

## **FARINGDON PEACE GROUP NEWSLETTER SPRING 2007**

[www.faringdonpeacegroup.org.uk](http://www.faringdonpeacegroup.org.uk)



There is so much information circulating these days in various ways that it is impossible to cover even a small part of it in this newsletter. Where possible I have put links to relevant websites and/or phone numbers for more information but if you want to receive peace related news/articles on a more regular basis then join our email circulation group. Email Sjoerd Vogt on [sjoerd@vogt.org.uk](mailto:sjoerd@vogt.org.uk). Contact him also if you receive a paper copy of this newsletter and would prefer to get it by email, or if you no longer want it at all.

We also use a telephone tree/email system to send out urgent messages now and then. If you would like to be part of this network please contact Jennie Chesterton [chesterton1@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:chesterton1@tiscali.co.uk) or Tel: 01367-710308 indicating how you would like to receive messages.

### **OCTOBER MEETING – AGM**

A full report of the AGM is available from me and detailed accounts from Steve Braithwaite. Here is a summary:

- An overview of the year's events included the Month for Peace (Oct 2005), Visioning Day (Mar 2006) and the Fete (July 2006). All successful, reports in previous newsletters.
- Speaker meetings covered the following topics: Campaign against Arms Trade, a young people's visit to Hiroshima, the Ethical Dimension of Armed Force, Direct Action at RAF Fairford and the consequent court action, Elections in Palestine, Military Use of Depleted Uranium, Food Choices to Save the Planet and Neve Shalom/Wahat-al-Salam, "Oasis of Peace" village in Israel.
- We had a presence at most national and local demonstrations against the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. These include RAF Croughton, RAF Brize Norton, civil disobedience in Parliament Square and Manchester Stop the War. We also attended Levellers Day in Burford and a commemoration of Hiroshima in South Parks, Oxford. A small group protested and picnicked at the RAF Fairford Air Tattoo and others have twice joined the Block the Builders actions at AWRE Aldermaston against the new generation of nuclear weapons. Individuals have attended court hearings of those involved in direct action.
- Finances are healthy. Subscriptions have been paid to Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and

Southern Region CND and donations have been given to Our World Our Say, Justice not Vengeance, CND and PSC.

- A decision was made to allow emergency donations of up to £20 between meetings but anything more must be put to a meeting. It was also decided to have both a chair and secretary in any sub-committee, e.g. Fete organisation.
- Adam Twine expressed concern that we should stick to our decision at the Visioning Day to hold 3 "Action Planning Meetings" a year
- There were no changes to the Peace Group committee which remains as follows:
  - REVOLVING CHAIRS – John Cottis, Trish Wickstead, Dave Headey, Dave Watson, Phil Chesterton, Sjoerd Vogt
  - MEETINGS SECRETARY – Jennie Chesterton
  - NEWSLETTER EDITOR, MINUTES AND FOLLY – Karen Vogt
  - TREASURER – Steve Braithwaite
  - FETE ORGANISER – Sjoerd Vogt
- Other members of the group were thanked for jobs they had done during the year.

### **NOVEMBER MEETING – KATE HUDSON, CHAIR CND, "TRIDENT"**

Kate Hudson, chair of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and member of the Stop the War steering group, spoke at the November meeting about Trident, Britain's so-called independent nuclear weapon system, and the implications of abolishing or replacing it.

Kate accused the government of ignoring the democratic process by making their decision about the replacement of Trident later this year, before any public or parliamentary debate, despite growing public, political and military opposition. Meanwhile, building work has already started at the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment (AWRE) at Aldermaston where the new generation of nuclear weapons will be developed.

Trident already costs around £1.5 billion every year and the estimated cost of its replacement could be as much as £25 billion. Kate argued that this money could be spent

much more effectively on public services or overseas aid. She explained that any replacement of Trident would put us in breach of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which, as well as preventing non-nuclear weapons states from developing them, obliges nuclear weapons states like the UK to reduce and eventually abolish their nuclear arsenals. It is hypocritical to insist on others fulfilling their treaty obligations while we ignore ours. If powerful countries say they need nuclear weapons for their security then other countries are obviously going to want them too. Global tensions will increase and a new arms race and conflict could result. Kate also pointed out that nuclear weapons are useless against the greatest threat of our time - terrorism.

CND and other groups are campaigning on many levels to raise public awareness of issues around Trident. "Faslane 365" is a year long peaceful blockade of the Trident nuclear submarine base in Scotland. Trish Wickstead, a peace group member, went with the Southern Quakers for a 2 day blockade and urged others to do the same, finding it a very effective and powerful protest. Peace Group members also support the "Block the Builders" monthly blockades at AWRE Aldermaston.

## **DECEMBER MEETING - ISLAMOPHOBIA – IS IT JUSTIFIED?**

Living in a predominantly white, Christian corner of rural Oxfordshire, we do not often have the opportunity to meet and talk with those from different faiths or ethnic backgrounds and we were therefore very pleased to welcome Ihtisham Hibatullah of the "British Muslim Association" (BMuA) to speak.

Ihtisham, who came here from Sri Lanka in 1989 as a cosmetics marketing consultant, now lives with his family in London where his children go to a local mixed faith school. Since 2004 he has worked with the Muslim Association of Great Britain and now the BMuA, encouraging integration, dialogue and understanding between faiths, and the promotion of mainstream Muslim views in government, the community and the media. He believes that faith should not make divisions; people can have different beliefs, with no need to compromise, but still work together in communities and challenge injustice together wherever they see it, at home and abroad.

The current Islamophobia, he claims, stems from the 9/11 attacks in New York in 2001. Since then Islam as a religion has been seen as a threat to so-called Christian values, and Muslims as people are constantly associated with violence, terrorism and oppression; a perception that encourages widespread fear and suspicion. 9/11 was

also challenging for Muslims themselves: Was Bin Laden right? Should they hate Westerners? Were they part of society or not? What should a good Muslim believe? It is in this atmosphere of mutual mistrust that Ihtisham believes dialogue and integration particularly among young people is so important.

He was asked how he, as a moderate Muslim, felt about Muslim extremists. Ihtisham replied that he felt he had a duty to explain the ideas and values of his religion to others, and rejected extremist and terrorist actions as un-religious. There have been injustices in Afghanistan and Iraq on both Muslim and American sides, but just as Bin Laden should not claim that all Americans are targets because of George Bush's foreign policy, so we should not condemn all Muslims because of Bin Laden. He was accused of trying to sanitise the truth in disclaiming extremists acting in the name of Islam. There are many Christians, for example, who strongly disagree with George Bush but who have to accept that he is a Christian. Ihtisham replied that you still have to differentiate between the religion in its pure form and what you see happening around you. Often faith is mixed up in politics when the conflict is really about other things, such as oil in Iraq and oppression in Israel/Palestine.

Ihtisham wants and tries to be true to his faith in all that he does and is hopeful that the initiatives in which he is involved will bring much more and better interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims and thus reduce Islamophobia in the future.

## **FPG PLANNING MEETING – MARCH 7<sup>TH</sup>**

This very well attended meeting covered actions taken since October by the group or individuals, an update on local RAF bases and work in schools, communications within the group, local actions, finances and the Grand Peace Fete.

- Faringdon Junior School is very willing to have input to lessons and assemblies on conflict resolution, community building etc and a budget was agreed for Liz Rothschild to take this forward.
- Activity at Fairford air-base may be the first indication that threats to attack Iran are serious, though there is nothing to report as yet. The base is being monitored by 2 local people. A successful Protest and Picnic was held during the Air Tattoo last year and will be repeated this year. The group has also supported demos at Brize Norton in December and Croughton in October. Local Quakers have been to Faslane and Dave Penn is joining the Oxford 365 trip there.

- We leafletted in the town before the Feb 24<sup>th</sup> demo in London (a mailing also went out) and before the Trident vote to encourage people to protest to their MP (who unsurprisingly voted in favour) and also held vigils during the Faslane 365 trip and during the Trident vote.
- Finances are healthy for this time of year and donations were made to CAAT to support their challenge to the BAE deal with the Saudis and to Oxford CND Faslane 365 appeal.
- Communications including the various merits of mailings, telephone tree and emails were discussed but needed more time so will be revisited at the next meeting.
- Names were taken to join the Fete organising committee which will meet shortly – see notice below.
- There was agreement that we should be doing something about Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan etc. as we are a peace group and our country is at war. Adam Twine proposed a big public meeting in the town with the MP, someone from the military, a peace activist and a commentator/analyst. The date is most likely May 18<sup>th</sup> but the line-up, venue and exact format are still to be arranged.

### **GRAND PEACE FETE 07.07.07.**

An easy date to remember, so make sure it's in your diary! The first planning meeting will be held over lunch on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> March, 12.30, Coleshill Village Shop. Delicious drinks, cakes and light lunches for sale.

If you would like to be part of the organizing team or are able to help on the day in any way, please contact Sjoerd as soon as possible: [sjoerd@vogt.org.uk](mailto:sjoerd@vogt.org.uk), tel: 01367-241707, 7, Leamington Drive, Faringdon, Oxon. SN7 7JZ

Please also start collecting/making/growing anything we can sell on the stalls eg. good quality jumble and bric-a-brac, jams, preserves, tombola/raffle prizes, plants, books, bottles etc. Cakes will also be needed nearer the time. We can arrange collection if you are unable to come yourself.

### **ANTI-WAR MARCH IN OXFORD – SAT 17 MARCH -TROOPS OUT NOW, DON'T ATTACK IRAN, NO TRIDENT REPLACEMENT**

This march was held to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the attack on Iraq by US and UK forces. The organisers wrote:

"We are now approaching the fourth anniversary of the attack on Iraq by US and UK forces. As we all know, the assault was brutal, unprovoked, and launched on the

bare-faced lie that the country was developing weapons of mass destruction. The consequences in Iraq include the destruction of the nation's infrastructure and social services, enormous death and devastation and the emergence of sectarian death squads. Here in Britain, they include bombs on the London underground, trigger happy police, an increase in racism, and ever greater restrictions of civil liberties. Our leaders are now threatening to attack Iran – shockingly, on the same pretext, that it is developing nuclear weapons. Again, there is not a scrap of evidence. At the same time, with breathtaking hypocrisy, our own government is preparing to spend tens of billions of pounds on upgrading the grisly Trident missile system – an obscene weapon of mass destruction with the capacity to kill hundreds of millions of people. We must not sit idly by while our governments continue to destroy other countries, murder other peoples, and continue to build weapons of mass destruction."

### **WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

- Kofi Annan says of Tony Blair's policy: "They should not imagine that this will be accepted as compatible with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty."
- Former shadow Defence Secretary Michael Ancram says: "The threat of using nuclear weapons is not only illogical but incredible... the need for genuinely independent alternative and flexible non-nuclear deterrence is if anything greater."
- Professor Stephen Hawking says: "To replace Trident would make it more difficult to get arms reduction. It would also be a waste of money because there are no circumstances in which we would use it independently."
- The UN's nuclear watchdog Mohammed El-Baradei said earlier this week that Britain cannot "modernise its Trident submarines and then tell everyone else that nuclear weapons are not needed in the future". He added: "We need to treat nuclear weapons the way we treat slavery or genocide. There needs to be a taboo over possessing them."

For in depth analysis of Trident see "Trident Dispatches No. 2" at:

<http://www.thebulletin.org/columns/rebecca-johnson/20070214.html>

## **BLOCK THE BUILDERS, AWRE ALDERMASTON**

The next blockade of the nuclear weapons research base, where the new generation of nuclear weapons will be developed, will be on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> April. This is hoped to be a mass blockade, the first since the Trident Replacement vote in Parliament and we are all encouraged to go. Phone Jennie if interested and for lift-sharing. More details from:

[www.blockthebuilders.org.uk](http://www.blockthebuilders.org.uk) and  
[www.tridentploughshares.org/aldermaston](http://www.tridentploughshares.org/aldermaston)

## **VANUNU FREEDOM RIDE - FASLANE TO LONDON 7TH TO 21ST APRIL**

On 21st April 2007, Mordechai Vanunu will have been held captive in Israel for 21 years. To protest at Mordechai's continuing persecution the Vanunu Freedom Ride (VFR) is being organised – a bicycle ride starting at Faslane, the UK's nuclear weapons base near Glasgow, on 7th April 2007 and ending at the Israeli Embassy in London on 21st April, the 3rd anniversary of Mordechai's release and the annual date on which, annually, his restrictions come up for review. If you want to join part of the ride or support in other ways please see below:

Tel: 0845 4581965, [info@vanunufreedomride.org.uk](mailto:info@vanunufreedomride.org.uk) or see [www.vanunufreedomride.org.uk](http://www.vanunufreedomride.org.uk)

## **ZAYTOUN PALESTINIAN FAIRTRADE OLIVE OIL – GET YOURS HERE!**

Zaytoun is a non-profit company which supports marginalized farming communities in Palestine, developing the agricultural infrastructure and finding a UK market for their produce. Palestine is the home of the olive tree, some as old as 2,000 years, supporting over half the population and dominating the landscape. It symbolizes life and hope for the Palestinians. The two oils produced by Zaytoun are both extra virgin cold-pressed, one certified organic the other working towards it, and both have applied for the Fairtrade mark. The organic is available in 500ml bottles, the non-organic in 500ml and 750 ml. They are on sale in the Mustard Seed shop in Faringdon or from me, Karen Vogt, details below. I will bring some to the next meeting. More information from the Zaytoun website:

[www.zaytoun.org](http://www.zaytoun.org)

## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

- Till 27<sup>th</sup> August – Mark Wallinger's faithful and detailed reconstruction of peace campaigner Brian Haw's Parliament Square protest, "State Britain", at Tate Britain, London
- 25<sup>th</sup> - 26<sup>th</sup> March – Faslane 365 blockade, Oxfordshire's turn
- Fri. 23<sup>rd</sup> March – 1<sup>st</sup> April – Film Festival in Hereford celebrating 25 years of Greenham incl. Sun 31<sup>st</sup>: Reunion of Greenham women lunch till evening, films, talks, exhibitions:  
[www.borderlinesfilmfestival](http://www.borderlinesfilmfestival)
- Fri. 30th March – Fete planning meeting, 12.30, Coleshill Village Shop
- Weds. 4th April – Monthly meeting: Dave Penn talking about the Oxford blockade of Faslane and Graham MacLean, RN retired, ex-Faslane.
- Tues. 10th April – Block the Builders Mass Blockade at AWRE Aldermaston. See above.
- Tues, 10th April – Trial of Milan Rai and Maya Evans charged under SOCPA for unauthorized demo in Parliament Sq. Oct.06. Maya's book "Naming the Dead" available from Justice Not Vengeance, £7 + £1.50p+p [www.j-n-v.org](http://www.j-n-v.org) Tel: 0845-4589571
- Weds. 2nd May – Monthly meeting: Jenny Stanton from Network of Oxford women will talk about her recent trip to Palestine.
- Fri. 18th May – FPG Public Meeting in Faringdon (see planning meeting notes above), see local press and posters for details of who, what, where and when, but please make a note in your diaries now.
- Weds. 6th June – Planning meeting including Fete
- Sat. 7th July – Grand Peace Fete, 2.00pm, Clock House, Coleshill. Help needed – see above.

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