

Campaigner at peace

Murray Horton

Bob Leonard, founder and leader of the Anti-Bases Campaign (ABC), died on August 13 in Wellington Hospital. He was 74.

He played a leading role in all campaigns past and present – such as Harewood, Black Birch, and Waihopai – where he was arrested once and was unforgettable costumed as “Uncle Sam.”

He and Barbara and their infant son Graham (now a renowned vulcanologist) came to Christchurch from the US in 1982, to get away from the threat of nuclear war.

As a Lincoln University scientist he was actively involved in peace and nuclear issues among fellow scientists and experts.

They plunged immediately into the local peace movement. Thirty years ago, CAFGINZ (now Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa – CAFCA) was a peace and anti-bases group. Very soon Bob and I set up Citizens for the

Demilitarisation of Harewood, a group campaigning about the US military base at Christchurch Airport. Once the Waihopai spy base was announced, in 1987, the Anti-Bases Campaign was born.

He was founder of ABC's newsletter *Peace Researcher* and was editor or co-editor until health reasons forced him to quit in 2002.

He wrote all of ABC's submissions, some of which are remarkably topical – such as those on the GCSB Act, which is in the process of being replaced by the government.

His submission on that predicted it would result in domestic spying and any “oversight regime” was a joke.

He fronted select committees, spoke at public meetings around the country and did innumerable media interviews.

He was centrally involved in helping the defence of the three Waihopai domebusters. His expert affidavit was of great importance and he was delighted when they were acquitted of criminal charges

by a Wellington jury in 2010.

Bob was also heavily involved with the New Zealand nuclear-free zone committee and groups such as Educate for Nuclear Disarmament and Nuclear Free Kiwis. He worked closely with major figures in the peace movement, such as Larry Ross, Owen Wilkes and Nicky Hager.

He was an active environmentalist for decades. Nor was he just an academic greenie – for example, he was among those who sat in front of logging trucks in a West Coast native forest on one occasion. He was a central figure in the Craigieburn Trust.

Earlier this year the ABC committee was able to get into Bob and Barbara's quake-damaged house – they fled to Wellington immediately after the February 22, 2011 killer quake – and get out a whole lot of files and other papers.

I have been fascinated by the sheer volume, range, breadth and depth of Bob's peace movement work. We



UNCLE SAM: Bob Leonard in costume at a protest

also got out a whole lot of historic photos and a number of them have gone to a good home – namely Maire Leadbeater's forthcoming book *Peace Power & Politics: How New Zealand Became Nuclear Free* (to be published in November). Bob features prominently in the book.

Bob and I had a lot of fun together. We talked about everything, including death – he was a scientist and had no doubt. “Death marks the extinction of consciousness.”

That may be so but my memories of Bob, and those of innumerable other people, will never be extinguished. He was a genuine non-violent warrior for peace.

Murray Horton is secretary/organiser of ABC and CAFCA.

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