

Pacific nuclear-free zone would oust U.S.

by Linda de Hoyos

Steadily, and now not so slowly, the United States is being backed out of the Pacific. This process was advanced in a major way with the Aug. 27 announcement that 14 countries of the South Pacific—including Australia and New Zealand—have unanimously agreed to create a so-called “nuclear-free zone” in the Pacific. The decision came at a meeting of Pacific island nations in Funagui, Tuvalu. The group designated a working committee to prepare a draft treaty for such a zone for final consideration at next year’s meeting.

The proposal adopted by the Tuvalu 14 was put forward by Australia’s Labour Prime Minister Bob Hawke. Hawke’s proposal bans the production, storage, and testing of nuclear weapons in the Pacific and opposes the dumping of nuclear waste. However, each country is permitted to decide for itself the question of access to ports by nuclear-carrying or nuclear-fueled ships.

Hawke won national elections in 1983 on a platform to ban U.S. nuclear-carrying or nuclear-fueled ships from ports of call in Australia, but was subsequently forced to back down on the proposal. Last month, in New Zealand, the Labour Party’s David Lange ousted National Party conservative Robert Muldoon on the same platform. He has so far refused to back down and is demanding the renegotiation of the ANZUS treaty between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.

No one is happier about the creation of a “nuclear-free zone” than the Soviet leadership in Moscow, which introduced the concept to begin with—while carrying out an unprecedented military build-up from Eastern Europe to Vietnam.

The names of many of the island-nations involved in this decision will not be familiar to Americans. Nevertheless, the entire area of the Pacific running south and west from the Philippines toward New Zealand constitutes the ports and bases that provide the military-strategic bridge between the United States and its allies in Asia, and the bloody battles in the Pacific during World War II are a bitter reminder of their importance. Furthermore, under the domination of American foreign policy by Henry A. Kissinger, the United States has smugly abused many of its allies—notably the Philippines, home for the crucial Clark Field and Subic Bay bases—with the idea that “we can always pull back to Guam, Palau, and the other islands and still maintain a logistical base for the

U.S. Pacific fleet.”

That kind of U.S. policy making has now been exposed as bankrupt. Take the case of the newly emerging Republic of Palau, the island-country that lies right off the Philippines and has been suggested as an alternative site for the Philippine bases. Last year, Palau, which has been under U.S. trusteeship, voted to become a republic, with the United States retaining absolute military domain in return for financial assistance. But Palau also voted not to allow any nuclear ships in port. The country’s supreme court adjudged the votes to be contradictory, and Palau will vote again in September.

Inaction from Washington

The response coming from Washington to these developments provides no clear-cut alternative policy. The Australian press has protested that the Republican Party platform gives Australia and New Zealand “a cold shoulder.” The Australian *Financial Times* angrily noted on Aug. 29 that the GOP campaign platform does not mention the ANZUS defense alliance. Then, in a briefing to foreign reporters, former National Security Adviser Richard Allen bluntly declared that recent election trends in the two countries toward the left meant “the United States had less sympathy toward them.”

On the other side, State Department spokesman John Hughes said Aug. 29 that the administration had not yet decided whether it would “endorse or oppose” the creation of a nuclear-free zone in South Pacific, “pending an opportunity to consider a formal zone proposal.”

Both these reactions boil down to one: disregard for any actions taken by America’s South Pacific allies.

The acting force on the scene is the Soviet Union, whose assets and agents have been leading the “environmentalist” movement in both countries and have been touring the South Pacific islands campaigning for a “nuclear free zone.” Hawke and Lange are playing the same role as the Socialist International in Western Europe—leading the stampede of appeasement before Soviet power. In a statement two weeks ago, Australian Foreign Minister Bill Hayden proclaimed that if the United States did not take action to improve superpower relations, then Australia would consider kicking the United States out of its major defense facilities at Ponce Gap and the North West Cape. The implicit notion behind this threat is that by doing so, Australia will no longer be a target for Soviet missiles.

Likewise, the New Zealand Labour government is threatening that if the State Department hardballs it on the question of port rights for nuclear-carrying or fueled ships, then New Zealand will remove itself altogether from the ANZUS treaty, and cease to function as an ally of the United States.

These threats are Pacific mirror-images of the “decoupling” process in Western Europe. Conversely, stopping the Kissinger decoupling of NATO would be the most efficient way for the Reagan administration to halt the same process that is losing it Asia.