GOOD TIMES, BAD TIMES

Rethinking the Peace Movement

A Roundtable

The INF treaty is a hopeful sign. But disarmament, and the removal of the bases, is still going to be a long haul. Is it time for a rethink?

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Beverley Symons is a longtime peace activist, particularly in the movement for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific, and currently works at the University of Wollongong.

The discussion was chaired by David Burchell, ALR's co-ordinator.

I want to start by asking everyone what effect they feel the recent INF Treaty and the talk of a 50 percent strategic nuclear weapons cut has had on the peace movement in this country; on its morale; on its view of strategy; and on what it thinks should be done over the next few years.

Denis: Well, I'm recently back from a peace conference in Europe, and the feeling there was one of euphoria. The words "new thinking" kept coming up a lot. In fact, I had to remind people that what the INF has meant for Australia is the continuation of the old. The South Pacific nuclear free zone treaty, for instance, has not been ratified by any of the three major powers. The French are moving their testing site so they're obviously planning more tests. And the Australian government is using the INF to validate the bases in Australia. So I think it's had very little effect on Australia in real terms. I think there is a slight possibility that some of the peace movement people have relaxed. I'm afraid that, if they have, they're on the wrong track. It really should be a signal to increase the push for this 50 percent reduction in strategic weapons.

Mavis: I think there's a degree of optimism around, and I think it's quite well placed. A few short years ago both the Americans and the Russians were telling the most bare-faced lies, and were treating each other in a very hostile way; especially the Americans under Reagan — while the Russians were trying to pretend that the SS-20s were defensive weapons, and things of that kind. And then it didn't look as though there could be any real negotiations.

The fact is that now there have been real negotiations, and there are ongoing negotiations, and there are some agreements. But I agree with Denis that the problem is that very many people who, after all, don't spend all their lives worrying about disarmament have come to a conclusion that now it's all right. It's a bit like the partial test ban treaty and the non-proliferation treaty in the sixties — people were saying, well, it's all going to be OK, it's not really as dangerous as we thought. And you had to go through a new bout of the arms race before the peace movement got back to being more than a very minority movement, as it was for quite some time. And I'm a bit concerned that it might become a very minority movement again.

I also think people have got enormous illusions. You see, I don't believe one nuclear weapon's going to disappear because of the INF Treaty. What's going to disappear are weapons delivery systems. That's very important, and I don't want to
say that it's not — I'm not trying to undersell what's happened — but they can take all the weapons and they can put them somewhere else. It's my suspicion that many are going onto submarines, and they're all going to be in the Pacific and Indian Ocean region — and that's going to be the new area of the arms race. So I think that helps to set the agenda for the next few years — namely, that there has to be a much greater development of consciousness — especially by Europeans and North Americans — that the arms race is taking on a particularly insidious form in this part of the world, and that means that there's got to be much better communication and solidarity with people in the Asian-Pacific area.

But I think it's going to be a long, hard haul, and I don't think it's going to be terribly easy, because I do believe that lots of people feel that it's all going to go on and be all right now. Maybe after the next summit people won't be quite so euphoric, because I think the really hard questions are going to start coming up now, and it's not going to be so easy to get agreement on them. But what many people's reaction to the INF agreement has underlined once again is that peace movements have all kinds of abilities to influence things, but that none of us are going to achieve anything unless and until there are pressures on the superpowers to come to some agreements. And that leads to strategies in my view — to once again asserting the role of the non-aligned nations.

**Peter:** I see a dual reaction to the situation as well. I think, on the one hand, you've got a drop in the numbers in the peace movement anyway in the last couple of years — for different reasons, I think: mostly political cynicism, and inability to be up to the long haul. It's hard to measure how much the continued drop in support, in terms of turnout for rallies and so on, is due to the feeling that the INF agreement means that the superpowers are at least talking to each other, that we've moved away from the era when Reagan was talking about limited nuclear war, and from the Cold War posturing of the Brezhnev years and the early 'eighties. It's certainly now a much more optimistic era.

On the other hand, I've also detected a fair bit of cynicism about the agreement — a recognition that, though the missiles might be removed from Europe, it only affects about four percent of the nuclear warheads in the world; they're all being recycled; the Soviets are simply putting the actual warheads on new land-based systems; and the Americans will simply put theirs out to sea, particularly the cruise missiles. It's very easy to recycle warheads because they do it every day, anyway, with the old ones. Within a year or so — probably by the time they've got rid of the warheads from the systems in Europe — the number will already be up to beyond what it was when they signed the agreement. And I think there's a certain amount of cynicism about that.

In terms of how it affects us here in Australia, I've already seen within the period since last December a lot more interest in the whole concept of disarming the seas. There's a recognition that the weapons systems are being moved out to sea, and that the Americans in particular — who always kept a much higher proportion of their weapons systems at sea — are switching more and more to the oceans because it's so easy to operate on the sea. There's no protests because they're the wide open spaces. What the peace movement has to do is to pick up the issue of security and arms control proposals in the Pacific. The peace
movement in Australia is beginning to come to grips with this, but I think we've got a lot of work to do on it. What it means is a lot more lobbying: something we're lousy at. The environment groups and the development groups are very good at lobbying — they keep lobbyists in Canberra and so on. The peace movement loves climbing over fences, and things like that — it doesn't lobby. This is going to mean a much lower profile for the peace movement: it's not going to be the big rallies and demonstrations. I think that period is over. They were the product of fear. The sort of work we're going to have to do is going to be much more dealing with proposals for security and arms control in the region.

My feeling, too, is that we're going to have to do what the Europeans are now beginning to do after INF: that is, to look at the concept of non-nuclear defence. They're saying in Europe, you've got to get beyond the INF agreement: How are we going to defend Europe, caught between the blocs? We're going to have to do the same in the Pacific. The logical extension of a nuclear-free zone — a proper one, not the farce that we've got at the moment — is to work with countries in the region to develop alternative forms of defence strategy. I think the final problems for us in this part of the world is going to be the fact that, although the superpowers may be putting less emphasis on nuclear sabre-rattling, what we are going to see an extension of is what I call bush wars — these regional wars. Many of these wars are proxy wars. We've always argued that if a nuclear war happened it would start somewhere in the third world. That instability is still there. And I don't think the peace movement has faced up to that. We always saw the US and the Soviet Union and the nuclear sabre-rattling. We talked about wars by accident; talked about fear of holocaust; but that isn't going to be the most likely cause of a nuclear war. Mavis made the point that we're going to have to work much more closely with people in the region. This can only be tackled at a regional level for a medium-range power like Australia. These are all exciting new developments, but it's going to be a very different sort of peace movement from the one some of us have got used to.

Denis: The way forward for the peace movement is to push the hard truths.

Beverley: I think that there probably is a lot of guarded optimism: I know that a lot of people I talk to feel that way about the INF Treaty. And a certain degree of cynicism, too. I think the point is that this period of relaxation of international tensions is very fragile. The tensions and the hostilities can easily build up again. And they are in fact still there.

I also want to take up the point about the significance of the changed situation for the Australian movement. I think the Australian peace movement has got an even more important role to play internationally. I've always thought that we were in the box seat to try to explain to the European movement what was happening in this part of the world, particularly because of our long-term connections with sections of the European movement, the non-aligned movement, the Japanese movement and so on. And the role that France is playing is another big responsibility for the peace movement. We have to keep people alert and aware about that situation.

I agree with Mavis that it's sad, and it's a great pity, if there's going to be a falling off in the movement. But, on the other hand, as we all know, the movement goes in troughs and it's probably inevitable that there will be some falling off in numbers in the big rallies and so on. This means it's more complex and much harder for the peace movement, and we'll have to really think out strategies a lot more and not just rely on getting several hundred thousand people along to big rallies.

But, on the other hand, I feel that we've done an enormous amount of groundwork, too, in the movement — over the last ten years particularly — in building up consciousness about what's happening in the Pacific. The disarm the sea movement, the whole spread of the NFIP consciousness — that's been a significant development in Australia. And a lot of that is now starting to be felt in the countries of Europe and elsewhere. I haven't got any easy answers on strategy, but certainly the situation's more complex, and it will be more difficult for us to sustain the movement at the level we've been used to in the last few years. But the need is there — there's no doubt.

If we agree that the peace movement is entering a downswing, how do we think the peace movement best protects itself in that sort of situation — in periods when there's a loss of activism, and perhaps, in a certain sense, loss of morale, if it's felt that the peace movement isn't actually achieving anything and it's all happening at top levels? Should it, for instance, focus on activist campaigns; should it be going for "achievable goals", as I've heard it described; should it try to "institutionalise" itself in the way that, for instance, SANA has done? Are there ways of organising and working which, as it were, tide you
over the down periods, so that you're fortified for the up periods?

Denis: I think the way for the peace movement to protect itself is to continue to push the hard truths. I think the death knell of the peace movement will be where people water down the message. The message is a fairly shocking message, and it has to be repeated again and again. And the message is that if we're going to have disarmament, we've got to make some sacrifices. And the sacrifices are going to be in our living standards, in the way that we view the rest of the world. We've got to be prepared to dialogue with the rest of the world instead of arming ourselves to the teeth so we can blow them apart.

So we've got to be able to take risks, we've got to be highly principled. We mustn't, whatever we do, take the soft options. This is a temptation which I can see around. Take the example of Keith Suter's recent argument for "Opening the Gap". He argues that the US government would change an Australian government if the Gap were closed; therefore we musn't do anything. We must try to get the United Nations in there. But, instead, we've got to push the hard truths. The hard truth is that these bases are war-fighting bases. The porting of ships helps the war machine. And we must push that and push that, and we mustn't retreat. We've got to show some leadership.

Mavis: I think it's wrong for the peace movement to see itself as a monolith, and to say we must do this or we must do that. People are going to do different things whether we want them to or not. And while I haven't actually read Keith Suter's recent stuff, I'm familiar with other people's arguments about internationalising Pine Gap or opening it. I don't agree with them, but I think it's important to dialogue with such people and to utilise this to raise consciousness about the nature of the foreign bases in Australia. And, for my money, I'm much more interested in pinning down the responsibility to those who say, as the official Labor Party position says, or as the Labor Party's Peace and Disarmament Bureau says, "We are hosts to joint facilities" and "we will never allow these joint facilities to be used to undermine the Labor Party's program". That's absolute nonsense. In the bases debate, people like Keith are responding to what I think is the real point, that the official ALP position tries to delude the average Australian into believing that these are joint facilities.

I'd like to come back to some other aspects of our work because I've really started, I guess, by the strength of the gun lobby. The problem with the peace movement and people on the left is that they don't really analyse what all that means. If people feel so strongly about their right to have a gun, it's very hard to talk to them about what the nature of the bases is, or about nuclear weapons, because they see it all in the sense of defending themselves — and power.

Lots of people in the peace movement find analyses that women make a bit bizarre, but I think we have to think these sorts of questions through. Why is it that people who are themselves relatively powerless suddenly feel powerful when they have a gun in their hand? Isn't that, writ large, what's wrong with all the people who run national wars? Isn't this what the French in New Caledonia are saying? Arm ourselves, and get out there and kill all the Kanaks, and somehow the problem will be solved?

Of course, the peace movement has got to spend the quiet times developing dialogue within itself. But I rather like the notion of the upcoming PND disarmament doorknock entitled "It's good to be asked". I think the only way the peace movement will avoid falling into a very serious decline and become a kind of movement where we all argue among ourselves is if we go and talk to the people — perhaps people we should have talked to before — who've never been on a march, and even think it's a bit weird to go to marches, but who, by and large, have got common sense and who don't want to be killed in a war or even shot by somebody's gun from the gun lobby. I think it can be a very useful time for the peace movement if we commit ourselves to going out and talking with people who haven't been talked to before, and even listening to some of them.

I suspect, without prejudicing the results of that doorknock, that lots of people in our society feel very strongly that Australia is very poorly defended. Now there are lots of reasons why they feel this way — and a lot of the things they think I believe are wrong. But we have to address those questions. We can't say to people "You're stupid" because they'll never take any interest in movements where people think they're stupid. We've got to try to discuss rationally those questions and to meet some of the problems, and even, I think, to face up to the fact that there can conceivably be threats to Australia and Australians. I think that makes a case for a much better concept of a non-nuclear self-defence.

Now, just using those words presupposes that the bases which are controlled by the United States can't be any part of that defence. And the
visits of nuclear-armed ships and planes from other countries can't be any part of it, either. That doesn't mean that, having got rid of those things, or having tried to find a solution that doesn't encompass those things, we will have no defence. Yet I think the peace movement has tended to give the impression that that's what it's on about. And that's our weakness. But perhaps if, in this period, we're not going to be so much in the demonstrative mode, we'll get down to finding ways to conduct dialogue with people on such questions.

Beverley: I'd like to come back to the point that it's wrong to see the peace movement as a monolith. The diversity of the movement should allow for a range of different activities from the more "advanced", if you like, to the more "respectable". And there's a big gap in between them — although it's amazing how often that can be narrowed, too. People will engage in so-called more "advanced" actions when they feel very strongly about an issue. Certainly, on the bases, my strong view, which I've had for years, is that the peace movement cannot runaway from continuing to say that the bases should go. That's always been our policy. There's no question about that.

At the same time, I think it is quite valid for Keith Suter to raise his viewpoint on the bases because I think it's a real view among a section of the peace movement. But it certainly won't be supported by all — I mean, I don't support it by any means.

Likewise, there is a place, and there always has been and always will be, for direct actions — exciting, imaginative, creative actions — and I think that many of the things that happened at the last Pine Gap action were splendid, and raised people's consciousness about that issue. At the same time, there's going to be many other people who believe in different approaches. I don't know exactly what the answer is to that, except that I think there's not much point in the various sections of the movement saying "You're wrong and I'm right", let alone attacking each other.

Peter: My understanding of what's happening in the peace movement in Australia at the moment is that the coalition groups, state PNDs and so on, are falling apart in terms of money coming in, offices, staffing and so on. But the smaller groups seem to be holding their own — like the doctors' groups, the scientists' groups, the women's groups and the church groups. And that's why I think the point about the peace movement not being a monolith is important. Because these smaller groups are very diverse, and they do hold a wide range of positions. The fact is that change takes place at a lot of different points. We've got to work with people who are trying to work, for example — because I'm in Parliament House, I have to work with people who have chosen to work within the Labor Party. I respect them though I can't do it myself.

It's the same thing with the debate over the bases. I see a role for people — the Andy Macks and Des Balls of this world — who say close North West Cape and Narrungar, but not Pine Gap. I would close the whole damned lot of them for different reasons. But I think we have to work with them. The other thing I want to stress is that in Jo Vallentine's office we've deliberately chosen, since late 1986, to take up the issue of an alternative defence for Australia. We've tried to develop that debate. I feel the peace movement is beginning to tackle it. But it's still a very slow growth.

Denis: That's another temptation — to become military experts and defence analysts. I think the peace movement is a group for disarmament. And it is a hard truth, it's something that people have to grapple with. We do not have to provide all the answers. I think we are dissipating ourselves if we go into all these defence planning situations.

Beverley: But Denis, surely that's a little exaggerated. I think the question's more that the peace movement has neglected to face up to the fact that the majority of Australian people have got these fears and insecurities in their heads — and that's one of the reasons the majority of the Australian people support the ANZUS Treaty, and support the bases. This question goes back a long, long time, to the 'fifties, with the yellow hordes from the north fear, and so on ....

Peter: It goes back to 1788 ...

Beverley: Yes, of course. And it's a real question in people's heads, and therefore it's a real question for the peace movement.

Denis: But the simple answer to that is that Australia is one of the most defensible countries. We don't have to go into providing alternative defence.

Beverley: We have to be able to explain what would replace the US bases and the ANZAS Treaty and the so-called security umbrella.

Can I just shift the question slightly and ask that, if we accept for the moment the proposition that perhaps the peace movement is going to have to get involved in more
areas of technical expertise than in the past, to what extent does that undermine some of the traditional wellsprings of motivation for people to get involved in the disarmament movement anyway — which are often direct, straightforward emotional responses to the insanity of the arms race and of war in general? In other words, if the peace movement becomes more in the nature of technicians, how does the peace movement also maintain that direct, emotional appeal that's always been one of its strengths?

Peter: I think it's a path only a few of us can walk, but I think it's a path some of us have to walk. I think it will add to our credibility if we start talking in those terms. And my feeling, too, is that if we are going to reach out to the middle ground that Mavis talked about, we've also got to go and talk to those small groups of people in Australia who do go and talk about these issues, and perhaps begin to talk with some of them on their own terms. We don't have to be experts — I'll never be an expert with people who spend their whole lives in the military — but I think we can talk in terms of non-offensive defence, and try to explain what we mean by that, when we're dealing with this area of threat perception.

I see the logic that if you're going to challenge ANZUS and the dependency syndrome, you have got to respond to the question of the debate we've just raised: it comes up in people's minds. If not ANZUS, what? A lot of people in middle Australia will accept ANZUS because they can't see an alternative.

We've got to start talking in terms of those alternatives. That thinking is going on in other parts of the world; in the middle powers, outside the US and the Soviet Union. And I think that's where the Australian perspective is unique. We've got some contribution to make. The trouble is that we've got to think it out for ourselves, because we're not in Europe, not North America, not the Third World.

Mavis: I appreciate what Denis was saying earlier. It's really important that the emotional commitment is there, and is nourished — the moral point of view if you like — and I don't think that we can all become experts, or that we would all want to become experts. But I think that we ought to try more to do both of those things. You can't give away the moral imperative. I don't care what anybody seeks to prove to me. I know that nuclear weapons are wrong, and that's the end of it as far as I'm concerned. And I think that kind of gut reaction ought to be maintained and strengthened. I think this is what lots of very young people feel — but then they come up against not knowing what to do, and that then leads to a certain degree of cynicism. The expertise comes in because of a recognition by the movement that you can't just be opposed to things; you've got to then say what does come next. That's really what is being said around this table.

I mean, thereal problem for us is not that we are not heard about the bases — lots of people know that there are significant numbers of people in this country who think there shouldn't be any bases. And we have moved the situation along to the point where the government is prepared to say that the bases make us, in certain circumstances, a nuclear target. Although they then go on to say, ah...yes, but there's nothing else to put in its place, so we have to take that as a kind of acceptable risk. Now we're saying there are things to be put in its place. So you do have to have a degree of expertise. And I believe that there is now sufficient experience of alternative ideas on non-nuclear defence to at least have the debate developed further.

But I come back to — and I hate to harp on it — the gun lobby. Because we want to tackle these really big questions, yet the peace movement didn't make its presence felt at all when the gun lobby was strutting its stuff. And to me it's all the same problem. Put in a nutshell, I couldn't think of the peace movement having a meeting about anything that would get several thousand people out in a town like Albury. Now, you can just write that off and say, "Oh, well, that was National Party organising" or "It was all an election ploy", but it was still real people, and mainly men. We've got to tackle the question of what it is that makes people, mainly men, feel stronger and more powerful when they have a gun in their hands? And why is violence so acceptable? It's in these areas, I think, that lie the clues to the changing perceptions of Australians about defence. Australia, for all its pleasantness, is a fairly brutal society, it's a very male-dominated society, and it's a society that's never hesitated to use violence in a variety of ways against Aborigines, women, the poor and so on...

Peter: And fighting other people's wars...

Denis: But that's par for the course, isn't it? As I was saying before, the warmongering reaches into all our institutions, right down to early childhood. I think it was PND who campaigned against war toys. If we conceive an overall plan for society, the structures which encourage warmongering right from early
childhood are gradually going to be siphoned off. That's what I would see.

Denis, could I perhaps pose a question to you. A lot of our discussion here seems to have been implicitly around the question of the importance of public opinion as an object of activism. An issue which comes to mind here is the recent differences over the slogan "Take Back the Cape in '88". I don't want to get into the nitty-gritty of that particular debate, but one underlying controversy within it, it seems to me, was the importance of public opinion: how one addresses it, and how important it is vis-a-vis more activist-oriented activities. How do you respond to that assertion of the importance of public opinion, and how would you see it fitting in with your vision of the peace movement?

Denis: It's a big question. I think public opinion is very important and I'd love to see a lot of people support the position of closing the bases. But, while that may be a dream at the moment, I think it's important to maintain a principled stand. If we say that the bases are morally indefensible, and public opinion is against us, we just have to take it in the neck. And if that takes ten years, or however long, that's unfortunate, but at least in the end we can hold our heads up high and say that we took a highly principled stand, and the stand was right and remains right.

What we've seen with the Hawke Labor government's emphasis on pragmatism is this terrible mish-mash of policies coming out of a government which is not providing very much leadership, and he is losing a certain amount of electoral support because he is seen to be standing against the principles of the ALP. I think that is a lesson for us, that we keep on with our principles; and that we should stick by our principles even though we are unpopular. I think we're always going to be unpopular to a certain extent because there's that tendency for people to think the solution is to blow somebody out of the water, whereas the solution is often a lot harder than that, which is to say to negotiate with them and talk to them.

Beverley: One of the problems with that, Denis, is that I've been involved in trying to campaign around the bases — let alone changing the government's view, or changing public opinion — just trying to get the issue onto the agenda, for at least fifteen years.

A lot of us in recent years have really had to start to grapple with this problem of why, in all that time, the mass of public opinion still hasn't shifted on the questions of the security umbrella, the ANZUS Treaty, the US bases. The hegemony of ruling ideas has remained unbroken. We have not succeeded to any great extent in breaking through that. We put it on the agenda; we forced the government to admit certain things about the bases, to give a little more information about them, and so on. But success is still a long, long way down the track in any realistic assessment.

A lot of us are just starting to say we're a political movement, and the aim of the peace movement is to change the status quo around these questions. The real question is, how you make those decisive changes? I don't believe you can run away from the really difficult question of reaching the mass of public opinion in Australia — and changing it. There's no short-term way of doing that.

Mavis: I think we're talking past each other a little on this. I agree that you've got to continue to have a profile of opposition to the bases and nuclear weapons. But the dilemma for us is that, when a government appears to be doing considerably less than we would like it to do — although why we should have the expectation that it would do more I have not quite worked out — people don't then respond by saying, well, let us find ourselves representatives who will do these things we want. Actually, when people become disenchanted with the Labor Party, they go after something that's infinitely worse than the Labor Party. If we think it's going to be hard to maintain the peace movement's profile with the kind of Labor government we've got, then we've got short memories about what it was like under a conservative government.

Whatever else the Labor government has or has not done, its very high profile in the International Year of Peace led to a situation where peace ceased to be the nasty word that it had been through all the long years of my life. It became an acceptable and reasonable thing to be involved in deciding on your non-nuclear destiny. That went right throughout the Australian community, unlike most other countries in the world. You could say, well, that's all a bit of a cop-out anyway, because the hard questions still remain to be solved. Yet the hard questions would have been even harder if we hadn't had that. What tends to happen is that, given two options, people will be pushed to a more conservative one — a dilemma that we've always got to be looking at.

But you see, what we're really saying is that, while some people will have a moral position in opposition to the bases, and a general, well-thought-out strategic position in opposition to them, the majority opposition to the bases will not come from people just being told how bad the bases are, or what they lead us to, or that it makes us a nuclear target. Rather, it will come out of addressing the development of common security, and overcoming perceptions of enemies near and far.

My final point is that I believe that those of us who are opposed to the bases ought to be saying to the Australian government, as tensions decrease between the superpowers, what can we get the Russians to trade off for some of the things that we have as part of the American alliance. I actually think that would be an interesting debate. I'd really like to know what the Russians would give up if we gave up Pine Gap. Just as with the SS-20s and Pershing and Cruise, we might surprise ourselves as to what can be given up or traded off.
Denis: A famous peace activist once said that nothing concentrates the mind like a good court case. I'd recommend that you all get arrested, and defend yourselves in court, and see what you're up against. Get real live experience of it.

Beverley: You think that's a good lesson?

Denis: I think so.

Beverley: About what? About the power of the state against us?

Denis: And how far we've got to go in the struggle. We've got to be able to encourage ourselves in the struggle. I think, on Mavis' political point, that we've got to learn to dialogue with all sections of the movement, so that we're a little bit more united. And so when people become disenchanted with the ALP they don't tend towards a more conservative line: they head towards peace candidates or whatever. And I think a great way to do that would be if we could get a little bit more unity across a whole lot of areas.

I think the specialist groups, the solidarity groups and so on, have done great work and will continue to do great work, but occasionally we should gather together and focus on something — it doesn't necessarily have to be bases; it could be some other issue. I think if we gathered all our forces together we'd be something to be reckoned with, and we shouldn't be too apologetic about our existence.

Peter: There's two things there I'd like to take issue with you over. One is the call for unity, which goes back a long time, and of which I'm always highly suspicious. I think the strength of the peace movement is its diversity. I think there's a time for coalitions but, on the whole, the peace movement is stronger for having a lot of small groups of people who can work more effectively than some of these ghastly attempts - particularly in a country the size of Australia — to try to build unity, and which invariably mean the domination of Sydney and Melbourne as far as the rest of the country is concerned.

Secondly, I really want to take issue with you over the question of getting arrested. I say this as someone who's been arrested, so I'm not putting it down. I think there is a time and place to get arrested. But the fact is that, for the vast majority of Australians, it's an impractical option. And I think it's a very dangerous option to advocate for more than a handful of people who can afford to go out and do it, because one of the traps of going out and getting arrested is that it bogs you down in a process which can last for years, which is fiendishly expensive, and which often involves travelling great distances — particularly because the places where you get arrested in Australia tend to be miles from anywhere.

I also think there's a very great danger of the "I'm holier than thou because I've been arrested more times that you" syndrome. There are people in the peace movement who lay that trip on an awful lot of us. I think it's extremely arrogant and very dangerous. I've seen it happen particularly in the United States where I've spent a lot of time, because there is a much greater tradition of civil disobedience there.

But to return to the "unity" question. I think we can come together in coalitions, for Palm Sunday or whatever, or one-off things. The oldest and the most contentious issue in Australia on the question of the call for unity is alignment versus non-alignment, and that can be so divisive that I'd rather not put energy into it.

Beverley: I must say I share a lot of Peter's concern. It really has not been a positive experience in Australia. The Viet Nam Moratorium certainly built a national coalition movement, but not without enormous tensions and problems. I think the reality of the Australian movement over the last several years is that the small groups are mushrooming all the time. It's not a question of whether they should. They will, because people want them. Many people don't want to get involved in a big, somewhat bureaucratic — let's face it — organisation. In a way, more effective actions can be developed from the smaller, action-oriented groups. I'm not denying the need for the bigger organisations or for coalitions, but I'm inclined to think they're more effective when they're set up for particular, short-term, aims.

Mavis: I think we also ought not to get too much into the cultural cringe. A very important beginning of the NFIP movement can be traced to Australia. The concept of nuclear-free zones for municipal councils can be traced to Australia. There are all kinds of things that our movement has done to enrich the world-wide peace movement, and we've done this without being part of some big international structure.

While I think solidarity is enormously important, I think in Australia we've made that a bit of a substitute for our own activity. I think we ought to be calling in the chips a bit and asking for a bit more solidarity for Australia from the international arena. It's really important that we try to get the American movement to do something about their bases. In much the same way, I think common cause between the Australian movement and the Japanese movement, which has got a fairly long history anyway, is going to be more important as the military profile of Japan increases.

My final point is that I've often felt the Australian attitude towards the French and the French nuclear testing in the Pacific was a bit of a cop-out. We let the Americans and the Russians off the hook a bit. But, really, what is happening now in New Caledonia is going to affect the entire Pacific. I think we have to encourage the position that's so far been taken by our government, which has clearly annoyed the French. The necessity for as many facets of the movement to come together — maybe this is the thing that we can come together in unity on — in support of the rights of the Kanaks, but more particularly in opposition to French colonialism. should be very high on all of our agendas over the next few months.