

FARINGDON PEACE GROUP NEWSLETTER – SPRING 2010

www.faringdonpeacegroup.org.uk



No apologies for this newsletter's Palestinian flavour – reports below show a great interest in the area, and with the recent deterioration in Israel's relationship with the US and UK, it could be that we are on the brink of a more balanced approach towards tackling the Israeli/Palestinian situation.

FPG, with perfect timing for a May 6th General Election, has organised a meeting with all the candidates:

'YOUR CANDIDATES – YOUR CHOICE' GENERAL ELECTION QUESTION TIME, APRIL 16TH

Would you like to hear what your Prospective Parliamentary Candidates have to say about the important issues of the day? Come along to **'YOUR CANDIDATES – YOUR CHOICE'**; an evening based on the BBC's Question Time, featuring all the General Election candidates who have so far put themselves forward for the Wantage constituency, with Henry Porter, the author and Observer columnist in the Chair.

The candidates are Adam Twine (Green Party), Alan Armitage (Liberal Democrats), Ed Vaizey MP (Conservative) and Steven Mitchell (Labour).

The meeting will take place in the Corn Exchange in the centre of Faringdon on Friday April 16th. Doors will open at 7.30 for 8.00. Please arrive early if you would like to propose a question; a selection will be chosen covering the most popular themes.

This is a follow-up to the hugely successful 'Taking Liberties' public meeting which took place last April. Admission is free but donations are welcome for refreshments and to help cover expenses.

Offers of help or more details: Jennie: 01367-710308 or Karen: 01367-241707, or email karen@vogt.org.uk

DECEMBER 2009 MEETING PICKING OLIVES IN OCCUPIED PALESTINE - With members of FPG

Members of Faringdon Peace Group who joined a group from the Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association (ORFA) on a 2 week visit to Palestine in October and November reported back on their experiences to a packed Meeting

House on December 2nd. They also spoke to Abingdon Peace Group in the New Year.

All had enjoyed the week spent picking olives in Arura village in the West Bank and experiencing the generosity and closeness of Palestinian family life. The second week based in Ramallah with meetings and visits was more challenging and emotional as they learnt first hand about the enormous impact of the Israeli Occupation on so many areas of Palestinian life.

Each speaker chose an aspect of the trip which had affected them in some way. Phil Chesterton spoke about the symbolism of keys and olives: Keys are a symbol of the refugees' hope and right to return to their old homes from which they were forced out mostly in 1948 and 1967, but also still today. Olive trees represent the deep connection that Palestinians have to their land which makes it all the more poignant when they are separated from their olive trees by the Wall or when the trees are uprooted or cut down by settlers. An ancient olive tree transplanted to a settlement with its un-harvested olives lying on the ground around it seemed to symbolise Israel's takeover of Palestinian land as its own, and its disregard for Palestinian values and heritage.

Jennie Chesterton mentioned joining Israeli women to protest against the Occupation and the siege of Gaza at their weekly 'Women in Black' demonstration in West Jerusalem. They stood with placards for an hour in the rain on a busy roundabout and witnessed a certain amount of verbal abuse from Israeli drivers.

Penny Wixey was impressed by the dignity and resilience of the Palestinians she met who, despite all their problems still work tirelessly for justice. She also expressed her shock at the apartheid road system, where Israeli only settler roads cut through Palestinian land forcing Palestinians to take lengthy diversions.

Karen Vogt was moved by the measured and articulate way in which Palestinians spoke of their situation, and by their inspirational efforts to improve the lives particularly of the younger generation. She described a creative art,

photography and writing project in a refugee camp, helping children to work through their experiences and encouraging them to see beyond the camp and the Wall, even if it's mostly in their dreams and imaginations.

Sjoerd Vogt was fascinated by the contrast between Arura and a ghost village nearby full of huge mansions built by wealthy Palestinians who live and make their money overseas, but want a home in Palestine too. He was also surprised to find out that in many parts the so-called security and separation wall does not separate Israelis from Palestinians but along much of its length separates Palestinians from Palestinians as it cuts through towns and villages into Palestinian land.

All had been deeply affected by what they had experienced and encouraged anyone who could do so to go and see the situation with their own eyes. A new group is being set up – the Arura-Faringdon Friendship Association (AFFA). Anyone interested is welcome to join. Please see AFFA article below.

Support the Palestinians. Buy 'Zaytoun' olive oil – available in 'Mustard Seed'. Boycott Israeli fruit and vegetables. Avoid 'Agrexco' and 'Carmel Agrexco' and 'West Bank' labels.

ED VAIZEY MP SURGERY VISIT

In December four members of FPG, recently returned from a trip to Palestine, visited Ed Vaizey's surgery to ask his views on the Palestine/Israel situation. A Conservative Friend of Israel, Ed supported Israel's position in most cases, but agreed to read literature the group would send him, for example about the academic boycott of Israel and persecution of Palestinian students. He believed the separation wall was defensive and that the Palestinians had brought the present situation upon themselves, although the democratic victory by Hamas in the Gaza elections should have been recognized by the international community. When challenged about the flouting of International law by building settlements, he claimed lots of countries disregard International legal decisions. He also believed that if the UK did not supply them with arms and equipment, another country would. In 2004 Ed visited Israel, but not the West Bank, and suggested that he might join constituents on any future trip to the West Bank.

Ed Vaizey's forthcoming Faringdon surgeries are on 9th April and 11th June, 5.30 – 7.00 in the Pump Rooms. No appointment needed.

FEBRUARY MEETING CLIMATE CHANGE AFTER COPENHAGEN? With Sjoerd Vogt, local campaigner

With climategate, amazogate and most recently himalayagate, climate scientists have recently scored a number of own goals, and the science of climate change seems to be in tatters. At February's meeting local campaigner Sjoerd Vogt tried to put the arguments on both sides into perspective by using a familiar childhood analogy: "Imagine two camps. One believes that the moon is made of cheese – the other has overwhelming evidence that it's actually made of rock. The cheese camp then suddenly discovers that there's discrepancies in the reporting of the manganese/titanium mineral ratios. This is then used to cast doubt on the entire rock theory". Sjoerd went on to speculate: "if our existing way of life depended on the moon being made of cheese – then there would be plenty of rock sceptics desperate to support the cheese theory".

Sjoerd explained why expectations relating to the Copenhagen Climate meeting in December were so unrealistically high, and why it was perhaps not surprising that the outcome was very disappointing. "The Kyoto Protocol takes us to 2012. To prevent runaway climate change, we need new global commitments of 40% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2020, and \$200 billion allocated to developing economies. Developing countries not only need to be able to deal with the effects of climate change but they also need to develop in carbon-neutral ways".

Sjoerd stressed that we shouldn't just be concerned with climate change. "The unsustainable exploitation of resources and the destruction of the biosphere are challenges that we must also face. The time has come for each and everyone of us to take personal responsibility for our carbon footprint; our excessive consumption; and our waste."

"At the moment there's no price or penalty for destroying rainforest, or releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, or extraction of non-renewables, or excessive waste going to landfill. There HAS to be a hefty price tag on all four if we want to survive" – according to Sjoerd.

MARCH MEETING DRONES – WAR BY REMOTE CONTROL? With Chris Cole from the Fellowship of Reconciliation

Has the growing use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles – "drones" – changed the nature of warfare? We were asked to consider the impact of this new technology not only on the nature of war, but also on the general approach to

security and enforcement, in a discussion introduced by Chris Cole from the Fellowship of Reconciliation on 3 March.

There are two main categories of drone: the first are those used solely for gathering information, and the second carry weapons as well. Both are remotely controlled. Since the intervention in the Balkans, the use of armed drones has grown rapidly in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, to the extent that military men have predicted that the UK will not commission any more manned fighter aircraft. The US developed drones jointly with Israel in the 'Watchkeeper' program. Britain has bought 3 armed Reaper drones for £6m each which we operate alongside the Americans from the control centre just outside Las Vegas. We have also bought into the technology of the Watchkeeper program for £850 millions and are supporting the development of 2 further drones by BAe Systems.

Apart from not putting our own aircrew at risk, drones are much cheaper. Drones can also stay in the air for much longer periods than manned aircraft and are very difficult to detect. These features make them very attractive for aerial surveillance. At another level, it was recently reported that the Merseyside police had illegally operated a drone for surveillance purposes and the Association of Chief Police Officers said to be strongly in favour of their use being permitted.

What are the issues we need to think about? Where is the boundary between combat allowed by the laws of war, and the use of drones in the assassination of leaders or individuals, where no rules seem to run? Does their use increase our security or stimulate the activities of suicide bombers against us? Do the operators of the drones from their remote locations act as judge, jury and executioner in circumstances which leave no chance to review the evidence of what truly happened? Will the trend lead to more and more automatic responses where human judgement ceases to exercise control? In surveillance uses, will there be any space left for the liberty of the individual?

There is much to think about! And much development is going on without open discussion of these questions. We need to inform ourselves and question our politicians.

A TASTE OF PALESTINE IN FARINGDON

The Catholic Church Hall was packed on the 6th February for an evening of traditional Palestinian food, music and dancing. Fifteen young dancers came from the Oxford University Palestinian Society and enthusiastically performed dances for different occasions, with dozens taking to the floor to join in the final dance. A vast array of

food was produced by local people following traditional Middle Eastern recipes accompanied by mint tea and Arabic coffee.

The purpose of the evening was to introduce people in Faringdon to the village of Arura in the Palestinian West Bank where some of us had picked olives in October (see above) and with whom we are setting up a friendship link. There were photos, information, handicrafts and other products on display from Arura as well as from the rest of Palestine.

The Faringdon Mayor, Dr. Mike Wise, was presented with a beautifully embroidered wall hanging made by women in Arura which will be hung in the Council Chambers. He was very warm in his thanks and in his support for the Arura-Faringdon Friendship Association (AFFA). An email was read out from Mohamed Aruri, one of the founders of AFFA in Arura, in which he remembered the happy times we had spent in the olive groves sharing stories and learning about each others' lives, and wished us success with the evening, hoping it would be the start of a deep and long-lasting friendship between our two communities.

ARURA-FARINGDON FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION (AFFA)

The inaugural meeting of AFFA was held on 23rd February. Aims and objectives and future events were discussed. The main aim is 'to establish people to people links between Faringdon and Arura to promote friendship and understanding'. This can be done initially through Facebook groups and between schools and will gradually widen to include different groups in both communities. The fundraising will focus on the 'Donate a Dictionary' campaign which involves sending dictionaries to Arura to assist in learning English. No official membership, everyone is welcome to meetings and events. Email karen@vogt.org.uk if you would like to be added to the supporters list and receive updates.

JUMBLE SALE: 10th April, 10-12am, Catholic Church Hall. Jumble needed (clothes, bric-a-brac, books etc) and also cakes for refreshments. Helpers for sale and refreshments needed. Contact Jennie or Karen – details at end of newsletter.

COFFEE MORNING: 22nd May, 83, Grove St. Wantage. Offers of cake welcome. Contact Penny Wixey: 01235-765840

NEXT AFFA MEETING: 27th April, 7.30pm, Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Road. All welcome.

BIG BLOCKADE ALDERMASTON

Hundreds of campaigners brought the gates of the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) in Aldermaston to a virtual standstill on Monday 15th February in the biggest protest to

be seen at the site for some years. The blockade comes at a time of major political controversy over the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system and shortly ahead of a global summit on nuclear non-proliferation in May. A number of FPG members took part in the blockade and will be speaking at the monthly meeting on 5th May. Come along and hear of their experiences.

GRAND PEACE FETE – SATURDAY 3RD JULY

Please make sure you have this date in your diaries and start making, growing and collecting now – plants, jams, bottles, raffle/tombola prizes, books, white elephants etc. The first Fete planning meeting will be on Tuesday 6th April, 7.00, 7, Leamington Drive, Faringdon (SN7 7JZ). All are welcome, but if you can't come please send any offers of help to sjoerd@vogt.org.uk or phone Sjoerd on 01367-241707. It takes a huge number of people for the Fete to run smoothly so any help would be very gratefully received.

FPG monthly meetings are held on the first Wednesday of the month (except August) at 8.0pm, unless otherwise stated, at Friends' Meeting House, Lechlade Road, Faringdon.

Our meetings are usually open to the public. For more details, please ring 01367-710308 or 241707

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- Wed. 7 April **Monthly meeting** - 'Dancing for Peace' led by Lilly Sell
- Fri 9 Apr **Ed Vaizey surgery** - 5.30 – 7.0pm Pump Room, Faringdon
- Sat. 10 April **AFFA Jumble Sale** in aid of 'Donate a Dictionary' for Arura. Catholic Church Hall 10.0 -12.0pm. Jumble needed (clothes, books, toys etc. also cakes) Please tell Karen , Jennie, Penny, Phil, Sjoerd if you can help
- Tues. 13 Apr Elias Chacour, Melkite Archbishop of Galilee, 7.45pm Christchurch College, Oxford.
'Educating for Peace in Israel and Palestine.' Entrance free by ticket only
- Friday 16th Apr **General Election meeting** – see top of newsletter for details. May be your only chance to question all the candidates!
- Sat. 17 Apr **Israeli Campaign Against House Demolitions (ICAHN) Day conference**

with Prof Avi Shlaim , Mark Thomas et al. (Info PSC 28/2)

- Tues. 27 April **AFFA meeting.** 7.30pm Friends' Meeting House. All welcome.
- Late Apr/May **'Walk of the Dead'** begins from Brize Norton and other bases to Downing St. Supporting Soldiers refusing to fight unjust wars. See Peace News. Feb P2.
- Weds.5th May **Monthly meeting** – First hand experiences from FPG members who were at the Aldermaston 'Big Blockade' in February
- Mon 10 May **Archbishop Desmond Tutu** to speak at the Sheldonian, Oxford. 5.0pm Admission free, but need ticket. (John/Janie/Jennie)
- Sat 22 May **Penny's Coffee Morning for AFFA** . 83 Grove Street, Wantage. 10.0am – 12.00 Offers of cakes appreciated. Tel: 01235-765840
- Weds.2nd June **Monthly meeting** – Oxford University students from 'Oxford Anti-War Action'
- Sat. 3 Jul **Grand Peace Fete. 2.0pm Clock House.** Already 2 people have indicated their willingness to help. Please let Jennie, Karen or Sjoerd know if we can count on you.
- Sat/Sun 17/18 July **Royal International Air Tattoo**, Fairford.

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In 1975 Morocco invaded Western Sahara, and is still in occupation, oppressing the Saharawi. Morocco has divided the country with a 1,500km wall, protected by minefields and 120,000 soldiers. More info:
www.wsahara.org.uk

Any contributions for newsletter or for more information about anything in it please contact Karen Vogt: 7, Leamington Drive, Faringdon, Oxon, SN7 7JZ, Tel: 01367-241707 karen@vogt.org.uk