

In the cause of peace

BY SIMON COLLINS

PEACE Workshops, Pohangina Valley, June 1996. It was snowing not far away. In the cavernous, concrete-floored hall where about 50 largely young people were discussing peace, the only heat came from a small fire in one corner.

When the women split off to discuss how to play a strong role in the peace movement, the men were supposed to form a group to examine their own behaviour. They gathered dutifully in a circle, but no one could think what to say.

Finally Dr Ian Prior broke the silence and asked a question which got people talking.

At 72 (now 73), he was a good two generations older than most of those present. A cardiologist turned fellow in public health at the Wellington Medical School, he seemed happy to devote a weekend in the freezing cold to working with a group of young enthusiasts in the cause of peace.

Now back in the comfort of his Wadestown home, surrounded by contemporary New Zealand art, the cause still dominates his life. This week he's organising a visit by a Mexican diplomat, Miguel Marin-Bosch, who played a key role in nuclear disarmament in Geneva for 12 years.

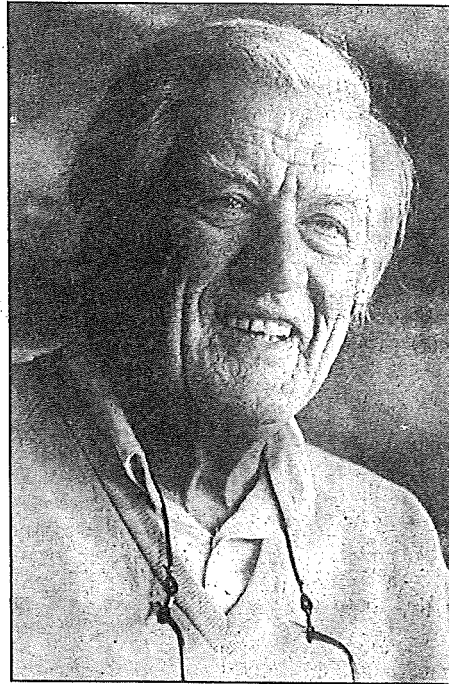
It's 14 years now since Ian Prior, with Erich Geiringer and others, founded the NZ chapter of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War

(IPPNW).

And 24 years before that, Prior had first worked with Bernard Lown, the American cardiologist who later, with a Russian colleague, decided that doctors could do something towards ridding the world of nuclear arms. When Lown started IPPNW in Boston, Prior and Geiringer were quick to follow.

"Erich Geiringer had this desire and the strength to do something about nuclear weapons. He was a key person," says Prior.

"I remember him saying that unless we could get a quarter of the doctors as members, governments wouldn't take any notice of us.



Ian Prior, at home with a Toss Woollaston painting.

Boston, followed by a visit to Europe.

"One thing that stands out when you move around is the extraordinary respect that is given to NZ because of its anti-

"Within a year, our membership was 1200 out of about 6000 doctors."

This was 1982-83. The doctors played a significant part in shaping public opinion to elect a Labour government in 1984 that was to cut all links with the United States' nuclear alliance.

Prior would like to see NZ continue to play that kind of leading role. He has just returned from an IPPNW congress near

nuclear stand," he says. "We have to consolidate that and take a lead to get other countries to introduce legislation similar to ours."

Recently Ian Prior, Erich Geiringer and others helped to take a case to the World Court seeking a declaration that nuclear weapons are illegal. They got a declaration that nukes should not be used except in the most extreme circumstances of self-defence.

Now the IPPNW has launched a campaign to have the nuclear powers abolish nuclear weapons completely by the year 2000. The campaign has been taken up by several hundred non-government organisations around the world.

Ian Prior is encouraged by the recent 'Canberra Commission', a group of the

showing an increasing number feeling we should do without nuclear weapons."

In Wellington, the IPPNW is establishing an annual 'oration' on the dangers of nuclear weapons in memory of Erich Geiringer, who died last year. The first oration, by Miguel Marin-Bosch, will be at the Overseas Terminal next Wednesday (13 Nov).

Marin-Bosch will also take part in a seminar on Tuesday with the NZ Institute of International Affairs, Institute of Policy Studies and Centre for Strategic Studies. On Thursday he will attend a review meeting of the IPPNW at Science House in Thorndon.

• Miguel Marin-Bosch, 'Getting rid of nukes', Overseas Terminal, Herd St, Wed 13 Nov, 7.30pm, free. Ian Prior, ph 385 5999 ext 6050.

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