



POVERTY WATCH

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THE ROLE OF U.S. BASES IN AUSTRALIA

While steps towards disarmament proceed at a snail's pace, millions of dollars which could relieve all the poverty in the world are still being spent on war, and in particular on nuclear proliferation. Medical people are convinced that there is no defence against nuclear war except prevention. The following article, reproduced with permission, by the Medical Association for the Prevention of War, looks at Australia's complicity in the armaments' scene.

The United States maintains in Australia more than a dozen installations concerned with military communications, navigation, satellite tracking and control, and various forms of intelligence collection. Three are extremely important: North West Cape in Western Australia; Nurrungar in South Australia; and Pine Gap outside Alice Springs. These are vital elements of the U.S. strategic command, control, communications and intelligence system (C3I) which supports the U.S. strategic nuclear posture.

Public debate about U.S. facilities has been unsatisfactory. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, it is a relatively complex technical subject and it has not been easy for the average person to find clear and comprehensive descriptions of the issue involved. Secondly, there is an extraordinary degree of secrecy which surrounds these bases and Australian governments have repeatedly treated the public's request for information with disdain, presumption and paternalism. Much of what is known about the bases comes from information that is on the public record in the U.S.A., but not in Australia. Although rather euphemistically called "joint facilities" by successive Australian governments they are in reality U.S. military bases.

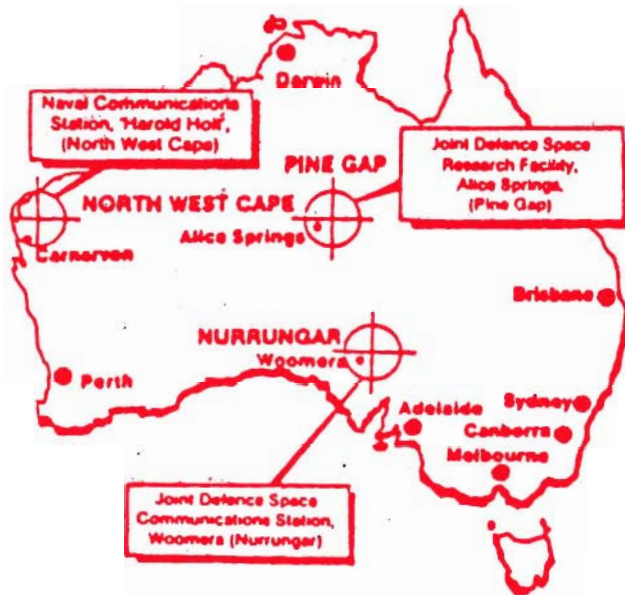
THE FUNCTION OF THE BASES

North West Cape: (Harold Holt Communications Station)

The most important strategic function of North West Cape is providing a Very Low Frequency (VLF) command and control link between the



U.S. and its ballistic missile submarines. North West Cape is the largest and most powerful of the three American global VLF stations, the other two being in the U.S. VLF is the only means of communicating with submarines when they are submerged with no links to surface antennas. North West Cape covers the south and west Pacific and the Indian Ocean.



The role of U.S. missile submarines (which carry about half the U.S. strategic nuclear warhead total) is becoming increasingly important. Submarines are the least vulnerable leg of America's so-called "triad" of land, sea and air-launched strategic nuclear weapons systems. Until recently the submarines' advantage of relative invulnerability has been offset by the inaccuracy of their missile systems - making them suitable only for "city busting" strikes. In the late 1980s the combination of highly accurate submarine positioning (achieved by the new Navstar satellite navigation system) and precision targeting (achieved by the D5 missile on Trident submarines) will give submarine systems the "hard target" capability they previously lacked (i.e. heavily protected missile silos, command centres, etc.).

U.S. submarines will also become less vulnerable to Soviet anti-submarine warfare (ASW) systems. This is because longer range missiles will allow U.S. submarines far more ocean in which to hide. And as weapon systems themselves become less vulnerable, so the focus of Soviet strategic effort will switch increasingly to submarine command and control facilities such as that at North West Cape.

Characteristic of all such facilities is their total vulnerability to attack ensured by the enormous height of the VLF antenna. As U.S. missile submarines become both more important and less vulnerable, North West Cape will become an increasingly attractive target in the event of a Soviet-U.S. war. Destroying the base would, for the Soviets, be a highly effective (and low cost) means of degrading the C3 (command,

control and communications) systems linking the U.S. with its ballistic missile fleet.

North West Cape is capable of relaying the first strike orders which would result in nuclear holocaust. In addition, North West Cape can help to direct acts of "gunboat diplomacy" against Third World nations. It also provides communications for Australia's submarine fleet. It has no role in disarmament or arms control e.g. by verification of arms control agreements.

Nurrungar: ("Casino")

Two large spherical perspex radomes protecting antennas are situated here. The facility processes data from multi-purpose geostationary satellites which give early warning of missile launches and detect nuclear test explosions. It is also involved in photographic and electronic intelligence.

Nurrungar provides an instantaneous data link between the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), the Strategic Air Command (SAC) and the National Military Command System on the one hand and the satellite early warning system on the other hand. There is also a direct link with the Department of Defence in Canberra.

It is from here that Soviet and Chinese missile launches, military communications, radio transmissions, missile telemetry transmissions, etc. are monitored.

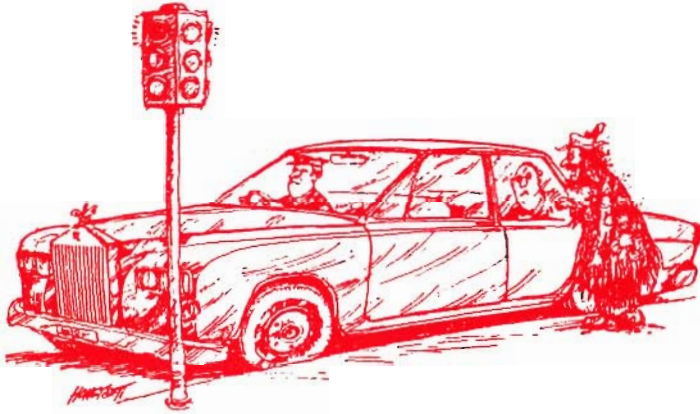
Nurrungar is one of only two ground stations for the Programme 647 satellite early warning system. (The other is in the U.S.). This has been described as America's "most important" early warning system. The 647 satellites, fitted with infra-red, ultra violet and visible light sensors, can detect and monitor Soviet missile launches - a capability which gives maximum warning time of a Soviet missile attack (25 minutes in terms of a land-based missile attack).

But early warning is only part of the 647 system's role. In the event of a so-called limited nuclear war which involved "slow motion" nuclear exchanges, the 647 satellite system would inform the U.S. which Soviet missiles had been fired and which had not. Such information is clearly of great importance to facilitate targeting (or retargeting) of U.S. missiles on Soviet missile silos.

The next generation of early-warning satellites which Nurrungar will monitor (the so-called "Block 14" satellites) will have an essential role in Star Wars, and in plans for protracted nuclear war, through their ability to accurately locate the sites from which Soviet ballistic missiles have been launched.

Whilst all three of the major U.S. bases are

Of course we already have some indications of wealth distribution. Surveys which have been conducted indicate that one-tenth of Australians control about 60% of all wealth in this country. In the period in which the number of people in poverty has doubled, the per capita income of Australians has increased by 15%. We know that there are over 30,000 millionaires in Australia.



"I said, we must have lunch some time."

Valuable summaries of available information by Phil Raskall were presented in **Australian Society** magazine in March 1986 and May 1987 with discussion of the wealth inquiry idea by Peter Browne in the November 1987 edition. These helped to fuel the debate. The August 1987 Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia called on the Commonwealth Government to commence such an inquiry.

Hurdles

A number of reasons have been given as to why such an inquiry is **NOT** feasible. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (A.B.S.) raised a number of points in a report to the Government. It suggested that overseas experience indicated that such surveys were not reliable because of people's lack of co-operation, and problems in accurately valuing assets. As the A.B.S. would play a crucial role in gathering information, its views were significant. The Bureau also expressed the concern that the controversy which would surround such a survey would jeopardise other vital aspects of its operation.

A further problem with the Inquiry is the opinion that it would be irrelevant because the Government has already ruled out a wealth tax or the introduction of death duties. This in spite of the fact that of 21 O.E.C.D. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, only Australia and Canada lack either a net wealth tax or a wealth transfer tax, and most countries have both.

It has also been suggested that the 1987 world share market crash makes such an inquiry less relevant. All of these views presume a very narrow interpretation of the process and potential of an inquiry.

Process

The B.C.J.D.P. Consultation will be based on the model adopted by the United States' Catholic Bishops in producing its pastoral message and letter **Economic Justice for All**. One difference is that the Australian process will be completed in 18 months, not three years. Our smaller population may be some justification for this, but time lines will be tight. June 6th is the deadline for initial submissions. Any individuals or groups are welcome to respond.

Possibilities

The process provides a positive opportunity to develop and deepen the concept of a wealth inquiry beyond the notion of a simple survey of wealth with a view to introducing a further tax on the wealthy.

It is to the credit of the Catholic Bishops that the parameters of the consultation also include an examination of the financial and capital resources of the Church. The 1987 Synod of the Uniting Church in Victoria defeated a similar motion.

From the point of view of the **Fair Share** project, the consultation is very important. The 1975 Poverty Inquiry headed by Professor Ronald Henderson provided an objective understanding of poverty in Australia. That information needs to be balanced by a comprehensive understanding of the amount and distribution of wealth in Australia. However a wealth inquiry would not be an end in itself. It would generate information and stimulate community discussion about community values and priorities for resource distribution. This would help to develop strategies to tackle the areas which cause and perpetuate poverty; areas such as family support and other services, including health, employment, housing and education need to be explored. While the Government's Social Justice Policy will begin to address these issues,



inevitably questions will need to be raised about its strategy. If appropriate action is to be taken the distribution of community resources needs to be more open to public scrutiny and debate. The B.C.J.D.P. Consultation will encourage this.

Any inquiry needs to be more than a survey of wealth. Its value would be in providing an opportunity to explore in detail the creation and distribution of wealth and the values implicit in the directions of the community. It could lead to an ongoing process for monitoring changes in these areas.

While there might be some resistance and controversy in relation to an inquiry into wealth the vast majority of Australians have little to fear and the potential for clarifying positive directions is immense.

The recent stock market shock has been used by some to suggest that a wealth inquiry would be irrelevant at this time. The opposite is the case. With the likelihood of even higher levels of unemployment and a continuing housing crisis the importance of addressing social priorities is even more urgent.

The critical issue is how to share the burden of economic problems across the community as a whole rather than allowing them to further worsen the situation of those already relatively disadvantaged.

The Government's acknowledgement of poverty in the lead up to the July election, and the Family Assistance Scheme announced in December 1987, although significant steps, still leave many questions. Uncertainty about our immediate economic future and the increasing likelihood of a recession heighten the urgency of facing them. The B.C.J.D.P. Consultation tackles an area of great importance and will enable many of those areas to be explored. It should be welcomed and supported.

Newton Daddow
Co-ordinator,
Fair Share

POVERTY WATCH, published by the Community of St Laurence Inc., is a monthly Christian action newsheet for individuals and churches. The Community of St Laurence is a group of Christians committed to creating a deeper awareness within the Church, of Christ's identification with the poor and the oppressed. Its work is to respond to Christ's challenge to bring justice, love and peace to all. Editor: Roger Sharr, University (03) 344 5126 or 481 4342. Community of St Laurence Inc., PO Box 298, Fitzroy, Vic., 3065. Registered by Australia Post: Publication No. VAS 5087. The views expressed in Poverty Watch are not necessarily those of the Community.

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Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace

THE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH IN AUSTRALIA:

PUBLIC NOTICE

The distribution of wealth in this country is the subject of a Social Justice statement to be issued by the Australian Catholic Bishops in September 1989. A broad consultative procedure will be used for its production.

Interested persons and organisations are invited to make written submissions to the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace within the framework of the following Terms of Reference. Public Hearings will also be held in diocesan and national centres at times and places to be announced.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Catholic Social Teaching and issues of morality and social justice relevant to the distribution of wealth in a modern society.
2. Principles and conclusions contained in the Social Encyclicals of the 20th century that relate to the just production, distribution and consumption of wealth, with particular reference to Pope John Paul II's Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (1981).
3. The distribution of wealth in the light of Biblical teaching.
4. The meaning of the Church's preferential option for the poor.
5. The practical application of Catholic Social Teaching to the distribution of wealth in Australia, in particular as it affects:
(a) persons who live below the poverty line; (b) families; (c) women; (d) children; (e) solo parents; (f) the aged; (g) aborigines; (h) the unemployed, particularly unemployed youth; (i) the concentration of wealth; (j) overseas aid.
6. The development of appropriate ethical criteria for formulating and evaluating policy on the production, distribution and use of wealth in Australia.

WRITTEN AND ORAL SUBMISSIONS

6th June, 1988 is the deadline for those contributors of written submissions who also wish to be considered as participants in the national Public Hearings, which will take place in August. Other written submissions will be received at any time during the process.

Any person or group interested in participating in this consultation may contact:

The Executive Secretary, BCJDP, at 17 Little Albin Street, Surry Hills 2010 (tel. (02) 212 6755) for further information about procedures.