



# ABINGDON PEACE GROUP

Newsletter

May 2022

## Art for Peace

In September 2020 Ali Lochhead, an artist who was on the MAW executive at the time, called out to all members of MAW (Movement for the Abolition of War), for artists, musicians, writers, or actors to come together to raise awareness about the futility and horrors of war and the essential need for militarisation to stop. The resulting "MAW Collective" first created a cartoon video involving a small boy and a polar bear, "Extinguish War and Save the Earth". Then they planned an exhibition and event in Friends House in London but the pandemic struck and Friends House closed. Undeterred, MAW & Abingdon Peace cont'd p 3

Next

meeting: Tuesday, 19th May 2022, at 8pm, online

## Colin Archer War, Law and Cash

Colin will address a number of issues under the title 'War, Law and Cash'. The Ukraine crisis has raised a huge number of questions, which are dividing both the international community in general and the peace movement. Among these are: the right of self-defence; the meaning of solidarity; and the experience of empire and humiliation. Tough challenges for those in the neighbourhood include: how to prosecute war crimes? how far to go with sanctions? and most crucial of all: how to avoid a nuclear confrontation? One key dimension is : What is the role of the UN in all this?

Colin will give special attention to the rise in military spending, both worldwide and in the UK, and will outline the work of the [Global Campaign on Military Spending](#), which he had a hand in founding back in 2011.

## In this edition:

Last meeting report – Paul Rogers talk and discussion p2

Ukraine Vigil report p3

Art for Peace at the Cornerstone (cont'd) p3

John Gittings' historical overview of peace-buiding p4-5

Diary of events p6



COLIN ARCHER retired in 2017 from his position as Secretary-General of the [International Peace Bureau](#) (IPB), a Geneva-based NGO federation. Previously he was for 10 years the Coordinator of a Third World solidarity centre in Manchester. He has also worked in community education, teaching

migrants and refugees. Now a member of the Steering Group of GCOMS-UK, among other roles.

*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 April 19th. If you don't receive it and would like to take part, simply email us ([abingdonpeace@gmail.com](mailto:abingdonpeace@gmail.com)).*

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

## Our last meeting: Paul Rogers on the Ukraine Crisis & discussion

Paul, professor emeritus from the groundbreaking Bradford University School of Peace Studies, had given his very absorbing talk on March 9 a few weeks before our discussion, but it wasn't the least bit dated. It was a talk. The links to the You Tube recording and transcript are below – if you have not yet read or heard it (at 35 mins) we would strongly recommend it (see below),

Having heard a recording of the talk, a few points were discussed. What was the source of Putin's idea of 'restoring Russia to its historic greatness'. 'I think that the main element behind this is the slow steady expansion of NATO eastwards, and the expansion of, the coming together of, more EU states, particularly the ones in Eastern Europe', Paul had stated. This is hotly denied by most of our commentariat and our political leaders. The meeting tended to feel that Paul was right, however, which does not excuse Putin's invasion one iota.

Nato's fear of nuclear war - 'that is something that is affecting the NATO thinking a great deal. It's a new thing that they've never had to face'. We discussed whether this fear might lead to new thinking around 'mutually assured destruction'.

On the topic of 'modern war', eg the Russian tactics in Chechnya (and now Ukraine) Paul said 'I could identify, quite easily, particular examples where in fact Western states have been involved in that' and cited the instance of Aleppo.

Would there be significant resistance in Russia to its militarism? There would be many soldiers, conscripted, ill-trained and young, who lost their lives. Their mothers might bravely try to halt the war. We agreed that we must give whatever support we can to those Russians who stood up to the war machine. Not easily done, but opportunities might arise which we must seize.

'At least in this terrible time [we should] remind people repeatedly why refugees are refugees in the first place'. We agreed with that and the idea was developed that supporting refugees was an example of humane behaviour on our part that would make our society fairer and more equal, leading to people being less receptive to politicians' aggressive bluster. In other words, being humane is a political act. A topic for a future meeting?

We then addressed some points that John Gittings had made in his recent article in the Oxford CND bulletin (reproduced in our April newsletter). His first was 'It always makes sense to seek explanations, but there is no justification, no extenuation [for the invasion]' What did this mean for our peace movement? We agreed that we must always make this point in discussing Ukraine with people who might not agree with our position as early as possible – not wait to be accused of 'what-aboutism'.

There would be a dilemma when the current war comes to an end, John had predicted. The military establishment would argue that the lesson is that we need nuclear weapons 'to deter a madman'. So just when events justify our case more emphatically, they will be used to encourage pronuclear entrenchment. We agreed that we need to be as willing to press the case for disarmament as ever. And we had, John said, 'not only have to imagine a new world order, based on principles of peace, equality, and justice, but we have to find a new range of arguments with which to advocate it'. What did this mean for local activists? Who do we address these new arguments to? We felt we must promote these ideas to fellow citizens who are not politicians; but at the same time demand of our 'leaders' that they move in these directions, which often means confronting a deep mindset. (Mike Bloom)

<https://peacenews.info/blog/2022/paul-rogers-ukraine-crisis> (transcript)

<https://peacenews.info/node/10150/professor-paul-rogers-ukraine-crisis> (You Tube)

## Ukraine Vigil report

The regular Monday morning (8.15 to 8.45) vigil calling for an end to the war against Ukraine continues. We stand in front of war memorial and watch the traffic go by and much of the traffic notices us in return. We know that because we get a lot of friendly toots and thumbs up gestures. But the event on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> of April was a bit different in that a man, stating that he was the son of a Ukrainian, took exception to what he saw as our message. He was a steadfast supporter of NATO, which in his view had done nothing wrong in its approach to Ukraine over the past few years. He put his views in a robust manner, which of course is fine, but was plainly not in listening mode.

We discussed this later and decided that we would write him a letter (see below) if he re-appeared. We don't know who he is and in fact we did not see him at the next vigil, Bank Holiday Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> May. Here is the letter, as yet undelivered to him:

'To the gentleman who took exception to the Abingdon Peace Group anti-war vigil last Monday.  
From: Abingdon Peace Group

The first thing we would like to say is that nothing at all excuses the vicious invasion of Ukraine by the Russian state, which is nothing less than a major war crime.

But this does not mean that we cannot criticise NATO for its actions over the last few decades. We have all known what the Putin regime is capable of for several years – just look at Syria and Chechnya. For us that means that there should only be actions against Russia that are genuinely and obviously defensive. Instead Nato has signed up new member states ever nearer Russia.

This was provocative. The great powers of East and West have been in a nuclear stalemate (so-called “Mutually Assured Destruction”) for many years. Many regarded this as good, but the Peace Movement, of which Abingdon Peace Group is part, most certainly did not. The nuclear stand-off was dangerous in itself: What if someone like Putin came along? Or if there was a misunderstanding or an accident (there were several)?

A very serious consequence of the stand-off was that any major nuclear-armed state could engage in non-nuclear adventures without fear of what people used to call the “ultimate deterrent”. And we see this now, alas, in Ukraine. Who wants to gamble on winning a war through using nuclear weapons?

This leaves us feeling rather powerless; and the whole situation must leave someone of Ukrainian derivation feeling awful. We are not hopeful the war will end very soon and it may take China to put serious pressure on Russia to stop its invasion; and maybe the United Nations will be involved to bring back some sanity to international relations.

Finally, thank you for stopping to talk to us. We would be pleased to talk some more with you, if you were so inclined. If you would like to contact us, our email address is: [abingdonpeace@gmail.com](mailto:abingdonpeace@gmail.com) (letter ends)

What do you think? Was this the right letter to send, both in tone and in content? Please let us know how you think we should talk to people who disagree with us

## Art for Peace (continued from front page)

... Group member Clare Davis introduced Ali to Cornerstone Art Gallery in Didcot, a beautiful purpose-built arts centre 10 minutes walk from Didcot Parkway, with a large open gallery on the ground floor, who were very open to hosting us. Ali brought a roomful of artworks from her studio in mid-Wales, Clare worked with Rana Ibrahim on a mixed-media collage representing their journey together, Ali charmed the “Conflict Textiles” archive of Ulster University to loan a powerful Arpillera, and MAW member Geraldine Bridges offered several pieces of textile and art based on her moving poetry.

The in-person event in the gallery on 21<sup>st</sup> April gave an uplifting counterpoint to the terrible scenes depicted in Ali's work. Frankie Armstrong and Sue Gilmurray shared some wonderful peace songs, Sally Mears read poems written by herself, Geraldine Bridges and others, including one by our old friend Beryl Davidson! Rona Topaz sang with huge energy, and John Gittings, former Guardian foreign editor, gave a characteristically comprehensive overview of peace-building across the ages,



Artist and MAW activist Ali Lochhead at the Cornerstone in Didcot

finishing with a clear message on the Ukraine war: “Our role [as Peace people] is to urge Britain to work in the UN for immediate cease fire and UN mediation, and support the United Nations Association, membership now a very modest £10 a year\*.”

A fuller report will be on the MAW website before long. [The Movement for the Abolition of War \(abolishwar.net\)](http://abolishwar.net). To join UNA-UK, go to [Membership | UNA\\_UK](http://Membership|UNA_UK)

**John Gittings** subsequently sent us the notes for his talk and they are the basis of the following. He started his review of peace-building with John Donne, who whilst seriously ill wrote: *No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.*

He then pointed to the a triple storm of existential risks that we face today: (A) COVID SARS 1 & 2, with The World Health Organization 2003 report warning of the potential for a future pandemic to spread “in a closely interconnected and highly mobile world”. The key lessons learnt this time will be invaluable in “being ready for the day when the next new disease arrives without warning.” Yet it is a brutal reality that SARS did not last long enough, nor kill a sufficient number of people, to encourage governments to be “ready for the day when the next new disease arrives without warning”.

#### (B) CLIMATE CHANGE/CRISIS

- in its First Report (1990/92), the intergovernmental panel on climate change reported that emissions resulting from human activities are substantially increasing the atmospheric concentrations of the greenhouse gases: carbon dioxide, methane, chloro-fluorocarbons (CFCs) and nitrous oxide. These increases will enhance the greenhouse effect, resulting on average in an additional warming of the Earth's surface.

#### (C) THE NUCLEAR THREAT TO EXISTENCE

60 YEARS ON we still face the same threat – or with Ukraine, a greater threat -- in spite of UN achievements such as Test Ban Treaty and NPT.

He then quoted the words of some philosophers, poets and peace advocates:

Epictetus discussing our place in the world - *The only logical step is to do as Socrates did, never replying to the question of where he was from with, 'I am Athenian,' or 'I am from Corinth,' but always, 'I am a citizen of the universe.' After all, why say, 'I am Athenian'? Why not just identify yourself with the exact spot where your little body emerged at birth?* [Discourses 1.9.1]

Erasmus: we are “citizens of the world”.

He then quoted Victor Hugo at the 1849 Paris Peace Conference: *Before long, men will traverse the earth, as the gods of Homer, did the sky, in three paces. But yet a little time, and the electric wire of concord shall encircle the globe and embrace the world.*

But by the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century there was waning optimism: the 1899 Hague Peace Conference introduced laws of war and international arbitration.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century there was continuity with 19<sup>th</sup> Century with the establishment of the League of Nations and then, after WW2, the United Nations. *We believe and solemnly urge that the time has come to devise and to create a working union of sovereign nations to establish peace among themselves and to guarantee it by all known and available sanctions at their command* (Woodrow Wilson 1916).

*An international organization based on the sovereign equality of all peace-loving nations and open to membership by all such states, large and small, in the maintenance of international peace and security.* (1943 Moscow Declaration)

But when it came to the point, the great powers wanted to keep control. There was a contest between the principle of Universality and Great Power Pre-eminence. However after a struggle at San Francisco, the UN rank and file membership gained a voice which they are exercising today.

The struggle continues. We have the TPNW (Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons); the ever more assertive smaller nations at COP 26; and the Ukraine General Assembly Resolution condemning Russian aggression with 141 votes, 73% of UN membership.

The key issue is that everything Russia is doing in Ukraine is an act of aggression under the UN Charter. And to bring the war to an end, we need much greater support for the UN, and action by the UN. 200 former senior officials have written to the Security-General urging greater efforts, saying *“We therefore implore you to intensify your personal efforts, deploying all capabilities at your disposal and acting upon lessons learnt from previous conflicts, for the cessation of hostilities and conflict resolution through peaceful means.*

*“This is the raison d’être of the United Nations, which is being tested again in this case. We are horrified at the alternative, the UN becoming increasingly irrelevant and, eventually, succumbing to the fate of its predecessor, the League of Nations, with the human losses and material destruction that went with it.”*

- OUR ROLE
1. Urge Britain to work in the UN for IMMEDIATE CEASE FIRE and UN MEDIATION
  2. Support the United Nations Association (UNA-UK), membership now a very modest £10 a year. Go to: [Membership | UNA\\_UK](#)

The latest UNA-UK statement says: “De-escalation, diplomacy and a people-centred peace process is urgently required. No country should be allowed to redraw the map of the world at gunpoint. The moment demands a robust response from the international community to defend the international rules based order.” John Gittings is the author of *The Glorious Art of Peace : Paths to Peace in a New Age of War*, OUP, 2018)

## Diary

*Fri Apr 1 – Sat Sep 24:* - Exhibition: Of Ordinary Things – Iraqi women share their life stories through art. Curated by Iraqi Women and Art and War Group. 10 -5 daily (not Sundays), at Museum of Oxford [museumofoxford.gov.uk](http://museumofoxford.gov.uk) – 01865 252 334. Free entry.

*Sun May 15:* International Conscientious Objectors' Day - People around the globe will speak out in solidarity with conscientious objectors in prison today and in grateful memory of conscientious objectors of the past. At 12 am. <https://www.ppu.org.uk/civicrm/event/info%3Fid%3D255%26reset%3D1>

*Tue May 17 & Wed 18 May:* Abandoning Palestine: the end of the Mandate, Britain's continuing responsibility, and what we can do now to advance equality - free virtual conference hosted by the Balfour Project. Speakers include Hanan Ashrawi, former PLO spokesperson on the past and necessary next steps; historian Avi Shlaim; Ghada Karmi, eyewitness to her family's flight from Jerusalem; Professor Michael Lynk on Israel's current use of administrative detention and other martial laws bequeathed by us, and from former Minister Rory Stewart on the regional impact of Britain's Mandate failures. At the end of the second afternoon, young British Palestinians and British MPs will offer their diverse views on the way forward: the status quo is not sustainable. 3pm start on each day. Links: Balfour Project: <https://balfourproject.org/future-events/>; to register: [https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_\\_1HYghbFTJ6C\\_xvJe8lLxw](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN__1HYghbFTJ6C_xvJe8lLxw)

*Wed May 18:* Faringdon Town Meeting discussing whether to press the Government to ratify the TPNW. Corn Exchange, 7.00 pm. Further information from Jennie 01367 710308 or Karen 01367 241707 or Dave 01367 240808.

*Sat May 21:* Levellers' Day (Burford) <https://levellersday.wordpress.com/whats-happening-2022/>

*Sat May 21:* Stop Return of U.S. nukes to Britain' 1.00 pm at RAF Lakenheath, Suffolk, IP27 9BU. Nuclear bombs were stored at Lakenheath until 2008.

*Wed 1 Jun:* Faringdon Peace Group Monthly Meeting Resist Armed Forces Day (25.6.22). Speaker Symon Hill from PPU (Peace Pledge Union) 7.30pm Venue TBA Further information from Jennie 01367 710308 or Karen 01367 241707 or Dave 01367 240808.

*Sat Oct 1:* Abingdon Peace Group Jumble Sale – Doors open for the sale: 3 – 4pm at the Northcourt Centre (in Tatham Hall). Please deliver items for sale between 1.30 and 3pm and stay on (or return) to help with clear up. Please note different timings from past jumble sales!

Please note: we strongly recommend <https://www.cndsalisbury.org.uk/events> (and the rest of this website) for up-to-date news and listings.

*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](mailto:abingdonpeace@gmail.com). Our telephone numbers are (01235) 526265 & 522163*