

### A Long-Term and Dedicated Worker for Disarmament

*Ian Prior was a member of, and an extremely generous annual donor to, CAFCA from 1993-99, and he was also an extremely generous donor to the CAFCA/ABC Organiser Account which provides Murray Horton's income. He was among the very first to donate when it was set up in 1991 and his most recent donation was in 2004. He was actively involved in a multiplicity of campaigns for decades, some of which involved CAFCA. Nick Wilson is the Chair of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (NZ). This obituary was written for the Anti-Bases Campaign's newsletter Peace Researcher 38, July 2009 and is also published in IPPNW (NZ)'s June/July 2009 newsletter. Ed.*

Ian Prior, who was well known to the New Zealand peace movement, died in February 2009, aged 85. Ian regarded the threat of nuclear weapons as a critical public health issue and with a group of physician friends he co-founded the New Zealand branch of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW)\* in 1981. He played leading roles in the New Zealand branch (including as Chairperson), and provided sustained contributions to the international efforts of the organisation for over two and a half decades.

*\*See "SIS Spied On CAFCA For A Quarter Of A Century", by Murray Horton, in Watchdog 120, May 2009, online at <http://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/20/06.htm>. That details the peace groups that the Director of the Security Intelligence Service has confirmed were the targets of its historic spying. IPPNW (NZ) was one of them. The Director explained that it had been necessary to spy on these groups because they had been infiltrated by "cynical Communists". Ed.*

Ian was particularly good at engaging young doctors and medical students (myself included, back in the early 1980s) in a way that made them feel part of an important and worthwhile national and international effort. Another attribute was Ian's ability to attract key international people to New Zealand to speak publicly on peace issues in well-orchestrated events. At these events it was easy to see what a great networker Ian was and how he engaged with politicians, diplomats, officials, scientists, artists and community leaders, both in New Zealand and internationally. As George Salmond\* once wrote: "with great skill and sensitivity, Ian uses his networks to advance the cause of nuclear weapons abolition". \* George Salmond is a long standing member of IPPNW, a long term friend of Ian's and he was a key figure in the World Court Project. He is a former Director General of Health.

Together with his late wife Elespie, Ian also provided critical financial resources to help IPPNW, particularly through the IPPNW Education and Research Trust. Elespie also provided strong and sustained emotional support to Ian, and frequently helped host IPPNW meetings at their Wadestown home. Ian contributed to many publications by IPPNW and other peace groups – and helped ensure that these were well produced, launched and distributed. He also contributed to various research projects, including work on the impact of nuclear testing [1].

The contribution that Ian made to nuclear disarmament activities has been well recognised, including in the book "The Health of Pacific Societies – Ian Prior's Life and Work". George Salmond also spoke eloquently about his important role on National Radio (1/3/09, Radio NZ). Furthermore, IPPNW (NZ) has recently deposited its key documents with the National Archive and this means that future historians will be able to study more closely the contribution that Ian and his colleagues have made in the disarmament field.

There was also other public recognition for Ian's long and varied contributions to disarmament, the environment, to the arts and to advancing public health. In 1988 he was awarded an Honorary DSc. (Victoria University of Wellington) and in 1996 he was inducted as an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM). Various articles expand on Ian's contributions in these other fields (e.g., [2-5]), but to me his contributions to advancing public health and disarmament particularly stand out.

#### References

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2. Pearce N: "Ian Prior and epidemiology in New Zealand". *J Epidemiol Community Health*

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3. Salmond G: Ian Ambury Miller Prior [*Obituary*]. *N Z Med J* 2009, 122:122-123.

4. Wallace C: Dr Ian Prior: MD2. *ECOLink*, March/April 2009:11.

5. Kitchin P: "Ian Ambury Miller Prior: Doctor, activist, patron of the arts". *Otago Daily Times* 2009, (11/4/09).

### Dr Ian Prior MD

by Cath Wallace

This is an extract from Cath Wallace's obituary of Ian Prior in *ECOLink*, *March/April 2009*. *Ed.*

Born in Masterton in 1923, Ian had a distinguished medical career, and was a founder of public health and epidemiology in New Zealand. He was also very generous and energetic, but used sometimes to call himself "MD squared" – a pun on his medical condition (*manic depression, now called bipolar disorder*. *Ed.*) and his medical qualifications. He suffered deep bouts of depression with a manic depressive disorder but his upside was organised, energetic, directed, urgent and engaging – hence his extraordinary feats of activism and campaigning on many issues...

Ian had an amazing knack for encouraging people, and for getting people to work together. His utterly egalitarian approach was profoundly blind to social status, though he made good use of those with wealth and connection. This was exemplified at his funeral at Old St Pauls in Wellington which was packed with activists, the "great and the good" of Wellington, family, former colleagues and which climaxed in a haka from Black Power and the presence of the Mongrel Mob. His epidemiological work with communities of the Pacific, particularly Tokelau, and Maori, particularly Tuhoe in Ruatahuna and Tikitiki left him with lifelong bonds with those communities...

Ian was chairperson of the Environment and Conservation Organisations (ECO) from 1975 to 1982. He was one of the main founders of the Save Manapouri Campaign, the first environmental mass movement campaign that shook the Muldoonist Think Big, energy and capital intensive, environmentally destructive "development" strategy to its roots by challenging the damming of the Manapouri River by the Ministry of Works and Development for hydropower development...

Ian's work for the environment was mentioned only a little at his funeral but it was major. He chaired ECO at a time of campaigning against logging of native forests, damming of our wild and scenic rivers and during the energy and anti-nuclear campaigns. ECO pressed with other groups successfully for the creation of national parks. Ian was one of the founders of ECO and he lent knowledge and expertise to the campaign against nuclear power... For him, peace, environment, health and social justice were all connected... Ian was well aware of the continuing environmental problems, even after he left the helm of ECO. In 2005 he was one of many distinguished and other people to sponsor an appeal to voters to prioritise climate change policies in their voting in the election.

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*Foreign Control Watchdog, P O Box 2258, Christchurch, New Zealand/Aotearoa. August 2009.*