

ALTERNATIVES TO ANZUS

Jo Vallentine

A nuclear-free, independent Australia based on a new sustainable economic, social and political order. That's my vision and my hope. It's also the hope of half a million Australians who put nuclear disarmament at the top of their collective political agenda at the 1984 federal election. They are too small words, "vision" and "hope" and, unfortunately, much underused in Australia today. Spoken in our federal parliamentary forum, they are almost tantamount to confessions of weakness, both in mind and argument.

It was exactly this political nearsightedness that first plunged me into the sometimes murky waters of Australian politics. After the Australian Labor Party's 1984 decision on uranium mining, which gave the green light to the Roxby Downs joint venturers, there was a vacuum in the electoral field which was partially filled by the fledgling Nuclear Disarmament Party. As someone who

was, first and foremost, an activist, my decision to enter the mainstream parliamentary process was not taken lightly. The debate within the peace movement has been lively since the last federal election, with some people preferring that we stay out of this arena altogether and concentrate, instead, in working through the major parties and encouraging greater mobilisation of support at the community level. There are also those who believe that parliamentarians elected on a single issue platform cannot address the many interconnecting concerns which face our society. Their suggestions focus around the development of a Green party which would field candidates with broad peace, social justice and environmental policies.

With 12 months' actual parliamentary experience, I am more drawn to the notion that I, as an independent, can do my best work concentrating on the issue of nuclear disarmament and its implications in the defence and foreign affairs area.

However, I believe it is important for us to draw the connections between nuclear disarmament and the broader peace issues. Working as an independent in the federal parliament on this single issue is, as I see it, the most effective way for me to work for change. If, on my election, people thought that a politician working full time on this issue could effect immediate change, reduce the number of nuclear weapons, manage to persuade the Labor government that it should ban the visits of nuclear warships to our ports, or terminate the leases on the three major US bases in Australia, then they would have been bitterly disappointed. Rather, I consider my task in politics to be one of changing attitudes, both of the major political parties and the Australian public. And I think it is in these vital areas that we are making some headway.

The main focus of my work, as I head into my second year in the Senate, will be striving to win Australians to the opinion that the only future lies in an independent nuclear-free Australia — and that means offering alternatives to the security blanket of ANZUS. A lot of work needs to be done to convince the seventy percent of Australians who cling to ANZUS that we can survive without an alliance which has moved

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us far and beyond the terms of the 35-year-old treaty. The challenge of developing creative alternative strategies for our future defence and security needs is one that faces all Australians. Our psychological, if not physical, reliance on our great friend and ally would have been greatly reduced if we were more actively concerned with these issues rather than leaving them to the academic and military boffins and the politicians.

This is an area which the peace movement must also address seriously. It is a difficult task, given that the people involved in the movement have natural and strong

reluctance to consider alternative defence in the context of continuing world-wide militarisation. But if we are indeed concerned with achieving the ultimate goal of a nuclear-free Australia, we must address the very real security concerns of the majority of Australians. Australia's progress along a nuclear-free path must, therefore, be a steady, step-by-step process.

The Dibb Report is a positive first step towards this goal as it outlines a more self-reliant defence posture for Australia. But do not think that the report somehow loosens the United States' nuclear stranglehold on us. We are still firmly entrenched in the US' nuclear war strategies and, until we free ourselves from this morally debilitating alliance with one of the world's great nuclear superpowers, we will never be truly independent. In fact, Defence Minister Beazley, when tabling the Dibb Report in the House of Representatives in June this year,

spent the first five minutes allaying Opposition fears that the Dibb Report would offend the Americans. Rather than offending, the Dibb Report complies with US policy to the letter. In line with the Guam Doctrine enunciated by President Nixon in 1969, Australia is finally looking

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towards self-reliant defence — a position which successive Australian governments have chosen to ignore. Instead, those governments chose a course which maintained our colonial client state mentality and immaturity, refusing to tackle our own defence responsibilities.

We must constantly remind ourselves of our position within the

ANZUS treaty. It does not commit us to hosting US bases on Australian soil; it does not commit us to granting landing rights for B-52 bombers; not commit us to allowing our ports to be used by nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed warships. All of these "obligations" have come about by separate and mostly secret agreements between the US government and, on many occasions, individuals in various Australian governments. The development of the alliance has moved heavily in the US's favour ... we don't even get a guarantee of help in time of threat to our national security. As we approach the embarrassing bicentenary of European occupation of Australia, it seems to be a perfect time to look at our sovereignty and to examine the alliance to determine whether it is beneficial or even relevant to our defence.

The Australian government has argued that we can have more impact on Washington from within ANZUS



than from outside it, but I can't see any evidence of this in terms of progress at the Geneva arms talks, nor, for instance, during the current wheat crisis. Personally, I think it is naive of Australians to think that the US government should consider our wheat farmers ahead of its own. But the interesting twist in this debate has been the suggestion that the bases could be used as bargaining chips in an attempt to get a better deal for our farmers. We are always being told of the vital role the bases play in arms control. Obviously, the work is not vital enough when the farmers and the government stand to lose \$400 million in lost wheat contracts. The mere suggestion undercuts the govern-

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ment's main justification for keeping bases here. It is also a good indication that the bases' peacekeeping roles of monitoring and verification must indeed be miniscule for the government to even suggest that they may be expendable.

The current wheat crisis has put our alliance with the US into sharp focus for many Australians. Generations succeeding the World War have inherited the debt of gratitude of those who fought

alongside the US between 1941 and 1945. I think we have repaid that debt many times over, and it is now time we took an independent and equal role in regional and international affairs. The events of recent months have clearly shown that our humble reliance and assumption of preferential treatment from our great ally are totally unfounded. The US could not have spelt out its position more clearly: it will look after its own interest first and foremost. It is a great shame that the string of Australian governments since 1951 did not think likewise.

It is the spirit of self-reliance that I applaud in Paul Dibb's report. That such a report was commissioned by a Labor government which has not shown itself to be dynamically different from previous conservative Liberal governments is encouraging in that it suggests it is pursuing a more self-reliant defence posture and seeking a more public debate on defence matters. However, while Mr. Beazley made it clear that we cannot depend on the ANZUS alliance with any degree of certainty, he continues to argue that we still need the US because it provides us with intelligence information and superior military technology. It may well be true that the US provides us with a great deal of our intelligence information, but just how much is relevant to the defence of Australia? I strongly submit that very little is relevant unless we intend to do something outrageous with information such as troop deployment on the Sino-Soviet border. Australia's own intelligence gathering service has proven, as recently as the fall of the Marcos regime earlier this year, that it can meet our intelligence requirements, and those of our great ally, more efficiently than the indiscriminate vacuum cleaners of Pine Gap and Nurrungar.

As for superior military technology, the first thing to point out is that, depending on our defence strategies, the military shopping list could vary considerably. We need only buy that equipment which is appropriate for the defence of this country. Secondly, the superior military technology is paid for at considerable price. We are the United States' second biggest buyer of military hardware. We don't get



bargain basement prices for the great costs of having US bases stationed on our soil, US nuclear warships or B-52 bombers visit. There is no such thing as a free lunch ... or alliance.

I agree essentially with Mr. Dobb's initial analysis of our relative security in the world, which seems to reflect the findings of the 1981 Katter report. However, Mr. Dobb's brief did not include the wider political and economic concerns that make for national security rather than purely military options. Nor was there any reference to alternative models of conflict resolution which we could explore from our secure strategic position; nor does he give us any reason why other countries in the region should not see the Australian military build-up in terms of security threat and follow suit, thus sparking a regional arms race among countries who cannot afford it any more than we can.

New Zealand is a shining example of a regional neighbour doing a serious stocktake of its foreign policy and defence arrangements. The New Zealand government is finalising its community-based defence inquiry which has been overwhelmed by more than 6,000 submissions. In October, my office is organising a conference in Canberra on alternative defence, and the keynote speaker will be Dr. Kevin Clements, one of the commissioners of the New Zealand defence inquiry. I am convinced that if we seriously hope to wreak any changes in the way we and our governments consider the defence of this country, it can only be achieved by continued and informed input from the people.

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At this embryonic stage of alternative defence, I advocate a step-by-step strategy of transarmament which would lead Australia from our new position of self-reliance within ANZUS, to defensive defence outside ANZUS, to my ultimate goal of nonviolent social, or civil defence. In tandem with these new defence ideas, Australia should be looking to develop economic security in the region.



Locked, as we have been, into a superpower alliance, we in Australia have been isolated in our own region. We are considered by most of our neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region as a major annexe of the United States — a country whose interests firmly rest in the palm of a nuclear superpower. Once detached from such an alliance, Australia could be expected to be an important active participant in our region's economic, political and cultural affairs. At the international level, Australia, as an independent and non-nuclear state, has the potential to be an important player in strengthening institutions such as the United Nations and the International Court of Justice, as well as encouraging alternative models of conflict resolution thus reducing tensions between greater and lesser powers.

There is no denying that we live in troubled times. With the rapid development of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, as well as a frightening proliferation of highly "efficient" conventional weapons, the world must make a determined effort to explore alternative ways of resolving international conflict. My

hope and vision is for Australia to be a creative force in this new mode of thinking. Growing out of the restrictive ANZUS alliance into more tailor-made defence and foreign policies, Australia would emerge as a benchmark for other "bloc" nations, both East and West, to follow suit, between and beyond the blocs. After almost 200 years of dependence on great and powerful friends and the misguided glamour-image of the Australian Digger going off to fight other nations' wars, it is time this country reclaimed its sovereignty.

The bicentenary is a good opportunity to challenge Australians with the concept of real independence and for us to learn a little neighbourliness towards nations in our own Asia-Pacific region — a relationship we have shamefully neglected for 200 years. I work for the day when the sun will rise on a self-reliant, independent Australia ... not as a European outpost, nor as the 51st state of the USA.

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