

## FARINGDON PEACE GROUP NEWSLETTER - WINTER 2004/5

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



With all that's going on in the world, with both natural and man-made disasters, it wouldn't seem right to wish you all a Happy New Year if there weren't such great potential for radical change in 2005. Maybe precisely because of the mess the world is in, people who are weary of war and suffering are reaching out to those they have rarely spared a thought for before and are eager to do something to change things and make it a better place for all of us. 2005 could be an amazing year if we take advantage of the opportunities presented to us; Britain's presidency of the G8 (Summit in Edinburgh in July) and the European Union, the "Make Poverty History" campaign, the Millennium Report on Africa, new leadership in Palestine, Faringdon Peace Group's 25<sup>th</sup> birthday..... We wouldn't have kept going for so long if we didn't believe we were making a difference in challenging injustice and aggression, so here's to 2005 and the next 25 years!

*October 2004 Meeting:*

### **"CITIZENSHIP – A SCHOOL'S RESPONSIBILITY" Dave Wilson and Mike Pearce of Faringdon Community College**

Mike Pearce talked us through the programme which all college students follow with their form tutor in an hour a week of Personal Social and Health Education. They learn study skills, rights and responsibilities and personal and social skills, which enable them to be positive about themselves, make the right choices in their lives and achieve their goals.

Dave Wilson, the Headteacher explained how these skills are put into practice in the college, in the local community and internationally. Students from an early age are given responsibilities within the college and are represented by a democratically elected Student Council. Issues, including those of war and peace, are raised through assemblies, guest speakers and trips (e.g. to the battlefields in France) and students use the skills they have been taught to form their own opinions. As well as

charity events, they take part in the Sports Leadership Award and the Community Volunteers Programme. The College is proud of its international links with schools in many parts of the world. A sixth form trip had recently returned from Uganda where they learnt about sustainable energy, eco-tourism and global citizenship. Their excellent ICT facilities enable them to hold web-based discussions on important issues with a similar school in the US.

*December 2004 Meeting:*

### **"DETAINEES IN GUANTANAMO BAY – IS THIS A HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTION?" – Mark McDonald, barrister in criminal law and prospective Labour Party parliamentary candidate for Wantage.**

Mark's short answer to the question was " Yes, Guantanamo Bay is a human rights issue". He went on to explain that the US has leased the area of the bay from Cuba at the beginning of the 20th century after helping the Cuban people secure their independence from Spain. The lease provided for its use a coaling station - by turning it into a military base the US is now in breach of the terms of the lease.

The treatment of the detainees, which Mark illustrated with evidence given by those released, was tantamount to torture and was in breach of the Geneva Conventions which the US had ratified and applied in previous wars. The US government had tried to put the detainees and Guantanamo outside the reach of the law and the jurisdiction of the US and international courts. Some of those in Guantanamo had been seized in Pakistan and Bosnia and taken to Afghanistan before being transported to Guantanamo. The detainees were not told what they were being charged with; had been

subject to cruel conditions and interrogation; and were denied access to independent legal representation. They were claimed to be "unlawful combatants" but this is not a valid category in international law. Also the US is using the so-called war on terrorism as a justification for detaining people for the duration of the 'war' - however long they may like to make that. Some recent decisions in US courts did indicate that these courts were resisting the use the government was making of the military tribunals and cases might be brought back within the proper legal system.

Mark argued that the British Government had spoken out against the actions of the US at Guantanamo and in Iraq; they had secured the release of some of the British detainees and an undertaking that the other Britons would not be subject to the death penalty. We do not, and cannot, know what pressure our government had tried to bring to bear behind the scenes. He said that the solution lay in all the cases being heard with proper evidence and legal representation before a criminal court - not in military tribunals. The proper legal process also needed to be applied to those detained in Britain under the Terrorism Act. The struggle against state torture needs to be continued with 'zero-tolerance' for torture and abuse, which only degrades the society that uses them.

## **NOVEMBER 2004 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

A full account of the AGM and financial accounts are available from me, Karen (see details below) or at the next meeting. This is a summary: All officers were thanked and re-elected as follows:

- ? REVOLVING CHAIRS – Dave Headey, Sjoerd Vogt, Trish Wickstead, Phil and Jennie Chesterton, John Cottis, Marcus Laphorn
- ? MEETINGS SECRETARY – Jennie Chesterton
- ? NEWSLETTER SECRETARY – Karen Vogt
- ? TREASURER – Marcus Laphorn
- ? NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTION – Mairead Boyce
- ? FETE 2005 – Sjoerd Vogt

? COMPUTER/WEB STUFF – Sjoerd & DaveH

Marcus reported a healthy financial situation with income up on last year due to donations and the fete. This enabled us to give more to worthy causes; Croughton Demo, Child Victims of War, The Trial Fighting Fund, Stop the War Coalition, Oxford-Ramallah Friendship Group, Our World, Our Say (K.Gunn), Peace News Trustees, Close Campsfield Campaign, CND, CAAT, the Peace Fund, NIS Education, Voices in the Wilderness. We are paid up members of CAAT, UNA, CND, Network for Peace and Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

Jennie went through all the FPG meetings and activities during the year: Meetings covered Fair Trade, Fairford, Palestine, Migrants and Refugees, Military Education, Direct Action, Iraq, Citizenship Education and old friend Jean Kaye's "Life as a Peacenik". We have been represented at all local and national anti Iraq war demos, including those during Bush's visit, as well as at RAF Croughton and AWRE Aldermaston. Individuals have attended trials of peace activists and area peace groups meetings. We had an NVDA workshop and our annual shared supper social. We have held local vigils relating to the Iraq war and occupation including "Naming the Dead", which finished on the day of the AGM.

Karen apologised for erratic newsletters last year. This year's should be out in March, June, September and December.

Nigel Nicholas reported on the European Social Forum.

Dave Watson reported on CND Conference: Dave was our first delegate in many years and came back armed with loads of literature, great enthusiasm and lots of suggestions for future FPG meetings and activities. The CND campaigns he picked up on related to Trident, new generation nuclear weapons at Aldermaston, Star Wars, the Mutual Defence Agreement, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the G8 Summit in Scotland in July. While understanding everyone's limits of time and resources, Dave felt we should all ask ourselves the question, "What are you doing to promote a more peaceful world and do you think

it is all that you can manage at the present time with the resources available to you?"

After Jennie's report on our 25 year anniversary celebrations (see below) and general discussion we finished with drinks and birthday cake (thanks to Gemma).

## **FARINGDON PEACE GROUP'S 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY, OCTOBER 2005 – A MONTH FOR PEACE**

To bring us all up to date in preparation for discussion at the February meeting, this is what has been agreed in planning meetings so far. And to whet your appetites, here's the best news first: We not only have Bruce Kent but also Tony Benn to come and speak!!!!!! Jennie's contacts and perseverance have paid off yet again!

- ? **LAUNCH** on Sat. 8<sup>th</sup> October in Corn Exchange 2 ish–7 ish with various speakers (including the above) and activities finishing with supper.
- ? **DISPLAYS/EXHIBITIONS** in Tourist Office, Library and mobile exhibition for elsewhere
- ? **OTHER GROUPS** meeting in October are encouraged to follow the "peace" theme e.g. U3A have invited Malcolm Harper, ex-chair of United Nations Association.
- ? **ARTWORK** – Aim to produce a small banner/collage/hanging
- ? **AUDIO-VISUAL PRESENTATION** chronicling our 25 year history to show at various events
- ? **ART EXHIBITION FOR SCHOOLCHILDREN**
- ? **POSTCARD** with arty front and details of all events on the back to be as widely distributed as possible
- ? **BARN DANCE** on 29<sup>th</sup> October to end celebrations

### **WE NEED YOUR HELP!**

- ? If you have any photos of peace group people or events (fetes, demos, etc.) over the years we would be very grateful for them for displays and presentations. Please write names date and event on the back and your name and address if you want them returned.

- ? Are you part of a club, society or church group etc. meeting next October who could introduce some aspect of peace at your meeting? If so, we can include you in the publicity.
- ? Would you like to be creative and help with the artwork?
- ? Could you help with distributing the postcards or with the launch or the Barn Dance?

Any offers, ideas, photos etc. to me, Karen (details below) in the first instance and I will pass them on.

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:**

- ? Weds 2<sup>nd</sup> February – Monthly meeting. Business and planning for meetings, Fete and 25<sup>th</sup> birthday
- ? Thurs. 10<sup>th</sup> Feb. – Anti-War Day of Action. See [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk) for details.
- ? Weds. 2<sup>nd</sup> March – Monthly Meeting. Hopefully with all local prospective parliamentary candidates in pre-election discussion of issues of war and peace.
- ? 1<sup>st</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> March – Fairtrade Fortnight. Use the Faringdon Fairtrade Guide (distributed with "What's On") to make a point of buying, drinking and eating Fair Trade locally.
- ? Sat. 19<sup>th</sup> March – "Bring the Troops Home" (from Iraq) Demo in London.
- ? Sat. 2<sup>nd</sup> July – GRAND PEACE FETE! Clock House, Coleshill. 2-5pm. Put the date in your diary NOW! Start collecting all the usual things – but no clothes this year thanks. Ideas, offers of help to Sjoerd, details same as mine below.
- ? Sat. 2<sup>nd</sup> July – G8 Summit rally in Edinburgh - "Make Poverty History". Or if that's too far, come to Coleshill to the Fete where we will have our own mini-rally!

All meetings are at 8.00pm Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Rd. (opposite Duke of Wellington) unless stated otherwise. Further details, help with wheelchairs etc. phone 241707 or 710308.

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