

FARINGDON PEACE GROUP NEWSLETTER – SPRING 2008

www.faringdonpeacegroup.org.uk



5TH ANNIVERSARY OF WAR IN IRAQ

If this newsletter reaches you before the 19th March, the eve of the 5th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, please join us for a silent candlelit vigil in Faringdon Market Place between 6 and 7pm.

Other vigils will be held at the same time around the UK and in the USA remembering the suffering of the Iraqi people.

For Christians this is Holy Week, when Jesus' path to the cross is remembered – the betrayal, the torture, the abandonment – and so too the people of Iraq are remembered.

The vigil is for those of all faiths and none. All are welcome.

Please bring candles/lanterns and appropriate placards/banners if you wish.

- Tens of thousands of Iraqis are detained, many without trial. A UN Human Rights report in June 2007 expressed concern about the Multinational Force's detention practices, and in particular the internment of suspects for prolonged periods without judicial review of their cases.
- 174 British, 3,923 US, and 133 other military personnel have been killed in Iraq between March 2003 and 14 January 2008.
- According to The Ministry of Defence (MoD) the UK has spent £5 billion on the war in Iraq over and above the UK's defence budget.

We remember

- 1.2 million Iraqi people have been killed directly and indirectly.
As a result of the destruction of infrastructure tens of thousands experience malnutrition and disease.
- Since 2003 there has been a mass exodus of people fleeing from the ongoing violence and occupation. More than 4.4 million Iraqis have left their homes. Some 2.2 million are displaced internally and more than 2 million have fled to neighbouring countries, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.
- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports that one in five Iraqi refugees registered in Syria is a victim of violence. Many suffer from chronic illness which is exacerbated as their financial resources run out. Refugee children are falling behind in education, and one UNHCR survey in Syria found 10% of the children of refugee families are working for a living.

THE BOMB STOPS HERE! - ALDERMASTON AWRE, 24TH MARCH, EASTER MONDAY

To mark CND's 50th birthday we are all invited and encouraged to join a mass demonstration at the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston on Easter Monday, 24th March. We plan to embrace the base colourfully and noisily, celebrating five decades of committed campaigning against nuclear weapons and sending a clear message to the Government that 50 years is enough. Despite public opinion and the sustained 'Block the Builders' campaign, work has started on the construction of facilities for a new generation of nuclear warheads at Aldermaston.

Oxfordshire groups have been asked to meet at the Home Office Gate where the theme is the 1970s, so dig out your flares and tank tops, banners, flags, fence decorations, instruments, whistles etc. for maximum effect, fence coverage and noise! More details see www.cnduk.org

Timings:

- 12.00 noon – Meet at Home Office Gate
- 12.30 – Speakers and entertainers tour the gates
- 2.00 – Get into position to surround the base
- 2.30 – Collective noise
- 3.00 Closing ceremony and action

There is transport going from Oxford (£6/£4 return), also picking up in Abingdon, leaving Oxford at 10.30 and leaving Aldermaston at 4.00. Booking is essential and you need to be quick. Phone David and Rene Gill, 01865-242919 to check availability and me (Karen 01367-241707) about sharing cars to Abingdon. If you are unable to come but would like to take part, please send photos, letters, decorations etc. that we can attach to the fence.

NOVEMBER MEETING – ‘AMERICAN BASES, OVER HERE, SECRETIVE AND OUT OF CONTROL’ WITH LINDIS PERCY

Lindis Percy, a veteran peace campaigner, paid a second visit to Faringdon Peace Group in November in her role as joint coordinator of the Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases (CAAB). This organisation concentrates on the presence, role and functions of the US Visiting Forces and their Agencies in the UK and is opposed to all nuclear weapons, particularly the American Missile Defence System. Many US bases in this country such as Menwith Hill, where the campaign began in 1992, and our local base at Croughton (the largest military switchboard in Europe) are essential for this system to function. The US base at Fairford would also play a significant role in any attack on Iran.

Lindis claims that US bases here are ‘secretive and out of control’. Secretive in that very little information is released about their activities and out of control in the sense that, although the land is owned by the UK, the buildings, the equipment and personnel, including the MOD police, are all paid for and under the control of the US.

Through asking parliamentary questions, monitoring bases, challenging unsafe laws, protest and civil disobedience, CAAB tries to raise public awareness of the issue, release information into the public domain and bring the executive to account. Lindis has been inside many US bases in this country and has frequently been arrested, but

believes that sometimes you have to break the law to change it.

Lindis and CAAB will continue their activities as long as US bases remain in this country.

DECEMBER MEETING – NUCLEAR WARHEADS ON THE A34

Oxford City Council declared itself a nuclear free zone in 1986 but that has not been enough to prevent the passage of nuclear warheads and nuclear weapons materials round the Botley Interchange on their way from Aldermaston to Coulport in Scotland or to Brize Norton.

Nigel Day from ‘Nukewatch’ described how they have been monitoring the movements of secret nuclear weapons convoys as they shuttle nuclear warheads by road, day or night, between the Trident nuclear submarines at Faslane, near Glasgow and the ‘research’ establishments at Aldermaston and Burghfield where they are refurbished.

Accidents can happen and the Ministry of Defence has accepted that there could be circumstances in a crash in which a fire and explosion, though not a nuclear explosion, could occur. This could release a cloud of deadly material. Each of the load carrying vehicles may carry one or two fully assembled nuclear warheads containing up to 8 kg of plutonium. Yet local fire services and emergency services are not made aware of their movements. Nor do the vehicles carry radiation symbols to indicate the nature of their load.

The routes are varied; no doubt through anxiety about the potential for terrorist attack, or the possibility of unwanted demonstrations. So you may see them on the network of motorways going north from Reading, on the M4/A34, or on the A43 crossing east from the A34 to join the A1(M). The convoy drives amid normal traffic and may spread out on the motorways, often travelling at about 50mph. Another smaller convoy takes nuclear material from Burghfield to Brize Norton on the A34 through Botley and Eynsham.

What are we to do? Let’s take our cue from Gordon Brown himself, speaking in 1982: "Instead of spending billions of pounds on weapons of death (like Trident) we will use our resources to help those most in need". Come on Gordon, keep your word... *Further information at* www.nukewatch.org.uk

John Cottis

FEBRUARY MEETING –THE STATE OF BURMA

Mya Kalaya's earliest memory is of being carried away from gunfire in the streets of Rangoon as the military put down the 1988 uprising of the people calling for democratic elections. A neighbour was shot. Now studying in London, Mya came to speak to us about conditions in her country after the latest demonstrations and crackdown.

She explained to us the complexities of the situation in her country. Burma (now called Myanmar) had been artificially created with the break-up of the British control of the region. Burma thought it could 'follow Socialism in its own way', rather like China, but the attempt to impose state control of everything led to economic collapse. In 1962 the military took control and seized power. Since then the country has been run by the army generals with a combination of brutal oppression, ethnic wars and a standing army of 400,000 soldiers. Over half the budget goes on the military whilst education, public health and widespread poverty are ignored.

In 1990 the generals allowed an election promised after the 1988 uprising, but the triumph of the National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, was short lived. The generals reasserted control and Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest ever since. The marches last September were sparked by an economic crisis with fuel and cooking oil prices soaring. This was devastating for people among the poorest in the world. Again the monks joined the marches but the ensuing crackdown was severe, in spite of media attention, leaving 31 civilians dead and thousands more beaten or jailed.

Mya explained that Burma is a very diverse nation with many ethnic groups and these generally have their own religious traditions and often their own resistance movements. Many of the opposition have crossed the borders and live in refugee camps. It is rich in resources, producing oil, timber and 90% of the world's rubies. Mya's own name means emerald. It could be so different...

What hopes for peace? The UN has sent special envoys but their missions seem ineffective and they seem to pay little attention to the ethnic conflicts. The Security Council issued a statement strongly deploring the violence but it is 'non-binding'! The US, UK and EU have strict sanctions on goods, but

no sanctions on oil. Burma's links with India, China and SE Asia – all of whom are keen to maintain their oil supplies - are still very strong. When the international pressure gets hot the generals make promises - but nothing seems to come of them. In this country one of the leading groups in exile runs Burma Campaign UK but there are several other exile communities. A recent development is the creation of Burma Political Forum to coordinate activities and campaigning for a better future for Burma.

You can find out more from their websites:

www.burmacampaign.org.uk and
www.burmapoliticalforum.org

John Cottis

MARCH PLANNING MEETING

At this well-attended but rather rushed planning meeting, it was decided to continue holding regular planning meetings, but with a limited agenda so that items can be discussed at length and decisions made. We agreed it would be good to take time to talk over the big, fundamental issues around 'Peace' to help cohesion within the group and make us more effective campaigners.

We had updates on action at local bases, particularly Fairford (protest and picnic at Air Tattoo in July), peace education in local schools (new pack available for secondary schools), possible large speaker meeting, and future actions to do with Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran.

Jennie Chesterton, Dave Watson and Dave Penn are taking the idea of a big autumn or spring meeting forward, others welcome to join them.

GRAND PEACE FETE, SATURDAY 5TH JULY

The first meeting to organise the 2008 Fete will be on March 31st at 7, Leamington Drive, Faringdon at 7.30pm. There is no formal Fete committee – if you are interested in helping please come along.

Everyone please start gathering together white elephants, jams/chutneys, plants, books, adult and children's tombola and raffle prizes to donate to the fete. There will be an 'Eco' theme this year and a viewing point with a fantastic view of our new Westmill windmills! Ideas for any eco or wind-related activities welcome.

Enquiries or offers of help to Sjoerd Vogt – 01367-241707, sjoerd@vogt.org.uk

EDMS

Please urge your MP to sign the following Early Day Motions. To find your MP and their contact details go to: www.parliament.uk Alternatively, visit your MP at their local surgery, dates given below in Diary Dates.

EDM 65 PARLIAMENT AND DECISIONS OVER US MISSILE DEFENCE

Notes developments at Menwith Hill approved without debate and calls upon the Government to arrange a full debate in the Commons about US Missile Defence plans in the UK.

EDM 72: NUCLEAR WEAPONS CONVENTION

As we approach the 40th anniversary of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and have failed to abolish or prevent further proliferation of nuclear weapons, this EDM calls on the Government to work to achieve progress on multilateral negotiations and implementation of a nuclear weapons convention by 2020.

SUPPORT MORDECHAI VANUNU

Mordechai Vanunu would appreciate messages of support, as he is still detained.
vanunuvmj@hotmail.com

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

MARCH

- **Weds 19th**: FPG Candlelit vigil on eve of 5th anniversary of war in Iraq. 6 – 7pm Market Place. See above. Also countrywide vigil - 'Christian Peace Witness for Iraq: A call to Prayer and Action' Details 01865 748796 (F.O.R.) www.for.org.uk
- **Thur.27th**: London Heathrow Demo Free T shirts!! 11am on the dot.0845 458 2564 www.t5flashmob.org
- **Sat 29th** : Christian CND Festival Oxford Town Hall. 'Caring for Creation – all faiths for peace, justice and sustainability' 10.30 – 5.0pm. Tel:020 7700 4200 With Michael Meacher M.P. Carol Naughton et al. 020 7700 4200 <http://ccnd.gn.apc.org>

- **Mon. 31st**: First Fete Planning Meeting, 7 Leamington Drive.01367 241707. All welcome. 7.30pm

APRIL

- **Tues.1st**: Fossil Fools Day! Direct action against climate change.
www.fossilfoolsday.org/9620
- **Weds 2nd**: '**Dancing our way to Peace**' Lilly Sell will lead us in some circle dances. No partners needed. Easy to follow 'No mistakes, only variations'! Friends' Meeting House, 8.0pm
- **Fri 11th**: Ed Vaizey, Faringdon surgery, 5.30 – 7.00pm. No appointment needed.
- **Sat.19th**: 'Nuclear Power and Nuclear Disarmament' with Frank Barnaby, World Disarmament Campaign in London EC1 see Peace News or Tel: 020 7377 2111

MAY

- May sometime - Proposed picnic and 'site visit' to Fairford – what's going on? What to look out for. With Nigel and Margaret from Oxford CND (Our local experts on the bases and Nukewatch.)
- **3rd**: Demo at RAF Croughton
- **Wed.7th**: Monthly meeting
- **Sat 10th**: Palestine Demo, central London. to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Nakba. Demonstrate against continuing dispossession and denial of Palestinian rights
- **Thurs.15th**: Conscientious Objectors' Day.
- **Sat.17th**: Levellers' Day, Burford. 'Time for a Written Constitution?' speeches, debate, music, bands, song, procession and more!
- **Mon.19th**: T.B.C. Fete Planning meeting.

JUNE

- **Wed. 4th**: Monthly meeting.
- **Mon 23rd**: T.B.C. Fete Planning Meeting.

JULY

Sat. 5th: Grand Peace Fete. 2.0pm Clock House, Coleshill. Theme: '**ECO-PEACE**'
See above for planning meeting dates and other ways to be involved.