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**New Zealand and Nuclear Autonomy,
c. 1985**

Lead: In the mid-1980s, a powerful anti-nuclear movement swept New Zealand. This led to a ban on U.S. Navy ships in New Zealand ports and jeopardized the ANZUS alliance.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: After the fall of British Singapore to the Japanese in the early days of World War II, Australia and New Zealand looked to the United States for security. The ultimate

result was a new treaty arrangement, formalized in 1951, ANZUS. This committed the three parties, Australia, New Zealand and the United States to mutual support and protection.

In 1984 the Labour Party candidate David Lange won election as Prime Minister primarily on a promise to ban nuclear powered and/or armed warships from New Zealand ports. This brought New Zealand into direct conflict with its most powerful ally the United States, one of the two major nuclear powers at the time. Since the US imported many metals and minerals used in industry and weaponry from the Pacific rim, it quite rightly felt it

needed to maintain safe shipping routes across the Pacific Ocean.

In addition, New Zealand was the first anti-nuclear *government*. If the US was denied access to New Zealand ports this might inspire and strengthen the anti-nuclear movement throughout the world.

In February 1985, New Zealand denied the United States request for docking privileges for USS *Buchanan*, a nuclear cable warship. America resolved to oppose and reverse New Zealand's policy. The US withdrew from joint military exercises, access to intelligence information was reduced and, New Zealand was demoted from the status of "ally" to that of "friend."

Efforts were made to block trade with New Zealand though this effort largely failed. One US official was overheard referring to New Zealand as “a piss-ant little country south of nowhere,” a sentiment shared many at the time.

Such treatment only hardened the resolve of the Lange government and New Zealand public opinion. In June 1987 the government passed the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Control Bill. The following August Lange’s government was reelected by a firm majority. Despite US disapproval New Zealand has continued to maintain this policy into the 21st century.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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