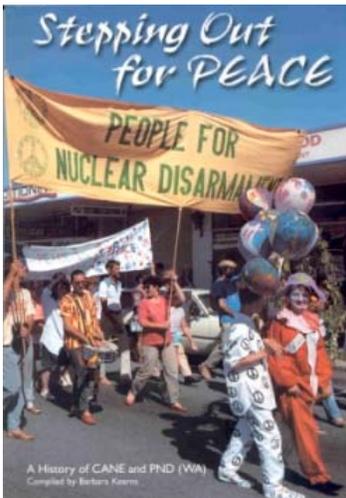


JO VALLENTINE AND POLITICS FOR PEACE



'Our sovereignty has been totally abdicated in matters nuclear and matters military. One of the most crushing things I have heard was said by Bill Hayden. When he was Foreign Minister, he said to me "it wouldn't matter if we got a bigger percentage of Australians than New Zealanders saying no to the nuclear warships, it would not make a jot of difference if there was seventy-five or eighty percent of people in this country who wanted the bases closed and the warships not to come here – the Americans wouldn't let us!'"



How is it possible to link the personal and the global search for peace? And faced by the dominating forces and structures of the wider world, what difference can we make?

Among those who show us the way is **Jo Vallentine** from Perth in Western Australia. Jo came to national and international prominence when she was elected as a Senator for the then newly formed Nuclear Disarmament Party in 1984, and was re-elected in 1987 and 1990, helping to make an effective bridgehead for green politics in Australian national politics. Her story however is much broader, as it speaks of the importance of the personal, as well as the parliamentary, and the need to make connections with others and the 'big picture' of the underlying interests directing affairs at home and overseas. For whilst Jo is clear

about the value of mainstream politics in addressing power, she also affirms the need for grounding this in the wider movement for peace and of faith in a deeper power. As a Senator she had most welcome resources to raise community awareness and build networks. She could also certainly go into places and do outrageous things that others could not: so that even her arrests during peace and justice actions at Pine Gap and Jabiluka, brought a great deal of media attention to the issues. As Jo comments however: *'I wasn't ever really sucked into learning all of the parliamentary procedure and so on. I fumbled along and made use of it, but we were basically activists who happened to get into parliament – the whole team.'*

Jo's peacemaking inspiration thus lies in the relationships she has with others and in the power of peace she finds within herself, aided not least by Quaker witness. For whilst major political influences have been such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King (in both their commitment to non-violence and their persistence against apparently insuperable odds), the final motivation is also closer to home. As she recalls what eventually propelled her into community politics:

'I am pregnant and standing at that kitchen sink doing the dishes with my belly bumping into the sink, listening to the radio and I heard Charlie Court, who was the then-Premier of Western Australia say, "Western Australia will be the first State in Australia to have a nuclear power station"! And I was just so mindful of this bulging belly bumping up against the kitchen sink, and I thought – no way!'

SEEDS OF PEACE

The need for faith and international solidarity

Despite the obstacles (raised for example by Bill Hayden's comment in the opening quotation), Jo continues to be highly active in working for a new international order founded on justice, human rights and the self-determination of peoples over their own land and destiny. This despite the fact that, in recent years, querying the intimate alliance of Australian government with the USA brings the further charge that this is also being 'soft on terrorism'. Against this, Jo affirms the importance of building links with other across the world: including the United Nations (*'imperfect as it is, it is the best bureaucracy we have got internationally to put these things forward'*) and the International Peace Bureau. Whilst the importance of renewing the vision is ever needed: ***You really have to have faith actually, and believe that tiny groups of people doing their thing everywhere, eventually amounts to that critical mass and eventually something happens that is absolutely transforming.'***

Anti-nuclear campaigning

Jo's political campaigning has included highlighting the extent of Australia's *'emotional and psychological ties to the whole American war machine'*, manifested in the significant



number of US bases, landing spots, and military exercises – closely and rudely met with by nuclear warships in Fremantle port.

Intimately connected for Jo are also the issues of nuclear energy (which first drew her into active politics) and the exploitation of Australia's rich uranium resources (with or without Indigenous land owners agreeing). For in Jo's words:

'We have really got to get underneath and behind the power structures, and of course it is what Eisenhower said in 1952, it is the 'military industrial complex'. So that is what I always say about globalisation – if people are worried about that, then the nuclear industry is the grand-daddy of the lot.'

Changing Politics and Interrupting Lives

As part of such movements, Jo has thus given a strong lead to addressing these key issues, even if the campaigns, as she strongly urges, need to be continually renewed. In doing so, she has also been part of a different kind of politics, reflecting the style and concerns of feminism, sensitive to the need of real connection with others.

'We were actually going to people's doors and interrupting their lives. I have often said, that is what we have to do – knock on the door and say "I am interrupting your life because this is really important".' (on the National Doorknock in 1988 – PND)

Sources and more information:

Stepping Out for Peace: A History of CANE and PND (WA) compiled by Barbara Kearns
International Peace Bureau www.ipb.org