



FARINGDON PEACE GROUP

NEWSLETTER 23

APRIL-MAY 2022

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY OUR NEXT MONTHLY MEETINGS

WEDNESDAY 6th APRIL 7.30pm

The Otmoor Riots in the Wider Context’.
Our speaker Ciaran Walsh will bring his talk
up to date with the

‘Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill’

This is likely to affect anyone who takes part in
demonstrations and campaigns of whatever kind
Via Zoom

WEDNESDAY 4th MAY 7.30pm

Cllr. Christine Townsend from Bristol will tell us
about the issues around the pulling down of the
Colston Statue, the legacy of the British Empire
and the way it receives only scant attention in
the school curriculum.
Venue tba.

ASYLUM WELCOME

‘A warm welcome for all refugees’

For 25 years Asylum Welcome’s volunteer
visitors made daily visits to Campsfield
detention centre, seeing every detainee who
asked for help. Campsfield closed in December
2018 and this publication records some of the
experiences of visitors, staff and detainees.
Asylum Welcome continues to work to
safeguard asylum seekers, refugees and
migrants at risk of detention.

Our services include:

Information, Advice, Adult and Family service,
Youth services, Domestic Abuse Support,
Employment advice, Legal immigration advice,
Welcome centre, Food bank, English classes,
IT support, Recycled bikes and more.

We help adults, young people and families to
feel safe, respected and understood as
members of our diverse community.

PEACE FOR UKRAINE

After the successful gathering that was held for
Ukraine one Sunday early in March, a few
members of the Peace Group met together to
discuss further action, and came up with some
proposals for your consideration.

The idea is that a similar gathering be held
each Sunday initially from 11.30am to midday
to fit in with the various church-goers who wish
to take part. We hope to maintain this until
Easter, but it can be reviewed.

The purpose is to continue to show support for
Ukraine and raise the increasing threat of
nuclear weapons and the very real possibility
of nuclear war.

A release of doves by Andy - especially for
Easter Sunday, might be included.

Attendees can bring a poem, reading or
something else to share after 11.45am. There
may be arranged speakers or a reading. An
open mic session will be available for those
who wish to speak. This can be arranged by
Sjoerd.

Other activities could be included, for instance
decorating a small piece of fabric to make
bunting or writing a short message to hang on
a Peace Tree. Please think about what might
be manageable in the Market Square and share
your suggestions.

SHARE YOUR NEWS!

Items for the next newsletter by 22nd May
at the very latest to jennyridd@yahoo.co.uk

Please ensure that your contribution is
ready to be taken directly from your email
to the newsletter. Word is probably
the best program to use.

The next newsletter will be for June and July

UKRAINE. A view from MAW, and suggestions for peace.

Understanding the Ukraine crisis - and how to resolve it MAW chair Tim Devereux and vice-president Colin Archer offer a way forward on the conflict in the Ukraine. Military confrontation between nuclear superpowers is the ultimate contemporary nightmare, as we are all too aware after the alarming escalation of the situation in the Ukraine. How did it come to this? NATO saw Russia again threatening a democratic and sovereign state, while Russia saw NATO relentlessly expanding up to its frontiers. Furthermore, the US established anti-ballistic missile batteries in Poland and Romania, ostensibly protecting the West from rockets launched by "rogue states" such as Iran. But these installations could easily be used to attack Russia itself. In the famous words of Robert Burns... "O, wad some Power the giftie gie us To see oursels as others see us! It wad frae monie a blunder free us". Consider - how would the USA view Russian missile launchers in Mexico, Canada (or Cuba!). Or for the UK, in Ireland or France? But similarly, how would we feel if we lived in the Ukraine, surrounded by Russia's tanks on several borders and with their troops threatening to invade? Now this long-dreaded scenario has come to pass, with all the consequences in terms of death, suffering and human misery that war always entails. Consider too the position of other ex-Soviet states. It is not unreasonable for them too to feel anxious about Moscow deciding that their independence isn't "real" either. The problem is that neither Russia, still humiliated by the collapse of its empire, nor the USA, smarting from its Afghan and Iraqi debacles, are in the best frame of mind to engage in the sustained, give-and-take diplomacy that durable solutions require.

They each think the other "understands best the language of force". Reliance on such a belief could be suicidal, since the slope that leads to a nuclear confrontation is a slippery one. We recognise that the taproot of this multiple conflict is a militarist nationalist culture on all sides which, when brought into confrontation by gloryseeking politicians, creates a toxic mix. The result is appalling violence, compounded by all manner of fake news, cyber-attacks, economic sabotage and generalised instability.

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Clearly, NATO represents the dominant formation in today's world and wishes to remain so. But it has waged aggressive wars in recent years, undermining the UN and international law. However, the militarism of the underdog can be threatening too, especially to those caught in between. The ramifications of this war are enormous: across political, economic, humanitarian and other fields. This is a historic turning point akin to 9/11. Our government needs to change tack. While targeted sanctions clearly play a role in getting Putin to rethink, it should, rather than banging the war drums, focus on persuading its NATO and EU partners to work to get all sides back to diplomacy. This is not caving into a bully, it is the path away from a terrifying conflagration. Regardless of our views on the balance of blame, we urge all friends of peace to raise their voices in favour of creative non-military solutions. Given the grave risks, nothing is more urgent right now. Recommended: Analysis and statements by groups such as International Peace Bureau, CND, International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons; World Beyond War, War Resisters International.

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STEPS TO PEACE IN UKRAINE:

Here's an agenda for the peace talks, when they come - as they must, sooner or later. It is not comprehensive and each step is fraught with difficulty. But grasping these nettles is far better than pursuing the perilous path of war.

1. Russia to withdraw from Ukraine as a whole and NATO to remove its missile bases from Eastern Europe.
 2. Implement the Minsk agreements.
 3. Ukraine to become a (genuinely) neutral state, such as Finland.
 4. NATO to offer an explicit (written) moratorium on eastward expansion.
 5. A raft of measures on military deployments and regional arms control, conventional and nuclear.
 6. Convene a Europe-wide consultation (ideally via OSCE) to devise a new Common Security framework for the whole of Europe.
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GREEN OUR TOWN

ENORMOUS PLANT GIVEAWAY

on SATURDAY 9th APRIL

from 9.30am 'til everything's gone

This will be a similar format as last year, when several residents put plants outside their front gates for people to take away free, in an attempt to green our town.

If you would like to take part or have seedlings or cuttings that you would like to contribute to another person's stall, please email faringdonplants@btinternet.com

And now is the time to plant a tree if you have space, or a shrub if you don't have space

NUCLEAR POWER STATIONS - AND WARS

CND's scientific adviser Dr Ian Fairlie writes a guest blog on the dangers presented by Ukraine's nuclear power stations: "For many years, NGOs and nuclear critics have warned that nuclear power stations pose dangerous threats during wars, as they provide tempting targets for military attacks. These concerns were routinely fobbed off by the government as being unrealistic and unthinkable.

But now the unthinkable has actually happened. On March 3 and 4, Russian troops shelled and occupied the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Ukraine. Apparently, little damage was done to the reactors as, thankfully, radioactivity levels were not increased. The shelling caused a fire in a nearby administrative building that was later extinguished. Two people were reported injured. The dangers of uncontrolled releases of the vast amounts of radioactivity contained in the Ukrainian reactors and their unprotected fuel stores should not be underestimated. The explosion and 10-day fire at Chernobyl in 1986 resulted in many thousands of cancer deaths and in 42% of the land area of Western Europe (including most of the UK) being contaminated with radioactivity. Although Ukraine's reactors are dissimilar in type to the RBMK reactors at Chernobyl, this is of little comfort in view of the quite different threats of indiscriminate shelling, aerial bombardment (incl. by nuclear weapons), and sabotage that may occur during the current war in Ukraine.

CND 8th March 2022 <https://cnduk.org/nuclear-power-stations-during-war/>

UKRAINE

Now that Russia has invaded Ukraine it really is difficult to dare to question what has brought us to the brink of a, possibly, globally devastating war.

There has been such a resistance to looking at the Russian position, but always the focus has been on the demonisation of Putin. This sort of focus led to the war on Iraq inspired by the hatred of Saddam Hussein, the bombing of Libya in the determination to get rid of Quaddafi. Each time we have left a relatively civilised country in tatters and thousands, maybe millions, of ordinary people killed and seriously injured.

Surely, by now, we can recognise the pattern. These wars carried out by NATO forces, have left a trail of violence, famine and desperate refugees that we in Europe are reluctant to accept.

Yes, Putin has now justified the projections of him as an aggressor, but can we consider what made him carry out this invasion?

For many years NATO has been encroaching with US bases and military exercises right up to Russia's border. Last year, for instance, B1 bombers, many of them from our local US base at Fairford, flew on such exercises for six weeks over the Baltic and Black Seas. Twelve NATO warships were on the Black Sea over that time. This surely was a provocation.

We have to be careful when we start talking about democracy. Wasn't the previous Ukrainian government democratically elected, but overthrown by the Bandera far-right party. Since taking power this government has refused to allow the communist party to take part in the Ukrainian elections, so is it really democratically elected?

We will now see whether NATO really is a war fighting force or a force for peace. There are 15 nuclear reactors in Ukraine quite apart from the nuclear arsenals of both Russia and NATO.

The US really should have accepted Russia's request to not have its bases in Eastern Europe.

Diplomacy and straight talking are crucial.

Why should not the west accede to Russia's understandable request for us to keep to our 2014 agreements not to have US nuclear bases in Romania and Poland? With such an arsenal of intercontinental weapons the US surely doesn't need to have any nuclear bases in eastern Europe. It now seems even more disastrous that the UK and the US did not press other NATO countries and the other nuclear powers to work for the ratification of the Nuclear Ban Treaty established last year. We are now all at the mercy of the nuclear bullies.

A letter from Perm, Russia, 26/02/2022

My dear international friends.

All those I have met and worked with in France Switzerland, UK, USA, Germany, Poland, Latvia, Bulgaria, as well as my friends from Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and other countries.

48 hours ago the world changed. Russia started a war with Ukraine. There is no justification for it and there can be no justification for it! This is a humanitarian disaster! I and the vast majority of my friends, colleagues and acquaintances do not support this war. The bloodshed must stop! We need peace!

I have lost several friends and acquaintances over the past few months because of COVID-19, now I have the feeling that I am losing my country and its future. This war is a cruel, senseless and criminal gamble. And I am well aware that Russia has already lost it and that the consequences will be dire and last for years. I, my family, my fellow citizens, will pay a heavy price.

Does he want to take over Europe? I think not. But he is willing to wage such a fight for the Russian world that no stone will be left unturned. As strange as it may seem to write under the circumstances, Putin genuinely loves Russia. In his perceptions, he is protecting it from a future imminent threat from the West.

The problem is that these perceptions are built on Cold War stereotypes, his own understanding of history, his service to the Soviet KGB, his detachment from the country's internal problems, his phobias and fears.

Because of this preoccupation with the future, real people on both sides are dying today. The worst thing is that the data on the deaths of Russian soldiers are classified. We do not know how many young guys will die these days for the sake of another "bright future". The lightning offensive did not work; the operation to demilitarise military facilities turned into protracted fighting in the cities, which inevitably increases the number of casualties, with the prospect of becoming a second Afghanistan for Russia. According to reports on social media (I understand that they cannot be fully trusted), we may already be talking about thousands of dead Russian soldiers. For Russia, which has just lost over a million people to COVID-19, this is a new national tragedy.

Anyone who survives will be impoverished. On the first day, the war caused the rouble to plummet, the Moscow Stock Exchange cancelled trading,

and the capitalization of major Russian companies collapsed by 6.6 trillion roubles. This is the record collapse since 2008. A number of Western countries, including the UK and the US, have announced serious new sanctions against Russia. Inflation in 2022 is forecast at 10-15%. Yes, Russia has accumulated large reserves in the Sovereign Wealth Fund, but even these will not last long in the face of international isolation and a ban on equipment and technology supplies. Many industries will shut down and hundreds of thousands of people will lose their jobs.

In the international arena, Russia is becoming a pariah. The question of expelling Russian athletes from world sport has already been raised. Musicians' concerts are being cancelled. Humanitarian, cultural and educational ties are being severed. Even air links with Europe are already in question. All relations that have been built up over many years are being suspended and severed. The main task of any politician is to increase the number of friends. In this case we have a complete failure of international politics. Not a single country supported Putin's operation. Even President Lukashenko, who is totally dependent on Moscow, distanced himself. In this isolation, all social institutions, which were already not in the best shape, will start to degrade quickly, and the number of local conflicts and problems will increase.

Most importantly, the political regime's main backbone - "Russia, the country that defeated fascism" - would be destroyed. Pride of victory in 1945, the annual parades on May 9, all this will collapse and we will experience an unprecedented humiliation both before the memory of our ancestors and before the future of our children.

This madness must be stopped as soon as possible. No more war!

I just want you to know that most Russians don't want this war. We love our children and want a peaceful sky for them so that they live in friendship with all people around the world! Peace!

With respect, Sergei Ponomarev

This letter came, via Abingdon Peace Group, from a Russian who came to Oxford as part of a group in November 2014. He is no longer at PSU but works freelance (as a political analyst I presume). He specifically asked that the letter be publicised and his name used.

OUR PETITION

Those of us who have been to any of the Sunday morning demos have seen and probably signed, a petition which was sent to David Johnston, MP. The text of the petition was:

"We are writing to express our deep concern about the conflict in Ukraine. We ask that you tell the Prime Minister that a political and diplomatic solution must be found.

There is a very real possibility of nuclear war.

We hope that the Prime Minister will take a decisive lead in getting all parties to the negotiating table, to secure Russian troop withdrawal, to make the Minsk agreements work and to call a halt to NATO expansion. Only dialogue and openness will make a difference."

Jennie received a reply fairly quickly:

"Thank you for sending me your petition. I am replying by email to ensure you receive this before your next meeting.

Everyone is keen to avoid any escalation of this conflict. That is part of the reason why we have not been operating a no fly zone. There is also a hotline between America and Russia to be used to avoid misunderstandings.

We need to be absolutely clear, however, that this war is entirely the fault of Vladimir Putin and has nothing to do with anything either Ukraine

or NATO has done. NATO is a defensive alliance and you do not find NATO countries invading their neighbours in the way Putin is doing. Indeed, if Ukraine was already part of NATO it is unlikely Russia would have invaded and it is no wonder that more countries, having seen Putin's brutal aggression, are now considering asking to join. We cannot allow Putin to take countries over when he feels like it and then try to blame NATO.

The Minsk agreements collapsed in the first place because Russia refused to abide by their conditions. You will be aware that before the invasion, the UK was working hard to secure a diplomatic resolution. Unfortunately, these attempts were rejected by Russia. You will also be aware that Ukraine and Russia have already started peace talks on the Belarusian border. I do not think it is for the Prime Minister to insert himself into these talks unless specifically requested by President Zelensky. I would also note that it is also only because of the Ukrainian military's success at repelling the invasion that Russia is willing to talk in the first place (aided by UK equipment and supplies).

Best wishes, David



Not an old picture - another convoy

I am, of course, not condoning any war, but it's worth noting:
Ukraine War: 953 civilians killed
Yemen: 377,000 people killed.

The point of nonviolence is to build a floor, a strong new floor, beneath which we can no longer sink. A platform which stands a few feet above napalm, torture, exploitation, poison gas, A and H bombs, the works. Give man a decent place to stand. *Joan Baez*



Sunday demo



Thank goodness it's Spring!