

FARINGDON PEACE GROUP NEWSLETTER – SUMMER 2009

www.faringdonpeacegroup.org.uk



GRAND PEACE FETE

4th July, 2 – 5pm, Clock House, Coleshill

Yes, it's that time of year again! This year the theme will be 'Civil Liberties' following on from the very successful meeting we held in April. Malcolm Harper, Chair of that meeting, will be opening the Fete with a few words about civil liberties. Hopefully you all have the date in your diaries and have already offered help of some sort. If not, it's still not too late! If you could relieve a stall holder for an hour or so or do a bit of washing up etc. we'd love to hear from you. We also need to make sure we have something to sell on our stalls so please see below things that you can be making, baking, growing or collecting together. We can arrange collection if you are unable to come on the day. Alternatively, bring things to the monthly meeting on Weds. 1st July, particularly bottles and tombola prizes which need ticketing beforehand.

Please contact Jennie: 01367-710308, Dave: 01367-240808 or Sjoerd and Karen: 01367-241707

sjoerd@vogt.org.uk

HELP NEEDED:

Publicity – Print off a poster from the FPG website and put it up somewhere (Remember to take it down afterwards or FPG could be prosecuted!!)

Help sticking tickets on bottles and Tombola prizes

Setting up – Friday evening and Saturday from 10.00

Clearing up - After 5.00 on Saturday and also Sunday morning

Stalls - Relieving a stallholder for an hour or so

Teas - Preparing, serving, washing up

Raffle – Selling raffle tickets

DONATIONS NEEDED:

White elephant (not jumble), plants, jams and preserves, cakes for teas, bottles, raffle/tombola prizes, books

Hope to see you all there for another afternoon of sunshine and solidarity, music and mayhem, fund-raising and friendship.

'TAKING LIBERTIES' - PUBLIC MEETING ABOUT THE EROSION OF OUR CIVIL

LIBERTIES Well, after 12 months of planning and agonising over whether we would have enough people to make Tony Benn's visit worthwhile, when it came to 25th April we needed more chairs, and the Corn Exchange was filled to capacity. In fact, at one point we had to close the doors and say 'sorry, no more room'.

The large audience listened attentively and made the most of the opportunity to put questions to our panel. Keeping everything moving to time, and seeing that fair play was observed at all times, was our long-standing friend of the Peace Group, Malcolm Harper. We had been fortunate in persuading a varied team to explore 'civil liberties' is it a case of 'nothing to hide, nothing to fear?' As well as Tony, who apologised for being 3 ½ years late – he was taken ill when he had agreed to a similar meeting back in 2005 – we were fortunate to hear Derek Wall from the Green Party, and also Scilla Elworthy from Peace Direct. After tea and cake, we had a double act from Ed Vaizey our MP and Henry Porter, Observer columnist. Many people filled in 'feed back' forms for us and we received unstinting praise for the afternoon, with the provision of refreshments coming in for special commendation. Appreciation of the afternoon was reflected in very generous donations. To round off the day, more than 80 people enjoyed a vegetarian supper supplied by Liz MacDonald from Wantage. We even had our own visual aid in the form of a timeline of civil liberties won and lost, which people could peruse at their leisure.

We had leafleted the whole of Faringdon and many of the villages with a splendid postcard produced by Al Cane, as well as advertisements in the local press and peace movement publications. Literally thousands of people will have been made aware of the danger to our hard-won rights. This was part of our aim. That we then managed to persuade 200+ people actually to give up a Saturday afternoon to consider this very important topic belies the notion that 'there is no interest in politics'. A great afternoon, the result of dedicated teamwork and enthusiastic help from supporters of the Peace Group.

Jennie Chesterton

Summary of speeches

Tony Benn entertained and inspired us with his overview of how we had gained our civil liberties, the state they are in now and how we should move forward in the fight to preserve them. He said the courage of past fighters for civil liberties gives inspiration to the next generation. Like them we must keep two flames alive: that of anger against injustice and that of hope, which means that we need to be impatient and patient at the same time. There is no place for pessimism, which he said is a prison into which we put ourselves. He admired politicians and leaders who took a principled stand and stuck to it. Technology has allowed the younger generation to escape the dominance of the mass media but has not changed morality: if it was wrong to kill with a bow and arrow then it is wrong to kill with an atomic bomb. He encouraged us all to 'say what you mean and mean what you say' and to keep fighting and hoping.

Derek Wall, Green Party candidate for the European Elections in June, followed by talking about the recent erosions of civil liberties in the context of environmental activism citing the G20 demonstrations and the Climate Camp in particular where he criticised police tactics. He pointed out that it was now illegal to photograph the police, but without videos and photos there would have been no evidence of their actions. He appealed to us to 'follow the repression'.

Scilla Elworthy, who founded the Oxford Research Group and Peace Direct, claimed that the prevention of war is going to be the civil rights movement of the 21st century. At present the world spends nearly 2000 times more on military budgets than it does on conflict resolution and yet of the 42 wars in the 1990s, 22 were ended through negotiation, not military victory. Social networking and communication between the victims and the peace workers at a local level are the key: The conflict in Kenya in 2007 was resolved in large part through the grass roots courage and organisation of women on both sides who met, discussed and drew up a plan to present to the elders. Peace Direct hopes the strength of opinion for conflict resolution measures will be tested through the early day motion 1248. Scilla asked us to encourage our MPs to sign it.

Henry Porter, the author and Observer columnist explained that through the generations the British have seemed able to hand on to the next generation the inheritance of their liberties against the ever-present danger of their surrender to the state, but that this

generation is in serious danger of not passing on this heritage of freedom.

We should be concerned about ID cards, about the Automatic Number Plate Recognition system, and about the EU Borders scheme which will require 53 pieces of information to be provided before one can cross an EU border. There must be a new re-engagement between Parliament and people and there are signs around of a greater awareness of this need.

Ed Vaizey, MP for the Wantage constituency, accepted that in all political parties there is a variation of view between those who are more or less authoritarian and he places himself on the liberal wing of the Conservatives. He has always been opposed to the introduction of ID cards and the retention of DNA records of innocent people and believes the Terrorism Act has been abused. Laws are being used to harass law-abiding people and the judgement of the police is being called into question.

Discussion between Henry Porter and Ed Vaizey referred to the disconnect between the police and the public and between the public and parliament. Many of our institutions have failed us. These failings have been heightened by the media using exaggerated fears in a completely negative way which allows the state to treat us with contempt. Can this generation find a way to reform these relationships so that we may hand on our country's respect for liberty in our turn?

GENERAL ELECTION CANDIDATES MEETING

As a follow up to 'Taking Liberties' we are hoping to arrange a public meeting of all the local prospective parliamentary candidates before the next general election. Please let Jennie know if you are interested in being part of the planning group. 01367-710308.

JUNE MEETING - SEEKING PEACE IN AFRICA

Malcolm Harper, whom many of you will have seen as Chair of the 'Taking Liberties' meeting, was well qualified to speak about Africa having spent 18 years working with Oxfam, much of it in East and West Africa, and 22 years as Director of the United Nations Association.

He began by explaining that 'peace' in this context does not simply mean the absence of war but the presence of non-violent communities built on equity, justice and human rights. He took examples such as Zimbabwe, Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo where things have gone badly wrong but pointed out that no

two situations are the same; all are unique and need different solutions. Peace will only come however through African solutions. Many of the problems stemmed from corruption among the elite group in power, weakness of African neighbours to stand up against wrong-doing and failure of the international community to fulfil its promises of support, and to bring criminals to trial at the International Court of Human Rights.

There are some African success stories such as Botswana where the economy is sound and conditions for most people have improved enormously. Also in many recent conflict areas grass roots groups are getting people together to try to rebuild relationships. Malcolm said he was an optimist and a great believer in the resilience of the African people who never give up and despite everything really know how to enjoy themselves.

PEACE NEWS SUMMER CAMP – July 23rd – 27th ...empowering, inviting, sharing, training, creativity, community-building, play, learning, entertainment...

This 5 day camp will take place on Adam Twine's farmland near Watchfield and promises to be very interesting and stimulating. Cost £15-£50 depending on circumstances.

'Join people from across the broad spectrum of the British peace movement for five days of exploration, celebration and empowerment. Bring your contribution to a hothouse of creativity, a small self-governed society run by democratic camp meetings, a viable example of the kind of world we are trying to bring about. The Peace News Summer Camp helps build a radical movement for the future by building a living community today.'

For more information and to book your place, go to www.peaceneWSCamp.info or phone 020-7278-3344.

OLIVE PICKING IN PALESTINE – October 2009

A group of up to 20 from the Faringdon and Oxford area (under the auspices of the Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association, ORFA) will be going to Palestine in October for one or two weeks as the first step towards a possible link between Arura village (near Ramallah) and Faringdon. The first week, from October 23rd, we will be living with families in the village and helping with the olive harvest and the second week we will be staying in Ramallah and taking day trips to places of interest. Some of us have already booked our

plane tickets but it may not be too late if you are interested in joining the trip. Please contact Jennie (01367-710308) or Karen (01367-241707) immediately for more information. ORFA will have a stall at the Fete where there will be an opportunity for those not going on the trip to make a donation towards equipment for a new Health Centre in Arura village.

PEACE DIRECT has a new and very informative website – www.peacedirect.org

Scilla Elworthy, its founder, was one of the speakers at our 'Taking Liberties' meeting.

Peace Direct finds, funds and promotes local people working for peace in conflict areas around the world. They give them funds to carry out the work they think is needed, not carry out some-one else's plan, and provide moral and practical support.

THE WORLD COURT PROJECT also has a new website - <http://worldcourtproject.org>. It is basically an international site but has pages for the United Kingdom. If you have not already signed one of their Affirmations of Freedom from Nuclear Weapons you can do this online if you click on the "Join In" tab.

The World Court Project is working to publicise and have implemented the 8 July 1996 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal status of the threat or use of nuclear weapons.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Monthly meetings are held at 8.00pm in the Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Rd. unless specified otherwise.

- **JUNE 27th** – Oxfordshire's inaugural Armed Forces Day. Also 'Unarmed Forces Day' – Celebrate those who dedicated their lives to non-violent social change.
- **JULY 1st** – Monthly meeting, Adam Twine will talk about his recent experiences in the Occupied Territories, Palestine.
- **JULY 4th** – GRAND PEACE FETE! See above for details.
- **JULY 18th-19th** – Royal International Air Tattoo, Fairford. Possible protest and picnic. Contact Jennie for more info.
- **JULY 29th – AUGUST 2nd** – Big Green Gathering, I think at Glastonbury. See www.big-green-gathering.com

Please send any items for the newsletter to Karen Vogt, 7, Leamington Drive, Faringdon, Oxon. SN7 7JZ or email karen@vogt.org.uk