

## Obituaries

# Avowed Marxist and stalwart peace activist

Ronald Joseph Smith, economist, peace activist and Marxist: B Wellington, 1921; ed Island Bay School, Wellington College and Victoria University; m Carmen, 1950; 3s, 3d; d Wellington, June 16, 1995.

The fight for peace is the fight for life, Ron Smith said when he stood for Parliament as the Communist Party candidate in 1954.

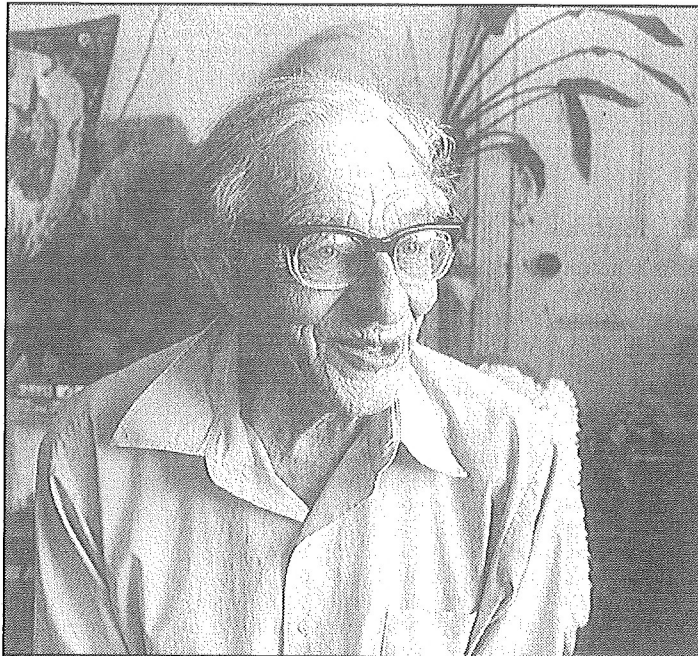
The failure of his bid was not surprising - Communism was hardly a popular cause during the Korean conflict and the subsequent Cold War - but that did not deter the redoubtable Smith. He stood for Parliament in Island Bay four more times, never winning more than 1.5 per cent of the vote.

His comment on peace epitomised the wartime Air Force navigator who became a stalwart of New Zealand's Peace Movement and a fearlessly outspoken champion of anti-war causes.

"Ron's fearless confrontation with those in authority who did not share his views can serve as an inspiration and a valuable legacy to us all," says the Wellington branch of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

This was highlighted in 1987 when Mr Smith, then 66, was ejected from a National Party rally at the Michael Fowler Centre during an anti-nuclear protest.

A Post report at the time



Ron Smith - "A new Marxist party with mass support will undoubtedly arise."

said: "Taking his cue from a fault in the sound system, a protester, later identified as Mr Ron Smith, stood up from his third row seat, yelling anti-nuclear slogans and trying to distribute protest leaflets. He had managed to release only a few before a National Party supporter sitting in the next aisle rushed over and grabbed him, almost knocking him over.

"Others seated around Mr

Smith tried to get him to sit down but he was unceremoniously escorted from the auditorium."

Peace campaigner Nicky Hager writes: "Ron Smith was never in any risk of being given a knighthood. Yet I believe he worked far, far harder and achieved more for the good of New Zealanders than many who appear on the honours list.

"He was a devoted political

activist for over 50 years and many of the things he worked for are now firmly part of the national identity ... Ron was modest, cheerful, intelligent and a good friend. Although increasingly sick in recent years, he attended his last peace meeting only earlier this month."

Besides the CND Mr Smith was also active for the Wellington Peace Office and Peace Movement Aotearoa.

In his autobiography Working Class Son, subtitled My Fight Against Capitalism and War, launched in December, he lifted the lid on the ideological schisms which convulsed New Zealand's far left in the 1950s and 60s, culminating in the expulsion from the Communist Party of the entire Wellington membership. But Mr Smith, a prolific letter writer to newspapers, remained unrepentantly Marxist right down to his choice of car - a Russian-built Lada.

It was during the Second World War, while serving as a navigator in Mosquito nightfighters, that he joined the New Zealand Communist Party, largely as a result of the hardship experienced by his family during the Depression.

After the war Mr Smith entered university, gaining his degree with honours in economics and subsequently became a public servant.

He was a fastidious keeper of notes, all now in the keeping of the Alexander Turnbull Library.