



ABINGDON PEACE GROUP

Newsletter

June 2021

Peace News

The June/July edition is now out. You can subscribe to a traditional hard copy or read it online. Its 24 pages cover an amazing range of peace-related topics. It's essential in the sense that it sits, quite independently, at the hub of the peace movement.

You can subscribe to the hard copy version for a year for between £10 and £60, according to household income. Online it's completely free, but we are all invited to be a PN 'sustainer'. Go to peacenews.info and explore. And whilst there go to the 'webshop' and click on subscribe for full details. And then think about it.

One of the features this month is an article by Paul Rogers, emeritus professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University. *Making Britain 'Great' again* is a 'decoding' of the latest military review. Incidentally, his last three blogs at Open Democracy are about Israel/Gaza. www.opendemocracy.net/en/author/paul-rogers/

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Next meeting: Tuesday, 15th June 2021, at 8pm online

Jeremy Cunningham on The Public Awareness of Nuclear Weapons

Jeremy retired from the headship of John Mason School in Abngdon in 2005 and then developed his interest in schooling and peace - and particularly the contribution of schools to peace-building after civil war, with a focus on Uganda, Sri Lanka and some research into Northern Ireland and Cambodia. While at the school he had been very interested in education for citizenship and human rights.

He remains a part-time independent researcher in the field of peace studies, it having struck him that the major threat to humanity of conflict was being rather overlooked, spurring him "to do some thinking and digging around".

He recently spoke at the OXPEACE annual conference in Oxford and will present us with his paper. He looks forward to lots of discussion. He has devised 'a simple ten question quiz' on nuclear weapons. They are certainly all questions that we should know all the answers to – but probably don't! If that's true of seasoned anti-nuclear campaigners, what does that tell us about our fellow citizens? Jeremy's talk will be fascinating.

Joining the meeting: Either use the link below or look out for a message with the link on June 15th. If you don't receive it and would like to take part, simply email us using:
abingdonpeace@gmail.com

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/91315134101pwd=RmxHLzBQaXIHjFSRm5nREVzYjdSdz09>
Meeting ID: 913 1513 4101
Passcode:015836

Jeremy Cunningham (and co-presenters?)



Our May meeting: Racism and Social Justice – What steps can we take?

This was, I believe, the first time that we have discussed racism as a peace issue as our main topic at a monthly meeting. There was no invited speaker nor even a home-grown expert in attendance; it really was a discussion meeting. We proceeded by looking at a series of ten rather varied short chunks of text and discussed each one in turn (available on request – email us). The plan was that in conclusion we would begin to work our way towards answering the question in the meeting title. We knew we wouldn't get very far along that road and, well, we certainly didn't. But members had participated actively in the earlier discussions and perhaps felt that they had enough to mentally process without moving to conclusions. However, we did send out a short questionnaire to members who had been present and received the following very interesting observations.

This first response was critical, but constructive (see below for further comment):

"I appreciate what the meeting was trying to do. Not many organisations I'm in are looking at race, so well done for that. So I apologise that my answers are not more positive.

1. No, I'm sorry, it [the meeting format] didn't [work for me]. We were asked to put comments in the chat so I did that. Most people spoke their comments and my impression was most didn't look at the chat. As a result I felt that my comments were largely missed or ignored. I didn't switch to speaking my thoughts because we couldn't all do that at once. I could see that some people were struggling to use chat.. but it really was only one or two. It could have worked better if most people had used chat and then one person needed to speak each time. But the spoken word has more impact so the temptation would be very great to answer verbally. If decided to be all verbal then we could have a go-around style so everyone got a say, but would need to limit time to 30 secs or a minute.

2. (*Did the meeting make any difference to your thinking about race and racism?*) Was there a shift in how you think about the issues, and if so, can you describe it?: No – I don't think so. I didn't feel I learnt anything new.

3. (*Did anything you read or heard on the night surprise you?*): Yes, I was surprised to hear some unaware comments, like "Yes, I might ask 'but where are you really from?' but I'm just being curious e.g. I've never been to the Cameroons. It's a shame some people misunderstand me." (Sorry, nothing personal – I don't even remember who said this.) Or the one about "all lives matter". I suppose I shouldn't be surprised, we all have our blindspots, but the problem really was that we didn't take up those issues properly. It would have been easier if we were all in the same room. Maybe just too difficult by zoom.

4. (*We had planned to move on to try to answer the question, "Where do we go from here?", but ran out of time. If we had had time, what would you have suggested?*): I think we need input from people with a lived experience of racism. Another approach is to ask people (our members, I mean) for their experience of being discriminated against.. and then try to make links to see how discrimination can be both direct and indirect, intended and unintended. And we need to ask the question: 'why we are an exclusively white group?' (or am I wrong about that?) As well as, 'does it matter?' and if it does then, 'what are we going to do about it?'

The second response went thus:

"I will try to answer your questions. But until I do I would like you to forward an article from today's Guardian to respond to a comment made by someone in the zoom session. In response to the term

"Black Lives Matter" they said we should be saying "all matter" That comment, to which none of us responded, indicated, I believe, an ignorance of the realities of racial history.

In the Guardian article (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/19/viola-fletcher-tulsa-race-massacre-congress-oldest-survivor>) the 106 year old survivor makes clear that there has been no justice for those massacred nor for the survivors of Tulsa. [do follow this link – this is the centenary year of the Tulsa massacre – ed.]

Third response:

"The meeting did make an impact, I thought back to it several times the next day. The format had potential. The passages were the right length and provocative in the right way. It would have worked better if we had all been good on chat, but mixing talking and chatting wasn't so good. I think with the people in the group, interactive participation slows things down.

The idea that it might be unwelcome for white people to pronounce on discrimination or do anything about it was new to me, but I can see some sense in it. However that means the non-whites have to work out what action to take.

I thought of all the people I know who, like David Bygott, were interested in justice for people of colour, interested in African history, who tried not to think of progress meaning being whiter, and felt sad they had not made a bigger impact. (Is this because the media have not till now been interested- see the comments on this in 'Black Poppies'.)

I felt confirmed in my dislike of the world being divided into black and white. I just do not see people that way. I do not think of Barack Obama as black. My anti-USA prejudice surfaced.

I was surprised there was not more support for Mick's suggestion that we have made progress, especially in schools.

On the fourth point, we have to get past being outraged and shamed by the past (though we might think of ways to make restitution) and think how to mix more, avoiding ghettos of mentally fenced off social groups. This is a huge task starting in formal and informal education, but would benefit the whole of the people of the country - and the cause of peace."

Fourth response:

"The peace group that usually focuses on nuclear weapons, the costs and the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia and Israel for use against Yeminiis and Palestinians and other already devastated people, asked members to think instead about racism. We were to consider if we held prejudice unconsciously and then to consider how we should respond to racism, as a peace group.

Having campaigned, personally, against speciesism, on the basis that humans should not get to decide when any living being dies, I consider myself non-racist. However, hearing a Ted talk, connecting racism to disparity in social justice, effects of climate change, patriarchy etc, I realized that I, too, fear losing my toeholds of freedom and safety. Maybe all people cling to what they've got, whether it was fairly allocated or not; be it a roof over the head or a few quid from a job. I also noted that this generation is one of collective shame rather than superiority, where most people are mortified at the behaviour of their governments, in different countries.

I have felt that shame and prejudice, going to University in Belfast where I was held accountable for everything the British government did. Then I moved to the Republic and was sat down to watch a long documentary about Cromwell's atrocities and have experienced many less direct attitudes towards my English accent – rarely having the chance to interject 'My Mum's Irish!' by way of apology.

Everyone acknowledged the power of the Black Lives Matter movement but I found myself asking which are the instances of racism that are important for a peace group?

No. 1 must be the 70 million displaced people at the moment. These people have had to flee their homes, due to attacks and massacres, carried out using weapons we have made, or fighting over resources we want, or having created an unliveable habitat due to drought, floods or fires from the early effects of climate change, caused by extraction and exploitation by wealthier countries.

I think we mustn't call these people at our borders 'migrants' or 'immigrants'. Those terms have an association as if they're here as entrepreneurs, to make money. Many of these people have been in danger and hunger for two years by the time they arrive somewhere. They are refugees and asylum seekers and I think the peace group's function could include a short press release on what is happening in the respective countries, of the people who arrive.

No. 2 I don't know yet how we can build respect between long-term oppressors and occupants of occupied territories. Or how to set free those that have been detained, say in China, in their millions for forced labour. All around the world the 'warehousing of humanity' is under way.

That subgroup we refer to, of white, wealthy males who genuinely have any say is getting smaller and soon it will be just artificial intelligence at the top orchestrating debilitating outcomes for every race, every species and the whole environment." (This response comes from a member's blog – <https://healingbyfranc.blogspot.com/> under the heading Racism as a Peace Issue - Two Less Obvious Reasons!

Editorial comment: inherent zoom problem or ill-discipline or deficient chairing or all three?

One obvious problem, as noted in the first response above, was that we did not stick to the plan to use the zoom chat channel; and much worse still that there was an awful lot of talking over others. The chairperson, (this reporter), should undoubtedly have called the meeting to order more effectively and will attempt to do so at future meetings, if necessary.

I think there are two zoom problems in play here. One is that there are members who are not yet sufficiently IT-experienced to feel comfortable using the chat; the other is harder to pin down: people who would never ever have spoken while someone else was already talking, in effect rudely interrupting, at a traditional face-to-face, non zoom, meeting, were doing just that. Why? Whatever the answer, people need to behave differently, which can only happen if the chair can be relied upon to know that they want to speak. (Mike Bloom)

Palestine, Gaza, Israel – an easy action to take from CAAT:

"Stop Arming Israel - Email your MP

The bombardment of Gaza has killed 219 Palestinians, including 63 children. It has injured hundreds of people and left over 58,000 homeless and seeking refuge. Israeli forces have used advanced F-35 fighter jets, 15% of the value of each aircraft is made here in the UK, with arms producers boasting that the "fingerprints of British ingenuity" are vital to the warplanes. They have also used F-16 fighter jets and Apache helicopters, both of which include UK-made components.

The UK government must act now to end its complicity in these atrocities. It is time to end the arms sales and investigate whether UK-made arms have been used in the destruction."

To email your MP now to demand they take action in Parliament go to:
<https://caat.org.uk/take-action/campaign-with-us/stop-arming-israel-email-your-mp/>

On this page you will see the above message and by entering your postcode and clicking continue there is a pre-written message to your local MP. Then just click.

CAABU panel discussion on *The Future of Palestinian Human Rights*

This online discussion conducted by CAABU, whose purpose is 'advancing Arab-British relations', and INSEAD students, was scheduled for June 3, too late for most if not all our readers. But a recording will almost certainly be posted online (on You Tube – search CAABU) soon afterwards. INSEAD (Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires) is a non-profit international university, based in Fontainebleau in France.

From the session's advance billing: The continued struggle for Palestinian rights, justice and accountability, following the recent escalations in the occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, not least following the forced dispossession and displacement of Palestinian families in the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, has highlighted the immediate need to further address issues of infringements on Palestinian human rights and adherence and implementation of international law in the face of the ongoing Israeli occupation.

Further info: www.caabu.org

Bruce Kent still doing the rounds

Now in his 90th year, Bruce Kent remains a tower of strength in the peace movement. He never gives up. He is to visit 10 Downing Street and the central London embassies of six other nuclear nations as part of Pax Christi's Pilgrimage of Peace this month. He will read an extract from the Nuclear Weapons Ban treaty at each embassy.

MAW is to celebrate its first 20 years of trying to abolish War and Bruce among others spoke on a Zoom event on 27th May. Since his days as a student at Oxford University he has never stopped working for peace. (Oonagh Godfrey)

MAW's 20th birthday 2021

Bruce Kent is of course well known for his major role in bringing the Movement for the Abolition of War into existence. It being 21 years since that happened the organisation has been quite justifiably celebrating its work, which continues strongly. On May 27 there was a zoom event to mark the occasion, entitled '*Saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war*'. Speakers included Bruce Kent, Paul Rogers (whose open democracy blog we often commend), and Paul Ingram in conversation with Mererid Hopwood discussing The challenges of war and peace in the 21st century, Alternatives to war – including the UN, conflict transformation and international law'; and The role of the armed forces and their carbon footprint. See a recording at: https://youtu.be/mr9ZjHva_dl

Diary

Wed June 9: How to talk about Hiroshima with Milan Rai, Peace News editor. Improve your skills and your knowledge. Online from 6.00 – 7.30pm. Info: tinyurl.com/talking-Hiroshima or 020 7278 334

Wed June 23: Resist the DPRTE arms fair – Farnborough (all day). 'With arms dealers planning a hybrid event that's both in-person and online, local people from Greater Rushmoor Action for Peace are planning to resist - with help from others around the UK and the world.' Details nearer the time from: <https://www.ppu.org.uk/civicrm/event/info%3Fid%3D206%26reset%3D1>

Sat June 26: People's Assembly Demo - 'After Covid, demand a new normal'. Join the CND 'Nurses Not Nukes' bloc. 'a national demonstration in response to the government's shocking mismanagement of the coronavirus crisis. Its pitiful offer to the nurses, the public sector pay freeze, lack of sick pay – all while announcing the first increase in nuclear weapons since the Cold War – makes it very clear that the government doesn't care about the health and wellbeing of our communities'. Assemble at 12 noon Portland Place, London W1. Contact information @cnduk.org

Sat June 26: Resist Armed Forces Day info: www.ppu.org.uk/events

Wed July 7: Faringdon Peace Group Monthly Meeting Subject TBA.

Fri Aug 6: Hiroshima Day silent vigil in remembrance – assemble at War Memorial (The Square, Abingdon) at 7.45 am (the time the bomb was dropped) until 8.15 am.

Sun Aug 8: Annual Abingdon Peace Picnic, but also celebrating our 40 years in existence. Details in July newsletter.

Mon Aug 9: Nagasaki Day (the second atomic bomb in 1945).

corrections, contributions etc to this newsletter are very welcome.

Abingdon Peace Group meets on the third Tuesday of each month except August. At present our meetings are taking place online. All who are interested in peace and campaigning for it are welcome to take part. The Group has no party political affiliations.

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