

FARINGDON PEACE GROUP NEWSLETTER – AUTUMN 2009

www.faringdonpeacegroup.org.uk



FARINGDON/ARURA FRIENDSHIP LINK

There is a definite Palestinian flavour to this season's newsletter, not least because 7 members are off to Arura, a village outside Ramallah in the West Bank, for a two week trip very shortly. Arura is looking for a town or village in this area with which to make contact and hopefully begin a cultural exchange. The request has come through the Oxford/Ramallah Friendship Association (ORFA) which has been very successful in making such links since it began in 2002. We are joining a larger group from ORFA to visit the village and help with the olive harvest. During the first week we will be staying with local families and getting to know the people and the area while during the second week we will stay in Ramallah, meeting various individuals and groups working for peace and visiting significant sites and places of interest. It is hoped that this will be the first step towards wider links between the two communities. Do come along to FPG's monthly meeting on Weds. 2nd December, when we will report back on our visit.

JULY MEETING – ADAM TWINE 'LIFE UNDER OCCUPATION'

Over 40 people came to the July meeting at which FPG member Adam Twine talked about the five weeks he had recently spent in Palestine and Israel. He had gone out with the intention of working in the West Bank with International Solidarity Movement (<http://palsolidarity.org/>) and had also worked with farmers and agricultural extension workers. Through a joint Israeli Palestinian organisation the 'Alternative Information Centre' (<http://www.alternativenews.org/>) he had the chance to meet a wide range of Israeli and Palestinian peace activists.

At July's meeting there were around 10 other people who had been working in Israel and Palestine and who shared their wide range of

experiences and understanding of the complexities of the conflict and the realities of living under occupation.

Adam did not attempt to rush through the history of the situation but rather spoke of what he saw and did while there.

Some of which was witnessing a number of the many stages by which Israeli settlers take possession of a piece of Palestinian farm land, ruled illegal under international law, but tacitly supported by the Israeli government.

Firstly a group of young men build a shack on the top of a suitable hill. The Palestinian farmer who owns the land has a time limit in which he/she has to prove that he owns the land, in an Israeli courtroom, in Hebrew. He cannot just turf them off as most of Palestine is subject to Israeli military law and Israeli soldiers have a duty to protect Israeli citizens. If he complains too vigorously to the police he may find that the travel permit for a relative's appointment for a hospital in Jerusalem or access to some of his other land to graze his goats is no longer forthcoming. Mains electricity and water to the shack will be laid on in a few months; more people will put up slightly more substantial buildings and eventually this develops into a small settlement. Some of these settlements will then carry on occupying more land and can grow into towns larger than Faringdon. All of this is both illegal and extremely damaging to the search for a just peace.

One of the surprising statistics to come out was that both Israel and Palestine are amongst the recipients of the greatest amount of aid per capita in the world. In Israel this is in largely military aid and is mainly from the US; in Palestine it is mainly for development/infrastructure work and largely comes from the EU. The strong US support for Israel is central to progress in the stalled peace negotiations. Here's hoping Obama can hold the

line on a freezing on the building of illegal Israeli settlements in Palestine as a start to encouraging the determination to find a workable resolution.

GRAND PEACE FETE 2009

Despite lower numbers of visitors (mainly due to a clash with the school fete), beautiful weather, a variety of music and dancing along with some new stalls contributed to a wonderful atmosphere and a very successful fete in July - the most profitable ever! Many thanks to all who helped in any way. Put the 3rd July 2010 in your diaries now!

HIROSHIMA DAY

Another Hiroshima and Nagasaki anniversary passed in August, commemorated in different ways all over the world. The words below were written by survivors and are increasingly relevant today.

COMMUNITY AFFIRMATION

We who live in the shadow of the mushroom cloud today declare our hope in the future.

We have come to renew our belief in the holiness of the earth, and the sanctity of all life.

We declare we are at peace with all people of good will.

We need no leader to define for us any enemy, nor to tell us what we need security for and defence against.

Instead we affirm that our earth's security rests not in armaments but:

in the justice of adequate housing and food,
in the justice of meaningful education and

work,

in the justice of an economic order that gives everyone access to our earth's abundance,

in the justice of human relationships,

nourished by co-operation,

in the justice of safe, clean water and

renewable energy.

We affirm people over property, community well-being over private satisfaction, and respect for others regardless of sex, race, class or religion.

We choose struggle rather than indifference,

We choose to be friends of the earth and of one another, rather than exploiters,

We choose to be citizens rather than subjects,

We choose to be peace-makers rather than peace-keepers,

We choose a nuclear-free future – and we will settle for nothing less.

We unite ourselves with sisters and brothers the world over, to join together in communities of resistance to all violence.

Bombs cannot dissolve hatred, but justice and love can overcome the machines of destruction.

Before us today are set Life and Death.

We choose Life, that we and the world's children may live.

Let it be so.

SEPTEMBER MEETING – ‘DON’T FIGHT, LET’S TALK!’

This was the advice of Sue Bowers, a Quaker and worker in the field of conflict resolution who led a meeting on this theme in September. It followed on from a discussion between Sue and the group last year on the meaning of ‘peace’ and reinforced her message that the principles of conflict resolution are the same whatever the level of conflict; for example within the family, between neighbours or internationally.

The answer in all cases is dialogue. This involves listening rather than forcefully putting your own case, and being open to perspectives very different from your own in order to reach some sort of understanding as a basis for further discussion. In the Peace Movement our views are often challenged and a role-play exercise helped to show how verbal confrontation could be turned into a fruitful dialogue leading to greater understanding on both sides of the opposing views.

OCTOBER – FPG ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This has been a successful year for Faringdon Peace Group: with record profits from the Grand Peace Fete and generous donations from the ‘Taking Liberties’ meeting our finances are very healthy. This means that, along with our usual subscriptions and donations to other organisations working for peace, we can afford to sponsor a

Ugandan trainee for another year through Faringdon Quaker Aid.

Our monthly meetings have covered nuclear weapons convoys and abolition, Palestine, Afghanistan, Uganda, peace in Africa and conflict resolution. 'Taking Liberties', our main focus in the early part of the year, tackled the erosion of our civil liberties. We had one planning meeting but felt these were of limited value.

Members have attended national and local demos on Gaza and Missile Defence and Levellers Day. All serving officers agreed to carry on and remain as follows:

- **REVOLVING CHAIRS** – John Cottis, Trish Wickstead, Dave Headey, Phil Chesterton, Sjoerd Vogt, Dave Watson
- **MEETINGS SECRETARY** – Jennie Chesterton
- **NEWSLETTER EDITOR, MINUTES AND FOLLY** – Karen Vogt
- **NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTION** – Vogts and Mairead Boyce
- **TREASURER** – Steve Braithwaite
- **FETE ORGANISER** – Sjoerd Vogt
- **COMPUTER HELP, WEBSITE AND EMAILS** - Sjoerd Vogt and Dave Headey
- **RESOURCES COORDINATOR** – Dave Watson
- **CREATIVE CO-ORDINATOR** – Karen Vogt . A new post to take charge of any arty jobs.

'BRING THE TROOPS HOME' NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION

SATURDAY 24 OCTOBER

ASSEMBLE HYDE PARK 12 NOON TO MARCH TO TRAFALGAR SQUARE

It will be lead by anti-war military families, army veterans and soldiers and will march to Trafalgar Square for a mass rally. There is a huge debate on both sides of the Atlantic about the future of the occupation, with the growing casualty rate among Afghan civilians and invading troops – against the background of the corrupt elections -- creating a majority against the war in most countries across the world.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition.

WHITE POPPIES

2009 is the 75th anniversary of the Peace Pledge Union's (PPU) white poppy – a symbol of grief for everyone who has been harmed by war but also a symbol of determination to work to abolish war. The PPU offers a wealth of resources promoting better understanding of the causes of war and raising awareness of alternative strategies to resolve conflicts non-violently. See www.ppu.org.uk for more information.

FPG has a stock of white poppies which will be available at Faringdon Friends meetings and FPG's meeting on November 4th.

CHILDREN OF GAZA

An exhibition of children's art responding to the bombardment of Gaza including Rod Cox's collection of children's drawings 'Loss of Innocence'. Rod Cox who went to Gaza, in February, meeting up with Viva Palestina aid to Gaza convoys, was forced to stay in Gaza for 5 weeks whilst trying to get his van out.

Fusion Arts Centre, Prince's Street, Cowley Road, OX4 1DD

Sat 7th – Sun 15th November

Oxford Town Hall, St Aldates, OX1 1BX

Tues 19th – Sat 30th January 2010

For opening times please call 01865-751475 or 07749-215758

SEVEN JEWISH CHILDREN - Fri. 13 Nov (time to be confirmed) at FUSION, Cowley Rd. Oxford

Caryl Churchill's play "Seven Jewish Children" will be performed by "SanaRt Theatre", with slide show, music and poetry. It is Caryl Churchill's response to the conflict in Gaza telling the history of Israel through a series of dialogues between Jewish adults about what they should tell their children. There will be a collection for Medical Aid to Palestine.

**PALESTINIAN CHILD PRISONERS -
Thursday, 5 November, Oxford Town Hall, 7.00
– 9.00pm.**

A national tour to highlight the systematic and institutionalized ill-treatment and torture of Palestinian children by the Israeli authorities. Organised by Action for Palestinian Children and Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Chair: Victoria Brittain (former Guardian Associate Foreign Editor), guests Danny Friedman (Human Rights Lawyer) and Karma Nabulsi. A Palestinian mother and son will share their experiences.

**PROSPECTIVE PARLIAMENTARY
CANDIDATES MEETING**

We plan to have a meeting of all candidates in the spring before the general election, widely thought to be in May. Malcolm Harper has offered to chair. If you would like to be part of the organising committee sorting out who, when, where and what format, please get in touch with Jennie Chesterton (Tel: 01367-710308 or email chesterton1@tiscali.co.uk)

**THE LONG MARCH TOWARDS FREEDOM
FOR GAZA**

To mark the first anniversary on 1st January 2010 of Israel's assault on Gaza, this is a non-violent march from Egypt through Gaza to the Israeli border, breaching the Israeli blockade. Amnesty has called the blockade a '*form of collective punishment of the entire population of Gaza (and a flagrant violation of Israel's obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention.*'

The March is being organised by an International Coalition with members representing a wide range of organisations such as CODEPINK, ISM, Institute for Jewish Non-violence, US Campaign to end the Israeli Occupation, and endorsed by many civil rights' organisations in Gaza and Palestine (and individuals like Tony Benn & George Galloway etc.) Peace News is coordinating the UK contingent. For full details see www.gazafreedommarch.org or www.peacenews.info .

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

OCTOBER 24TH – National demo 'Troops Out'.
See details above

NOVEMBER 4TH – FPG Monthly meeting – John and Janie Cottis will lead discussion on non-violent action.

5TH – 'Palestinian Child Prisoners'
See details above

15TH – Remembrance Sunday

21ST – One World Fair, Oxford Town

Hall

DECEMBER 2ND - FPG Monthly meeting –
report back from visit to Arura, see above

12TH – Green Fair, Oxford Town Hall

JANUARY 6TH – Happy New Year Party, 7,
Leamington Drive. Bring food and drink to share.
All welcome.

FEBRUARY 15TH – Blockade Aldermaston. Info:
0845 4588 361

All FPG meetings take place in the Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Rd. at 8.00pm. unless stated otherwise.

If you receive this newsletter on paper and are able to get it by email instead, please email me karen@vogt.org.uk and help to reduce our costs and tree consumption. Thanks.

www.faringdonpeacegroup.org.uk