

OBITUARY

LARRY ROSS

- Murray Horton

This was originally published in Foreign Control Watchdog 130, August 2012.

Larry Ross was the true father of nuclear free New Zealand and a veteran peace activist from his arrival in this country (from Canada) in the 1960s right through until just a few years ago. It is worth reminding ourselves that the Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa (CAFCA, or CAFGINZ – Campaign Against Foreign Control In New Zealand - as we then were) grew directly out of the massive anti-war movement of the 1960s and 70s. In fact, by the time CAFGINZ was founded, nearly 40 years ago, Larry had already “retired” from his first remarkable stint in the peace movement, namely as a leading figure in the 1960s’ national campaign against the Vietnam War and NZ’s disgraceful involvement in it. That was the context in which I first met Larry, going right back to the beginning of my brilliant career as a political activist. Larry was an intermittent CAFCA member over the years, most recently in 2005. But our economics focus was never his primary interest; Larry was, first and foremost, a peace warrior.



The other half of my job as Organiser is for the Anti-Bases Campaign and although he was never a member of ABC and never came on a Waihopai spy base protest, Larry took part in plenty of protests at the US military base at Christchurch Airport (Harewood) over many decades. Among those who worked very closely with him in the NZ Nuclear Free Zone Committee in Christchurch in the 1980s were Bob Leonard and Dennis Small. Both went onto become Editors of *Peace Researcher* (Bob did it for two decades); Dennis remains a regular *PR* writer today. Bob, of course, was a founder of ABC and the driving force behind it, until the February 2011 Christchurch earthquake forced him and Barbara to permanently move to Wellington. Dennis is a current and long serving member of the CAFCA Committee and a longstanding, not to mention

voluminous, writer for *Watchdog*. Bob was an active CAFCA member for the nearly 30 years that he lived in Christchurch; and for 20 of those years he was my paymaster as Treasurer of the CAFCA/ABC Organiser Account. So we have lots of connections to Larry, both political and personal.

Larry died in April 2012, aged 84, having been adversely affected by a series of mini-strokes in the past decade, which put him into the rest home where he spent his final few years. It was a severe stroke which killed him. How ironically coincidental that he should die in the same month when US combat troops were holding joint exercises in New Zealand for the first time since 1986 – the year in which NZ was expelled from the ANZUS Treaty* because of our nuclear free policy. That was the product of a hard fought mass campaign over many years, with Larry as one of its leading lights (he died just a couple of months short of the 25th anniversary of the Nuclear Free Act, an anniversary that attracted a lot of coverage in the mainstream media). *The Australia, New Zealand, US military treaty that was the foundation of all New

Zealand's defence and foreign policy from its inception in 1951 until the US, under President Ronald Reagan, kicked us out in 1986. It remains in force today, but only between the US and Australia.

Tireless Campaigner For Nuclear Free NZ

Maire Leadbeater sent this tribute to Larry's funeral, in Christchurch. It is the best summary of why Larry deserves the eternal thanks of all New Zealanders. "I have been researching old peace files with the hope of publishing a book* and I have spent time delving into the vast Larry Ross collection at the Macmillan Brown Library at Canterbury University. So I can testify to Larry's incredible hard work and absolute commitment to peace work. I think he might be best remembered for the work he put into the nuclear free zone campaign – the campaign to get local boroughs, district and city councils to make a nuclear free zone declaration. This campaign was an intrinsic and vital part of the campaign to get our Government to pass legislation establishing New Zealand as a nuclear free zone.

"Here is how the progress went: the NZ Nuclear Free Zone Committee was formed in 1981. By mid 1983 Larry for the NZNFZC told the media that there were 23 nuclear free zones representing more than three quarters of a million people. By the time of the snap election in 1984 60% of the population lived in a local nuclear free zone. But the Labour victory did not signal the end of the campaign – in October 1989 72% of the NZ population lived in nuclear free zones. Larry played a particularly important role in encouraging these campaigns in the rural areas and smaller centres and he personally travelled all round the country to ensure that the groups and peace-minded individuals in these places had all the encouragement and resources they needed to mount a successful campaign. Activists from this time will well remember the succession of wall maps of NZ which marked each nuclear free zone and recorded the population figures.

"Some of that work was not so apparent in the larger centres and probably at times Larry did not get his due credit. But Larry was never discouraged by setbacks or failure to get media coverage, the NZNFZ continued to host a wide range of speakers, participate in demonstrations, distribute resources and lobby politicians. The NZNFZ Committee was renamed the NZ Nuclear Free Peacemaking Committee in 1988 (after the NZ legislation was passed) and it was very active at the time of the 1991 Gulf War and subsequently as peace activists confronted the so-called "War on Terror". I believe the group went into recess only in 2007. Larry leaves behind a great legacy and his work lives on. My condolences and sympathy to his daughter Laurie Ross who has kept the peace candle burning so diligently, and to all Larry's family and friends". *Maire is updating "Peace People" by her late mother Elsie Locke. My obituary of Elsie is in *PR* 23, June 2001, <http://www.converge.org.nz/abc/elsobit.htm> my review of her book is in *Watchdog* 71, November 1992, <http://www.historicalwatchdog.blogspot.co.nz/2009/12/foreign-control-watchdog-november-1992.html>. Elsie's book covered peace movement history up until 1975. Maire aims to update it up until 2001 (the start of the "War On Terror").

Maire is quite right about Larry not getting his due credit. In his day he was a major public figure, nationally influential, internationally renowned, a charismatic man with a following of many thousands of people and one who generated a truly impressive amount of money for the nuclear free cause. He was one of only a handful of people that I knew then who made a living as a fulltime activist (in the 1980s, when Larry was at his zenith, I was working as a Railways labourer). And he was the first person that I knew who had to register for GST because he was turning over more than the then limit of \$30,000 per year from sales of merchandise and suchlike (to put that into perspective, I bought our house in 1982 for \$25,000). But Larry's "day", in fact, extended far beyond the 1980s. He was heavily involved in the campaigns against the 1991 Gulf War, the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. He remained active in the peace movement well into the last decade (for example, in

2006 he gave a public lecture on the threat of a nuclear strike on Iran) until a series of mini-strokes bugged his short term memory and he had to go into the rest home where he lived until his 2012 death. So he was by no means some old hasbeen from a bygone era – but you wouldn't know that from the mainstream media. To research this I checked out my obituary file (I know that some of my friends and colleagues think that it's purely imaginary, but I assure you it's a very real and regularly updated file box of clippings and articles). It goes back more than 20 years, yet I could find absolutely nothing about Larry in it. Which means that by the 1990s the print media had stopped reporting and profiling Larry. Shame on them.

SIS File An Invaluable Scrapbook

But I had no shortage of material about Larry from his “day” and, in a couple of cases, from distinctly unusual, not to mention downright hostile, sources. Over recent years CAFCA has collected an archive of copies of the Personal Files held on various individuals by the NZ Security Intelligence Service (SIS). Larry's is one of them. Getting it was the only project whereby I actually worked with Larry, from 2009-11, and it came right in the final three years of his life, when he was already living in the rest home. It involved me in the most contact I'd ever had with him and I, and colleagues (such as Bob Leonard and Warren Thomson) had a number of highly enjoyable social gatherings with Larry in the course of it. Larry's SIS file is voluminous but the vast majority of what they chose to release to him is simply what's on the public record, including Larry's own encyclopaedic writings (the very first recipients of released SIS files, such as CAFCA itself, got much more of the full uncensored version. As more and more people applied for them, and the SIS got its act together, what they released was much more sanitised. For example, there is a great contrast between what the SIS gave my colleague Bill Rosenberg and what they gave me, which is along the same lines as what they gave Larry). But even that acts as an invaluable record, scrapbooking to an obsessive degree things like the innumerable letters Larry wrote to the *Press*, to give one example. I am indebted to the SIS for keeping the 1980s' *Press* and *Herald* features on Larry quoted in this obituary. The latter was the most recent, published in 1989, and that must be the last time that the mainstream print media profiled Larry. This is the first time that I've used one of the SIS Personal Files in CAFCA's archive as a source for that person's obituary.

The other such source is even more curious, namely the May 1988 issue of *Plain Talk*, the journal of the now forgotten Plains Club, which was a stridently pro-American, pro-nuclear, pro-ANZUS Christchurch-based lobby group in the 80s. This issue was titled “Rent-A-Demo: New Zealand's longest playing soap opera” and was aimed at “exposing” the peace movement (I was given it by a bemused journalist who had received it from the Plains Club). It listed the “Leading Characters” as “Horton, Murray” and “Wilkes, Owen”. The “Supporting Cast” included: “Hager, Nicky; Ledbetter (sic), Maire; Leonard, Bob; Locke, Elsie; Rosenberg, Bill; and Ross, Larry”. It filled 12 of its 16 pages about us. I've kept it because it is fascinating to read your own life story being exhaustively chronicled from a Rightwing perspective by my ideological enemies who tried to tie it all together into a seamless conspiracy (spoiler alert – it's all a Communist plot!). Somebody not at all kindly disposed to me has gone to all the trouble (no Internet, Google or Wikipedia in those days) of documenting all sorts of things from my ancient past that I've long forgotten, so the least I can do is keep it and give it an airing every now and again. I last used it in my obituary of Owen Wilkes in *PR* 31, Special Issue, October 2005, <http://www.converge.org.nz/abc/pr31-119.html>. At the time of writing, Owen's brother Jack, his only living immediate relative, is fighting an uphill battle to get the SIS to release to him Owen's file, even the sanitised version.

Canadian Since Age Eight

Lawrence Frederick James Ross was born in New York State in November 1927. Interestingly, his SIS Personal File's Personal Particulars Form (stamped “Keep On

Top Of File” and classified Secret) lists his birth month as January 1928. So, they got the wrong month, and the wrong year. Who would have thought that the SIS made mistakes in the files of those they spied on? I was surprised to learn that Larry was an American by birth, because it was so ingrained into everyone’s heads in NZ that he was Canadian (in the end he held dual Canadian and NZ citizenship). He was eight when his family moved to Canada. I don’t know why they moved but that was right in the middle of the 1930s’ Depression, which may have been a factor. From then on Larry was a Canadian. He grew up during World War 2.

“In fact he was intending to enlist in the American Air Force in his final year at high school when Hiroshima made his patriotism unnecessary. The terrible image of the mushroom cloud towered over 1950s’ consciousness and Ross acknowledges the power it had. ‘I stared at the photos and it really set me to thinking’. He became involved with the Albert Schweitzer peace group and as a member of the Unitarian Church lobbied for an end to the Cold War of the 1950s. In 1962 the Cold War intensified as the Kennedy Presidency dealt with the Cuban missile crisis. By this time Ross was an account executive for a Montreal advertising firm. He was married with six children. ‘And there was Kennedy on the television telling us it might be a good idea to start building fallout shelters in our backyards. I tried to imagine what it would be like being down a hole in our backyard with six children and decided to spend on emigration the \$C4,000 we needed for our fallout shelter’. New Zealand was the most distant English-speaking country the Ross family could find. They settled in Christchurch and Ross was hired by a market research organisation” (*New Zealand Herald*, 14/11/89, “Larry Ross follows his dream”, Gilbert Wong).

“He had followed the arms race very closely, and concluded that President Kennedy’s recommended fallout shelters would not be effective. People in them would be roasted or asphyxiated, or they would be irradiated or starve to death when they came out. New Zealand looked like a safe, remote, civilised, English speaking country with a democratic system of government, so the Ross family packed up and emigrated. He had a friend in Christchurch, so that is where the family settled” (*Press*, 27/4/82, “Canadian pressing for NZ as neutral refuge in World War III”, Garry Arthur). It is impossible to overemphasise the all-pervasive air of apocalyptic nuclear dread during the early 1960s. In 1962 I was 11 and, like most New Zealand primary school kids of that age at that time, had very little awareness of the big wide world. But I have a crystal clear memory of the Cuban missile crisis. Our headmaster assembled us all on the playground of our little primary school on the outskirts of Christchurch and told us that World War III, which would be a nuclear war, was imminent, maybe within hours. Welcome to the grownups’ world, kids, and sorry that it’s all over so soon for you! The fact that it didn’t happen was more down to good luck than good management. I’ve never forgotten that moment in my childhood and I can fully empathise with why Larry wanted to get his family as far away as possible from where the radioactive shit was threatening to hit the fan. Canada’s loss was New Zealand’s gain. Larry was to spend the next 50 years of his life in Christchurch, 40 of them in the one house in New Brighton, which he was to rename Peace House.

Nuclear Refugee

From the outset Larry displayed the enthusiastic patriotism of the new migrant (particularly one of the nuclear refugee variety). His very first appearance in the mainstream media was an article of his in the Christchurch *Star* (9/4/63) entitled “A Note to the *Tribune*....NZ as Close to Paradise As Anyone Could Wish For”. It was accompanied by an editorial explanation reading: “This is a copy of a letter which Mr Lawrence FJ Ross, a recent arrival in Christchurch from North America, has sent to the Editor of the *Chicago Tribune* complaining of the picture his newspaper has been painting of the Dominion and endeavouring to set it right” (fascinating to see the country routinely referred to as “the Dominion” 50 years ago. Who today would have any idea what that meant?). It was a paean of fulsome praise for Larry’s new homeland. “My wife and I and our six children were born and raised in the United States and Canada. Although we have only lived in New Zealand for nine months we

love it and would never consider returning to North America to live, although we still have a great affection and concern for our homeland.... Although people's ideas of the good life vary widely, we believe that New Zealand is just about as close to paradise as one could ask for".

When he arrived he was in his mid 30s and he had a wife, Shirley, and six young kids to support, so his first priority was to earn a living. In Canada he had been a qualified engineer and an advertising executive, but he never worked in those particular professions again (although his background in advertising doubtless stood him in good stead when it came to selling the idea of a nuclear free New Zealand). Larry Ross hoped to make a living by free lance writing on some of the subjects that interested him, such as the use of hypnosis in childbirth and as a means of tapping the unused potential of the mind. There was not much money to be made from that nor, as it turned out, from a book he wrote about 'World War III in the Southern Hemisphere'. He spent £600 to publish it himself in 1963. Thanks to an inheritance he was able to work fulltime for peace in the 1960s" (*Press*, *ibid*). The inheritance was a legacy from his father.

Larry hit the ground running when he arrived in Christchurch and he plunged into peace activism. "Meanwhile, a new voice was being heard in the land. LFJ Ross, better known as Larry Ross, arrived from Canada with his family, satisfied that New Zealand offered a safer and more congenial base for pursuing his active concerns with the peace of the world. He already had a network of international connections; and now he wrote an 'Open Letter To World Statesmen', dated 1 June, 1963. His view was that the nuclear free zone should be 'pioneered within an area of land and water surrounding the total of New Zealand and most of its territories'. Once accomplished in this limited area, recognised and subject to inspection, such a zone would be a model and precedent for future treaties. He submitted his proposals in some detail to the 1964 conference of the United Nations Association (UNA) of New Zealand, along with a number of others. He envisaged his adopted country becoming a world peace laboratory, and a centre for peace initiatives. This meant a lot of new ideas all at once for the UNA; but they went so far as to set up a special sub-committee on peace and war" ("Peace People: A History Of Peace Activities In New Zealand", Elsie Locke, 1992).

Prodigious Writer & Lobbyist

Within a couple of years of Larry's arrival he was the subject of a report from the Director of the SIS to the Prime Minister. For decades he was a prodigious writer of newsletters, articles and letters to the editor. Brigadier Gilbert*, the founding Director of the SIS (1956-76), wrote to the Prime Minister, Keith Holyoake (27/5/64): "Almost immediately after his arrival in New Zealand, ROSS began writing to newspapers. He has continued an incessant barrage of letters and articles ever since. His main theme has been nuclear disarmament and plans for a nuclear free Southern Hemisphere. He has published a booklet 'World War III and the Southern Hemisphere' which he has distributed to, among others, the Prime Minister, External Affairs, the US Ambassador and the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires... ROSS is obsessed with the idea that nuclear war is inevitable in the Northern Hemisphere, and with a desire to keep New Zealand out of it. His constant letters to prominent public figures will no doubt cause antagonism towards him". *My obituary of Gilbert is in *Watchdog* 58, January 1988, http://www.historicalwatchdog.blogspot.co.nz/2009/12/foreign-control-watchdog-january-1988_11.html. "Brigadier Gilbert was one of those splendid one-dimensional characters of the 60s and early 70s...His views were suitably prehistoric – a late 60s' feature described him as regarding Communism as a green slime that was, even then, oozing under the door. Predictably he was reviled by the protest movement. Demonstrations resounded with chants of 'The Brig's a pig'..."

Larry's first NZ peace movement article was for the *NZ Rationalist* in 1962 (he was a member of the NZ Rationalist Association). His first organisational involvement was with the United Nations Association. "At a meeting of the United Nations Association,

Christchurch Branch on 11th May 1964, it was announced that a new group called 'The World Peace and International Affairs Committee' was being formed. This appears to be the brain-child of ROSS and provides him with an opportunity for disseminating his propaganda in a manner which attributes it to the United Nations Association. For example, one of his recent leaflets states 'the above material has been prepared by LFJ Ross for the Christchurch Branch of the United Nations Association of New Zealand, in accordance with his responsibility as Executive Council member concerned with peace/disarmament matters'. ROSS is a member of the Branch Council of the Christchurch Branch of the United Nations Association. Of the 17 members of the Christchurch Branch executive, 14 are known to have had connections with the Communist Party or with various Communist front activities" (Brigadier Gilbert, letter to Prime Minister, *ibid*). Predictably, Larry was soon under attack from MPs of the ruling National Party, such as Christchurch's Bert Walker, who went on to become a Minister (*NZ Truth*, 26/5/64, "MP Slates UN Group As 'Anti-West'").

Larry first came to the attention of the SIS by taking the direct route and writing several letters to Brigadier Gilbert, starting in 1963. "It occurred to me that some might misinterpret my ideas and thus I thought it best to write to you, so that you would be informed in case the matter came to the attention of your office" (Larry to Gilbert, 4/6/63. He addressed it to Brigadier Gilbert, Internal Security Police, Wellington). Gilbert replied: "May I assure you that I personally share your deep concern on the subject of New Zealand's defence and security. While I appreciate your motives in writing to me, you will, I am sure, understand when I say that I am not in a position to offer any official comments or criticisms of the work" (Gilbert to Larry, 11/6/63). In April 1964 Larry wrote Gilbert a four page letter outlining his views (which had already been published in numerous articles and letters to the editor), reassured him that he wasn't a Communist, and asked Gilbert's opinion on his suggested creation of an "NZ Political Intelligence Agency...As matters now stand I doubt if NZ has a broad enough range of information coming in to develop accurate theories. We may be a victim too often of our trust in other nations and thus rely on false CIA secrets to influence our response. Do you think there is a chance of developing an organisation such as I suggest? It might make the difference between national survival and death for all of us" (Larry to Gilbert, 28/4/64). But he only received a non-committal acknowledgement. His SIS Personal File doesn't include any more letters which he wrote specifically to Brigadier Gilbert but he kept sending material to Gilbert. For example, a copy of a letter he wrote to the Prime Minister (10/7/65), to which Larry added a handwritten note which read, in part: "I am not, and never will be an enemy of the State...". This correspondence was unique in my experience (there is nothing similar in any of the other SIS Personal Files that I've read). I know people (myself included) who have written to various SIS Directors over the years but only for purposes such as seeking files, never to attempt to engage the Director in political or philosophical discussion, let alone to offer advice on how the work of NZ's spies could be done better. Larry had a political naivety that made him be very direct in his approaches to people such as Gilbert. It didn't cut any ice with the Brigadier and the SIS already had opened a file on Larry (his 1965 SIS Personal Particulars Form includes "Description: 5'10"-11" in height, slim build, dark hair, semi-crew cut, slightly slanted eyes, sallow complexion, neat appearance, glib and persuasive speaker").

Vietnam War

Of course, the huge international peace issue of the 1960s (and halfway through the 70s) was the Vietnam War. It was Larry's Herculean efforts in opposition to it that justifiably made him nationally famous, indeed a legend within the anti-war movement. One of the international giants of the peace movement was the world famous British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970; one of the giants of philosophy, and a pacifist and militant peace activist for many decades. In his last years he was a high profile opponent of the Vietnam War). Larry corresponded with Russell and was invited to set up a New Zealand and Australian Branch of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, which he duly did in 1965. Russell wrote: "The

formation of a New Zealand and Australian Branch of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation is an event which gives the greatest encouragement to us...I have corresponded with Mr Ross over many years and have learnt to value his unceasing work for peace. He has my every confidence..." (undated letter). In "Peace People" Elsie Locke described Larry's overseas correspondence on behalf of the Foundation as "amazing".

This led to Larry becoming the subject of a second report from Brigadier Gilbert to Prime Minister Holyoake (who committed NZ troops to the Vietnam War; they were there from 1965-72). "Early this year ROSS circularised persons in New Zealand and also in Australia regarding the formation of an Australia and New Zealand Branch of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. He stated that Bertrand RUSSELL, with whom he had been in communication, had asked him to be the Chairman. According to ROSS, the parent body was formed in England by Bertrand RUSSELL in September 1963, its aims being described as being: 'To investigate the causes of war, and to pursue such measures as may diminish and eliminate the risk of war' and 'To communicate with all the governments and peoples on the nature of the danger, its imminence and magnitude'. As Chairman of the Foundation, he has since produced a flood of Foundation literature; all prepared by himself, condemning US policy in Vietnam. He has also lectured in various centres to enlist support for the organisation. The headquarters of the Foundation is in Christchurch, and branches are reported to have been formed in Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin. Membership, which was only 70 in April 1965, is still believed to be small. During recent months ROSS's obsession with the situation in Vietnam has verged on hysteria...Apart from a relatively unremunerative connection with Gallup Polls (NZ) ROSS has had no paid employment since he arrived in New Zealand in June 1962. ROSS has mentioned that Bertrand RUSSELL has considered he should be paid for his services as Chairman of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation of Australia and New Zealand once the Foundation was properly established. However, despite appeals for financial support in most of the Foundation literature issued, a recent report from the Foundation indicated that their treasury was 'below zero'. In the circumstances, he is unlikely to receive a salary from this source in the near future, but it would seem that he has ample private funds to continue his present unpaid preoccupation with 'peace' matters, and Vietnam in particular, for some time to come" (Gilbert to Prime Minister, 22/7/65). Doubtless to the disappointment of Gilbert there was no Moscow gold involved in supporting Larry – his three years of fulltime unpaid work for the Foundation were financed by a legacy from his father.

Larry's ceaseless writing, public speaking and lobbying in opposition to the Vietnam War had an impact at the highest level of Government. In September 1965 the Christchurch-based *Monthly Review* filled pages and pages with a correspondence entitled "The Great Debate on Vietnam: Holyoake and Hanan v. Ross", in which both the PM and the Acting Minister of External Affairs wrote to debate claims made by Larry in the May 1965 issue. It is impossible to imagine a comparable situation today, and just goes to show the extraordinary influence that Larry wielded, not to mention the late, lamented *Monthly Review* (my obituary of it is in *Watchdog* 84. May 1997, <http://www.historicalwatchdog.blogspot.co.nz/2009/12/foreign-control-watchdog-may-1997.html>). "The war in Vietnam was the main focus of attention then, and Larry Ross's attempts to show the true origins of the war led to public discussions of Government policy with Sir Keith Holyoake in the pages of the Leftwing journal *Monthly Review*. He regards that exchange as the highlight of his campaign against New Zealand involvement in Vietnam, and, although it did not stop New Zealand from sending troops, he believes his work may have moderated New Zealand's involvement" (*Press*, 27/4/82, "Canadian pressing for NZ as neutral refuge in World War III", Garry Arthur).

Once Met, Never Forgotten

Larry made a deep impression on all who met him in the 60s. Here are a couple of tributes sent to his April 2012 funeral. "I first met Larry when he lived in New Brighton,

Christchurch with six kids and his wife. I was about ten, it was probably 1967; Larry and my mum and brothers somehow met up; them all being committed peaceniks. Larry, as I recall, having been charged with starting the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation in NZ. I remember their wonderfully chaotic home: here were a family of exotic 'Americans' who spoke with accents and ate strange foods; my first experience with hamburgers, peanut butter and jelly, and real spaghetti came at their crowded kitchen table.

"Larry a hyperactive speaker and thinker, rushed hither and thither in the chaos, his dark hair flopping over his furrowed forehead. The words and letters I remember over those days/months/years, run together in my mind now; LBJ, Vietnam, the CIA, the Bomb, Nixon, the Bomb, CIA, Vietnam, the Bay of Pigs, Robert McNamara, JFK, the CND, intercontinental ballistic missiles, the Pentagon Papers (perhaps these particular words came later; but for sure at this particular house Larry's sunroom was stacked from floor to ceiling with papers; falling out of boxes, lying on the desk, leaking from the shelves; Larry's papers came to be in *my* childhood memory forever a vision of the Pentagon Papers). Larry and mum and others pored over these papers and we licked envelopes stuffed full of papers to post out to 'the members'/'the faithful few'? We marched up through Cathedral Square carrying placards - the demonstrators then seemed to consist of Larry's family, my family, some Quakers with pushchairs and probably Elsie Locke and her family, perhaps some union people, maybe a few long haired students. We sang songs; 'We Shall Overcome', 'Down By The Riverside', 'We Shall Not Be Moved' and 'Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream'. I felt embarrassed to be walking in the middle of the road but also kind of proud that we were the ones who knew about the Bomb!

Preparing To Survive Nuclear Holocaust

"Larry's family and our family bought a bach on the West Coast at Okarito. This was so we could go and hide there when the Third World War came (which, due to all the papers, LBJ, and the Bomb, the CIA and Nixon and Vietnam, was imminent). Our family had tea chests packed up in the hall with 'survival' stuff ready to throw into the Morris Oxford should the moment come. Larry's family had a big long 'American' style car which was so long its rear end hung out over the hairpin gravelly corners of Arthurs Pass. I remember actually seeing this as we drove behind their wagon when we did our 'practice run' to the bach.

"Being at the bach was so much fun that I spent the next months hoping 'they *would* drop the bloody bomb' because I definitely wanted to spend the next several years of my life in Okarito, not going to school and living off toasted marshmallows (another fantastic exotic experience!) and playing with all the kids. Sometime after this (1968. *Ed.*) there was a big earthquake at Inangahua Junction on the West Coast. Christchurch woke to heavy shaking in the early hours of the morning. I heard Dad telling someone that Larry had shot straight up in bed that morning and said: 'the bloody fools have done it!', somehow this was very scary" (Gael Johnson, who started her tribute with "he is a giant in the mythology of my childhood").

And: "I was aware of Larry before I met him because he arrived, with Shirley and their children, from Canada, bringing with them a huge Ford car, about 20 feet long, at a time when there were very few cars like that on the road in New Zealand. Larry and Shirley had bought a large rambling house in Keyes Road, New Brighton, and, as we lived in New Brighton at that time, we saw the car frequently. I met Larry through my mother who was one of a fairly small but dedicated group of workers for peace. When I met Larry he was working full time on peace matters, and I spent hours at his place helping prepare material for dissemination. From time to time Larry hosted gatherings at Keyes Road and it was at these that I met a wide range of people who all had their own ideas for making the world a better place, from Trotskyites who advocated bloody revolution to humanists and Quakers who were on quite a different path.. Wolf Rosenberg* was usually on hand to assist our understanding of economics. Jim Flynn dazzled us with his academic approach to issues of the day. Larry through his

knowledge and enthusiasm, plus access to dissenting material managed to coordinate a lot of the protest effort at the time. Larry introduced us to the *IF Stone Weekly* which always contained material that flatly contradicted what was in the mainstream press. Larry was instrumental in introducing us to the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. By coordinating the efforts of many people and providing excellent insights into what lay behind the headlines Larry created and fostered a formidable peace group in Christchurch "(Anne Johnson). *My obituary of Wolfgang Rosenberg is in *Watchdog* 114, May 2007, <http://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/14/04.htm>.

Larry was certainly a legend to me before I'd ever met him or got involved in politics. 1964-68 inclusive were my high school years, which coincided exactly with Larry's stratospheric work with the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. I started off supporting the Vietnam War (along with sporting ties with South Africa and taking Israel's side in the Middle East – I hasten to add that I saw the error of my ways on all those issues). When I changed my mind about Vietnam, I felt the need to write a mawkish schoolboy letter to the North Vietnamese to express my support for them. But where could I send it to? I went to school with one of Larry's sons and asked him to ask his old man for the relevant postal address. Back came the answer – the North Vietnamese Embassy in London. I duly sent it there – months later I got a polite letter from the South Vietnamese Embassy in London, saying that their enemy did not actually have an embassy in that city, and that they couldn't help me. Oh dear! When I finally did meet Larry years later, we had a laugh about it (for the record, I should have written to the North Vietnamese Embassy in Paris). That son of Larry's went on to become a fellow member of the Progressive Youth Movement (PYM), the first political activist group that I joined (he's been living back in his native Canada for decades).

Owen Wilkes' Peace Movement Apprenticeship With Larry

Larry was an instrumental 1960s' figure in the lives of other key Christchurch activists, people with whom I was to have a close political and personal relationship over the following decades. The SIS has only released a tiny sample of the late Owen Wilkes' Personal File to his brother Jack (who is trying to get the rest). The earliest entry is from 1965, recording Owen's involvement with the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. "In 1965, he worked as a dustman in Christchurch, a job he enjoyed immensely – he recalls occasions such as the one when he dressed up in a white tennis dress found in a rubbish bin (*this was in the days before household rubbish was disposed of in wheelie bins*). It was this job that led to him being politicised, an occasion straight out of Gilbert and Sullivan. He pulled a newspaper out of a rubbish bin, and read that during the Wellington visit of the US Ambassador to (the then) South Vietnam, an American Secret Service agent had dropped his gun at the feet of a student protester. Owen began to realise New Zealand's involvement in America's war in Vietnam – he pulled more papers out of rubbish bins, and read them so assiduously that he once fell off the truck. When Keith Holyoake sent New Zealand troops into Vietnam, later in 1965, Owen decided to get involved in the anti-war movement. He joined the Australasian branch of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, and as he was unemployed, made a fulltime job of 'cranking duplicator handles'. The Foundation eventually printed over one million leaflets. It was here that Owen first met Keith Duffield, Christchurch's veteran agitator and future partner in crime" (this is from my obituary of Owen Wilkes in *PR* 31, Special Issue, October 2005, <http://www.converge.org.nz/abc/pr31-119.html>). Keith Duffield became my first political mentor and was a major influence on me, not to mention an excellent friend and comrade in my first decade as an activist. He died far too young (my obituary of Keith is in *Watchdog* 18, March 1979, <http://www.historicalwatchdog.blogspot.co.nz/2009/12/foreign-control-watchdog-march-1978.html>. Note that the Web address says March 1978. That is a mistake; the issue is March 1979).

I still have the typed carbon copy (remember typewriters and carbon copies?) of a profile I wrote on Keith Duffield entitled "The Man They Couldn't Hang" (as I don't have the actual published article, I'm not sure where it was published or in what year. My guess is it was in the short-lived NZ edition of *Rolling Stone*, sometime in the first half of the 1970s). This gives some of the flavour of the 1960s' movement in which Larry, Owen and Keith all met and worked together. "He (Keith) joined the Citizens' All Black Tour Association, which focused on the 1960 tour to South Africa; in 1961 he with others formed the Canterbury Association for Racial Equality, becoming Secretary. CARE lasted four to five years and was ultra-respectable - meetings were held in Council Chambers and an Executive member was Bert Walker (National MP and later a Cabinet Minister). Keith joined the UN Association, met Larry Ross (a Canadian living in New Zealand) and in April 1964 they, with others, started printing literature on the Vietnam War. A sub-committee of the UN Association was set up and SE Asia discussed – the very same Bert Walker attacked it in the press and Keith and Larry were forced off the Executive by a 'Quaker-pacifist takeover'. He (Keith) describes the UN Association today as a 'stooge of Government foreign policy'.

"Larry Ross established the Australasian branch of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, lasting three years and printing over a million leaflets. It was here that Keith met Owen Wilkes, now the leading campaigner against the US military in NZ ('Owen's got an incredible penetrating scientific mind; I'm astounded that an individual can find this information'). Larry Ross sank his life savings into the Foundation and Keith credits him with single-handedly establishing local opposition to the Vietnam War. Duffield was in on the founding of the Joint Council on Vietnam which specialised in silent marches and banners censored by the pacifists. He describes the CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) and Quakers as 'pacifist gangsters, old fuddy-duddies who equate US atrocities in Indochina with the violence of the victims defending themselves'. None of these groups satisfied his desire for action and people's involvement, so in May 1967 he founded the Citizens' Vietnam Action Committee with himself as Chairman and Owen Wilkes as Secretary...". That was the point where Larry went one way and Keith and Owen went another.

"The Foundation went into recess in 1968 as the Vietnam War began to wind down (*actually it lasted until 1975. Ed.*), and Larry Ross's own resources became exhausted. Not that he minded using up his capital: 'There's no point in taking wealth into a nuclear grave'. He tried to get back into advertising, but was told he was too controversial and might upset certain clients. He found a job selling building society shares which left time free for peace work" (*Press, ibid*). Larry worked as administration manager for the Western Building Society for the next 12 years. That's what he was doing when I first met him when I started as a political activist in 1969 (he was a born salesman, but he had no luck selling me building society shares). He had retired as a fulltime peace activist but he certainly hadn't retired from the anti-war movement. For example, Elsie Locke's "Peace People" has a chapter titled "The Mobilisations", describing coordinated big national protests around the end of April/beginning of May 1970. "Christchurch rallied about 1,000 demonstrators who marched through Cathedral Square three times with two sit-downs. On the Sunday the PYM hosted a rock rally in the University quadrangle, where some 500, mostly young, people listened to Murray Horton, Larry Ross and James K Baxter as well as to the music. Fired with enthusiasm, the next day 11 of them held a sit-down at the Joint Services Recruiting Centre; three left when asked to go and eight were arrested" (including me and Keith Duffield).

Down Time

The 1970s were Larry's "down time", when he concentrated on earning a living and supporting his family. Not to mention his numerous other interests. "Inventing is one interest that has suffered from his concentration on the peace movement. He says he invented the sailing surf ski years ago and did nothing about it. Now it is a multi-million dollar industry. He did the same with inflatable water skis for walking on water.

Now he has an idea for a manually operated underwater propulsion device, which he would like to develop if he gets time" (*Press*, *ibid.* I used to call him "Larry the Messiah" because of my professional admiration of his healthy ego. But I never realised that his messianic repertoire actually included walking on water). There's precious little 1970s' material in his SIS file. Interestingly, when the spies really had the chance to stuff him up – when he applied for NZ citizenship in 1978, which required SIS vetting – they waved him through. "Since arriving in New Zealand in 1962, ROSS has been involved in a variety of organisations e.g. the NZ-USSR Society (1963) and the Bertrand (sic) Russell Peace Foundation which he founded in 1965. He has been a frequent contributor to "Letters to the Editor" expressing views on such topics as Disarmament, Apartheid, New Zealand's Defence Policy, and the Vietnam War, his last letter being published in the *New Zealand Listener* on 5 March 1977. Recommendation: I (name withheld) would suggest that ROSS' political consciousness was to some degree heightened by the Vietnam War and a large part of his political activities were directed against that war. It appears that the traces do not fall within the guidelines of the Cabinet Directive on Citizenship and I would therefore recommend a No Comment reply be given in respect of his application" (SIS Personal File, 9/11/78). At the bottom of that document are handwritten notes: "I (name withheld) agree. I think ROSS is a minimal current interest".

Not that he ever walked away from the anti-Vietnam War movement, which raged on throughout the first half of the 70s, until the Vietnamese people achieved their hard fought victory and true independence. I well remember Larry, somewhat the worse for wear, at the victory party at the former Resistance Bookshop. He made an impassioned speech insisting that it was a victory for Vietnamese nationalism, not Communism – he always had a bee in his bonnet about Communism, which rendered laughable the insistence of the pro-American, pro-ANZUS, pro-nuclear groups that he was some sort of Communist dupe, if not an outright commo. He always went to great lengths to assure anyone and everyone that he wasn't one – as evidenced by his self-initiated remarkable correspondence with Brigadier Gilbert, which I've already cited. At a 1980s' protest at the US military base at Christchurch Airport (Harewood) I witnessed Larry, from the speakers' truck, publicly go ballistic when he spotted a Communist Party banner in the crowd. He engaged in a shouting match with the less than pleased banner holders. Vietnam always retained a special place in his affections – he was deeply touched to be given a Ho Chi Minh T-shirt at his 80th birthday by a former colleague who had recently visited that country. A couple of years later when I had lunch with him, I mentioned that and he immediately hauled up his jersey to reveal that he was wearing that very shirt.

1980s: Larry's Time Had Come

The 1980s were Larry's golden decade and, unlike in the 60s, he wasn't pissing into the wind. He slogged his guts out for a nuclear free New Zealand (see above for Maire Leadbeater's succinct summary) and, before that decade was out, that amazing goal had been achieved and become part of the country's law (and it still is). When David Lange died in 2005 (my obituary of him is in *PR* 32, March 2006, <http://www.converge.org.nz/abc/pr32-121b.html>) he was lauded as the father of nuclear free NZ, but that accolade rightfully belongs to Larry – with the help of the hundreds of thousands of Kiwis who passionately campaigned for that cause. It was Larry's singleminded vision, boundless energy, organisational genius, unparalleled salesmanship and sheer personal charisma which provided the leadership that helped to make it all happen.

Kate Dewes wrote an obituary of Larry in the Catholic Worker Movement's newsletter *The Common Good* (61, 2012). "In his mid 50s he joined the Christchurch Peace Collective and committed the rest of his life to helping secure New Zealand's nuclear free policy and shift public opinion towards a more neutral peacemaking role in the world. In December 1981 he established the NZ Nuclear Free Zone Committee, which became the NZ Nuclear Free Peacemaking Committee in 1988. Following the lead of Devonport which had become a nuclear free borough in March 1981, he then

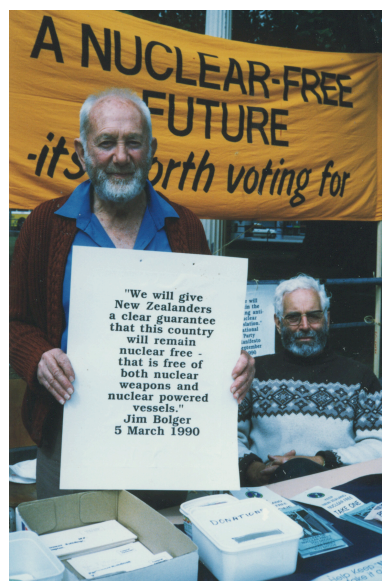
led the campaign to get other local councils declared nuclear free. Christchurch became the first nuclear free city in March 1982, the same night as Lyttelton. Over the next two years Larry visited 25 centres nationwide helping establish local peace groups especially in small towns. By the time our now famous nuclear free legislation was passed 25 years ago in June 1987, over 72% of the population lived in locally declared nuclear free zones. He encouraged people to act locally, to dress formally, meet MPs, collect petitions by door knocking, write letters to papers, and have stalls in main streets”.

Kate wasn't kidding about Larry's insistence on dressing formally. "Anti-nuclear campaigner Larry Ross flatly refuses to be photographed wearing a nuclear free New Zealand T-shirt. 'No, I'd rather not', he says firmly. 'It's just too easy for people to say it's all part of that hippie dippie stuff and downgrade the issue'" (*New Zealand Herald*, 14/11/89, "Larry Ross follows his dream", Gilbert Wong). This old dippie hippie got the message that I should wear my funeral suit and (only) tie to Larry's April 2012 funeral, which was held in a suburban Baptist church. Larry was an active Unitarian all his adult life, in both Canada and NZ. He told the *Press*: "I'm not religious but peace work has become like a religious mission to me" (*Press*, 27/4/82, "Canadian pressing for NZ as neutral refuge in World War III", Garry Arthur).

When I helped the octogenarian Larry to get his SIS Personal File, the accompanying letter denied that the SIS had ever had a file on the NZ Nuclear Free Zone Committee or its successor the NZ Nuclear Free Peacemaking Association. That flatly contradicted what the current SIS Director, Warren Tucker, had told another prominent peace activist in a letter in which he itemised the four peace groups which he said had been the subject of SIS files. So I helped Larry to successfully pursue the separate file on the Committee/Association (there had been a "misunderstanding" said the SIS, it was all down to a filing error. Of course it was). There is nothing particularly exciting in that file, nothing worth quoting here, because it is virtually all comprised of Larry's own writings, either in *Nuclear Free*, the group's newsletter, or other newspaper clippings. But that alone provides a fascinating record of just how much was going on in those hectic 1980s' years, and of just how much Larry got done.

Stan The Man

Larry was front and centre in that incredibly vibrant 1980s' peace movement. He was back working with some of his original colleagues, such as Owen Wilkes, who had gone on to a stellar career as an internationally famous peace researcher and activist. A 1983 *Evening Post* article is illustrated by a photo of Owen and Larry together on the steps of Parliament (they look polar opposites, both sartorially and tonsorially). They were there to present a 50,000+ signature petition calling for NZ to be declared a nuclear free zone. There were some veteran Christchurch campaigners who worked closely with Larry for many years. For example, in my obituary of Stan Hemsley (*PR* 34, July 2007, <http://www.converge.org.nz/abc/pr34-142a.html>) I quoted Larry's eulogy at Stan's funeral, which was probably Larry's last public speaking appearance: "Stan was a dedicated member of the Executive and tireless worker for the New Zealand Nuclear Free Peacemaking Association from our foundation in 1981. He helped our national three part campaign started in 1981 to have the Government declare New Zealand a Nuclear Free Zone...He wrote brilliant Letters To The Editor of the *Christchurch Star* and *Press* on peace and many other subjects. He designed and made peace banners for our various marches and



demonstrations. He could always see the big picture - that mankind was capable of triggering his own global suicide and often came close to doing just that. That realisation kept Stan working for peace and nuclear disarmament all his life. Almost every week during the 1980s he operated a Nuclear Free NZ peace stall in Cathedral Square, often on his own, but usually with others. They gave away and sold literature, badges, stickers, T-shirts and posters and publicised the cause. He loved people and getting involved discussing the issues of the day. In 1982, he constructed a huge dummy of a nuclear missile out of a steel drum, welded the front cone and tail fins then painted it red for danger. He wanted to dramatise the terrible dangers of the international nuclear missile race. He would drive around Christchurch with the missile and an informative sign on a trailer. Then put it on display at peace events to demonstrate Man's perilous and fragile existence. Stan was a unique mixture of hands-on practicality and insights into the multiple environmental, war and nuclear threats to humanity...". It was Stan the ever practical man who rigged up an old washing machine wringer so that Larry could squeeze flat each bulging copy of his newsletter and other mailouts, after Larry had got into a contretemps with Post Office counter staff about the size of his items and how much he should be paying for them. According to one eyewitness Larry proceeded to stomp on the offending item on the Post Office floor so that it would make the fit and go at the lower price. The wringer was Stan's solution to that problem.

Inspired People To Build A Movement

Part of Larry's genius was to inspire new people to get actively involved. John Gallagher who worked very closely with Larry in the 1980s and 90s wrote, in an online tribute: "I first met Larry a year or so before he got into nuclear-free campaigning. He joined a social club of which I was also a member, as was Jenny Lineham. Jenny lived just around the corner from his Keyes Road address. These were Cold War days, and Larry drew us and some others at the club into conversations about the global nuclear situation and New Zealand's connection to it as a member of ANZUS. This was around 1980-81. At one point Larry put together a paper on the subject, which he piloted one evening with the social club at Jenny's home.

"Like many interested in current affairs I had been used to 'for or against' framing of many issues which could lead to seemingly endless, polarised argument. A remark he made that evening rung a lot of bells with me as something that could enable New Zealand and New Zealanders to make a difference. Referring to the then recently resolved Iranian hostage crisis he remarked that the Algerians, as a neutral third party, had enabled the parties involved to reach an agreement. That crisis involved Iranian students invading the United States Embassy in Teheran in 1979 and holding over 50 US Embassy staff hostage for 444 days, for well over a year. An agreement was made for their release in January 1981.

"Larry also emphasised how Switzerland, because it was neutral, was suitably positioned to offer peacemaking services to Cold War antagonists. In other words, neutrality could be a practical option, indeed something the world actually needed. Larry carefully differentiated his neutrality from 'isolationist' neutrality by calling it 'positive' neutrality, and later on more descriptively, 'positive, peacemaking neutrality'. Critics in the peace movement quickly pointed out that Switzerland had this or that flaw. Of course it did - all countries do. Then there were also three other neutral models of what neutrality could be in Europe, each with their own unique strengths and weaknesses, cultures and style of neutrality - Austria, Sweden and Finland. The case did not stand or fall on everything Switzerland did or did not do. What Larry wanted to do was not just to get rid of ANZUS, but replace it with a clear and viable alternative, which was why he proposed positive neutrality.

"Larry was soon engaging Jenny, who had a background in typing and office work, to type up media releases and letters. The era of affordable desktop computers had not

yet arrived. Soon she also helped set up office structures and procedures in his home. A hard-working New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone Committee also came together. In the early days this included Jenny Lineham, Carol Peters, Bob and Barbara Leonard, Dennis Small, Julie McKinnon, Keith Burgess and Stuart Hickman and others. Soon Larry was putting out a newssheet which became a regularly produced *Nuclear Free* magazine. He also toured the country, setting up local groups to campaign and lobby to have their local bodies declare their area nuclear free zones.

“Many volunteer workers also came to his place over the years to help get newsletters out, and increasingly also, to send out petitions for a nuclear free New Zealand, literature, badges and bumper stickers in response to requests from all over the country and the world. Larry noted how instead of just discussing roads and potholes, the councils throughout the country were now also debating ‘the fate of the Earth’ and what they could do about it. He encouraged and helped organise the lobbying of politicians both locally and in Wellington. United States, Russian, British and Swiss embassies were also visited. As Jenny remarked, when I contacted her to check out some details for this blog, Larry created a structure that ‘reached and motivated ordinary grassroots people around the country to feel they could do something and to act together’” (<http://www.village-connections.com/blog/?p=6400>).

Jenny Lineham wrote, in her online tribute: “Many people want to contribute their skills and talents to making the world a better place. The problem is there is often no ready-to-hand means for individuals to come together and act in ways that are both collectively effective and personally meaningful. Larry created opportunities for people to contribute by turning his home at Keyes Road, Christchurch, into a national coordination centre to support peace group formation and activities in localities throughout New Zealand: I would say it was Larry's gift that he could relate to mainstream people and empower them to take some action. This is what happened to me. Having absolutely no background in political matters, Larry got through the message of how important it was for ordinary people to make their feelings felt. Next thing, I'm inviting around 30 friends for an evening to discuss such matters with Larry as the guest speaker and he brought along Barry Metcalf (sic*). Next thing, the New Brighton Peace Group is formed. From here I became involved at HQ with secretarial type duties and along with many others kept the office going as Larry set off on his trips to inspire people to set up local peace groups in all sorts of places” (“Learning from successful Nuclear Free Peacemaking”, <http://www.village-connections.com/blog/?p=6414>). *Owen Wilkes' obituary of Barry Mitcalfe is in *Watchdog* 52, May 1986, <http://www.historicalwatchdog.blogspot.co.nz/2009/12/foreign-control-watchdog-may-1986.html>.

Exposing CIA Plots

It was in the 80s that the political activities of Larry and CAFCINZ/CAFCA were the most aligned that they were ever to be. A Christchurch *Star* article headed “Ex-CIA men may give talks in NZ” (3/6/86) featured both Larry and me. “Planned visits by two ex-CIA agents who have blown the whistle on their former employer could cause friction between the United States and New Zealand. Philip Agee, author of ‘Inside The Company: CIA Diary’, and who, in the 1970s, revealed the names of many alleged Central Intelligence Agency officers around the world, has been invited to speak by the organisation Campaign Against Foreign Control In New Zealand. The other former agent is Ralph McGehee, author of ‘Deadly Deceit’, based on his 28 years in the CIA and who has been invited by Larry Ross of the Nuclear Free Zone Committee to speak on CIA infiltration of unions, papers and politics”.. Well, Larry succeeded where CAFCINZ/CAFCA and I failed (incidentally I use both our previous and current title, because this spans the period when we changed name). Three years of work to get Agee to tour NZ came to nought in 1987, when he changed his mind and declined the invitation that he had previously

accepted, citing a rearrangement of priorities (my obituary of Philip Agee is in *PR* 36, August 2008, <http://www.converge.org.nz/abc/pr36-164a.html>). But Larry did successfully tour Ralph McGehee through NZ, in August 1986. Indeed, McGehee's visit marked the only time that I ever visited Larry's New Brighton home in the nearly 40 years that he lived there. He and his colleagues, including Dennis Small and Bob Leonard, who went on to become my very close colleagues, did excellent work in analysing and exposing the CIA destabilisation plots against New Zealand in the 80s, when this country was seen as posing a dangerous threat to the US, because of the nuclear free example we presented to other American allies, who might get infected by what was called "the New Zealand disease".

CAFCA, ABC and Larry had a long running shared interest in the murky world of US intelligence agencies. Right through the 1980s and nearly to the end of the 90s he supplied both groups with a photocopy of each issue of the wonderful US magazine *Covert Action Information Bulletin* (which later renamed itself *Covert Action Quarterly*). CAFCA holds nearly a complete set of these, filling three file boxes in my office, dating back to the second issue, in 1978. It was only when the quality of the photocopies we were getting from Larry deteriorated to the point of illegibility (I have a vivid memory of the toner coming off the pages and all over my hands when I was trying to read an issue in bed) that CAFCA/ABC severed the arrangement with Larry and dealt directly with the magazine (sadly, and without explanation, *Covert Action Quarterly* stopped publishing with number 78 in 2005). In *PR* 11, December 1996, Larry reviewed *Covert Action Quarterly* under the heading "US Magazine Exposes CIA Assassinations, Plots, Coups And Disinformation" <http://www.historicalpeaceresearcher.blogspot.co.nz/2010/06/peace-researcher-vol2-issue11-dec-1996.html>. That may well have been the only time that Larry ever wrote for *Peace Researcher*, at least to my knowledge. It illustrates his lifelong interest in the CIA and co.

Naturally the local Rightwing apologists for the American Empire came to the conclusion that any Kiwis not on Uncle Sam's side during the Reagan years of the Cold War must be commos, if not outright agents of the Soviet Union. At the beginning of this obituary I have already mentioned the extraordinary May 1988 issue of *Plain Talk*, the journal of the now forgotten Plains Club, which was a stridently pro-American, pro-nuclear, pro-ANZUS Christchurch-based lobby group in the 80s. This issue was titled "Rent-A-Demo: New Zealand's longest playing soap opera" and was aimed at "exposing" the peace movement (I was given it by a bemused journalist who had received it from the Plains Club). It listed the "Leading Characters" as "Horton, Murray" and "Wilkes, Owen". The "Supporting Cast" included: "Hager, Nicky; Ledbetter (sic), Maire; Leonard, Bob; Locke, Elsie; Rosenberg, Bill; and Ross, Larry". It filled 12 of its 16 pages about us. Its' conclusion was: "While Wilkes, Hager, Ledbetter (sic), Horton, Rosenberg, Leonard, Ross and the many others may not be overtly pro-Soviet, they are socialists. They are steeped in the doctrines of Marxism and have a natural affinity for that cauldron of revolutionary socialism, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Their activities pose a very real threat to the future stability, and indeed the freedom, of the countries of the South Pacific region". The Plains Club calling Larry a "socialist" was the 1980s' equivalent of the Tea Party calling Barack Obama one, and about as accurate. As for the bullshit about the Soviet Union, bear in mind that this was written a mere three years before the Soviet Union imploded and disappeared without a trace, taking the "Communist bloc" and the "Second World" with it (yes, there used to be another "World" between the "First" and "Third" ones). I was never a fan of the Soviet Union. I went there once, in 1978, as a rank and file tourist who crossed it from the Pacific to the Baltic on the Trans-Siberian Express, and it didn't strike me as a "cauldron" of anything, let alone "revolutionary socialism". Ah well, the Rightwing conspiracy nutters have never let the facts get in the way of a good story.

Larry Was A Professional, In Every Sense

To quote from Mike Crean's obituary of Larry in the *Press* (5/5/12, "Leading figure in NZ anti-nuclear crusade"): "When his children had left home he returned to full-time anti-nuclear campaigning, in 1981. He established the Nuclear Free Zone Committee that year. Revenue from books, posters, stickers and other protest merchandise that he developed helped sustain him. Maintaining a fitness regime of daily swimming at QE11 pool and walking on the beach near his New Brighton home kept him in good physical trim. He built up a formidable collection of books, journals and papers. They filled his house and garage to overflowing, but they also provided the background for him to argue his case against nuclear weapons to groups and towns throughout New Zealand and abroad.

"His achievements included the successful promotion of the idea for towns and regions to declare themselves nuclear free. He gave hundreds of addresses and did radio and TV interviews around the world. Daughter Laurel says her father travelled widely 'empowering people to start neighbourhood peace groups to lobby their local councils to declare a Nuclear Free Zone'. Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland City Councils were among 86 local bodies that had passed the declaration by 1984, when the Labour government was elected on this policy platform. Within three years 72% of New Zealanders lived in 105 nuclear free zones and the policy was enshrined in legislation. Ross was awarded the Queen's Service Medal and the Peace City Award for his work.

"Leading peace campaigner Kate Dewes says Ross differed from other activists in two main ways. Ever the 'professional' man, he was always well dressed and groomed. He insisted on wearing a suit and tie. He wanted to break the common image of a 'peacenik' and make it difficult for people to dismiss him as a crank. He remained sharply focused on the nuclear threat to humanity, refusing to broaden his focus to other topical issues while his peers were protesting against apartheid, abuses of the Treaty of Waitangi and violence against women. Some people in the peace movement found Ross overwhelming. He was a forceful character with strong self-belief. He was relentless and brash, in a North American way, Dewes says. He mellowed with age and became better able to work with others and empower them. 'He was energetic and dynamic. He did his research thoroughly and always had the facts at his fingertips. I honour his perseverance and commitment. I learned a lot from him. He had a huge impact on keeping New Zealand nuclear free', says Dewes".

No Saint

That extract from the *Press* obituary hints at a darker side of Larry, who was definitely no saint. Words such as "sharply focused...refusing to broaden his focus...overwhelming...forceful...relentless and brash". Larry was a messianic figure with a very strong ego (I remember a journalist from a national publication telling me that he'd got sick of Larry regularly ringing to urge that the publication write about him and his campaign). He was not foremost a team player, nor did he practise internal democracy in the groups that he founded and/or headed. He did not accept the concept of agreeing to disagree; on the contrary, he publicly and repeatedly attributed base motives to those on the same side who disagreed with him, or who had different priorities. I emphasise that I had no personal experience of this – the only time we ever actually worked together was in the final three years of his life, on the project of getting his SIS file. By that stage he was a mellowed out and likeable old man who was in a rest home and who had lost his short term memory to a series of mini-strokes. In his prime in the 80s, when his and CAFCA's interests and activities were most closely aligned, namely in our mutual interest in CIA activities, we weren't travelling on the same train but on two separate trains on parallel tracks. CAFCA's focus was always much broader than that of getting New Zealand nuclear free, or peace issues in general.

So my experiences and memories of Larry are entirely benign. But not so for some of my friends and colleagues. No names of individuals or groups – but I was told that

his idea of running a committee was to tell them what he'd done and expect retrospective approval. In one group things got so bad that an official mediator was engaged to see if problems could be worked out. They couldn't and people walked out, leaving Larry to it. When he died, one of my current colleagues, who had started off in the peace movement in the 80s, said: "Well, I won't be going to his funeral. He 'outed' me as a CIA agent at a peace gathering because I supported Maori sovereignty" (unlike CAFCA, he never changed the country's name in his group's title from New Zealand to Aotearoa). Larry regarded those sorts of issues as not merely distractions and deviations from the One True Path but as manifestations of a treason to the peace movement – specifically, his definition of the peace movement - being manipulated by the malign forces of the US covert empire. He made a lot of enemies in the broader progressive movement by indiscriminate accusations of "CIA influence". When Owen Wilkes very publicly turned his back on the peace movement in the early 90s and supported nuclear powered ships being admitted to NZ harbours, Larry let loose with the "CIA" claim again. Until the end of his life, whenever Owen was mentioned, Larry wondered aloud if "the CIA had got to him". Larry's commendable vigilance against the likes of the CIA could also veer into outright conspiracy theories. In our last ever "real" conversation a few years ago (I don't count the ones when he was in the home, etc, because, although he didn't have dementia or anything like that, the brain damage caused by his strokes-induced memory loss meant that he couldn't keep up his end of the discussion so well), he expressed surprise that I didn't agree with him that the 9/11 terrorist atrocities were an inside job by the US government. My view of that theory is it that it insults the intelligence of America's enemies by suggesting that they lack the motivation or the military and technical ability to do what they did with such devastating effect. It's almost a form of thinly disguised racism.

That's enough of the criticism, which is all second hand, but it is essential to provide balance. A veteran peace activist summed it up best by saying: "I admired Larry but I didn't love him". After a lifetime of high profile and very contentious single issue peace activism which included a globally significant victory over the world's strongest superpower, that is a fitting epitaph. I'd be happy to settle for that for myself. If you're serious about making real change, you're going to make mistakes and make enemies; people are going to get hurt, including those close to you. The old saying "nice guys finish last" is not usually thought of as applicable to the peace movement, but Larry was proof that you need steel in your backbone to get things achieved. Maybe the 1983 *Christchurch Star* headline labelling him the "strongman of the peace movement" wasn't so silly after all. Most emphatically, Larry wasn't a "hippie dippie". He wasn't even a classic pacifist – in more than one media interview he said that he'd be prepared to "shoot a gun" to defend New Zealand.

Never Stopped Campaigning

New Zealand becoming nuclear free by law was certainly not the end of it for Larry. To quote from the *New Zealand Herald* profile on him (14/11/89, "Larry Ross follows his dream", Gilbert Wong): "But after eight years as a full-time peace worker, Ross is not one jot more optimistic. Humanity, he says, still has a better than even chance of being the first species on the planet to trigger its own extinction. A nuclear free New Zealand is only a faltering step away from that prospect, he says. And a nuclear free zone is only half a foreign policy. It means little if New Zealand does not take the next step and declare itself neutral and walk away from the Western military alliance.

"Ross sees New Zealand becoming a South Pacific Switzerland or Sweden. 'Neutrality does not mean that we would not have armed forces. We would defend ourselves in the case of attack. But neutrality would become our main defence. We would be too valuable a resource for other Pacific nations to invade'. Ross dreams of New Zealand as a nation respected for professional peacekeeping, supplying observers, peacekeeping troops and offering a neutral debating ground... Ross thinks there is ample room for such a nation in the Southern Hemisphere. He has

been to see the American Embassy about it. 'The Ambassador heard me out and agreed that it all made sense, but was something the American government could not countenance'....

"Ross shows no sign of losing his enthusiasm for the campaign. But his continuous campaigning has exacted a personal toll. His marriage ended in divorce. 'At times I regret that I was not a better father to my children. I could have been there more'. Two of his children support his work. The others are more distant. Does the continuous pounding against what appears to be the unassailable walls erected by the superpowers, and the mounting evidence he collects of major destruction, weigh down the spirit? 'No, not at all', he says. 'You become like a doctor in an accident and emergency clinic. Every night bloodied bodies pass before you. There's little point in fretting. It's a job that has to be done'. Ross considers what drives him on. 'In five billion years the Sun will be a white dwarf and we'll all be dead anyway. But why do we have to go before our time? It was Jean-Paul Sartre who said that when we choose, we choose in part for all men. I think we have to choose to live rather than to die'".

"Even after the National Party adopted the (nuclear free) policy in 1991, Larry did not give up. He toured 17 towns warning that NZ must not return to ANZUS. He also spoke in Australia, Italy, Japan and Canada. When Christchurch became the first United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Peace City in 2002 Larry received one of eight inaugural Peace City Awards. His amazing collection of papers is safely stored in the Macmillan Brown Library at Canterbury University" (Kate Dewes' obituary of Larry, *The Common Good* 61, 2012). Larry certainly did not give up peace campaigning but he never had the same profile or impact that he'd achieved in the 1980s. Mind you that was a nice problem to have because it was a problem of success, not of failure, namely his leading role in this country becoming nuclear free.

He never ceased campaigning against the threat posed to all life on Earth by nuclear weapons (a threat which remains just as real today). Nor did he stop vigorously campaigning against those who wage war (but the SIS finally worked out that he wasn't an enemy of the State and stopped spying on him. The last clipping in his Personal File is dated 1994. Ironically it's a *New Zealand Herald* article [11/4/94] headed "US admiral's visit splits protesters", featuring opposing quotes from Larry on behalf of the Nuclear Free Peacemaking Association and Nicky Hager on behalf of the Coalition Against Nuclear Warships). He was actively involved in the Christchurch campaigns against the 1991 Gulf War; the 2001 invasion and occupation of Afghanistan (which is still ongoing); the 2003 invasion and years-long occupation of Iraq; and the endless "War on Terror". Just a few years ago, in the middle of the last decade, Larry, by then in his late 70s, was still publicly speaking out against the danger to world peace posed by the Bush Administration's threats to wage war on Iran (that remains a current threat, but one now being waged by Israel, rather than directly by the US). He remained a peace movement activist and supporter until the end of his life, attending peace movement functions until his final year - the nuclear free sticker on the door of his room in the rest home left residents, staff and visitors in no doubt as to what he stood for.

Final Few Years In A Home

Throughout those last two decades Larry and I saw each other now and again (we were never personal friends or direct colleagues; we never had a political discussion outside of the parameters of the peace movement, so I have no idea what his politics were or even who he voted for). He belonged to CAFCA off and on (although he never joined ABC); we saw each other at peace movement activities and meetings; we even bumped into each other at the movies now and again (don't worry; they were good PC anti-war documentaries, not Hollywood action movies). And we socialised in as much as I attended Larry's 70th and 80th birthday parties, and he came to my 60th in 2011 - he enjoyed it so much that as he left, he said:

“Have another one next Saturday!”. As I’ve already mentioned I saw more of him in his final three years than ever before, because of our successful joint project to secure his SIS file. That was a long drawn out process and involved me visiting Larry in the home on several occasions and also taking him out for some very sociable lunches, accompanied by old friends and colleagues such as Bob Leonard and Warren Thomson.

To quote from Mike Crean’s obituary of Larry in the *Press* (5/5/12, “Leading figure in NZ anti-nuclear crusade”): “His health suffered in latter years and after a spell in hospital, he entered a rest home in 2007. He rebounded and regained much of his independence, helped by the loving care of partner Brenda Crocker. He kept a lively interest in current events, plants, photography, food and arts and crafts”. Brenda certainly deserves a big vote of thanks for the care she took of Larry in his final years, and for her constant companionship. It is highly unusual to have got this far into the obituary of a Christchurch person without mentioning the earthquakes. That’s because Larry was unaffected by them. The home he lived in is in the west of the city and was unscathed (Larry told me that he looked out the window during the original September 2010 quake and told me: “The land danced!”). Bob Leonard and I took him on a late 2010 outing to see his old New Brighton home of 40 years, which had been converted into a small business – from the outside at least, it looked fine (I don’t know how it fared in the much more destructive February 2011 quake and subsequent big aftershocks). But Larry was lucky to no longer be living in New Brighton or anywhere else in the east of the city, where whole neighbourhoods have been condemned as no longer habitable and thousands of people have to involuntarily leave. He was particularly lucky not to have ended up in an eastern suburbs rest home – several were destroyed, leaving their residents not only homeless but substantially out of pocket

Larry remained remarkably fit and youthful looking until the end. He looked more like 64 than 84. When Becky and I paid him a final visit when he was terminally comatose in hospital, she said, with the brutal honesty of the spouse: “You’ve got more wrinkles than him”. Whenever I visited him in the home I had to make sure that I fitted it in around his daily walk. I last saw him, quite unexpectedly, just days before his fatal stroke and he was his usual friendly, chatty self. The problem in his final years was the short term memory loss caused by a series of mini strokes. Bob Leonard and I witnessed this when we took him on another outing, to visit the Owen Wilkes memorial bench in Beckenham Park. When we told him where we were going, he asked: “How is Owen these days?” We had to gently tell him that Owen had killed himself, in 2005. To which Larry replied that he did remember that now. Our outing fired up his old instincts and he parted company with us by saying that he would start writing letters to the *Press* again, maybe do another speaking tour. But those resolutions would have been soon forgotten, as our visit no doubt also was.

Remarkable Legacy; Brilliant Organising Model

“It has been a privilege to work closely with Larry for over 32 years. He leaves a remarkable legacy. His fundamental role in our nuclear free heritage is yet to be properly documented and extolled. When it is, he will be acknowledged for his passion for world peace, his intellectual capabilities and his dogged perseverance despite meagre funding and other challenges. Larry nurtured a compelling obsession that called us all to reject violent solutions and embrace a constructive altruism based on mutual respect, independence and peace. May he now rest knowing he has helped create and shape a policy that New Zealanders will always identify as fundamental to who we are as a nation” (Kate Dewes’ obituary of Larry, *The Common Good*, 61, 2012).

“Many people at this funeral and in the wider community have, like me, opposed New Zealand’s entanglement in the nuclear threat and the wars of world powers. But Larry was exceptional. He was possibly the single greatest contributor to making New Zealand nuclear free through years of hard work, dedication and sacrifice. His

contributions to peace by no means end there, but New Zealand's nuclear free status is a distinctive and invaluable part of New Zealand's history and values. It certainly was influential in changing the thinking of people around the world as to the seriousness of the issue and whether they could do anything to reverse the arms race. Larry, go in peace and with pride in what you achieved" (Bill Rosenberg, tribute for Larry's funeral, April 2012).

I concur with both Kate and Bill and would add one observation of my own. If Larry is remembered for nothing else (but he will be) let it be for the absolute genius of the model he used to drive the nuclear free movement, namely getting councils of cities, town and regions to declare themselves nuclear free. But he didn't approach this as a top down thing to be lobbied for with local body politicians and bureaucrats. No, Larry built it from the bottom up, by urging grassroots people to form local peace groups (there were hundreds of them right through the country in the 80s) and for people to declare their churches, schools, workplace, streets, even their houses, nuclear free. It was a single issue campaign but an incredibly important one, which took on a nuclear superpower and its local collaborators and won. It's an organising model that is applicable to any number of current issues. Of course Larry singlehandedly did not make New Zealand nuclear free, no more than David Lange did. But Larry played a critical, leading, role in achieving that amazing feat.

We Musn't Rest On Our Nuclear Free Laurels

I'm going to conclude by doing something of which Larry would have approved, namely by issuing a call to action. This is a press release that I circulated on behalf of the Anti-Bases Campaign on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Nuclear Free Act, which is "a worthy cause for celebration for what was, and is, a fantastic achievement. It is also timely to remember that it was accomplished by hundreds of thousands of ordinary New Zealanders who were prepared to confront the State and its pro-nuclear, pro-war, pro-ANZUS status quo. They directly confronted the US nuclear machine and its New Zealand enforcers on the water; on land they confronted and defeated a colonial mentality that swapped from gutlessly hiding behind Mother England's skirts to gutlessly hanging onto Uncle Sam's coat tails. The victory belongs to the New Zealand people; the headline hogging politicians only surfed the tsunami of public opinion.

"But New Zealanders can ill afford to rest on our nuclear free laurels. Much remains to be done. For nearly 60 years Christchurch Airport has been the site for a US military base, albeit one that is a medium level transport base. How many New Zealanders know that US military planes using it operate under exactly the same 'neither confirm nor deny' policy that has seen US warships banned from New Zealand since 1987? Christchurch remains the only city in Australasia to host a US military base. This country still operates two 'New Zealand' spy bases – at Waihopai and Tangimoana. In the case of Waihopai, it is a US spy base in all but name, operating as an outpost of the US National Security Agency in rural Marlborough. Details of all three bases can be found at www.converge.org.nz/abc.

"In the 25 years since New Zealand became nuclear free by law, our Government, whether National or Labour, has continued to help the US fight its seemingly endless wars. Currently NZ has troops in Afghanistan, effectively acting as mercenaries helping the US to prop up a corrupt regime of opium barons, warlords, murderers and misogynists, in a totally meaningless war. In recent months NZ has sent troops to train on US soil; hosted US combat troops here; and sent NZ warships to take part in US naval war exercises – all of these for the first time since NZ was unceremoniously kicked out of ANZUS in 1986 for having the unmitigated gall to put our own national interests first.

"Wikileaks reveals that full intelligence relations between NZ and the US were covertly resumed in 2009; plus revealing a whole lot more details about the extent of that cosy covert relationship, right through key organs of the NZ government. All in all it adds up to a concerted drive to putting the 'NZ' back into ANZUS and turning back the clock to the good old days when NZ was a loyal satellite of the American Empire. The nuclear free movement in this country did a great job but it's not finished by any means. And the powers that be in both Washington and Wellington are doing their level best to completely undo it. They need to be forcefully reminded of the successful campaign of the New Zealand people for an independent foreign policy, of which the Nuclear Free law was an important part; a policy which rightly earned this country both international admiration and self-respect. Instead of restoring military and intelligence ties with the US, NZ needs to be breaking the chains that bind us to the world's biggest warmonger" (13/6/12; "We Mustn't Rest On Our Nuclear Free Laurels: Concerted Drive To Put The 'NZ' Back Into ANZUS"). Larry, you can rest in peace (how appropriate), you've more than done your bit. But for the rest of us, there's still plenty of work to be done.