [of Canterbury] nine years earlier.'<sup>92</sup> Linus Pauling was twice winner of the Nobel Prize, for chemistry and his work for world peace. Because of his stand against nuclear weapons tests he had faced impeachment before the US Congress.

The Peace Congress called for the ending of nuclear weapons tests, the banning of all nuclear weapons and total disarmament of all countries. It was a declaration with something to please everyone present, from those leaning towards the policies of Soviet Russia to the adherents of absolute pacifism. It avoided what one peace activist recorded in a memo to colleagues as the 'unnecessary discord at the last session of the Peace Assembly in Sydney, in 1956'. Then pacifists had insisted on including in the final declaration of the assembly an objection 'to the employment of armed forces in any circumstance'. Relations with pacifists 'can cause some difficulty, as when the SU [Soviet Union] [was] compelled to carry on atomic tests because the other powers would not agree to stop them. But we should be generally able to agree with pacifists in present world circumstances.'<sup>93</sup>

The partial thawing of Cold War politics meant that the 1959 Congress was given a wider public airing than any previous congress. Still Prime Minister Menzies criticised those 'eminently respectable people' who had allowed their names to be associated with promoting the Congress.<sup>94</sup> Victor James in one of his regular Sunday afternoon broadcasts commented on how 'even the word 'peace' has now become more respectable and abandoned its

inverted commas'. He observed that peace activists, who had called to ban the bomb, had circulated the Stockholm Appeal and sent delegates to overseas peace conferences 'can now see those who refused to have anything to do with us and our policies, repeating them word for word as their own policies and opinions.'<sup>95</sup>

### British Atomic Bomb Tests

When Prime Minister Menzies announced, on 18 February 1952, that Britain would test atomic weapons 'at a site in Australia' it elicited little response let alone demonstrative protest from the APC. Looking back over the records of the APC and its affiliates it seems organising public protest was never seriously contemplated at that time. No attempt was made to mobilise the hundreds of thousands of Australians, who had signed 'ban-the-bomb' appeals, to protest. It was a passive response to atomic bomb tests in our backyard.

There were political difficulties. The government was armed with a law prescribing heavy penalties for so much as speaking, or writing, against a defence project if prohibited by the government. A majority of Australians supported the tests though in the absence of informed debate. It is hard to provoke argument in an information vacuum. Menzies negotiated personally on the location of the first atomic test on the Monte Bello Islands and then for months he did not even inform Howard Beale, the minister who would become responsible for Australia's role in the tests. When asked about rumours that a test was imminent Beale genuinely denied any such test was planned.'<sup>96</sup>

The APC had lost credibility by defending Russian tests as a defensive response to testing in the West. Defence of continued testing could be used either way. Australia, said Menzies, was doing no more than its bit by helping Britain create a vital defence against a nuclear-armed Soviet Union hell-bent on imposing communism on the 'free' world. Only the pacifists, who opposed the weapons, no matter in whose camp, were in a moral position to oppose the British testing.

Within weeks of the Menzies announcement, WILPF called a public meeting which approved the motion: 'This public meeting of Melbourne citizens expresses its emphatic disapproval of the use of the atomic bomb anywhere and particularly an atom bomb in Australia. We believe it to be against the best interests of the people of the Commonwealth and one more betrayal of our responsibility to guard human rights, especially the rights of aborigines.'<sup>97</sup> A copy of the motion was sent to Prime Minister Menzies.

WILPF also sent the motion to Evatt, Leader of the Opposition. It was accompanied by a special plea 'to use your influence even at this late hour to prevent the use of this country as an atom bomb testing base...Can we depend on the Leader of the Opposition to take up this task with which History is challenging him?'. Evatt side-stepped his 'historic' challenge by replying: 'Whether it be an atom bomb, an incendiary bomb, a block buster or a bullet fired from a rifle the principle is just the same.'<sup>98</sup> Labor members cheered the success of Britain's first atomic explosion with the same enthusiasm as those on the government benches of the House.

*The Peacemaker* regretted that to set up a bomb-testing range site on our soil 'gives us now a direct responsibility for this form of warfare.'<sup>99</sup> The League for Freedom and World Friendship, in its newsletter, complained that 'all of our major political parties have acquiesced in this abdication of our national rights ...and have tied Australia to the chariot wheels of British-American foreign policy'. However, 'since it was the height of the football season it would be rather hard expecting Australians 'to face up to the trivial question of the future of his country, and the survival of his race.'<sup>100</sup> People's nuclear fears, which were aroused by the Hiroshima holocaust, had either subsided or people had come to feel the nuclear problem was beyond them. The arousal of public concern over an issue has often to wait upon some turn of events no matter the effort put into 'spreading the word'.

In the 1950s the peace movement was more constrained if only because of the repressive political climate of the Cold War. It was the bomb testers who raised people's concerns. Alarm bells began to ring worldwide when, in 1954, a Japanese trawler fishing in the Pacific was contaminated by radioactive fallout from the US hydrogen bomb test, Bravo. The ships radioactive fish and the sick and dying crew reawakened fears about radiation exposure. Even without nuclear war, the world environment was becoming dangerously radioactive.

Now Australians began questioning their own exposure from bomb testing right at home. Support for the tests among Australians had slumped. In 1952, when Menzies announced the tests, 52 per cent approved whereas, by 1956, 58 per cent disapproved Australia hosting the tests.

Australians were far from knowing just how much they were being exposed to radioactive fallout. After the *Mosaic G2* test on the Monte Bello Islands in June 1956, Hedley Marston, CSIRO scientist, measured a hundredfold increase in radioactivity. He reported to the Australia Weapons Test Safety Committee (AWTSC) that an 800-km swathe across Northern

Australia had been “dressed” by a radioactive cloud drifting across the continent. The AWTSC was dominated by Ernest Titterton, who played down the hazards of fallout. He was determined nothing stood in the way of carrying out the tests efficiently and in the greatest secrecy, not even public safety.<sup>101</sup>

Marston’s findings were confidential. Not so the clicking of Geiger counters across Australia. At Kuridala in far north Queensland a prospector reported the count from rainwater had jumped from a normal 20 to 2000 counts per minute. A physics professor warned against drinking water in areas so heavily contaminated by fallout.<sup>102</sup> Beale, who at the time was giving news editors a guided tour of the Maralinga test range, suggested “such alarmist’ reports be ignored. Later he told his cabinet colleagues how the editors had given him an undertaking ‘to minimise public alarm as much as they could and to print the facts.’<sup>103</sup>

Such government disinformation, abetted by media editors, does not always, prevail over genuine community concerns. Citizens can, research an issue and put on public notice information that cannot be entirely ignored by the media or denied by the authorities and their appointed experts. Citizen investigations are often aided by scientists who appreciate the need for informed public debate. Even before the *Mosaic G2* test went horribly wrong John Blatt, professor of physics, disagreed publicly with Titterton’s assertion that ‘the level of radioactive contamination gives no cause for anxiety.’ Responsible scientists the world over, said Blatt, ‘have expressed anxiety on precisely this point and have warned about bomb tests anywhere.’<sup>104</sup> In an international petition, sponsored by Linus Pauling, 9,000 scientists called for all testing to cease. In Australia, 350 scientists called for a ban in view of ‘the threat facing humanity through the development of nuclear weapons.’<sup>105</sup>

### Australian Convention on War and Peace

In 1953, at the request of the Peace Quest Forum, Dr A.H. Wood and a colleague, Reverend Eric Owen, took on the organising of the first Australian Convention on War and Peace in Sydney. They decided that ‘in order to avoid being condemned from the outset as merely another Communist front activity ...The control and management of the whole movement was to be in non-communist hands.’<sup>106</sup> Of course, this studied effort at political correctness had no effect on a government determined to stifle open public debate on foreign policy no matter from where came the opposition. Foreign Minister, R. G. Casey, made an unfounded claim that communists were contributing £10,000 towards the cost of the convention of £20,000. Prime Minister Menzies followed with ‘evidence’ that ‘the Communist Party is behind the convention and hopes to exploit it’. Leader of the Opposition, Evatt, joined him

in denouncing the convention as communist inspired.<sup>107</sup> Owen sought an interview with Menzies, who attended his Toorak Church, but was not given any evidence to deter him from proceeding with the convention.

But the smear could not always be ignored. Dr Wood, encouraged by Owen, decided: 'I must sever my connection with it [the convention] or injure the school of which I am principal. But I hate doing it.'<sup>108</sup> It was a measure of the social pressures being put on individuals to conform politically. This was especially so for those holding prominent positions in institutions fearful for their 'good name,' not that Dr Wood was shy about public utterance. He was drawn towards pacifism and socialism and spoke at the popular Sunday forum on Melbourne's Yarra Bank. Owen was also feeling the pressure of political intimidation. 'To some extent', he later reflected 'I was the victim of the atmosphere of suspicion in which we are all forced to work whenever the Communist bogey is raised. I found myself eyeing my closest friends with suspicion. That mood carried to its logical extreme leads to secret police methods, the vicious power of the secret informer and the end of democratic freedom.'<sup>109</sup>

A thousand delegates from all walks of life attended the convention. *The Peacemaker* declared the convention 'extraordinarily successful and important.'<sup>110</sup> The news media reported with the usual Cold War mindset. The *Sydney Morning Herald* would not so much as accept a small advertisement for the closing public meeting to report on the findings of the conference. Owen was told there was no space available. He consoled himself with the thought that 'so much adverse publicity had been given to the Convention and our own pamphlets were so widely distributed that we had little to fear for the success of the final night.'<sup>111</sup>

Censorship went beyond the mainstream press. The Methodist and Presbyterian journals were at first disposed to be friendly, if cautious. However, as the smear campaign intensified even Owen's own church journal, *Anglican* ceased reporting anything to do with it. Only after the close of the Convention did the paper publish 'a belated impression of the proceedings...Many who could have taken a constructive part in this Convention did not do so...They had been intimidated by a 'smear' campaign against it in advance.'<sup>112</sup>

As public awareness of the issues grew with the dissemination of information by the peace movement so its following increased and broadened across the community. In 1958, the ACTU, its affiliate trades and labour councils and many trade unions became active in the protest. They were now prepared to go further than a general appeal to 'ban the bomb' and to oppose specifically British bomb tests in Australia. The ALP now encouraged members to

join national demonstrations against the British tests, a change of heart from when its members of parliament cheered the news of the first British test explosion. The Victorian ALP journal, *Tocsin*, announced "Labor's Atomic Week" with educational activities leading up to a protest march. Trades and labour councils and many trade unions became active in the protest.<sup>113</sup>

In 1960 the CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) formed at Melbourne University and in 1962 another in Sydney. A year later a national body was formed. Though confined largely to academic circles and surviving only a few years these groups can be seen as the incipient Nuclear Disarmament Party, which flourished in the 1980s. Church assemblies and women's bodies continued to call for testing to cease.<sup>114</sup> A petition, canvassed by the peace movement, and which gathered 200,000 signatures, called for the government to support an initiative within the UN for a Nuclear Free Zone in the whole southern hemisphere.

### Cavalcade to Canberra

The quiet seclusion of Canberra, was shattered 'when 1000 men and women converged there from all over Australia in a mighty cavalcade for peace', the *Tribune* reported triumphantly in August 1962. They had brought a petition with 205,000 signatures, calling upon the Australian government 'to enter into an agreement not to manufacture, test, station or acquire nuclear weapons' and 'to assist towards a universal and permanent test ban treaty'. The petition was tabled in parliament by Jim Cairns but the speaker refused time for the house to debate it.<sup>115</sup>

Delegations were elected to wait on 25 embassies. At the US embassy the delegation fielded a technical question from the ambassador on the need for 'on-site inspections' before his country could stop testing. At the Soviet embassy the exchange was more amicable with the ambassador offering bland reassurances that his country was working for peace in order to 'build a new society, a communist society.'<sup>116</sup>

Technical quibble and political platitude would seem a poor reward for so much dedicated community effort. The cavalcade might be written off as no more than a quixotic tilt at the formidable nuclear bastion. But the petitioners, and their supporters back home, had no illusions about the nuclear contestants laying down their arms. Individuals can feel the need to associate with others, whatever the likely outcome, in expressing their feelings on critical public issues. The cavalcade was just one national peace initiative among innumerable actions around the world. In 1961, not long before the cavalcade, thirty pacifists arrived in Moscow

from San Francisco. They had taken 312 days and walked 10,000 km, crossing two continents and many national borders, to speak against Soviet military policy just as they had spoken against their government's policy back home. *Pravda* reprinted an article, which criticised both Presidents Khrushchev and Kennedy. Organised international walks became a regular event in the anti-nuclear campaign.

In the face of a great surge of world opinion against the tests, Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the *Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty*, on 6 August 1963, notably Hiroshima Day. A week later a cavalcade converged on Canberra where it marched through the streets and then descended on parliament house. Instead of being rejected, like the year before, the Kings Hall this time 'resounded to animated discussion of hundreds of delegates with numerous members of parliament'. A delegation went to the French Embassy to raise with the ambassador his country's forthcoming atmospheric test on Moruroa Atoll in the Pacific. The delegation was not welcomed inside though perhaps the diplomats looking out the window could have been impressed by the persistence of the protesters standing outside in the heavy rain.

That night people gathered in the Albert Hall. A sweet smell of success permeated the hall. A resolution was carried saying: 'We rejoice at the signing of the partial test ban treaty by the U.S.A., U.S.S.R. and Britain...[and] that 64 nations, including Australia, have indicated their intention to become signatories to the treaty...'. One factor in the breakthrough 'has been the determined and faithful work of peace workers throughout the world'. However, 'the test ban treaty does not affect the kill and overkill of existing armaments.'<sup>117</sup> The signing of the test ban treaty was something of a victory for the peace movement. Its efforts in community education on nuclear weapons, in the difficult Cold War climate, were an important factor in the building up of public pressure to stop the tests. However, testing continued underground and even intensified.

### A legacy

Activists in social movements often find that the public's understanding of and engagement with challenging issues remain superficial and uninvolved for as long as the wider public does not feel personally affected. So it was that concern over the proliferation of nuclear weapons was subsumed by a concern over radioactive fallout from testing them. It would be decades before the peace movement was able to bring the proliferation issue back into public prominence, this time when Europeans became aware that they were being placed in the front line of nuclear war.

A lasting legacy of Australia's post-war peace movement has been the networks, national and international, along which exchanges take place on nuclear and peace issues. The rise of the more youthful CND and then the anti-war movement during the 1960s has often been represented as a break with the past. It was not as simple as that. A network of peace bodies and older peace activists survived to provide an organisational base for the burgeoning campaign in the late 1960s against the Vietnam War.

The insurgent peace movement of the late 1960s required some structure in order to coordinate large demonstrations, to relieve tensions and reach consensus between diverse groups on themes and slogans. The Vietnam Moratorium Campaign came to use the resources and outreach to the trade unions established by the CICD, which could trace its origins to the APC and even further back to the VCAWF in the 1930s. The success of the anti-war movement in the sixties and seventies had to do with the ability of the old and the new movements to form a working alliance. Networks of community groups which evolved during that time have continued to operate worldwide. Though the groups may change, a global network has remained viable, the more so with the use of the internet and email.

Community groups around the world can now exchange their local knowledge and experience with each other and coordinate transnational campaigns and actions. Within this global inter-communitarian network an understanding has grown that health and environmental hazards are associated with all nuclear undertakings. We now have a global movement, which campaigns on a broad front, for protection of the whole biosphere from despoliation by rampant technologies of all kinds. Globalisation is not now, if ever it was, the sole preserve of corporations.

'Communitarian globalism, or globalism from below', says Tehranian, 'is also a powerful force assisted by global communication networks and an emerging international civil society.'<sup>118</sup> The peace movement in Australia, for all its tensions, mistakes and misplaced loyalties, made a lasting contribution to this forward global movement.

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## Appendix

### Peace bodies active from 1930s to 1960s

Association for International Cooperation and Disarmament (AICD)

Australian Peace Council (APC)

Australian Peace Pledge Union (APPU)

Congress for International Cooperation and Disarmament (CICD)

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)

Christian Pacifist Movement (CPM)

Federal Pacifist Council (FPC)

League of Nations Union (LNU)

Union of Australian Women (UAW)

United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA)

United Peace Council (UPC)

Victorian Campaign Against War and Fascism (VCAWF)

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)

### Archival sources of peace activities

Australian Science Archives Project

University of Melbourne Archives (UMA) hold the following collections:

Australian Peace Pledge Union

Alf Dickie

Dorothy Gibson

Frank Coaldrake

Frank Hartley

Movement Against Uranium Mining

The Peacemaker

United Peace Council

Victor James

Victorian Peace Council

Vivienne Abrahams

The State Library of Victoria Archives holds the collection:

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Alf Dickie, *Should Such a Faith Offend*, a pamphlet

Alf Dickie, *Statement of Common Beliefs*, a CICD pamphlet

Marion Hartley, *The Truth Shall Prevail*, Spectrum Publications, Melbourne, 1982

Frank Hartley, *My Pilgrimage for Peace*, a CICD pamphlet.

Victor James, *Window on the years, a tract*, Melbourne, self published (UMA Victor James Colledtion) .

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