

Written by John Hallam
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PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

LAST WEEK OF AUSTRALIAN ELECTIONS: THE EXISTENTIAL THREAT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS NOT AN ISSUE.

ANOTHER PRESS-RELEASE TO BE CONSIGNED TO OBLIVION?

As the election campaign staggers into its last uninspiring and unedifying week, the existential threat posed to civilization by the persisting nuclear arsenals of the nuclear weapon states has continued to be a complete non-issue. It has never been an issue in the entire campaign in spite of brave attempts by a number of groups to focus attention on it, notably at the Lowy Institute last week.

This also, more importantly, in spite of the fact that according to the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists Nobel-heavy Board of Sponsors, and according to a number of former commanders of both US and Russian nuclear forces, including generals Lee Butler, Cartwright, Vladimir Dvorkin and Zolotarev, the risk of a massive nuclear exchange is as great or greater than it was in 1983, when the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists 'Doomsday clock' was set, as it is now, at 3 minutes to 'midnight'.

According to People for Nuclear Disarmament's United Nations Disarmament Campaigner John Hallam:

"When one tries to get coverage for what is truly a survival issue for civilization generally, and tries to get politicians and media to focus on it during an election, it's easy to end up with a sense of despair – not only for the nuclear weapons issue, but for the way other similar issues – notably climate change – get treated. Or rather, just not treated at all.

What seems to take place at an election is that issues that are truly important get zero coverage, while the focus is on ultra-short-term economics and personalities. Issues that might bear on slightly longer term human survival are simply placed in the 'too hard' basket. The more vital the issue the less likely it is to be covered.

Australia is currently playing a most unedifying role in a global nuclear disarmament debate that has been gathering steam for a number of years in Oslo, Mexico, and Vienna and most recently in Geneva at the UN's Open-Ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament, which we attended. Australia has been 'leading' (if one can dignify this by calling it 'leadership') a movement by a small number of governments known as 'weasels', whose role is in effect to act as proxies for the nuclear weapons states and to oppose anything that might actually lead to the global elimination of nuclear weapons. The Coalition currently opposes moves – moves that will take place anyway – to negotiate a nuclear weapons ban or otherwise outlaw nuclear weapons. The Labor party, as far as we understand, supports those moves. Australia should get behind them.

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A week out from the election there has been absolutely no debate, and no media attention to, a danger that still, more than 20 years after the end of the cold war, has the potential – and the all too real risk – of ending civilization. Bluntly, the mind boggles.

People for Nuclear Disarmament,(PND) Aotearoa Lawyers for Peace, and the the Human Survival Project at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPACS) at Sydney University, are jointly organizing an International Peoples Tribunal on the Nuclear Powers and the Destruction of Civilization, starting at 9am, 7th and 8th July, in the Common Room of the Woolley Building at Sydney University. The Tribunal is jointly convened by Professor Peter King, a founder of CPACS, and John Hallam, PND and Human Survival Project UN Nuclear Disarmament Campaigner. The Tribunal will involve experts and international lawyers from around the world, and has attracted the eloquent support of Justice Michael Kirby.

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