



ABINGDON PEACE GROUP

Newsletter

February 2022

Culture or war?

We read – and hear - lots of political vacuity about 'culture wars'. But we believe that much art, both in its appreciation and in its creation, can be valuable in making ourselves and others aware of how the world works.

The next month or two are going to be a good test of that belief. Local MAW (Movement for the Abolition of War) activists are organising an exhibition and related events at the Cornerstone in Didcot which is certain to be very rewarding. See the diary pages at the back of this newsletter.

And tell any friends who for any reason don't read our purple prose.

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Next meeting: Tuesday, 15th February 2022, at 8pm, online

Rana Ibrahim

Iraqi Women, Art and War

Rana Ibrahim, an Iraqi archaeologist, is a founder and Director of the Iraqi Women Art and War (IWAW) project, working with Iraqi women based in Oxfordshire to capture their war-surviving oral stories through art.

As a Collection Project Officer at the Oxford History of Science Museum she has also worked on the Multaka Oxford project, helping refugee and forced migrant communities to integrate with Museum collections primarily through Scientific Islamic objects.

During COVID19 she has been displaying her own artwork via Tumblr.



Rana, left; and you can go online online for a preview of her activities:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1cPSn29BuQwjCA6i1mdaA>

Twitter: @rana72

[https://www.facebook.com/IWAW19/?](https://www.facebook.com/IWAW19/?view_public_for=322345831759556)

[view_public_for=322345831759556](https://www.facebook.com/IWAW19/?view_public_for=322345831759556)

https://www.instagram.com/iraqi_women_art_war/

& see events diary on back page

This meeting will be a zoom call. To join us either use the link below or look out for a message with the link on February 15th. If you don't receive it and would like to take part, simply email us (abingdonpeace@gmail.com).

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/91315134101>

pwd=RmxHLzBQaXIHjYjFSRm5nREVzYjdSdz09 Meeting ID: 9131513 Passcode:015836

Our January meeting: Holocaust or Genocide?

Subtitled 'from Nazi Germany to Rwanda, from Bosnia & Darfur to Nuclear Mutually Assured Destruction, will we ever learn?' this meeting seemed to this reporter to be especially valuable, for it linked, almost seamlessly and certainly very significantly, the crimes of Nazi Germany, preparations for nuclear holocaust and genocides in Africa in the last forty years.

Daniel Scharf spoke first, recounting his father Rafael's life. A Jew, he came from Krakow in Poland to London in 1938. Many of his extended family, who stayed, lost their lives. After the war 'he regarded [it as his] his duty [to] form a bridge between the Poles and the Jews'. However, he never forgave the Poles their anti-semitism nor the Germans their crimes. (He regarded Polish anti-semitism as much more virulent than the British variety).

Rafael was invited in 1995 to a conference at Auschwitz at just the time that Daniel made his first visit to Upper Heyford, the US military base that he regards as the best preserved site of preparations for the nuclear holocaust. This is where for many years now he has led an annual walk noting the 'Path of MADness' around the time of Holocaust Memorial Day. This year's was to take place on January 30th. Unfortunately the necessary co-operation of the land developer was not forthcoming, so it was to take place at Greenham Common, where the walk included passing by the peace garden in memory of the Greenham women.

Rafael had no hesitation in agreeing that such sites should rightly be called "holocaust sites". He ended his last public lecture by saying 'How will human beings face up to the evil they are capable of perpetrating? How will they renew their faith in morality in a world of which, in Adorno's word, we cannot be too much afraid; and which contains instruments of destruction that put even the gas chambers in the shade? On the answers to such questions hang all our tomorrows'.

Eloquently complementing Daniel's talk, Rebecca Tinsley turned our attention to recent genocides in Africa. She has spoken to Abingdon Peace Group a number of times, most recently about the danger of one in Cameroon. On this occasion she posed the question 'Why do genocides keep happening?'. Why do they keep happening? Well not because of stupidity or lack of education – she recalls talking to a prisoner responsible for many deaths in Rwanda, who as first thing in their conversation had wanted to discuss Jane Austen (he was a professor of English). It seems that genocide is not an aberration, it's just that we all have the capacity to commit these crimes.

Rebecca pointed to two historical problems – the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) which decreed that rulers are free to do what they wish to their own subjects within their own sovereign borders; and the 1948 Geneva Convention which defines genocide as 'the intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnical, racial or religious group'. So social classes of victims are excluded - thus In Cambodia the Khmer Rouge selected, presumably none too fussily, those who wore spectacles, who were highly likely to be working in middle class jobs.

Features to look for that might precede a genocide include lazy political leaders, rapid economic decline, intellectual justification, scapegoating, fear, greed and conformity. Other signposts: dehumanising language, laws that discriminate, international passivity, and racism: Black African Lives Don't Matter. Rebecca also showed us a list of seventeen genocides from the Herreros in South-West Africa in 1903-4 through to the Yezidi more recently. (Perhaps a Christmas quiz question?)

What is needed is political rather than military solutions. Genocides are not just a humanitarian issue. What is needed is what Rebecca calls 'smart sanctions' on the perpetrators. The guilty leaders must be ostracised and prevented from visiting plush western capitals and acquiring their hugely expensive trinkets to show off to the world.

Perhaps a dispiriting evening, but it is very positive that we could hear the voices of two uncompromising ceaseless campaigners. (Mike Bloom)

Anniversary of TPNW coming into force

It's now a year since the Treaty on the Prevention of Nuclear Weapons came into force (on Jan 21 2021). More and more nations have signed and ratified it. It's not going away and the nuclear powers are perhaps getting a little nervous, with the Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races, published on January 3rd. The opening paragraphs:

"We affirm that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. As nuclear use would have far-reaching consequences, we also affirm that nuclear weapons—for as long as they continue to exist—should serve defensive purposes, deter aggression, and prevent war. We believe strongly that the further spread of such weapons must be prevented."

"We reaffirm the importance of addressing nuclear threats and emphasize the importance of preserving and complying with our bilateral and multilateral non-proliferation, disarmament, and arms control agreements and commitments. We remain committed to our Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations, including our Article VI obligation "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control".

This contrasts uncomfortably with the announced increase in nuclear weapons spending; with the bluntly dismissive posture towards the Treaty on the Prevention of Nuclear War from when it was first mooted until very recently; and with the way in which the nuclear powers have consciously ignored the provisions of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Indeed, it is their their flagrant disregard for the NPT that made the TPNW so necessary. John Gittings, in a recent article*, suggests "that one important inducement [for the NP statement] was the perceived need for more effective propaganda to counter the appeal of the TPNW. This treaty had been strongly opposed by the P5 in their joint statement in October 2018. Like the latest statement, this was pegged to the NPT (to the earlier 50th anniversary of its opening signature), but half of it was an unqualified denunciation of the TPNW. The five opposed the Treaty, they did not support it, they did not regard it as binding, and they called on all states that might consider supporting it to "reflect seriously" on its implications."

*[Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races with a Comment by John Gittings | The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus \(apjif.org\)](https://www.apjif.org/2021/01/03/joint-statement-of-the-leaders-of-the-five-nuclear-weapon-states-on-preventing-nuclear-war-and-avoiding-arms-races-with-a-comment-by-john-gittings/)

Talks Not Bombs - CND digital toolkit to help all of us to campaign

We clearly need to put pressure on the UK Government. CND writes:

"get Britain involved with the agreement so it can take steps to join the global majority in support of a nuclear weapons-free world. The states parties to the TPNW will meet for the first time in Vienna in 2022. As a non-signatory, the **UK can attend as an observer, but it is refusing to do so. The conference has been postponed due to the ongoing challenges posed by Covid-19, but is likely to be re-scheduled for the summer. Help us put pressure on the Foreign Secretary to commit to attending, like other NATO states Norway and Germany.**" (<https://cnduk.org/talksnotbombs/>)



When you go to this website you will find it includes a link to this – **DIGITAL TOOLKIT FOR ONLINE CAMPAIGNING**. We recommend this - it will help us with our armchair campaigning!

No to War in Ukraine – Stop the War Statement (posted 21/01/22)

British politicians are playing with fire stoking up the tension around Ukraine. As the danger grows of a conflict breaking out between Russia and Ukraine following an apparent lack of progress in

negotiations with the USA, Tories and Labour are outbidding each other in pointless bellicosity.

The government has sold fresh weaponry to Ukraine and Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has made a sabre-rattling speech in Australia. Shadow ministers David Lammy and John Healey have flown to Kiev to support Ukrainian resistance to Russia.

Britain should be advancing serious diplomatic proposals to defuse the tension and seek a solution to the crisis rather than ratcheting it up. This involves taking both Ukraine's integrity and Russian security concerns seriously.

Stop the War demands an end to the relentless expansion of NATO, which has only added to international tension, particularly as NATO has played a more aggressive role internationally in the Balkans, the Middle East and South Asia. We oppose the deployment of British forces to the borders of Russia as a pointless provocation.

We urge the reduction in nuclear weapons in Europe and the agreement of new arms control measures, including the withdrawal of all such weapons to the territory of the state that controls them.

We believe there needs to be a new all-inclusive security architecture in Europe, not under the hegemony of any one state. We demand that the British government and the Labour Party distance themselves from the policies and priorities of the USA and develop an independent foreign policy."

Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists – It's now 100 seconds to midnight

"Leaders around the world must immediately commit themselves to renewed cooperation in the many ways and venues available for reducing existential risk. Citizens of the world can and should organize to demand that their leaders do so—and quickly. The doorstep of doom is no place to loiter".

(<https://thebulletin.org/>)

Afghanistan – are we prettifying our memories?

The campaign was a disaster, especially for the Afghans, But the narrative we are being sold – when the media talk about it - is still along the lines of 'we did our best, a few mistakes were made and (your editor heard this on the Today programme just before Christmas, from a British general), we must learn from our mistakes so that we can get it right if we have go back!

Here are three good links:

"*Where is the UN*" by John Gittings (johngittings.com), originally published in the Oxford CND newsletter in the autumn.

"*Afghanistan - What the media and political establishment are not telling you*" by Ian Sinclair in Peace News in the autumn (<https://peacenews.info/node/9991/afghanistan>). You may recall that Ian visited Abingdon a number of years ago to speak about his book, *The March that Shook Blair An Oral History of 15 February 2003*.

Chomsky on Afghanistan: the West must co-operate with China, interview conducted on Gulf News, dated September 8. (<https://peacenews.info/node/10015/chomsky-afghanistan-west-must-co-operate-china>).

The case against nuclear power as a non zero carbon energy source

"Same Old Not New Not Zero Nuclear" (or, most of what you need to know about Nuclear Power in the UK but weren't nerdy enough to ask) Thus reads the caption over a review of the arguments. You may recall the meeting when we saw the two Sussex University academics (Philip Johnstone??? and Andy Stirling....) inveigh against the nuclear lobby's arguments. Though this link (<https://www.risingtide.org.uk/node/581>) you can read an impressive briefing paper for COP26 Coalition from RisingTideUK.

**OXFORD DOESN'T INVEST IN
TOBACCO BECAUSE IT PUTS
LIVES AT RISK.**

**BUT IT'S HAPPY
TO WORK WITH
THE ARMS TRADE.**

**ENOUGH CONTRADICTION.
DISARM OXFORD NOW.**

A good news story: Disarm Oxford

On 4 November, students and residents of Oxford found city and University buildings dotted with posters criticising the University's alleged "complicity with the arms trade." The posters were placed by the relatively new group Disarm Oxford. Disarm Oxford seeks to "[lobby] the University — departments and colleges — to sever ties with arms companies, to stop taking research funding from such companies and to cease Careers Service advertising for them". One such poster features the image of Wafic Saïd, the namesake of Oxford's Saïd Business School, referring to him as a "world-famous arms dealer." Saïd, one of Britain's wealthiest men, fixed the Saudi purchase of British arms in 1985, known as the Al-Yamamah deal. It is considered one of the largest-ever arms deals in history.

"Having a business school after someone called an arms dealer honours an industry we think deserves nothing but dishonour," said Matt Rosen, a student activist with Disarm Oxford.

They are not only criticising the names of buildings. Another poster read, "Oxford doesn't invest in tobacco because it puts lives at risk. But it's happy to work with the arms trade. Enough contradiction. Disarm Oxford now."

Diary

Fri Feb 11 – Sat Feb 12: Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp – Nuala 01865 749459.

Sun Feb 20: – CND online conference Working for Peace in the Middle East' With Sharon Dolev, Kate Hudson and others. 1.00pm -4.15pm. Registration: CND 020 770 2393 www.tinyurl.com/peaceneews3685

Tue Mar 1: Memorial Lecture. What has Particle Physics ever done for me? Celebrating Nobel Laureate Dorothy Hodgkin 5.30pm. Oxford International Women's Festival event – info via <https://oiwf.org/2022-festival/>

Wed Mar 2: Lindsay German from Stop the War coalition has been invited to speak on the dangerous moves towards war in the Ukraine. Details later. Faringdon Peace Group monthly meeting. Further information: Jennie 01367 710308 or Karen 01367 241707 or Dave 01367 240808

Thu Mar 3: CND, NFLA, Nukewatch webinar on nuclear warhead convoys at 6.30pm
Convoys carrying nuclear bombs often travel along Britain's roads, putting at risk the communities which they travel through. No radiation warning symbols are carried and neither the public nor local authorities are warned of these nuclear convoys. This webinar will discuss these convoys, the dangers they pose and share how you can get involved in tracking them as part of the campaign to scrap Trident. To register: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_mbWfFo3ZTzqKJFN2TFoH9w

Sat March 5: Celebration of two Inspirational Oxford Women Margaret Stanton/ Anne Mobbs, political campaigners and feminists 2.30pm. Oxford International Women's Festival event – info via <https://oiwf.org/2022-festival/>

Thurs 10 Mar 10: International Women's Day www.ppu.org.uk/events

Thu Mar 10: Nine Quarters of Jerusalem: A New Biography of the Old City CAABU launch book by Matthew Teller 5.30pm. Full information: <https://caabu.org/events/caabu/nine-quarters-jerusalem-caabu-and-mbi-al-jaber-foundation-online-book-launch-author>

Thu Mar 10: Alexandra Kollantai. 'Her Life and Work' 1872 -1952. A Celebration of her revolutionary life. 7.00pm. Oxford International Women's Festival event – info via <https://oiwf.org/2022-festival/>

Sat Mar 12: A Celebration of Women's Voices in Peace and Protest – An evening of music and poetry with the Sea Green Singers, Iraqi Women Art & War, and women peace campaigners, celebrating women's voices in protest over the decades. Special event at Cornerstone Arts Centre, Didcot, at 7pm.

Sun May 15: International Conscientious Objectors' Day



Cornerstone Arts Centre. Didcot. OX11 7NE

<https://www.cornerstone-arts.org/>

THE GLORIOUS ART OF PEACE

March 8th May 1st

presented by The Movement for the Abolition of War

Paintings, sculpture, textile art and texts about the impact of war

LIVE EVENTS – all to be confirmed

March 12th 2022, 7–9pm **Celebrating Women's Voices in Protest** – An evening of song and poetry with Frankie Armstrong, Oxford Sea Green Singers, Rona Topaz and Sue Gilmurray. **CANCELLED**

April 1st 2022, 7–9pm **War, Peace and Care for the Earth** An evening of poetry, talks and songs with Frankie Armstrong, John Gittings, Sally Mears, Sue Gilmurray and Rana Ibrahim; Iraqi Women Art and War group. Tickets £5.00 – Covid rules apply. for more information contact Ali Lochhead 07976 272765 **POSTPONED CORNERSTONE CLOSED – BOILER PROBLEMS**

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. abingdonpeace@gmail.com. Our telephone numbers are (01235) 526265 & 522163

