

VIEW FROM AN ANTI-WAR AND ANTI-NUCLEAR ACTIVIST IN 2022

Anyone who has been around in the peace movement for a long time will know of Rae Street. A dedicated activist and campaigner, she joined the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1980 and has since served as its Vice-Chair and as Vice-President of the International Peace Bureau. Rae spoke to the Faringdon Peace Group in November about the state of the world today through her eyes as an anti-war and anti-nuclear activist.

She began by talking about the war in Ukraine for which she strongly condemns Putin, but also recognises provocation by NATO which reneged on its promise not to expand into former Warsaw pact states bordering Russia. Peace will not come by pouring weapons into Ukraine she claims, but only by a ceasefire and negotiations – the way all conflicts end. We must support peacemakers in Ukraine and Russia. Rae quoted J.F. Kennedy: *'Let us never negotiate out of fear but let us never fear to negotiate'*.

Now is the time to talk about nuclear weapons, Rae urged us, to show they cannot win a war and are a disaster for the planet and all life on it. This is at a time when NATO has a 'first strike' policy if threatened and through 'nuclear sharing' is basing nuclear weapons all over Europe. As a Greenham woman, Rae is very sad that nuclear weapons are returning to Lakenheath in Suffolk after we got rid of them in 2008. The majority of the world does not want nuclear weapons: Ninety-one states have signed up to the Treaty for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons and sixty-eight have ratified it. Faringdon Town Council has signed up to the Treaty, despite the UK's refusal to sign. There was pressure on NATO states not to participate. Rae said 86% of Labour voters support a ban on nuclear weapons so it is disappointing that the Labour Party under Kier Starmer is in favour of Trident renewal.

Other wars continue, most fuelled by arms trade. In Yemen UK arms are sold to Saudi, who use them to devastating effect on the local population. Few are talking about peace between Israel and Palestine these days. The reason, according to Rae, is that money is to be made from conflict – Profit before people. NATO insists that former Warsaw Pact states replace their old soviet arms with NATO ones - another boost for arms sales.

Rae is disturbed by how many politicians want to increase defence spending to 3% of GDP – an increase of 60% - especially in these times of austerity and spending cuts. Weapons do not feed people, educate children or create clean water. They also contribute greatly to carbon emissions and climate change.

When asked if there was any cause for optimism, Rae replied that there were signs of hope in South America and that lots of groups working for peace were achieving success on a small scale. We can all support campaigning groups like CND, Stop the War, Campaign against Arms Trade etc. and use the media and social media to raise issues. Non violent direct action can be very effective, as witnessed at Greenham Common. Most of all she said we have to 'keep on keeping on'.