

# Ending Nuclear testing in the Pacific: Bishop Bryce and the Pacific Conference of Churches

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One of the dominant issues of South Pacific regional meetings and international negotiations in the 1970s and 1980s was the use of the South Pacific as a testing ground for nuclear weapons by outside powers and, at least potentially, as a dumping ground for nuclear waste. While the establishment of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone in 1985 reduced the immediate concerns, arguments about compensation and acknowledgment of damage rumble on. The negotiations which led to the establishment of the Nuclear Free Zone have been investigated by a number of political scientists,<sup>1</sup> and studies of the Pacific Nuclear Free Movement, often by activists, have described and deplored the devastation of US Trusts Territories and their successor polities and French Polynesia by nuclear testing.<sup>2</sup> But neither the political scientists nor the activists have paid much, if any, attention to the role of church, trades union and civil society activists in preparing the ground for political action, or the links between government actors and civil society campaigners.

**Previous studies, especially in Australia, have recognised the role of Trades Unions in pressuring Australian and New Zealand governments to adopt an anti-nuclear stance. However in the Pacific the churches and other NGOs seem to have been more influential than trades unions. This paper foregrounds the activities of the NGOs and Pacific churches in the struggle against nuclear testing and dumping, and investigates the linkages between these civil society organisations and pressure put on governments,**

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew O'Neil, 'Australia and the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty: a reinterpretation', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 2004, Vol 39:3, 567-583; Yoko Ogashiwa, *Microstates and Nuclear Issues: regional co-operation in the Pacific*, 1991, Suva: ISP, USP; Greg Fry, 'Towards a South Pacific nuclear-free zone' *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 1985, vol 41:6, 16-20; Paul F. Power, 'The South Pacific Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone', *Pacific Affairs*, 1986, vol 59:3, 455-475; Stephen Henningham, 'France and the South Pacific in the 1980s: an Australian Perspective', *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 1991, Vol 92-3, 21-45.

<sup>2</sup> Amongst a large literature: Bengt and Marie-Therese Danielsson, *Moruroa Mon Amour*, 1977, Melbourne: Penguin Books; Bengt Danielsson, 'Under a Cloud of Secrecy: The French Nuclear Tests in the Southeastern Pacific', *Ambio*, 1984, vol 13: 5-6, 336-341; Giff Johnson, *Collision Course at Kwajalein: Marshall Islanders in the shadow of the Bomb*, 1984, Honolulu: Pacific Concerns Resource Centre.

**particularly during the period 1965 to 1986. One of the main supporters and facilitators of the movement – from the 1970s up to the late 1990s - was Bishop Jabez Bryce, Anglican Bishop of Polynesia from 1975, Moderator of the Pacific Conference of Churches 1976-1986, and member of various committees of the World Council of Churches.**

While protests and concern about nuclear proliferation in Europe involved the churches and NGOs from the end of the 1940s, they did not have much effect on domestic governments during the Cold War and secondly, did not concern themselves much with issues outside Europe. Nonetheless the World Council of Churches Executive Committee in Feb 1950 sent the following 'Message on the Hydrogen Bomb' to member churches:

'The hydrogen bomb is the latest and most terrible step in the crescendo of warfare which has changed war from a fight between men and nations to a mass murder of human life. Man's rebellion against his Creator has reached such a point that, unless stayed, it will bring self-destruction upon him. All this is perversion; it is against the moral order by which man is bound, it is sin against God'.<sup>3</sup>

Within the South Pacific, complaints about nuclear testing were limited by the fact that most islands were still colonies, indeed most were colonies or mandated (Trust) territories of one of the major powers – Britain, France or US – conducting the nuclear tests in the region.<sup>4</sup>

In the race to improve and expand their nuclear programs, the British, Americans and French all undertook atmospheric nuclear testing in the Pacific islands in the immediate post-war years. American testing from 1946 to 1958 in the Marshall Islands had led to concern around the region, especially after the fallout accident at Bikini Atoll on 1 March 1954 seriously contaminated the islands of Rongelap, Rongerik and Utirik, and the Japanese fishing ship *Lucky Dragon*. This resulted in the death of a Japanese crewman, accompanied by world-wide publicity as well as Japanese outrage, and cases of cancer amongst Rongelap people in particular were noted from around 1963.<sup>5</sup> Along with British nuclear tests from 1957-8, and American tests in 1962 on Christmas Island, this meant that before the Partial

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<sup>3</sup> World Council of Churches, *The First Six Years 1948-54: Report of the Central Committee presented to 2nd Assembly of WCC Evanston Illinois*, (1954, Geneva: WCC), 112

<sup>4</sup> US undertook 232 atmospheric nuclear tests in the Pacific between 1946 and 1962; Britain 24 tests between 1957 and 58; France 41 atmospheric tests between 1966-74 and underground tests between 1975 and 1998

<sup>5</sup> Jon Van Dyke, Kirk R Smith and Suliana Siwatibau, 'Nuclear Activities and the Pacific Islanders', *Journal of Pacific Studies*, 1984, vol 10, pp 4-6

Test Ban Treaty (US, USSR, UK) in 1963, at least 250 nuclear bombs had been exploded over the region.<sup>6</sup> While secrecy was maintained as far as possible, the 1962 Dominic test created an electromagnetic pulse which put out street lights in Honolulu, and heightened public concern around the region. No sooner had this anxiety been somewhat allayed by America signing the Test Ban Treaty and thereby agreeing to stop atmospheric testing from 1963, than the French, not signatories to the Treaty, started their own nuclear tests at the other end of the Pacific.

French nuclear tests began in the Pacific in 1966, after Algerian independence removed the earlier test sites in the Algerian Sahara desert from French jurisdiction.<sup>7</sup> Underlying the testing in French Polynesia was the determination of the French state to 'preserve and strengthen France's status as a *puissance mondiale moyenne*'.<sup>8</sup> The decision to maintain the 'force de frappe' must be seen in the context of French determination never again to find themselves in the position they had suffered in World War 2 – occupied by a hostile power. The Centre d'Experimentation du Pacifique (CEP) began construction work on the islands of Moruroa and Fangataufa in the Tuamotu group from 1963, and the first bomb was detonated in the atmosphere on 2 July 1966. 41 French atmospheric nuclear tests took place between 1966 and 1974.

While the American atmospheric tests ended in 1963, other concerns for Pacific Islanders included the use of Kwajalein Atoll for tests of rocket technology (as the target for missiles fired from California) and concerns about living conditions and over-crowding for the Marshallese construction and missile site workers living on Ebeye.<sup>9</sup> Other issues included requests from the Japanese to store nuclear waste material in Pacific area, an issue which was raised periodically during the 1970s and 1980s.

Lacking political independence, the ability of Pacific people to protest about other nations' nuclear experiments was seriously constrained. It was only after the independence of Western Samoa that the first protest about the proposed French nuclear testing was made - at the South Pacific Commission meeting at Lae in 1965 though the resolution (sponsored by

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<sup>6</sup> Danielsson, 'Under a Cloud of Secrecy', p. 336

<sup>7</sup> For the French nuclear tests in general see; Danielsson, 'Under a Cloud of Secrecy', pp. 336-341; Jon Van Dyke, et al 'Nuclear Activities and the Pacific Islanders', pp 1-36

<sup>8</sup> Jean Chesneau 'The Function of the Pacific in the French Fifth Republic's "Grand Design": theory and practice of the "puissance mondiale moyenne"' *JPH* Vol 26:2 1991, 256

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, *Collision Course at Kwajalein*, 19-25.

the Cook Is) did not pass.<sup>10</sup> But in the 1970s things began to change. More Pacific countries were independent or close to it, and the dangers of nuclear testing were better understood, at least by leaders and those directly affected. Birth defects and increased miscarriage rates amongst Marshallese beginning to be apparent by 1960. Thyroid cancers began to be noticed amongst Rongelap people by 1963, and first death from leukaemia was reported in 1972. Suggestions that they were being used as guinea-pigs by American scientists began to be voiced by the Marshallese.<sup>11</sup>

As a result the number of protests by both government and non-government actors rapidly increased. In 1971 the newly independent governments of Fiji and Western Samoa, along with Tonga raised the issue of nuclear testing at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Singapore, only to be told that this was not the right forum to raise the issue. In 1975 at the United Nations, Fiji, PNG and New Zealand proposed a Pacific Nuclear Free Zone, which resulted in a rather weak resolution in the UN General Assembly, expressing 'serious concern' and 'urging' that French tests should end, which was rejected by France.<sup>12</sup>

It seems however that these initiatives were not pushed by widespread popular support, although as we shall see, that was beginning. Rather these initiatives can be seen as the radicalism of early independence accompanied and encouraged by the left-wing governments of Kirk in New Zealand and Whitlam in Australia. Nuclear protests in Australia and New Zealand were well-established, and here too the role of the churches and church figures in leading more widespread public protest against nuclear testing and weaponry is evident. At St John's Anglican College in Auckland staff members George Armstrong and Raymond Pelly attempted to 'relate action and reflection, practice and theology',<sup>13</sup> in part through anti-nuclear involvement. Armstrong was part of the New Zealand Peace Squadron which attempted to stop US nuclear-powered (and probably nuclear-armed) ships from entering Auckland Harbour. Pelly was involved in a 1978 attempt to prevent the visit of US nuclear submarines, as well as several demonstrations against US warships from 1975 to 1984, and both were members of the Nuclear Free Pacific movement. Not everyone in the church approved of this activism, but the St John's College Board of Governors protected

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<sup>10</sup> Ogashiwa, *Microstates and Nuclear Issues*, 2

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, *Collision Course at Kwajalein*, 12-13,

<sup>12</sup> Ogashiwa, *Microstates and Nuclear Issues*, 11-12

<sup>13</sup> Allan Davidson, *Selwyn's Legacy: the College of St John the Evangelist, Te Waimate and Auckland 1843-1992*, 1993, Auckland : St John's College, p 253.

them against episcopal protests.<sup>14</sup> We should also note that St John's was the training ground for several Pacific Anglican priests including Walter Lini 1966-8, Ellison Pogo 1977-79, John Ini Lapli 1977-79.

### **Against Testing On Moruroa (ATOM) 1970**

Within the Pacific 1975 to 1985 can be seen as the years in which a popular movement grew in the Pacific against the use of the islands for the testing and storage of nuclear materials. This movement, incorporating the voices of trades unionists, students, scientists, and led by the churches, gradually recognised that these issues were closely tied to political independence, without which the island nations had no voice, and developed techniques through which popular democratic pressure could be exerted on the newly independent governments to act.

The first non-government organisation against nuclear testing was Against Testing On Moruroa (ATOM) founded by biologists Graham Baines and Suliana Siwatibau at the University of the South Pacific. Alert to the dangers of radiation on living things, and concerned about the health risks of the atmospheric nuclear tests conducted in the region, they contacted other groups they belonged to – YWCA, the Student Christian Movement, Fiji Council of Churches, USP Student Association – and on 28 May 1970 organised a public meeting at the new Town Hall, chaired by Dr David Lancaster, and attended by around 600 people including representatives from the trades unions and churches. As Siwatibau has said: 'The Nuclear Free movement, right at the beginning, was a very strong network with the churches, the academics and other NGOs like the YWCA'.<sup>15</sup> At that first meeting, five months before Fiji's Independence, Ratu Edward Cakobau read out a message of support from the Chief Minister, Ratu Mara.<sup>16</sup>

ATOM's Statement of 15 June 1970 allowed a wide brief, with focus on the main cause for concern in 1970: '[ATOM] will protest against all nuclear testing, but have a specific concern with the Pacific area and therefore anyone who tests in the area, eg the French at present.'<sup>17</sup> ATOM organised meetings, marches and discussion groups around Suva, and organised the Nuclear Free Pacific Conferences, the first being held at USP in April 1975.

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<sup>14</sup> Davidson, *Selwyn's Legacy*, 273-5; Interview with Allan Davidson 13-11-2011, Auckland

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Suliana Siwatibau, 15-8-2012, Suva

<sup>16</sup> Walter Johnson and Sione Tupouniua, 'Against French nuclear testing: the ATOM committee', *JPH* 1976, vol 11:4, 213.

<sup>17</sup> Johnson and Tupouniua, 'Against French nuclear testing', 213.

Later conferences were held on Ponape in 1977, Hawaii in 1980, and Vanuatu in 1983, by which time, with the increasing recognition that lack of political independence in the US Trust Territories and French Polynesia and the lack of ability of to determine the future of their own islands was integral to the problem, the title had been changed to the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement (NFIPM). In Vanuatu 1983 the NFIPM meeting was opened by Vanuatu's Deputy Prime Minister, Sethy Regenvanu, who 7 years earlier had been one the delegates to the PCC Assembly in Port Moresby.

### **The 3<sup>rd</sup> Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), Port Moresby, 1976.**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC ) was held at the new University of the Papua New Guinea and opened by PNG's new Governor-General Sir John Guise. The delegates were young, many were graduates of the regional Pacific Theological College, and they reflected the idealism and the challenges of new nations. Bishop Bryce, the Anglican Bishop of Polynesia for less than a year and elected Chairman of PCC at the meeting, spoke for many when he commented on the importance of decolonisation, both national and in the churches: 'We are like the governments of our countries. We are taking up the reins of the churches for the first time, and the directions are not yet clear.'<sup>18</sup> For Bryce it was the beginning of his involvement with the nuclear-free movement. Those who attended the Port Moresby Assembly of 1976 have spoken of its radicalism, the sense that the Pacific peoples had a new confidence to stand up for their own interests and rights.<sup>19</sup> The Assembly is notable for two decisions: the Roman Catholics became full members of PCC through the membership of the Bishops' Conference of the Province of Oceania (CEPAC), and for the first time the PCC Assembly condemned nuclear testing in the Pacific. The nuclear issue had been raised at the Assemblies or Synods of some constituent churches, such as the New Hebrides Presbyterian Church in 1973, but this was the first PCC Assembly motion.<sup>20</sup> In Port Moresby the following motion was moved and passed:

We, the Pacific Conference of Churches, condemn the continued use of the Pacific by foreign powers still occupying areas of the Region for nuclear weapons testing, storage and waste dumping; the mining of uranium for destructive purposes, and the disregard of the stated wishes of the people of the Region for self-determination in this matter. The Assembly also

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<sup>18</sup> Coop, 'A Christian Reality' pp. 33-34

<sup>19</sup> Plenary discussion at 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary PCC Conference, Malua College, Samoa, 31 August 2011; Interview Christine Weir with Rev Dick Avi , 1 September 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Helen Gardner 'Keynote Address' 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary PCC Conference, 2011, Malua College, unpublished paper.

endorses the resolution of their Executive Committee (February 1974) for the creation of a Pacific nuclear free zone.<sup>21</sup>

A long article in *Pacific Islands Monthly* reported these two issues, and noted the ‘unifying forces’ evident: ‘French and English-speaking peoples, clergy and laity, men and women, all seemed to pull together signifying a new beginning for the Pacific churches’. The main photograph for the article, by John Garrett, showed Bishop Bryce and the Catholic Bishop Finau together, calling them ‘an outward sign of an inward unity’.<sup>22</sup> Theirs was a productive friendship which was to last until Finau’s death in 1993.



Bishop Patetisio Finau, RC Bishop of Tonga (left) and Bishop Jabex Bryce, Anglican Bishop in Polynesia, also a Tongan, at the assembly . . . an outward sign of an inward unity!—Photo: John Garrett

PIM March 1976

But while Catholics and Protestants in Port Moresby may have been together condemning French nuclear testing, in French Polynesia attitudes were conflicted and complex. There is evidence of Protestant Church opposition to the initial French testing proposal,<sup>23</sup> but once construction began, local opinion in French Polynesia became more mixed, as jobs and increased income arrived in the islands.<sup>24</sup> By 1966 thousands of French and local people

<sup>21</sup> PCC, *Report of the Third Assembly*, p 86.

<sup>22</sup> Roxanna Coop, ‘A Christian Reality: it was no dream when the Pacific Churches bridged the gap’, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, March 1976, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> Marama Gaston Tauira, ‘The Protestant Church of French Polynesia and the French Nuclear Testing Programme: responses of the past decade’ *Pacific Journal of Theology*, 1992, series II no 8, pp 35.

<sup>24</sup> Tauira, ‘The Protestant Church ... and the French Nuclear Testing Programme’, 36-7; Pieter de Vries and Han Seur, *Moruroa and Us: Polynesians' experiences during thirty years of nuclear testing in the French Pacific*, 1997, Lyon: Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur la Paix et les Conflits, 127-137. The research of de Vries and Seur was sponsored by, amongst others, the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia and the NGO *Hiti Tau*

were employed, on good wages, by the Centre d'Experimentation du Pacifique (CEP). It was this new found wealth which blunted the criticism of the testing program by the churches. The Catholic Church, which had always been supportive of the French Government, saw the CEP as the bringer of infrastructure and economic development. Many parishes both Catholic and Evangelical saw in the CEP an opportunity for improving the living standards of their communities. In 1965-66 the pastor of Fitiï led his parishioners to work at the testing site, using part of the money earned to construct a new church building back in the village, and this example appears not to have been unique. It was widely acknowledged that families with members working for the CEP were able to donate more generously to the church.<sup>25</sup>

Against this background the Evangelical Church found itself in conflict with the PCC's Port Moresby declaration and indeed its Synod had attempted, unsuccessfully, to prevent the motion being put. However two events in 1979 marked a shift. The first was an accident in a shaft which caused serious leakage of radioactive materials, two deaths and six injured. This inevitably got widespread publicity. The second was the attendance of John Doom, Secretary-general of the Evangelical Church at a WCC meeting in Jamaica – or more particularly what he said in the media on his return. He revealed that the World Council of Churches, where he was a member of the Central committee, preached independence and denuclearisation – which seems to have come as a surprise to people in Tahiti!<sup>26</sup> The linking of the two causes, by WCC and by Doom, caused outrage in the pages of *Les Nouvelles de Tahiti*. It published a letter from 'a group of protestants' who described Doom as 'an Ayatollah for Polynesia'.<sup>27</sup>

But his words, coupled with other voices from within the Pacific Conference of Churches, were beginning to have an effect. Lorini Tevi and Bishop Jabez Bryce (General Secretary and Chairman of PCC) both visited Tahiti in 1979-80, and both opposed nuclear testing. Bryce said in an interview:

In all the island nations, in these days, the indigenous people are emerging and they have the belief that they have the right to say what they think about what should

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<sup>25</sup> De Vries and Seur, *Moruro and Us*, pp. 126-133

<sup>26</sup> Marama Gaston Taura, *The Protestant Church on the Colonial Regime in French Polynesia* (with special reference to the French nuclear testing program) MTheol thesis, 1991, Pacific Theological College, Suva, 58-9

<sup>27</sup> *Les Nouvelles de Tahiti* 5-09-79 – as appendix 10 in Taura MTheol 1991 thesis,



happen to them. We cannot bury ourselves in the Bible and forget what is going on around us ... Concerning the Tahitian tests, what do we say? Most churchmen in positions of responsibility are new to these issues, but we must make it known to the French that we do not want these nuclear tests'.<sup>28</sup>

In 1982 the General Synod of the Evangelical church made its first declaration against nuclear testing, which was reiterated in 1983 and 1984, and accompanied by letters of protest to French President, though divisions persisted within the Church until the 1990s.<sup>29</sup> The Catholic church in French Polynesia had always tried to keep out of 'political' issues, though this had been challenged by individual Catholics like Oscar Temaru who as mayor of Faa in 1979 declared that the Catholic church should face up to their responsibilities, and could not have 'a Bible in one hand and the bomb in the other'.<sup>30</sup> A more typical voice, however was that of the Catholic bishop of Polynesia Mgr Coppenrath who in an interview as late as 1997 said he was 'at a personal level... convinced of the harmlessness of the tests' and that the economic and infrastructure benefits of the CEP outweighed any disadvantages.<sup>31</sup>

### **Early 1980s: major campaigns by PCC**

Under the energetic leadership of Jabez Bryce, and also of David Williams the head of the PCC Church and Society program, the PCC launched into several initiatives to promote awareness of nuclear issues amongst the churches and more widely. The first was a Poster Competition run at the end of 1981 and open to people from across the Pacific. Posters were judged by Bryce, Suliana Siwatibau and Paul Malone a Peace Corps volunteer working at USP as a graphic designer. First prize went to Charles Manata of Solomon Is (\$400) and his poster became the image of the nuclear free movement in the Pacific. Ra Forsyth, PNG honourable mention, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place were awarded to rather more 'religious' and perhaps graphically less impressive posters by Fiji artists Francie Moss and Malo Vaurasi; they were less used publicly.

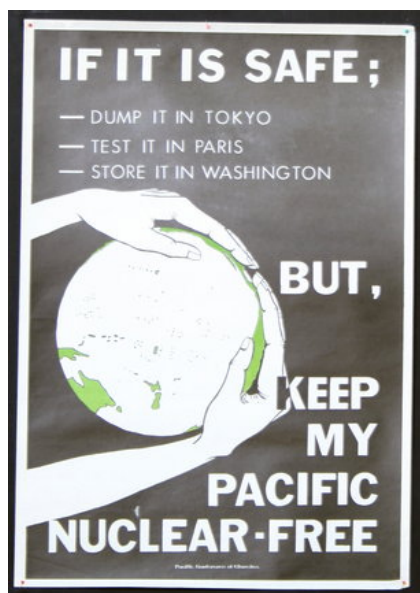
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<sup>28</sup> *Les Nouvelles de Tahiti*, 4 March 1980, in Tauria MTheol 1991 thesis as appendix 13, my translation; interview with John Doom 31-8-11, Samoa

<sup>29</sup> De Vries and Seur, *Moruroa and Us* 134

<sup>30</sup> Tauria MTheol 1991 thesis p. 56

<sup>31</sup> De Vries and Seur, *Moruroa and Us* 128



The winning poster by Charles Manata

The second initiative was the book *Call to a New Exodus*, 'an anti-nuclear primer for Pacific people' written by Suliana Siwatibau and David Williams and published by PCC in 1982. It included both examinations of the science of radioactivity, (fission and fusion, nuclear fuel cycle, nuclear explosions, issues of half-life and waste, and genetic issues) and an examination of the economics and politics of who controls nuclear power, and a history of the US and Fr nuclear presence in the Pacific. Designed for a general audience, it included cartoons and photos, and also raised serious theological issues – stewardship and justice, peacemaking and hope.

The book was used very widely as a general awareness book across the Pacific . Suliana remembers taking it round the schools, and also 'going and talking to church ministers, because every year the PCC chose a particular Sunday to be Nuclear Free Sunday and they preached from the pulpit – and that was a powerful tool.'<sup>32</sup> While not on any national curriculum, it was used in many schools run by church bodies, and was picked up and used extensively in the Marshalls, where cancer and birth defects were becoming serious issues. These campaigns have a high public profile.

### **Pacific Plenary at the World Council of Churches Assembly 1983 Vancouver**

The 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches was held in Vancouver in July –August 1983, and for the first time the Christians of the Pacific area were given the opportunity to

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<sup>32</sup> Interview Suliana Siwatibau 15-8-12

showcase their concerns in a 1½ hr plenary session to all delegates. It was an opportunity that the PCC seized. In Bishop Bryce's papers are notes and a script from the planning stage of this presentation, and reports of the Assembly also carry some of the speeches.<sup>33</sup> The session aimed to illustrate the theme of the Assembly 'Jesus Christ - the Life of the World' to 'show

- a) the people of the Pacific and the way they experience life as a gift from God ...
- b) the many threats to life they are facing, concentrating on the nuclear and cultural threats, and the response of the churches;
- c) the call to the Pacific nations and to the rest of the world for a new life in unity and solidarity'

Participants included Dr Sione Havea of Tonga who spoke on coconut theology and Bp Leslie Boseto (SI) on unity and solidarity with the powerless. It included the beating of the lali, slides and music, a history of missions in the Pacific, the exchange of leis.<sup>34</sup> But the longest presentation was from Darlene Keju from the Marshalls. For ten minutes she described to the delegates the effects of radiation on the Marshallese, the 'jelly fish' babies being born, the fears that the Americans were using them as scientific guinea pigs, the poverty and overcrowding of Ebeye compared to the much more luxurious conditions for American servicemen on Kwajalein, and ending by displaying the poster from the PCC competition.<sup>35</sup> The effect of this plenary presentation was considerable on the delegates from all over the world who saw it and who reported on it back home.

The PCC was, at this particular moment, pushing at an open door, with Bryce, Doom and Leslie Boseto on the Executive Council of WCC and the impact of the 1983 presentation. At the Vancouver Assembly the WCC's Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation process (JPIC) was inaugurated,<sup>36</sup> and many of the requests of the Pacific delegates were incorporated into the '10 Affirmations on JPIC' adopted in Seoul in 1990. For the 7<sup>th</sup> Affirmation reads: 'We affirm the creation as beloved by God' ... 'because creation is of God and the goodness of

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<sup>33</sup> It was held on Sat 30 July 9 -10.30 am, the morning after the Canadian Night when the totem pole had been raised. These were the only two regional plenaries. Ed David Gill, *Gathered for Life: official report of the VI Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, 1983, Geneva: WCC, 172,

<sup>34</sup> 'Pacific Plenary' in the unsorted papers of Bishop Jabez Bryce

<sup>35</sup> 'The Context of our witness' 504-5; 'Pacific Plenary'.

<sup>36</sup> Gill, *Gathered for Life*, 255

God permeates all creation, we hold that all life is sacred' – and not just a resource for exploitation, and No 8 reads: 'We affirm that the earth is the Lord's' ... 'We will resist any policy that treats land merely as a marketable commodity; that allows speculation at the expense of the poor; that dumps poisonous wastes into the land and the waters; that promotes the exploitation, unequal distribution or contamination of the land or its products; and that prevents those who live directly from the land from being its real trustees'<sup>37</sup> The pleas from the Pacific had had its effect.

### **Pacific Politics and the Rarotonga Treaty 1985**

By 1983 then, interest and awareness in the Pacific Islands about the nuclear issue had been considerably enhanced, largely by the churches. At this moment, governments changed in both Australia (March 83 Hawke Labor government) and New Zealand (July 84 Lange). It was the initiative of these two governments to work with Pacific Islander governments – now being pressured by their electorates – to achieve the Rarotonga Treaty in 1985. This has been widely discussed elsewhere, and I only wish to make a few comments. Both metropolitan governments had some personal connections to the religious dimension – alongside Trades Union influences - of the nuclear free movement: in Hawke's ministry was Brian Howe UCA minister and SCM member, Lange had been at Trinity Methodist College at the University of Auckland – with the Siwatibaus, with whom he was friends.<sup>38</sup> The scene was set for change: Pacific people were sensitised and wanted an end to nuclear testing in the region, and the dominant metropolitan powers both had governments prepared to act. For, as Suliana Siwatibau, one of the strongest advocates for a nuclear free Pacific put it recently: 'The political process comes at the end – it starts with the people's movement – the government takes over later because they are prodded by the people The Pacific was waking up and asserting its role in the world.'<sup>39</sup> But I note too the irony of Australia's position: sponsoring and being seen as leader in the Rarotonga treaty negotiations seen as proving Australia's

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<sup>37</sup> Ed Michael Kinnamon and Brian E Cope *The Ecumenical Movt: an anthology of key texts and voices*, WCC Publ Geneva 1997 pp 321-322

<sup>38</sup> Interview 15-8-2012 Suliana Siwatibau

<sup>39</sup> Interview 15-8-2012 Suliana Siwatibau

position as a responsible middle ranking power<sup>40</sup> – ironically the same argument France was using to justify its nuclear program.<sup>41</sup>

The Rarotonga Treaty, negotiated through governmental processes, signed by most Pacific Island governments at the 1985 Forum meeting, and ratified by Australia in 1986, established the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone, in which the testing, possession and storage of nuclear weapons is banned, and also the dumping of nuclear waste. It however has limitations: it excludes the area which had been US Trust territories; it excludes nuclear-powered and nuclear armed shipping, either in transit or for short port visits. Greg Fry's verdict 1985 'though it will not affect current US and French involvement, the treaty could prevent further nuclearisation'<sup>42</sup> Yes, it was welcome - but it didn't stop the French tests.

While many people in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific had hoped in 1981 that the election of the Socialist Party's President Mitterrand would herald the end of nuclear tests, they were to be disappointed. After all it was Mitterrand's government which plotted to bomb the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland Harbour in 1986. Mitterrand's position was partly because he had to work with a Gaullist dominated Chamber of Deputies in a 'cohabitation government', and in part because the Socialist party in France also accepted that nuclear weapons formed 'the irreversible backbone of French defences'.<sup>43</sup>

They too believed in the 'force de frappe', especially as tension heightened with USSR in 1983-4, and anti-authoritarianism became the dominant view of European socialists.<sup>44</sup>

Other political scientists have commented on Mitterrand's attempts to be a 'president for all the French', by fully legitimising the socialist platform through the use of nationalist symbols, including the Gaullist legacy of the 'force de frappe'.<sup>45</sup>

The halt to French testing in 1991 may have been in part a response to the very hostile world, and particularly regional reaction to the *Rainbow Warrior* affair, but was much more influenced, in the eyes of most commentators, by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The ostensible enemy, which had been disappearing. Even so, Chirac opened his Presidency in

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<sup>40</sup> O'Neil, 'Australia and the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty'.

<sup>41</sup> Chesneau 'The Function of the Pacific in the French Fifth Republic's "Grand Design"

<sup>42</sup> Greg Fry 'Towards a South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone' *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 1985, vol 41:6, 16-20

<sup>43</sup> Jolyon Howorth, 'Consensus of silence: the French Socialist Party and defence policy under Francois Mitterrand' *International Affairs*, 1984, vol 60: 4, 584.

<sup>44</sup> Howorth, 'Consensus of silence', 586.

<sup>45</sup> Wayne Northcutt, 'Francois Mitterrand and the Political Use of Symbols: the construction of a centrist republic' *French Historical Studies* 1991, vol17: 1, 141-158.

1995 with a brief resumption of testing. Having proved his point, he then declared that France would sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and reduced the defence budget, explaining that simulation programs could now adequately replicate the results from physical nuclear tests.<sup>46</sup>

While many, indeed most, French politicians wanted to forget the testing and ignore any repercussions on Pacific people, in the 1990s the first Greens parliamentarians, along with a few other left wing deputies began to support demands which had regularly come from churches and NGOs in the Pacific and in Europe for detailed information about the tests and investigation of the health effects, and the release of health statistics. In 1997 the Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur la Paix et les Conflits based in Lyon published the most extensive history of the tests in French Polynesia and survey of the known health and social effects on the local population – I have used this survey extensively in this paper.<sup>47</sup>

In 1999 the Centre, along with Greens and Socialist parliamentarians hosted a symposium in Paris at which Bishop Bryce, as Pacific President of the WCC spoke, along with representatives from Greenpeace, unionists, scientists, and the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia. The aim of the symposium was to demand ‘assessment, truth and openness’ about the French tests, through the opening of the data archives concerning the tests, and provision of follow-up radiological measurements of the French Polynesian environment and the population.<sup>48</sup> In his speech Bryce noted the long history of the PCC and the WCC in protesting the nuclear tests, as a denial of human beings’ responsibility to care for the earth and all that lives on it. He was firm in his demands:

Peoples of the Pacific believe that the nuclear tests have threatened the environment and it seems to us that the authorities in France have hidden the consequences of the nuclear tests and not faced the results of what could turn out to be harmful. The Protestant Church of French Polynesia has asked the French Government for the military archives relating to

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<sup>46</sup> French Senate report ‘Les Essais Nucléaires’ at <http://www.senat.fr/rap/o97-179/o97-1798.html#toc32> accessed 1 Dec 2012

<sup>47</sup> de Vries and Seur, *Moruroa and Us*.

<sup>48</sup> Ed M.-H. Aubert and M. Rivasi, *The French Nuclear Test in Polynesia: Demanding the Truth and Proposals for the Future*. 1999, Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur la Paix et les Conflits, Lyon. 5.

the tests to be opened and independent researchers to conduct other assessments ... To avoid decades of dispute, France has the opportunity to act now, rather than later.<sup>49</sup>

He asked for transparency over radiological data, access to medical records, continued monitoring, and research on diseases caused by radiation, compensation for those with test-related health problems, and no nuclear dumping.<sup>50</sup>

While French research has determined a 'small but clear' incidence on thyroid cancer in the French Polynesian population and the French government has accepted responsibility for the medical costs for Polynesians with diseases deemed to be radiation related,<sup>51</sup> it is far from clear that Bryce's other requests have been met. The current WCC Pacific President, John Doom, continues demands for transparency and ameliorative action, in the areas affected by both French and American tests. Yet concern over the legacy of nuclear tests is no longer the main environmental issue – it has been replaced in the popular imagination by climate change. This too is a prime concern today of the PCC. But, having been at the forefront of protesting against nuclear testing, the churches of the Pacific still demand that the victims of the tests are not forgotten.

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<sup>49</sup> Jabez Bryce, 'An Initiative for Truth about the French Tests' in ed. Aubert and Rivasi, *The French Nuclear Tests in Polynesia*, 86.

<sup>50</sup> Bryce, 'An Initiative for Truth about the French', 87.

<sup>51</sup> 'France's nuclear tests in Pacific "gave islanders cancer"' *The Independent*, 4 August 2006.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/frances-nuclear-tests-in-pacific-gave-islanders-cancer-410474.html> accessed 10 Nov 2012