

Sound: Oxford Union debate on nuclear weapons

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David Lange at the Oxford Union debate, 1 March 1985.

Transcript

Arguer for the negative: What I should like to know, sir, is why you don't do the honourable and the consistent thing and pull out of the ANZUS alliance. For whether you are snuggling up to the bomb or living in the peaceful shadow of the bomb, New Zealand benefits, sir. And that's the question with which we charge you. And that's the question with which we would like an answer, sir.

David Lange: And I'm going to give it to you if you hold your breath just for a moment ... I can smell the uranium on it as you lean towards me!

I want to pass over here the preparations which are constantly being made for the winnable or even survivable nuclear war. I would ignore those and wholeheartedly embrace the logic of the unthinkable war if it could be established that the damage which could result from the collapse of that logic could be confined to nuclear weapon states. Unfortunately and demonstrably, it would not. We in New Zealand, you know, used to be able to relax a bit, to be able to think that we would sit comfortably while the rest of the world seared, singed, withered. We were enraptured!

And the fact is that we used to have the vision of our being some kind of an antipodean Noah's Ark, which would, from within its quite isolated preserve, spawn a whole new world of realistic humankind. Now, the fact is that we know that that is not achievable. We know that if the nuclear winter comes, we freeze; we join the rest of you. And that means that there is now a total denouement as far as any argument in favour of moral purpose goes. It is a strange, dubious and totally unaccepted moral purpose which holds the whole of the world to ransom.

Updated 27 July 2015





This frame is from film of David Lange speaking at the televised Oxford Union debate in 1985. David Lange successfully argued the proposition that 'nuclear weapons are morally indefensible'. See film of the debate on NZ On Screen - choose clip 3, the debate features about 6 min 40 secs in.