

FARINGDON PEACE GROUP NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2007

www.faringdonpeacegroup.org.uk



The beginning of October is set to be a busy time for the peace movement with the Big Blockade of Faslane on Oct. 1st (the anniversary of the start of Faslane 365), a protest and picnic at RAF Croughton on 6th as part of the 'Keep Space for Peace Week', an Afghanistan Peace Walk and Vigil on the 6th anniversary of the 2001 invasion in London on 7th and a 'Troops Out!' national demo on 8th, the day that MPs return from their summer break. In Faringdon we have our AGM and future planning meeting (with birthday cake!) on 3rd. What should we be doing as a Peace Group in a time of war? All welcome.

MAKING WAR OR PEACE? FPG PUBLIC MEETING, 18TH MAY

This Public Meeting brought together Ed Vaizey, local MP, and deputy chair of Conservative globalisation and global poverty policy, and Jo Wilding, human rights activist and joint nominee for the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize. The Defence Academy failed to provide a speaker and others pulled out at short notice. Attendance was good with a healthy mix of local people and peace group members from near and far. Discussion centred around Iraq which Jo had visited before, during and after the invasion, most recently in 2004 when she took a circus. She initially saw how UN sanctions adversely affected the poor and weak and, after the invasion, witnessed people's initial hopes turn to fury and despair. Her circus allowed people, particularly children, to suspend reality for a short time and laugh and enjoy themselves.

Ed was very firm in his support of the war and the removal of Saddam Hussein, believing the West had to be resolute in the wake of 9/11. There were strong reminders from the floor that there were no links between Iraq and 9/11. He thinks British troops should stay until Iraq's democracy is secure and blames American mistakes and Iranian interference for the failure of the war so far. He was unashamed in voicing strong support for Israel and its foreign policy.

Jo felt no just solution could be found in the Middle East without taking on the IMF, the World Bank and the Arms Trade, while Ed believed the solution could only come from the Middle East itself particularly in a peace agreement with Israel.

PLANNING MEETING, WEDS. 6TH JUNE

Actions since last meeting: leafletting on Trident vote, Oxford demo (Trident, Troops out), Faslane blockade, Jenny Stanton (Palestine speaker), 2 fete planning meetings, Leveller's Day, OPC meetings and a public speaker meeting.

Finances: Approved a donation of £25 to Peace News.

Work with schools: On hold until Liz Rothschild has time to commit to it.

Future activities: Repeat of last year's protest and picnic at the Fairford Air Tattoo 14th – 15th July. Wait for news of next action at Aldermaston. Feeling that anti-war protests at Brize Norton insensitive with casualties and bodies flying in there. OK if other reason like Extraordinary Rendition. Leafletting if specific issue.

Discussion about 'Making War or Peace' public meeting, 18th May. (See report above)

Valuable meeting but unfortunate that key speakers dropped out, the Defence Academy failed to produce one and Jo Wiley had to leave early. Agreed that a public meeting is a good idea but needs at least 6 months to plan. Suggestion to have it on a Saturday like a mini 'Day for Peace'.

Communication: Phone tree had not been used at all, most communication by email.

Planning meetings: The value of quarterly planning meetings will be discussed at the AGM.

GRAND PEACE FETE 2007

Visitors to the 26th Grand Peace Fete on 7th July once again enjoyed a sunny afternoon of music, entertainment and homemade teas and curries in the beautiful grounds of Clock House, Coleshill. New attractions, including Beatrice the donkey and Tom Falding's circus skills workshop and juggling show, were a great success. Old favourites like the sack races and children's games were as popular as ever. The Fete was opened by Mike Sofroniou of 'Friends of Amma' and music was provided by 'The Last Straw' and the Cherry Tree players.

Income was good and feedback positive. Any problems which were highlighted will hopefully be sorted out by the committee before next year's fete – Saturday 5th July. Make a note of it now! The theme will be of a climate

change/environmental nature which gives great scope for different stalls and activities. We also hope to have a viewpoint to see the 5 new Westmill windmills in action! The perennial problem is getting enough people together to organise the fete, set it up, run the stalls and activities, and clear up afterwards. It's very rewarding to be part of it and if more people could commit to this side of it, it would ease the load of the faithful few. All offers/ideas gratefully received: sjoerd@vogt.org.uk Tel: 01367 241707

FAIRFORD AIR TATTOO PROTEST AND PICNIC

A group of us went to Fairford Air Tattoo again this year [Sat 14 July], where thousands come to be "entertained" by the prowess of military aircraft roaring overhead. We were joined by others at one of the entrances, where we stood for several hours with our banners, reminding innumerable visitors passing us that these aircraft are used for threatening and killing. It was an ideal opportunity to catch the attention, however briefly, of people who normally have little or no contact with anyone from the "peace movement", and present a point of view about the purpose of the military they weren't going to get inside the base!

OTHER FAIRFORD NEWS: Phil Pritchard and Toby Olditch were found not guilty of criminal damage to planes at RAF Fairford at the end of their trial in May. The court agreed that they had acted to prevent damage to life and property in Iraq and war crimes by the aggressors.

FAIRFORD WATCH: A close watch is being kept on RAF Fairford to note any increased activity which may indicate the build up to an attack on Iran. Nothing of note has been reported so far.

GREENHAM ANNIVERSARY WALK AND PICNIC, SEPT. 1ST

The Chestertons report:

It is incredible to think that it is 26 years since a group of women and men came from Cardiff to the airbase in

Berkshire where it was proposed to site nuclear-tipped Cruise missiles.

The last time some of us had actually been to Greenham Common was when the fence was officially and ceremoniously cut down in the year 2000. With the 'men in suits' on the inside of the base with their bolt cutters, and the peace women relegated to the outside, it was an altogether bizarre spectacle as the common was officially declared an open space, the first time since World War 2.

It was a journey of nostalgia to return there this September, in the company of friends from our Peace Group, to re-live old memories and hopefully re-charge batteries, because although we did send Cruise missiles back, we still have nuclear weapons in Britain.

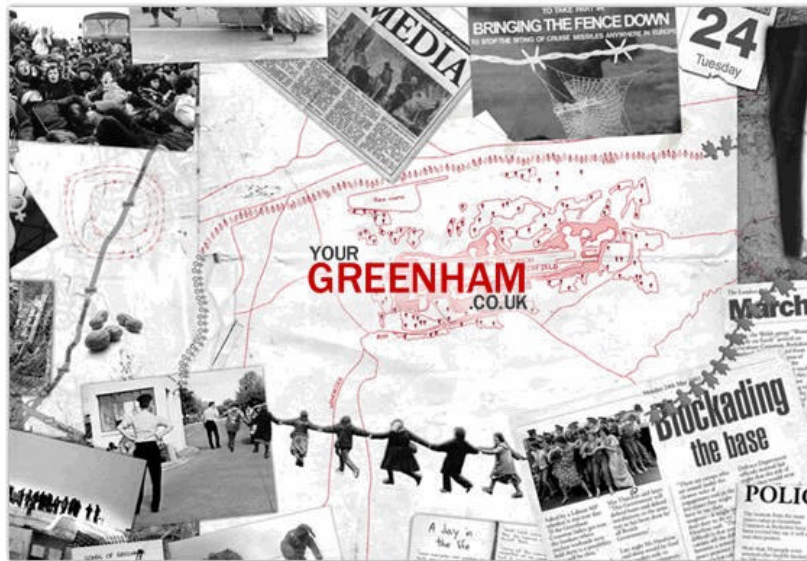
I was pleasantly surprised to find that the authorities have installed (or allowed to be installed) several memorials to the 'Peace Women'. There is the information board detailing the recent history of the Common which gives due recognition in a time-line to, amongst other events; the

Peace March arriving in 1981; 30,000 Women 'Embracing the Base' (how we all remember that amazing day); the missiles being removed; and the MOD declaring the base 'surplus to requirements'.

Then there is the Memorial Board at the control tower, where there are photos of scenes from the peace camps, together with quotes -

do you remember 'You can't kill the spirit, She is like a mountain, Old and strong, She goes on and on' - which I found very moving. You can also see a picture of a collection of tiles with peace symbols, perhaps created by children, part of the recognition of the need to find new ways of dealing with conflict in our so-fragile world.

On a day which was quite dull and overcast, we shared a very pleasant picnic, sitting around one of our rainbow flags, very fitting for Greenham, where very early on the women illustrated their commitment to peace by re-naming the 7 gates around the base with the colours of the rainbow.



We first went to 'Helen's Garden' at Yellow (main) Gate. This is a memorial to a young woman who was killed in a road accident during one of the many protests, and the slabs of Welsh slate, and herbs and flowers combine to make a lovely, peaceful memorial to Helen.

At Orange gate you can still see the remains of orange paint on the fence posts, and remnants of ribbon, now brown and tattered. We had our picnic in the wooded area near the Gate.

Our last stop was at Blue Gate for a walk across the site of the old runway which at the time was the longest runway in Europe, to the still sinister 6 silos, which once held the weapons. To think that this so easily could have become the epicentre of nuclear annihilation! There is still no access to the silos, but we remembered the iconic photograph of Greenham women dancing on top of a silo one New Year's Eve.

Although there have been attempts to mitigate the aggressive nature of the former base, I am still left with a feeling of unease at the evil history of this place. It should be a permanent reminder that nuclear weapons are still with us and that our job is not finished. We have work to do!

Jennie and Phil Chesterton

A QUESTION OF CONSCIENCE – Speaker Meeting Sept 5th

“Thou shalt not kill” is a commandment that we can all accept as a rule of life for individuals – but what happens to it when countries fall out with other? Wars and battles happen, and deliberate killing on a huge scale is somehow justified. We now accept that if someone sincerely holds beliefs which do not allow him to engage in warfare, he (or she) may apply to be recognised as a conscientious objector and do alternative service. Robin Brookes spoke to the Faringdon Peace Group at their September meeting about ‘Conscience’. Conscience is an organisation seeking to extend the right of conscientious objection to military service to the right to divert that part of their taxes that would be spent on the military machine to alternative peace-building efforts. Supporters do not want to pay less tax in total, but to direct part of their tax to a Peace Tax Fund for peace building.

Most people have tax deducted from their incomes before it reaches them – through the PAYE system. They have no opportunity to hold back the proportion of their tax that goes on military spending. Seven members of the Peace Tax Campaign, including Robin, who are not subject to

PAYE, have taken the step of withholding part of their tax and have argued the case for a conscientious objection to military taxation in the law courts. Though they have not been successful so far, they are now taking their case to the European Court of Human Rights. They were encouraged by the view expressed by the English Appeal Court judges that a decision in the European Court 20 years ago which denied their claim that human rights could cover taxation, education and employment matters “...may be legally and logically unsound”.

Robin argued that a peace tax fund is right and constructive. That conflicts cannot be solved by killing people is surely evident in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Government has set up a fund for ‘conflict prevention’ but this is a tiny proportion of the Ministry of Defence budget and far more needs to be done within our own society and internationally for serious efforts to promote conflict resolution if we ever hope to reach the day when ‘war shall be no more’. If governments could be persuaded to recognise the right of conscientious objection to military taxation and allow citizens to divert a small part of their taxes to peace building rather than war fighting, it would be step in the right direction towards a more peaceful world where all life is valued.

LOCAL NUKEWATCH EXHIBITION

At a recent Nukewatch exhibition in the Lord Mayor’s Parlour in Oxford Town Hall, the Lord Mayor of Oxford, John Tanner, thanked the local nukewatch team for the work they had done to highlight the dangers of convoys that carry nuclear weapons and special nuclear materials on Oxfordshire roads. Nuclear convoys regularly travel on our local roads, A34, M40, A43 and even the A420. There will soon be a local Nukewatch touring exhibition and a national Nukewatch film available for showing. I’m sure it will come to Faringdon, but for more details and other events please phone Nigel Day on 01865-248357.

CROUGHTON PROTEST – October 6th

Oxfordshire Peace Campaign is organising a protest at the former RAF base on the Oxfordshire/Northamptonshire border which is now the site of a major US communications base handling almost a third of all US military communication within Europe. In addition to its communication role, it also supports war-fighting functions, including guiding bombers, and reportedly played a crucial role in the illegal war against Iraq.

The demonstration has been called as part of Keep Space for Peace week (4th – 13th October), an international week

of protest which will include demonstrations at Menwith Hill, Fylingdales, many locations in the US and elsewhere in the world. (See <http://www.space4peace.org>) OPC Coordinator, Gawain Little, said "This year, Keep Space for Peace Week will have added significance as the US has announced plans for a Missile Defence system with components based in Poland, the Czech Republic and Britain. This system has far more to do with offence than defence and we must mobilize now to prevent it before we are dragged into a new cold war."

Speakers at the demonstration will include Kate Hudson, Chair of CND (who organized a major conference on Missile Defence in London on the 1st September), and Lindis Percy, Coordinator of The Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases (CAAB). Ms Percy was recently arrested for protesting outside Menwith Hill RAF base in Yorkshire, one of the proposed sites for use in the Missile Defence system. The government has already agreed to US use of the base despite huge public and local opposition and a complete lack of consultation. Bruce Gagnon, a well-known US peace activist, took time out from his speaking tour of the UK to assist the Lord Mayor of Oxford in planting a tree outside the base. (See AfterDowningStreet.Org for news of peace movement activities in the US)

Protestors will assemble at RAF Croughton at 12noon on the 6th October for a march around the perimeter fence ending with a rally and picnic. Please phone Jennie, 01367-710308 or Karen 01367-241707 about lift-sharing from Faringdon. Transport will be leaving central Oxford at 11am and further details are available from 07967392229, oxonpeace@yahoo.co.uk.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- ? Oct. 1st: Big Blockade, Faslane. Celebrations and carnival of resistance on the anniversary of Faslane 365. More details www.faslane365.org/1oct
- ? Oct. 3rd: FPG AGM with 27th birthday cake! All welcome.
- ? Oct. 6th: Protest and picnic at RAF Croughton. See above for details and lift-sharing
- ? Oct. 7th: Peace Walk and Vigil for Afghanistan on the 6th anniversary of the invasion. Demanding an end to bombing and withdrawal of British troops. 10.00 am. Saint Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, 78 Bishopsgate, London EC2

- ? Oct. 8th: Troops Out! National Demo in London on day MPs return to parliament. See www.stopwar.org.uk
- ? Oct. 8th: 'Breaking the Silence' a one-woman show about the life and work of Rachel Carson, one of the first US environmental campaigners and author of 'Silent Spring'. Beautifully written and performed by FPG member Liz Rothschild. Not to be missed! Swindon Arts Centre, 7.30pm. Tel: 01793-614837 www.rachelcarson.co.uk
- ? Oct. 13-14th: CND Conference 2007 and AGM City Hall, London www.cnd.org
- ? Nov. 7th: FPG Speaker Meeting hopefully with Lindis Percy from Campaign against American Bases
- ? 10 NOV, LONDON: MOVEMENT FOR THE ABOLITION OF WAR LECTURE BY CRAIG MURRAY, FORMER BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO UZBEKISTAN. Methodist Hall, Old Street, London EC1. Contact 01908 511948. www.abolishwar.org.uk.
- ? 28 NOVEMBER, LONDON: MASS LOBBY OF PARLIAMENT ON PALESTINE ORGANISED BY THE ENOUGH! COALITION. See www.enoughoccupation.org.uk
- ? Dec. 5th: FPG monthly meeting
- ? 8 DEC, OXFORD: FUNDRAISING CONCERT FOR THE PEACE TAX SEVEN. With Ruth Underwood and Margaret Lion. Music by Schubert, Telemann, Messiaen, and more. 7.30pm, Holywell Music Room. Contact Robin Brookes 01380 812294 or robin@robin-brookes-design.co.uk. See www.peacetaxseven.com.

All FPG meetings are held on first Wednesday of the month in the Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Rd. at 8.00pm unless otherwise stated. Everyone is welcome. Refreshments at 9.30pm.

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