

The 14th of April 2012 marks the thirtieth anniversary of Wellington's declaration as a nuclear weapon free zone – a motion put forward by Labour City Councillor Helene Ritchie amidst considerable public controversy.

This declaration – part of a growing international anti-nuclear movement – had significant national and international repercussions. Within one year, half of New Zealand was living in nuclear-free zones, and women were spurred on to increase their representation in local government. There was major political fallout, too, with two of the country's key leaders eventually resigning on the nuclear issue.



Helene Ritchie was first elected to Wellington City Council in 1977. She became Wellington City's first woman deputy mayor in 1986. During that time she chaired the Civic Centre project and held all key portfolios of the Council. Today, Helene is a Wellington City Councillor, where she is the Natural Environment portfolio leader. She also focuses on Wellington's waterfront; and health issues, on the Health Board.

30 Years of Nuclear Weapon Free Wellington



Helene Ritchie

*To my late partner Peter, my children Timmy and Jonty, their partners Sherrill and Tessa, and my grandchildren Milly Nova, Ira, Nuku Te Rangi and Pipiata Helena. This story has been written with them and future generations in mind.
To the people of Wellington, without whom this would not have happened.*

Wellington's Nuclear Weapon Free Zone turns thirty

This reprint is an update of an earlier small book written to commemorate the 25th Anniversary on 14 April 2007.

It has been completed to coincide with the City's celebration of the Declaration of Wellington as a nuclear weapon free zone initiated thirty years prior and passed by a majority of that Council in 1982.

In 1982, when the Declaration was passed, there were ships coming into Wellington Harbour with nuclear weapons capability, whose country of origin would neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weaponry on them.

This 1982 Declaration in the Capital in 1982 had significant repercussions – national and international.

Within one year, through the effort of many activists at the time and before, and of local government throughout the nation, half of New Zealand was living in nuclear free zones.

By 1987 when the legislation was passed, 72% of New Zealanders lived in these declared zones. Women played a leading role and were then encouraged to stand for election to local government. A new government was elected on the issue, in 1984, and nuclear free legislation passed in 1987 by Prime Minister David Lange and his Labour Government.

Today it is time to pass the flame on to a new generation of young activists who will think global and act local on this most important issue facing the world.

Helene Ritchie
Wellington City Councillor
Health Board Member.
14 April 2012

About the author

In 1982, when she instigated the nuclear weapon free zone motion, Helene Ritchie was the first woman



Dominion Post

Labour leader on Wellington City Council, a position she held for six years. She was then the mother of primary school-aged children, Tim and Jonty, and partner of Peter. At the same time she worked full time as a psychologist in the Department of Education, was a founding Regional Councillor and chaired Wellington's Airport Authority and the national organisation of all airport authorities.

During her time as Labour leader she initiated Wellington's Moa Point sewage campaign, and co-led with Sir Guy Powles a deputation of eminent persons to the Governor General in relation to the 1981 Springbok tour. The deputation expressed concern about racism, apartheid and civil disruption in New Zealand, and asked that the Governor General stop the tour. Saving Wellington's historic town hall from demolition was also a priority of the Labour team of the early 1980s.

The message for peace is even more relevant today with the proliferation of nuclear weapons to additional countries – and the urgency give to nuclear disarmament by global leaders including UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and US President Barack Obama.

The leadership of Wellington – and indeed New Zealand – on this issue is well recognised and deserves to be celebrated.

Alyn Ware
Peace Foundation International Representative
Te Tuapapa Rongomau o Aotearoa
Global Co-ordinator of the Parliamentarians for
Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (PNND)

Foreword

I well remember the happy occasion that April day when peace movement people celebrated in the street the declaration of Wellington as a nuclear-free city, the capital of Aotearoa/New Zealand. We were so grateful to Councillor Ritchie for bringing forward to a successful conclusion the movement to this effect in the City Council, and we will always remember her courageous action with admiration.

I was in New York in June 1982, representing several organisations at the United Nations General Assembly Second Session on Disarmament, and I was proud to be able to say to people that I came from a nuclear-free city.

As the plaque honouring the Wellington peace movement in the Botanic Garden says, 'Like Wellington's wild south coast, the path to peace is often rocky and difficult.' Helene Ritchie's leadership in guiding the City Council to this historic declaration was an inspiration to us all.

Dame Laurie Salas, DBE, QSO
Wellington, 17 March 2007

A most important motion

On the 14th of April 1982, on my motion, Wellington was declared a nuclear weapon free zone, amidst considerable public controversy. I had given notice of this motion on the 2nd of April. It was described by my seconder, Councillor Hazel Bibby, as,

"Perhaps the most important notice of motion to be debated by this Council."

Both the city's mayor and the Prime Minister missed the point of this significant symbolic gesture. Mayor Michael Fowler, who had been an unsuccessful National Party candidate, described it as 'stupendous nonsense', while Prime Minister Muldoon remarked that the Council's 'fun and games' would not prevent the imminent visit of the nuclear warship the *USS Truxtun*. Fowler and Muldoon would both eventually lunch on board. Muldoon cockily told the *Dominion*,

"My nose did not light up."

Despite this, my motion was successful and along with subsequent cumulative action, resulted in significant national and international repercussions. Within a year of the Wellington Declaration, half of New Zealand was living in nuclear-free zones, and women were spurred on to increase their representation in local government.

There was major political fallout, too. Two of the country's key leaders would eventually resign on the nuclear issue – the mayor of the capital and the Prime Minister. And it heralded a new political era when the Labour Government was elected running on this policy in 1984.

Symbolic gestures – the anti-nuclear campaign in New Zealand

The background to this achievement and what followed it is described in several works, one being Jo Stone's MA thesis in history, 'Rebelling By Any Means Possible: New Zealand Local Government Nuclear Weapon Free Zones.' Jo interviewed me for her thesis in December 2004.

Jo's thesis studied three New Zealand locations that had declared themselves nuclear weapon free zones: Wellington, Eltham and Palmerston North. These three localities had arrived at their nuclear weapon free zone status in a different way, and Jo covered the history and development of each campaign. Some information from her thesis is conveyed here.

The anti-nuclear campaign in New Zealand can be traced back as early as 1947, but it wasn't until 1960 that key policy was developed by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). In 1975, Elsie Locke led a major protest against French nuclear testing in the Pacific. During the 1970s, peace activists expressed significant concerns about New Zealand's relationship with the

United States through the ANZUS agreement. Keith Clements was a leading opponent of that security agreement. The Peace Squadron, which had been led by Reverend George Armstrong in a campaign for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP), had a wider indigenous rights agenda. In 1982 the Peace Movement New Zealand was established, and it promoted personal nuclear weapon-free zones – such as homes and buildings.

Women have always been to the fore in the peace movement. Some, like Dame Laurie Salas, with whom I worked for a time in the United Nations Association, worked tirelessly for the cause.



Women surround Defence headquarters, the Stout Building on Lambton Quay, in a peaceful protest as part of Women's International Disarmament Day, 24 May 1983. Women have always played a major role in the peace movement.

PHOTO: *Dominion Post*

Both the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the United Nations Association were also prominent in the movement.

The 1980s had seen towns declared nuclear-free in Japan, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada. In 1980, Devonport in Auckland was the first borough in New Zealand to declare itself a nuclear weapon free zone.

Despite all this, there was no nationwide organising body in New Zealand until 1981 when the New Zealand Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Committee was formed, led by Larry Ross, an émigré from North America.

Wellington's campaign

In Wellington, as the capital of New Zealand, there had always been a history of dissent and protest action. In the 1980s, numerous groups were active including the Peace Council New Zealand/Aotearoa, the Trade Union New Zealand Council for World Peace, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the United Nations Association, Campaign Against Nuclear Warships, the Peace Squadron and the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship.

It was in 1981 when Wellington's mayor, Sir Michael Fowler, was first approached to take a stand on the nuclear-free issue (although I did not learn of this until more than 25 years later,

from Council records). Gerald O'Brien, the president of the Peace Council, had visited Fowler and called for the City Council to give leadership to the country when, at this time, there had been no declaration in New Zealand. The organisation's secretary, Des Brough, also wrote to Fowler about Wellington becoming a nuclear weapon free zone. In March 1982 (also unbeknownst to me or the Council), the Peace Council again raised the issue of Wellington becoming a nuclear weapon free zone by letter.

Jo Stone picks up the story:

Ritchie, daughter of Jewish refugees from the Holocaust, from Central Europe, had been on the Council since 1977 and was the Leader of the Labour Caucus. She had no formal connection with the peace movement. Rather, she had been introduced to semi-formal politics through the women's movement. Ritchie was not aware of the Peace Council's approaches to the mayor when she decided to raise the motion due to her personal concern about the nuclear issue.

The motion was seconded by fellow Labour Councillor Hazel Bibby, who had been president of the Federation of Progressive Associations, an umbrella residents' organisation. Attached to the motion was an explanatory note which did not contain any expected justification, but rather was a call for consensus amongst the Council factions of the labour and citizens groups:

"Because the issue is of such vital importance to the people of Wellington, we are hopeful that we can avoid it simply becoming a party political issue. A joint initiative would avoid such a development and we would therefore welcome any Citizens Councillors who are prepared to join us in proposing this motion."

Ritchie's request was not met with the overwhelming consensus she had hoped for.

I then engaged in public debate in the media before the motion was put to Council. I said such opposition to nuclear weapons was Council's responsibility, describing a nuclear bomb scenario on the capital and pointing out the additional threat posed by the nuclear weaponed ship *Truxtun*. I also said that such a declaration, supported by Councillor Hazel Bibby, would be influential in that others would follow the example. Labour Councillor Jenny Brough also believed, along with Hazel Bibby, a member of the Wellington Harbour Board, that a trading port was not the place for nuclear weapons.

Mayor Fowler publicly expressed to the government his opposition to the motion, saying he believed local government was being used as 'stooges for political purposes' and he was concerned about 'denying treaty [defence] obligations that we have with our allies'. He believed that councils should not 'usurp'

the functions of central government and therefore a debate would waste Council's time. He wrote in a *Sunday News* article on April 11, 1982:

"I suppose that they will hold that people who vote against this motion are therefore in favour of nuclear weapons in the City of Wellington. Well, I will vote against it ...

... because I think it is the sort of motion that says, 'I love God, mother and apple pie,' or put another way, it is a motion analogous to the question, 'When did you stop beating your wife' ... To pontificate about Wellington being a nuclear weapon free zone is similar to making a policy statement banning wild elephants from the streets of Wellington or declaring that we are not in favour of rape, robbery or murder."



The Motion and the speech

On the 14th of April 1982, I spoke to the motion I had instigated.

The motion was:

That this Council declare Wellington a nuclear weapon free zone.

"I rise to move this motion and in doing so, to stress that this should not be decided on party-political lines; the issue rises above and beyond party politics.

I am hoping that at the end of this debate when councillors have had the opportunity to hear the various viewpoints, that they will be at one in support of the motion.

I am hoping therefore that this council will make a clear and unequivocal expression of social concern, that it will demonstrate that it can think globally and act locally, and that as one of, perhaps the most influential councils in New Zealand, it will make clear its position in support of the motion.

This debate, and in particular, my comments, will not focus on the foreign policy of this country. That debate is for another forum – Parliament. Nor will my comments focus primarily on the *Truxtun* visit next month, for that is a bit of a red herring for the purposes of this debate tonight. The harbour board, which has jurisdiction over the operation of the port of Wellington, will no doubt make its views clear on the very specific issue of the visit of the *Truxtun*. The visit of the *Truxtun* serves only to highlight for the people of Wellington, and for councillors, that Wellington could be a target for a nuclear attack.

I remind councillors, however, that other nations of the South Pacific – Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands – have recently declared that they will not admit ships to their ports unless the masters of the ships give an assurance to the authorities that they are not carrying nuclear weapons.

I want tonight to focus specifically on our responsibilities as persons privileged to be publicly elected.

This debate is an important one, and one being held not only in Wellington, but in many cities, towns and homes throughout the world.

It is not for us as elected persons to shun the issue. Nor is it for us to adopt a head-in-the-sand attitude. Nor is it for us to duck the issue, and claim it is not ours and therefore it should not be debated, or that it should be passed on to central government as if it were the only decision-maker in the land.

This council, *this* council, in the capital city of New Zealand, has both a direct responsibility in making Wellington a nuclear weapon free zone, and an indirect responsibility, in putting pressure on the decision-makers of the country and the world.

This council has a direct responsibility to prepare for, to plan for any eventuality which might arise out of a direct hit, or a war in the northern hemisphere which would have serious repercussions on the entire fabric of our city as we know it today. This council has very real and direct responsibilities in the areas of health, by-laws, town planning, transport to name a few.

In the area of civil defence, perhaps you are unaware that the director of the Ministry of Civil Defence, General Holloway, has

stated that the last time guidelines on nuclear fallout were issued to householders was twenty years ago, in 1963.

This is a shocking state of affairs.

I am hoping that tonight, rather than adopt the attitude of the mayor, that this council will grasp the nettle, and will make a clear and decisive statement on a motion couched in simple words.

This is a motion which deserves lengthy and full consideration by us. I will point out to council that the regional council has adopted an entirely different and, might I say, a more responsible stance than that publicly adopted by the mayor before this debate tonight.

The regional council has a contingency civil defence plan for a nuclear reactor incident or accident in a nuclear powered vessel whilst in the port of Wellington. This draft plan was produced this morning at the regional council meeting after I raised the question there. I am hoping that some other regional councillor here tonight might refer to it in support of this motion.

There is no doubt that councils all over the world have been taking stands against the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The Mayor of San Francisco, Dianne Feinstein, has issued a proclamation calling on President Reagan to act immediately to reduce international tension and to work for a joint USA–USSR suspension of nuclear weapons production.

A recently formed group of Californian elected officials has urged de-escalation, and has taken its plea to the President of America. It stresses that there are no winners in a nuclear war. It

stresses that all those areas of responsibility which normally concern a city council, would be swallowed up in the immensity of the disaster.

The city council of Sydney made a clear and decisive decision to declare that city a nuclear free zone. Over a hundred councils in England have done likewise.

The mayors of Christchurch and Devonport have supported motions calling for nuclear weapon free and nuclear free zones.

There is growing world wide concern about nuclear weapons and the arms race.

We have to think globally.

We have to recognise that we cannot simply rely on our so-called isolation to ensure safety.

I can assure you that I feel as impotent as the next person in the face of the enormity of this issue.

I too would rather not think about the unthinkable as I go about my daily tasks or tend to my husband and children.

I cannot fail to recognise that in countries such as West Germany, or the United States of America, that public pressure may already have effected some minimal change. As individuals, we may feel and indeed be helpless. Collectively, we may be able to effect change. As a country we cannot be, on the one hand, opposed to nuclear testing in the Pacific, and on the other hand oppose a nuclear weapon free zone in Wellington.

This issue is of worldwide concern and significance.

United States senators, Democrat Edward Kennedy and Republican Mark Hatfield, have 'called on the United States to

seek agreement with the Soviets to halt the production and deployment of all nuclear weapons in a fashion that each side could verify as a prelude to arms reduction talks.'

They have criticised President Reagan and attacked his assertion that the USA needs to continue its build-up in order to force eventual arms reductions.

Kennedy argued, 'This is voodoo arms control which says you must have more in order to have less.'

I ask you to tonight join in support of our sisters and brothers in the South Pacific, who experience the effects of nuclear fallout as a daily occurrence, and who suffer.

In proposing this motion tonight I ask you to think globally and act locally.

I remind you of an editorial in the *Dominion* of April 2nd which said, 'Real peace will not be helped by backing off from a contemplation of the horrors which man's invention is capable of inflicting.'

I ask you not to shirk your responsibilities.

I inform you this debate is centred around the growing worldwide concern about the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the threat of nuclear war. This city must take part in that debate, and make a clear decision on the motion before it tonight.

I have urged you tonight to think globally, act locally, and conclude by pointing out that women's organisations and the churches have been in the forefront of this debate. Religious leaders and groups have played an increasingly important role.

In the words of another American Senator, Republican Charles McMathias, 'Nothing less than the future of mankind is at stake.'

I echo the words of Tip O'Neill, Speaker in the Senate, 'What is happening to us? What is the cause of this madness? I hope and pray the freeze resolution [referred to earlier, of Kennedy and Hatfield], will prove the vehicle to stop this arms race.

Finally, in the words of Rabbi Schindler, head of the Union of American Hebrew congregations, 'Nuclear disarmament is going to become the central moral issue of the eighties'. This indicates the importance of this issue in a local and world context.

I opened this debate by saying that I would focus specifically on our responsibility, both direct and indirect to debate and decide.

I have highlighted that we have a direct responsibility to the welfare of our citizenry through our elected positions. Further, I have highlighted the responsibility we have as elected persons to deal with the most serious problem confronting not only the City, but this World.

I conclude by quoting from a speech the Pope made in March of this year to the people of Ireland. He said:

'I urge you who are called to the noble vocation of politics, to have the courage to face up to your responsibility to be leaders in the cause of peace, reconciliation and justice. If politicians do not decide and act for just change, then the field is left open to men of violence.'

I urge you to support the motion."

The motion was passed by a majority of one. I was successful, from a position of a minority on the council, because of the support of all the Labour councillors, but also because two Citizens councillors crossed the floor - Betty Campbell and David Bull.

The mayor was furious, and even more so given his vocal opposition before the meeting, in the media in Wellington and nationwide.

That night, Sonja Davies rang me. She was so excited, as was Gerald O'Brien former member of parliament for Island Bay, who also contacted me. Both had been long time campaigners for nuclear disarmament.

How they voted: Wellington City Councillors on the motion to declare Wellington a nuclear weapon free city

SUPPORTED

Labour

Helene Ritchie (Labour Leader)
Jo Aspell
Hazel Bibby
Jennifer Brough
Tala Cleverley
Rosslyn Noonan
Frank O'Flynn
Keith Spry

Citizens

David Bull
Betty Campbell

OPPOSED

Citizens

Michael Fowler (mayor)
Denis Foot
Leone Harkness
Bruce Harris
Ian Lawrence (deputy mayor)
Les Paske
Roger Ridley-Smith
Gavin Wilson
Rosemary Young Rouse

Local repercussions

There were repercussions immediately following the success of the motion.

Fowler announced the day after the motion was passed that he would quit at the end of that council term. On the 16th of April he lashed out in a *Dominion* article written by Martyn Gosling entitled 'Nonsense spurs Sir Michael to quit'. The mayor attacked Labour councillors, particularly the women, who dominated the Labour team.

Fowler would say later that the ongoing political tension within the Council was responsible for his decision to quit rather than the specific nuclear weapon free zone motion. However, I believed he had misjudged the political situation.

I refuted statements that the declaration would become a symbolic gesture. I believed there were ways the Council could put its declaration into action and I suggested that the city become known as the 'Peace Capital of the South Pacific'. I reiterated that Wellington City Council was the most influential in the country and therefore the government would take it seriously.

The declaration saw a flurry of letters - in support and opposition - to the editor of both papers, *The Dominion* and the *Evening Post*.

From Council records, it is now known that the mayor received many letters congratulating the council for its stand - although none were disclosed to the council. They were from

educational and trade union organisations, the Wellington Clerical Workers' Union, the Public Service Association, the Wellington Polytechnic Students' Association, South Wellington Intermediate School Committee, and the Family Life Education Council.

There were more: from representatives of peace, environmental and international organisations nationwide; the Environment and Conservation Organisation of New Zealand Executive Council; Peace Action Tauranga; the Kapiti-Mana branch of the United Nations Association; the National Consultative Committee on Disarmament; the National Council of Women; the Federation of Labour; and the Catholic Commission for Evangelisation, Justice and Development. A letter from the secretary of the National Council of Churches, Llewellyn Richards, on 30 April 1982, referred to the importance of symbolic gestures:

As citizens of this modern world, we have very little control over our destinies, so gestures become very important. This gesture makes an important point - we do not wish to be bombed irradiated, mutated, nor have our city (and our children's city) destroyed, whether on purpose or by accident.

Paul Tolich, President of the Tramways Union, expressed the union's concern that the Council leaders would backtrack on the

declaration; they considered holding a stopwork in support. At the same time they were being banned by the general manager of City Transport, Mr Fyfe, from showing an anti-nuclear film in their Council training room in May 1982.



On 25 May the *USS Truxtun* arrived in Wellington, despite Keith Spry's attempts to have the harbour declared a nuclear weapon free zone. Spry was a member of both the Harbour Board and the Council.

CANWAR (Campaign Against Nuclear Warships), established in 1976, was revived at the time of the *Truxtun* visit. It gained support from the Victoria University Students' Association which became the key group organising opposition to the *Truxtun* visit. The letter which they sent around, asking for support, referred to the nuclear weapon free zone as an important impetus for support:

Wellington City Council has declared Wellington a nuclear free zone. Wellington people must endorse this strategy and oppose any threats to our zone of peace.

There was a public meeting at Wellington Girls' College. The Labour Party distributed 40,000 leaflets, posters were put up, white poppies signifying opposition were sold and stalls set up.

A small peace squadron (about 25 vessels) went out into the harbour, and seamen on a passing ferry held up an anti-nuclear sign. A demonstration was planned, along with a march on the US Embassy, foiled deliberately by a changed departure date.

Activity was ongoing. The growing women's disarmament movement ran a peace festival after the declaration, and Dr Helen Caldicott (Physicians Against Nuclear Weapons - 40,000 strong) visited. The peace festival's promotional pamphlets declared:

The festival has been prompted by the fact that Wellington City has been declared a nuclear weapon free zone, and by growing awareness among New Zealand women of the links between nuclear technology and practice and women's oppression in a male-dominated society.

The churches highlighted the peace theme. The Reverend John Murray, whom I had first met in 1981 during illicit Springbok action in the gallery at Parliament, was a strong supporter of the declaration, with his own church, St Andrew's on The Terrace, having its own peace group.

The citizens of Wellington would again be challenged, by the August 1983 visit of the *USS Texas* - 'at the time,' said Marie Leadbetter of Auckland CND, 'of Hiroshima Day commemorations'.

The Wellington Peace Squadron referred to the Wellington Declaration in a telegram to the *Texas* on 10 August 1983:



The Reverend John Murray, a strong advocate for peace, chairs a meeting I addressed at St Andrew's on the Terrace.

PHOTO: Dominion Post

Citizens of Wellington have declared their city a nuclear weapon free zone. In view of your policy neither to confirm nor deny presence of nuclear weapons on board we have no alternative but to assume you are loaded to full nuclear capability and strongly oppose the visit of your ship. Wellington Peace Squadron will present a peaceful but determined resistance to your entry. Should you decide to force your way, we hold you responsible for the consequences.

Councillor Frank O'Flynn called on fellow councillors to decline an invitation to visit the ship. The Mayor, Michael Fowler, took no notice and visited.

I was active in the lead-up to the *Texas* visit. Fran Wilde, Sonja Davies and I sold white poppies for peace on Hiroshima Day. I joined the late Owen Wilkes, the leading peace researcher of the time, as a speaker on Hiroshima Day and was introduced as the council spokesperson. At the next Council meeting, I was challenged by Councillor Betty Campbell about my 'status' as the



Fran Wilde, Helene, and Sonja Davies. Selling white peace poppies, Hiroshima Day, 4 August 1983.

PHOTO: Dominion Post

Council spokesperson. I responded that I had spoken with pleasure about the issue, which was in line with Council policy.

There was all kinds of protest activity during the ship's visit, including a three day and night vigil. Nicky Hager, a prominent peace worker at that time, realised that they 'had made it' in terms of gaining public support.

By the time the British nuclear weaponed ship *HMS Invincible* visited New Zealand in 1983, Wellington Harbour had joined the city in its nuclear weapon free zone status, through the efforts of Hazel Bibby, also a harbour board member, along with Grahame Anderson, and with the support of Keith Spry and Ted Woolf.

CITIZENS OF WELLINGTON

*We invite you
to join us
People concerned with PEACE*



*to celebrate
the first Anniversary
of the Wellington City Council
declaring our city to be
"a nuclear weapon free zone"*

*+
This is a day of happiness
and of hope for PEACE
14th April 1983*

On the first anniversary of Wellington's declaration, Sir Guy Powles, who later became patron of the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone Committee, gave the following speech:

"Your Worship the Mayor, Citizens of Wellington,

Today is just one year after the Wellington City Council voted to declare the city a nuclear weapon free zone.

You, sir, were not very happy about the motion. We doubly welcome you at this celebration. Your presence signifies this lovely city of ours, and your own fearless integrity in being its chief citizen.

A lot of people think these declarations of nuclear weapon free zones – and there are many of them in this world – are nonsense. Nothing could be further from the truth. From little acorns great oaks grow and from this growing number of little acorns throughout the world will grow the great oaks of nuclear disarmament.

This movement, which will grow into a great peace movement, will eventually compel the stubborn leaders of our great institutions, particularly in the super powers, to move from their entrenched positions, and have regard to the future of the human race, of us ordinary people. There are none so blind as they who will not see, and the leaders are in this category.

Nuclear weapons are people weapons. They kill people by the millions. Their use is immoral. It is genocide on an appalling scale. And don't forget that nuclear weapons mean nuclear war. Yes, they do. That's what they are for. We should resolve to have

absolutely nothing to do with nuclear weapons – absolutely nothing.

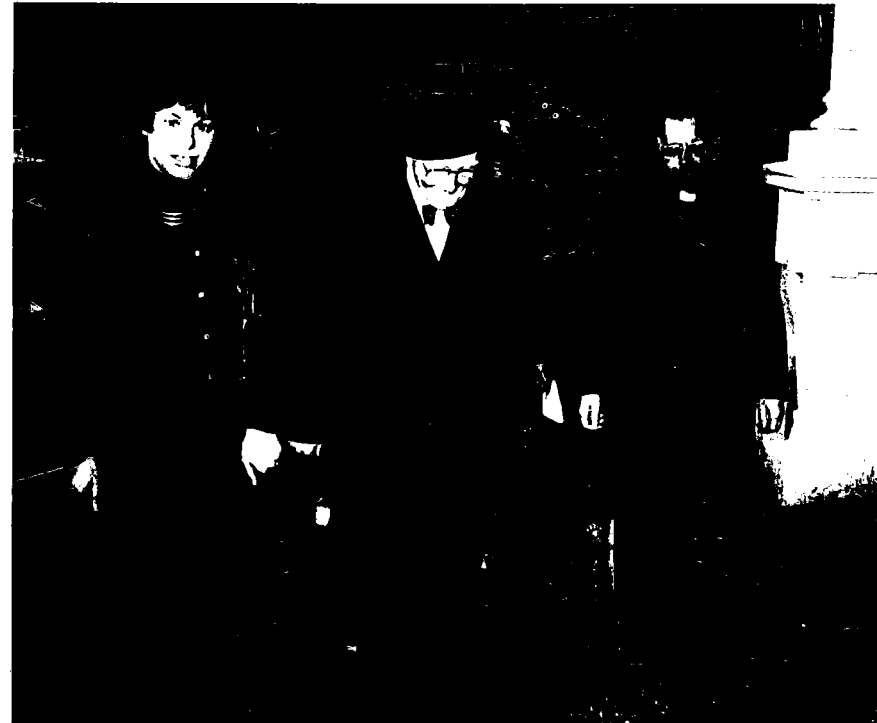
Those who see in a nuclear war a way of defending a particular economic and social system, are hopelessly wrong. This will not be a relevant effort for the millions who will already be dead. But it has no greater meaning for those who survive. In the nuclear aftermath, free institutions and their associated values – our way of life – will all be gone. Those who say that we should accept the risk of nuclear conflict to save our system are saying in the strongest terms that we should accept its certain destruction.

One of the greatest citizens of our commonwealth, Lord Mountbatten, said 'the world now stands on the brink of the final abyss, let us all resolve to take all practical steps to ensure that we do not, through our own folly, go over the edge.'

I hope we can draw back from the edge of Lord Mountbatten's abyss, and turn to cultivate the arts of peace. But it is a people matter, and it will need people power to do it.

One more thing. It is said, what on earth can we few in far away New Zealand do about these things? How do they concern us? Make no mistake, a nuclear war in the northern hemisphere will make devastating changes in our way of life, even if we escape actual nuclear effects, which is doubtful.

And as for us, poor little New Zealanders, unable to do anything, I utterly reject this idea. We have three million magnificent people, we have before led the world in some things, aspects of social welfare and aspects of sport. I refuse to believe



Sir Guy Powles was a leading figure in the peace movement. Here he is flanked by Helene and Archbishop Tom Williams in August 1981 when they delivered an appeal against the Springbok Tour to the Governor General.

PHOTO: Dominion Post

that we could not, if we tried, and with the grace of God, march in the forefront on the road to peace.

The great aim of us all is peace. We present you today with these tokens of peace – flowers, food and fruit. And we ask you to accept them on behalf of our city. And in the cause of peace."

Sir Guy Powles, 14 April 1983

Nationwide action

Meanwhile, other nuclear-free campaigns gathered momentum.

In 1983, the city council of Palmerston North somewhat reluctantly declared the city a nuclear weapon free zone. The mayor, Brian Elwood, a National Party candidate in 1981, did all he could to first oppose, then a year later to obfuscate the issue with ponderous and evasive resolutions. He believed, like many others, that it was a symbolic gesture that would achieve very little. 'A declaration that Palmerston North is a nuclear weapon free zone will have no practical or legal effect.' On 23 August 1983, 5590 people had signed a petition in support of the declaration.

Palmerston North resolved to recognise the public concern but still worded their resolution reservedly, recognising it had no legal capacity, that little would be done about proliferation, and that defence treaty obligations should remain intact. Elwood ultimately conceded.

By this time, 34 cities and rural towns were also nuclear weapon free zones. Kate Dewes, in an interview with Jo Stone in 2004 said that the larger cities helped encourage others:

It was an achievable thing once you started getting Christchurch and Wellington nuclear free. They were big cities; that empowered people and then those little boroughs. It wasn't too hard ...

Eltham, a small rural town in Taranaki, was declared a nuclear weapon free zone in 1983, led by Margaret Smith – its first woman mayor and a Catholic mother of six.

Major fallout

Muldoon had already shown himself unsympathetic to the nuclear-free cause.

In March 1982 he had shut down the Commission for the Future – set up to plan for New Zealand's future – because of a report written by five authors, of whom Dr George Preddey and Peter Wilkins were two. The 180-page report entitled 'Nuclear Disaster' had examined briefly the effects of a one-megatone nuclear bomb air burst over an American nuclear-powered warship berthed at Devonport naval base in Auckland and also looked at the effects on New Zealand of a full scale northern hemisphere nuclear war.

Shortly after, when the Wellington declaration was passed, Muldoon immediately commented on the nuclear weapon free zone as being 'fun and games' and of no practical effect, and confirmed that the visit of the *USS Truxtun* would go ahead.

At the Labour Party conference in Wellington in May 1982, the conference as a whole resolved that, if elected, they would establish a nuclear weapon free zone in New Zealand.

In June 1984, Labour MP Richard Prebble introduced his Nuclear Free Zone (New Zealand) Bill into Parliament – which



The nuclear-free movement was strong and active throughout the 1980's and early 1990's. New Zealanders have long been proud of their nuclear (weapon) free status.

PHOTO: Dominion Post

would effect a ban on all nuclear armed and powered ships, as well as nuclear reactors and waste. He used the Wellington declaration to make a stand on the issue.

"The New Zealand people want peace, and that is why city councils, such as the Wellington City Council have passed resolutions proclaiming nuclear-free zones. Churchmen,

community leaders, scientists, and people of vision are calling upon us as legislators to find a political solution to the greatest political challenge of the age."

The National Government had, at that time, a majority of one, and when one of their number – Marilyn Waring – crossed the floor in support of Prebble's Bill, Muldoon was incensed and claimed that Waring's 'feminist anti-nuclear stance' threatened his ability to govern. In his cups, he called a snap election, which he lost. David Lange, in his autobiography *My Life*, tells the story:

"Muldoon, claiming himself unable because of Waring's actions to command a majority in the house, had asked the governor-general to dissolve parliament.

There was never a night like that in all the time I was in politics. The air was electric. I could hardly believe it.

Muldoon had thrown away his government. There would be an election and not for a moment did I doubt we would win it."

A nuclear-free New Zealand

Lange was right, and Labour did indeed win, and entered office with the intention of declaring New Zealand nuclear free; the party had proposed to renegotiate the ANZUS treaty to incorporate a nuclear free nation. The critical moment in relations with the US came when in 1985 New Zealand refused a

request from the destroyer *USS Buchanan* on the grounds that it was capable of carrying nuclear weapons. New Zealand was subsequently ejected from the American Alliance.

The New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act was passed by the fourth Labour Government in 1987 - 'to establish in New Zealand a Nuclear Free Zone, to



Thankfully for Helene, the wind did not change as she tried to light a peace torch at the beginning of a month-long peace walk for a nuclear-free New Zealand, 18 July 1987. Ritchie became a little concerned when the flame kept racing along the taper? rather than lighting the new torch. But the torch was eventually lit and the march headed off from Civic Square to Parliament. Commemorations and campaigns went on after the declaration, and people have always been vigilant.

PHOTO: *Dominion Post*

promote and encourage an active and effective contribution by New Zealand to the essential process of disarmament and international arms control.' It also implemented a number of treaties in New Zealand, including the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The act established a zone which comprised all New Zealand territory (including ocean territory and airspace) and prohibited 'entry into the internal waters of New Zealand by any ship whose propulsion is wholly or partly dependent on nuclear power'. It banned the dumping of radioactive waste within the nuclear-free zone, as well as prohibiting any New Zealand citizen or resident 'to manufacture, acquire, possess, or have any control over any nuclear explosive device.'

This legislation was a milestone in New Zealand's development as a nation and seen as an important act of sovereignty and self-determination.

By 1987, one hundred and five nuclear weapon free zones covered the country. The zones were declared by local councils and harbour boards. Over 72 percent of New Zealanders lived in these zones.

In 1988, after years of negotiation, a sign was erected near the airport entrance to Wellington.

WELCOME TO WELLINGTON: A NUCLEAR FREE CITY



Wellingtonians were proud of their nuclear-free city, and very angry when their prominent sign was removed by Mayor Prendergast. A 'rebranded' Wellington sign was erected in its place. Here prominent anti-nuclear campaigner Owen Wilkes shows support for the sign, June 1992.

PHOTO: *Dominion Post*

In 2003 the sign was removed by Mayor Prendergast, a former National Party candidate, who appeared more concerned about the 'branding' of the city. After much pressure from the Peace Council, a different sign - WELCOME TO WELLINGTON was erected in its place, with the words CAPITAL OF NUCLEAR FREE NEW ZEALAND added, and a monument built in the Botanic Garden recognising the efforts of Wellingtonians who made the city nuclear free and their efforts for peace. At the time Mayor

Prendergast erroneously claimed, in *The Dominion Post* of 9 October 2003, that Wellington was the first nuclear free city in New Zealand.

In her MA thesis, Jo Stone writes:

"The Wellington nuclear weapon free zone was not the first city declaration but it was significant. The zone resulted from relatively minimal public lobbying, but instead came about through the efforts of a Labour caucus led by Helene Ritchie. The zone led to comprehensive media coverage due to the reaction of the mayor and his subsequent resignation.

Ongoing ship visits also kept the zone in the public mind. The zone encouraged some peace activity, including the Disarmament Exhibition and Peace Festival. The nuclear free status of Wellington also added legitimacy to ongoing opposition to ship visits, which remained the main rallying point for the peace movement. Yet, the ship visits also confirmed what many believed, that the zones were ineffectual in actually maintaining any form of a nuclear free area. The power remained firmly in the hands of the central Government, (and in the 'international' hands of those who controlled nuclear weapons)."

Sheer bloodymindedness?

In the period immediately following the declaration, it was obvious that both Mayor Fowler and the Town Clerk, Ian McCutcheon, were reluctant to support the Council policy.

However, it wasn't until twenty-five years later when I searched Council records, that I discovered how hard they had worked to undermine the declaration. They wrote letters back to correspondents saying it was an exercise in futility; it was a symbolic gesture; that Council had little power. This meant that all approaches to Council to participate in ongoing action, speaking, assisting activity or promoting the policy were spurned. A couple of examples: on 14 June 1983, Fowler wrote to Rodney Murphy declining an offer to participate in a nuclear free festival; and in October and November 1982 he declined to agree to official Council support to the Women's Disarmament Exhibition.

The existence of those letters – and there are plenty of them on file – was unknown to me and other councillors at the time; some were in contradiction to Council policy.

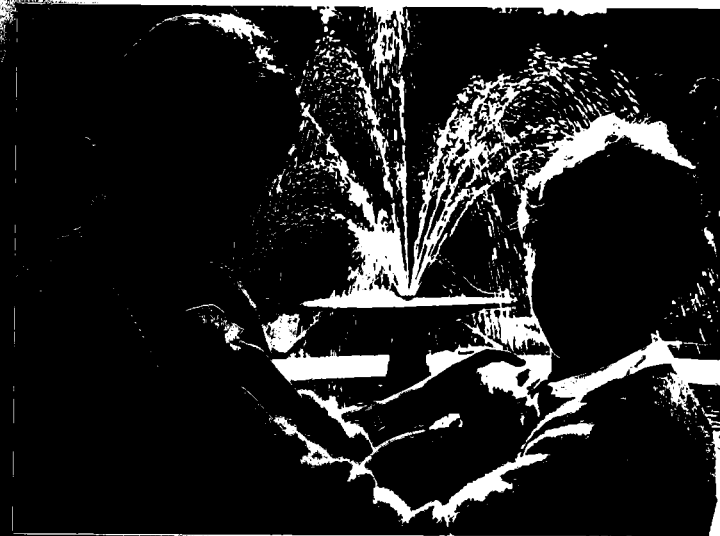
Was this Muldoon's influence? Or that of the USA? Or both?

Or was it just sheer bloodymindedness?



I am proud to have played a part in the declaration of Wellington as a nuclear weapon free zone, and to live in a country which has played such an important role in the world on nuclear issues.

This story, which I have written to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of that declaration, is also a fascinating vignette about politics in action, the power of the people in a democracy, the relevance of women in places of influence. and the priorities of politicians in positions of power.



Maureen Sheppard and her campaign in the late 1890's led to women having the vote, and to being able to take on public positions. The women's movement went on to play a significant role in peace issues. Maureen with Danna Glendinning – a leading women's activist – on Suffrage Day, Botanic Garden, September 1989.

PHOTO: Dominion Post

There are important lessons to be learnt from this story.

The first is that democracy can triumph.

In our democracy the power of the people can be paramount and constructive and has been in important issues in Wellington and Aotearoa/New Zealand. We have helped to influence the world in a positive and constructive way.

"We have three million magnificent people. We have before led the world in some things, aspects of social welfare and sport. I refuse to believe that we could not, if we tried, and with the grace of God, march in the forefront on the road to peace."

Sir Guy Powles, 14 April 1983

The second is that local government – city and regional councils – are an integral part of the government of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The power of local government should not be underestimated in its potential to shift the world on important issues.

The third is that the vocation of politics is a noble one.

"I urge you who are called to the noble vocation of politics, to have the courage to face up to your responsibility to be leaders in the cause of peace, reconciliation and justice. If politicians do not decide and act for just change, then the field is left open to men of violence."

From an anti-nuclear speech delivered by the Pope in March 1982

By the time we reach the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Wellington as a nuclear weapon free zone, my grandchildren may have children of their own.

Will their world be a place where sustainability of the physical environment, peace, justice, and reconciliation are paramount?

Will we have left the world a better place for our children and grandchildren?

14 April 2007

Helene Ritchie

Wellington City Councillor

Capital and Coast District Health Board Member

Mediator

Registered Psychologist

M.A.; B.A.Hons; Dip.Ed.; B.Ed.Studies; Dip. Business Studies (dispute resolution)

M. NZ. Ps S.; A Arb M.I.NZ

Afterwords

Written on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the declaration of Wellington's nuclear weapon free zone status, March 2007.

The Right Honourable Helen Clark, Prime Minister

I'm proud to have chaired Parliament's Foreign Affairs Select Committee prior to the 1987 election while the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament and Arms Control Bill was being considered. The campaigns up and down New Zealand in the early 1980s to declare our cities and other local body areas nuclear free were very important reflections of the overwhelming public mood in favour of the legislation. As Prime Minister I am pleased to say that all those who worked to put in place such declarations deserve our thanks and gratitude.

Rod Alley

Wellington representative of the Peace Foundation of New Zealand

It is highly appropriate that Wellington's citizens and their representatives mark the significance of this occasion. It deserves reiteration that becoming nuclear free was a collective statement by this city's citizens asserting their determination to

disarm nuclear weaponry. That determination is now more necessary than ever as the choice between abolition and continued nuclear proliferation grows ever starker.

Nuclear abolition has strong roots in Wellington: from the days of conscientious objector meetings in Pigeon Park; the waterfront stoppages protesting against visiting nuclear weaponry led by Toby Hill; the important founding meetings of New Zealand sections of the International Physicians Against nuclear War; the meetings and protest activities convened to mark the solemn ceremonies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki destruction; and countless lobbying exchanges by a wide variety of anti-nuclear non-governmental representatives and involving officials, visiting diplomats, and politicians.

Since the disaster of 9/11 in New York, and the abuse of that event by the Bush Administration to prosecute the so-called global war on terror, nuclear disarmament has been marginalized in many capitals. However that is changing as publics turn away from the deceptions and failures that has characterised American and British policy in the Middle East. Relatively unsullied by these disasters, nuclear disarmament as a core national value is alive and well in New Zealand. The next 25 years of nuclear disarmament activity have ample road maps to hand such as last year's Blix report which offers a range of practical measures leading to comprehensive nuclear disarmament. The best way to commemorate 25 years of a nuclear free Wellington is to commit

to the next two and a half decades through a wide range of citizen activities consolidating and extending Wellington's nuclear free status.

Marian L Hobbs

MP for Wellington Central

That New Zealand has been able to be such a strong advocate for disarmament in the world, is because New Zealand politicians know that New Zealanders support a world free of nuclear weapons.

We know that because of political actions such as yours twenty-five years ago. Thank you again. Peace is won most sustainably from the ground up.

John Murray

St Andrew's on The Terrace, Christians for Peace

As I write this, in front of me lies the *Evening Post* report of the Wellington City Council's debate and decision: 'Wellington shuns nuclear weapons'.

Though I had just left for overseas, I remember so very well the struggle in those days leading up to this decision, involving the combined efforts of our various Peace groups, with Helene leading from the front.

I remember also helping to organize the first and second birthday celebrations of the declaration. I vividly recall how on these occasions, both Mayors showed that in no way did they support the declaration and were in fact annoyed and embarrassed by it.

All had changed five years later in 1987 when Parliament passed the Nuclear Free Act. Now our whole country accepts the morality of the decision, though we continue to live in a world where the power nations are still playing nukes.

Gerald O'Brien

President of Honour, Peace Council of Aotearoa New Zealand

Without total abolition of nuclear weapons the fate of humanity is certain. Citizens' moral duty is surely defined as recognising that no country, no nation, no political system is entitled to employ mass murder in order to maintain itself, and that every citizen therefore has a responsibility to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

Those who hope for a future for civilisation should be proud of our elected representatives who led by resolving to act on Resolution No. 1 of the United Nations to abolish nuclear weapons and unreservedly oppose their possession, existence and development.

Nation states historically grew from the loaned authority of the city states which preceded them but, except for a few such as

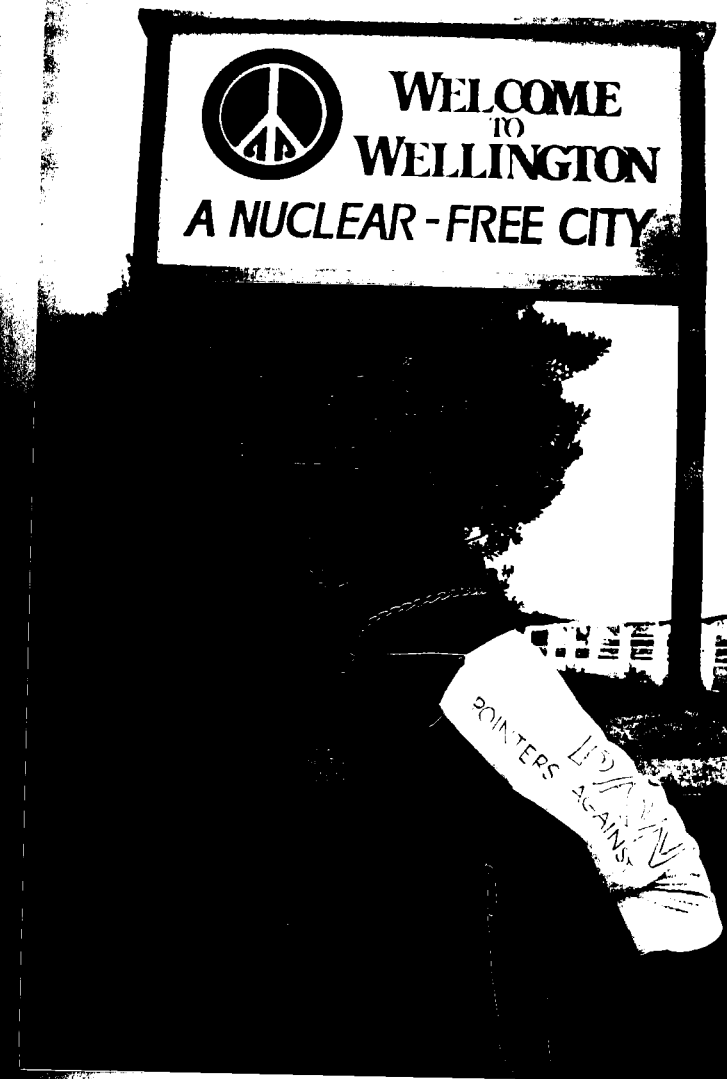
New Zealand, most have consistently lacked the courage or the will to reclaim humanity's right to exist in peace free from fear, today's paramount danger as many nations now seek to defend themselves in the same illegal manner claimed by the nuclear states.

Those citizens with courage and foresight such as Helene Ritchie and those who shared those leadership qualities reclaimed and asserted our rights to civilisation's future in our city and, as with Peter Fraser and Norman Kirk at the UN for our part of the world, that is a milestone to be saluted and a cause devoutly to inspire us all. Wellington can be proud.

Alyn Ware

Global Coordinator, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (March 2012)

Councillor Helene Ritchie's 1982 resolution to make Wellington a nuclear-weapon-free zone led the way for other cities to become nuclear-free and establish a norm against nuclear weapons which resulted in New Zealand's groundbreaking 1987 anti-nuclear legislation. From a small but courageous seed has grown a global momentum that hopefully will save us from a nuclear catastrophe - today and for future generations.



James Beard and his dog Flame at the unveiling of Wellington's nuclear free sign at Wellington airport, 6 August 1988. Photograph by Phil Reid. Dominion Post Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington (EP/1988/3198/18).

Acknowledgements

Foremost thanks to the people of Wellington for continuing to support me in my work for the city, and for their work and enthusiasm over so many issues. I am humbled and privileged to represent them.

For voting for my motion, thanks to Hazel Bibby, Jenny Brough, David Bull, Tala Cleverley, Rosslyn Noonan; and the late Frank O'Flynn, Keith Spry, Jo Aspell, and Betty Campbell.

For their contributions to this booklet, thanks to Charles Chauvel MP, the Rt Hon Helen Clark, Marian Hobbs MP, John Murray, Gerald O'Brien, and Alyn Ware.

Special thanks to Dame Laurie Salas and Rod Alley.

For production assistance on this booklet, thanks to Sarah Bennett, Jill Livestre and Datastream Instant Print. For photographs, thanks to *The Dominion Post* (particularly Sarah Bartel) and the Alexander Turnbull Library. Thanks also to Elspeth Preddey and Peter Kitchin.

I would like to acknowledge the support of Annie Hogan, friend and former *Evening Post* Civic reporter.

I wish also to acknowledge the support of Professor Pete Ellis who has made my completing of this story possible.

Sources

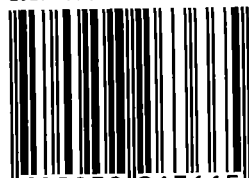
David Lange, *My Life*, Viking Penguin, Auckland, 2005

Chris MacLean, *Wellington: Telling Tales*, Whitcombe Press 2005

Jo Stone, 'Rebelling By Any Means Possible: New Zealand Local Government Nuclear Weapon Free Zones', MA Thesis, Massey University, 2005.

Wikipedia and sources therein.

ISBN 978-0-9582636-6-5



9 780958 263665

Front cover: Nuclear-free New Zealand
protest, Wellington, 1987

Back cover: Photograph by Neil Price

Helene Ritchie

Email: heleneritchie@clear.net.nz

