

URL link to the text: [Sound: Oxford Union debate on nuclear weapons | NZHistory, New Zealand history online](#)

This text is a speech presented by David Lange as a segment of an Oxford Union debate on the morality of nuclear weaponry. In this section, he answers a question presented to him about why New Zealand hasn't left the ANZUS alliance at the time, which was an alliance between Australia, New Zealand and the USA to remain allies and back up the other allies if the threat of nuclear fatality was presented. However, when New Zealand announced that they no longer wanted anything to do with nuclear weapons the USA demoted them from allies to friends. He answered that question in this speech. The purpose of this oration is to persuade and convince the target audience that New Zealand's stance on nuclear weapons is morally correct, and as it is part of a debate, trying to win the debate with intellectual points and responding to arguments made by the opposing team. The intended audience of this text is the supporters of nuclear weaponry outside of New Zealand and also people who are associated with Oxford University, which is a very old, influential British university. It isn't directed towards New Zealanders as it states facts that reflect on what New Zealand has gone through and New Zealand decisions that the public of New Zealand had experienced firsthand. It demonstrates formal features that target the more sophisticated minds of the world, hinting that it's aimed at world leaders and powerful individuals. This fits into the context of the speech as it is presented at a formal international debate. The purpose remains to win a debate where David Lange is a part of the affirmative team and to promote awareness of the dangers of nuclear weapons and that New Zealand is taking great steps to remain nuclear-free and healthier overall. The verbal language used creates a forceful tone and mood as it is part of a competitive debate. It incorporates language that makes the text sound more persuasive, but David Lange also uses some sarcasm and irony to keep the audience engaged and create a lighter tone in places. By portraying this tone, Lange can put across his points in a way that can increase his chances of being heard and taken seriously. A summary of the text shows that David Lange believes that nuclear weapons are "morally indefensible". The verbal language I have identified highlights how he was able to win this debate and demonstrate his points.

In the 1980's New Zealand's anti-nuclear position caused a huge political issue with the USA and England and David Lange went into the debate knowing that he was possibly going to make things worse with those countries. Despite this pressure he opened his speech using humour, which David Lange states in a satirical rhetoric form. This means that he is using his time to ridicule one aspect of the opponent and the opposing topic to bring more attention to the issue and to promote his side as the 'correct' side. At the beginning of the text, he makes a statement after an arguer for the negative voices their question on why New Zealand hasn't dissolved the ANZUS alliance. He replies with the phrase, "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!". The humour is used to point fun at the opposer as it states that because he supports nuclear weapons he must also be aware of its side effects and how bad they can be, and must surely have accumulated those side effects themselves. The statement also makes a subtle dig at the USA at the same time as the speaker is representing his country's position. Lange uses humour in an informal matter to demonstrate that he is conversing with

someone who he doesn't believe should be viewed with respect or referred to formally, furthermore indicating his dominance in the debate. Humour is used in many speeches as it makes both the audience and the speaker more comfortable with the presentation and more receptive to the ideas presented. This is also very helpful in succeeding in a debate. In this case, David Lange's statement was probably not planned, he was thinking on his feet, but it did bring out a strong, positive response from the audience, which would increase his confidence with the more planned parts of his response.

Most major countries had accepted and adopted nuclear power and weapons, but the New Zealand government and people took a different position. As a small country that not many people knew about in the 1980s, it was important for David Lange to be able to quickly explain why we were anti-nuclear and what the impact of nuclear war would have on our country. David Lange incorporates a triple of negative verbs into his speech to show this. In the speech he expresses the phrase, "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.**". In the debate, Lange uses triples to list the characteristics of the dystopian world that could occur because of nuclear weapons. By doing this he can create emphasis and an impactful tone on the effects of his thoughts on the future if nuclear weapons are welcomed both in NZ and across the whole world. Triples help to define a point with more detail while being short and sharp, making it easy to grab the listener's attention. That is why they are often used in debates as they can help to relay easy to remember information without taking up too much of the listener's time. By doing this the speaker can ensure that they are increasing their chances that the listener has not only heard but understood what they are saying. Triples in this context are used to shine a light on the future. By doing this Lange has created a sense of fear that he can harness to help draw people away from the opposing side.

Aotearoa New Zealand is the land of the long white cloud, but has also been known as God's Own or Godzone for many years. Nuclear weapons don't fit into that vision of our country so in the debate, David Lange is emphasising New Zealand's unique position at the bottom of the world by using a biblical metaphor. He comments that he believes New Zealand is some kind of "Antipodean Noah's Ark". He uses this metaphor in a way that portrays New Zealand as isolated and free from the world of nuclear weaponry as well as what would happen if it destroys the planet. This metaphor compares New Zealand (antipodean means coming from New Zealand or Australia and being on the other side of the world from Britain) - without nuclear weaponry, to the story of Noah's Ark. The story of Noah's ark shows how life was rescued from a disaster because of a safe space that was created by Noah. Lange is hinting that New Zealand was always seen as a safe space in the event of a nuclear collapse but that this is now changed. By using metaphor he has quickly developed an image of a safe land, helping the listeners understand what is at stake if New Zealand relents to America's demands to accept their nuclear warships. David Lange may not have been religious, but the story of Noah's Ark would be well known by this particular audience of Oxford students, academics and the wider international audience, so using this comparison would be effective. He defines New Zealand as the saviour (Noah's Ark) because they don't use nuclear weapons. Another metaphor, "nuclear winter" is also used to emphasise what will happen to the whole world if nuclear war breaks out. Furthermore he says that "we will freeze with you" if New Zealand accepts the USA's position and allows nuclear weapons. A nuclear winter was a new idea in the early 1980's, and by David Lange

using this metaphor in this context with this educated audience would quickly emphasise another negative effect of nuclear weapons. Speaking with a lot of metaphors can be confusing because the audience needs to be able to understand what the comparisons mean. David Lange knew exactly what type of audience he was talking to, and this will have helped him confidently choose these metaphors, knowing they would understand them.

To conclude, this speech demonstrates persuasive properties because of the verbal language it uses. Because of this, this speech is still recognisable from his famous one-liner; “I can smell the uranium on your breath.”. It helped David Lange to secure his win at the Oxford Union debate and changed the minds of many people around the world about the ethics of nuclear weapons. He focussed on his verbal vernacular to ensure that he could deliver his points in a way that would be listened to and recognised. The purpose of a debate is ultimately to win, to convince the other side of your points and use whatever you can to demonstrate your ideas. While also showing off verbally, Lange was also known for his charisma and tone. How he performed his speeches orally helped to strengthen his ideas and make a greater impact of what he believed and was trying to promote. By displaying his ideas in an authoritative manner this helps him to convince the audience by making them feel that he has important knowledge worth sharing. He used humour to help him to connect with the audience and bring down his opponents. Triples were used to provide impact on specific points in a short snappy way that is easily heard by listening audiences. Metaphors help to explain certain ideas and provide comparisons with other aspects that might be more relatable to the audience. The correlation of these language features helps to bring the speech together making it easy for the audience to acknowledge his overall point. Nuclear weapons are “morally indefensible”.