



ABINGDON PEACE GROUP

Newsletter

June 2022



activist promotes the cause of peace
Jubilee Meadow Festival

The sun shone, and persuaded over 70 visitors to our stall to wear one of our “Picasso Peace” stickers, and many to sign our petition against US nukes coming to Lakenheath. Some even signed up to receive the newsletter, and good honest conversations were had about the utility of war and whether war, although obnoxious, is sometimes necessary to halt a dictator (some of us would agree) and whether nuclear weapons have kept the peace (not many of us would accept that!). Thanks to all the Peace Group members who cheerfully hosted the stall in the hot sunshine!

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Next meeting: Tuesday, 21st June, at 8pm online

John Gittings:

Can diplomacy prevent a longer war in Ukraine?

With depressing speed, many governments and media assert that the Ukraine war will be a long one – and must be until “Russia is defeated”. Predictions of the time required are made on the basis of no visible evidence, and since the failure of the Secretary-General’s mission to Moscow and Ki’iv, even the UN seems to have given up.

This view is beginning to be challenged by a more “realist” perspective (with Henry Kissinger widely quoted) which argues that the goal of defeating Russia is illusory and that Putin would simply raise the stakes in a dangerous escalation.

Neither of these two views addresses the basic dilemma. On the one hand the Ukrainian people, or a large part of them, do want to win the war and regard foreign hesitation as back-sliding. (Although President Zelensky at times has accepted the need for a diplomatic compromise).

On the other, the very continuation of the war is a breach of the UN Charter and a violation of human values, as well as a possible existential threat, and the interest of peace in Ukraine and elsewhere demands that it be stopped as soon as possible.

John Gittings will attempt to tackle this dilemma.

John was for many years a Guardian writer, focusing on foreign affairs and in particular on the Far East. He is the author of *The Glorious Art of Peace* (OUP, now in its second edition) and has spoken to us a number of times. He also writes a regular - and unmissable - commentary in the Oxford CND Bulletin.

Joining the meeting: Either use the link below or look out for a message with the link on June 21. 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

Jubilee Meadow Festival (continued from front page)

My favourite visitor was the first – a young scientist from China, who was astonished that the UK has nuclear weapons, and horrified that they are regularly serviced in Aldermaston – turned out he lives there! (Report by Sally Reynolds)

Our last meeting: Colin Archer on the Ukraine: 'War, Law and Cash'

Colin is a former general-secretary of the International Peace Bureau in Geneva, a MAW (Movement for the Abolition of War) activist and a campaigner against military spending with GCOMS-UK. As his title suggested he covered a wide range of topics relevant to the current war in Eastern Europe, stressing at the outset that if you think it's easy to analyse the conflict from an antiwar perspective, then you've not been concentrating! He pointed out that we are well used to criticising the UK and other Nato powers for their militarism, but now find ourselves having to stress the culpability of a modern-day imperialist power in the East. History is littered of course with examples of taking by force territory that is not yours, but most of that history was before the nuclear age. Have nuclear weapons kept the peace, as Mrs Thatcher asserted? They may have kept a precarious peace for the nuclear powers, but can scarcely be said to have done so for the people of Ukraine.

Colin acknowledged the rights of the Ukrainian people to self-defence and discussed aspects of just war theory and went on to look at the divisions amongst the NATO powers about whether to send arms to Ukraine and whether the sanctions against Russia would be effective in hastening the end of hostilities. He also pointed out that NATO spends vastly more on its military than Russia – by a massive 18:1. Even if costs are lower in Russia, this is wholly disproportionate.

You can hear Colin's talk on our You Tube channel: <https://youtu.be/AI3lgP-H84o>

You might also be interested to hear Noam Chomsky's very trenchant views on the war and its dangers for all here: *Chomsky: WAR in Ukraine is "AN INSANE EXPERIMENT" by the USA!* (05/2022) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCVN7iV5kVo> . If you prefer reading text there is an article by Chomsky and CJ Polychroniou in the current *Peace News*. Entitled "Chomsky: 'our priority on Ukraine should be saving lives, not punishing Russia'" it is also available online at <https://peacenews.info/node/10255/chomsky-our-priority-ukraine-should-be-saving-lives-not-punishing-russia>.

Mil Rai on the David Amess assassin

Also in the most recent edition *Peace News*, Mil Rai has written a thoughtful editorial on the case of Ali Harbi Ali. He hardly needs to point out, but wisely does, that "if we want to prevent future attacks of this kind, we need to understand where they come from"; that "'understanding' is a world away from 'justifying', of course"; and that "Ali Harbi Ali's assassination of David Amess had no moral justification".

What's to be understood? Do we for instance just blithely assume that this murderer was led to his actions by a deeply established religious fanaticism, that given the chance he would have continued attacking others like an American school shooter and that he had few worked out ideas, however ill-conceived, on the political state of the world? Mil shows that such assumptions would be false, having studied the court case carefully and found that many key facts about Ali Harbi Ali were effectively suppressed by the media coverage. And he points up the irony that his defence to the murder charge – that he was seeking to prevent a greater crime - is the defence often offered by non-violent activists when facing a judge and jury charged, for example, with damaging military equipment.

As for preventing future attacks of this kind, he ends his piece thus: "The more we protest against state terrorism, the more effectively we hold back state violence, the less despair there will be among those who are vulnerable to jihadist appeals. Peace activism is the real counter-terrorism". (Mike Bloom)

To read the article online, visit: <https://peacenews.info/node/10225/editorial-terror-against-terror>

Oxford Women in Black

Along with many other vigils, Women in Black in Oxford suspended their activities during the worst of the pandemic. However, since late March the Oxford vigil has been rebooted, not least by the kind donation of some weatherproof correx placards by WiB London. Given the state of the world, we have increased the frequency of our vigils from monthly to weekly. We continue to focus on protesting against war and against the arms trade that fuels war and has a devastating impact on the people in many countries throughout the world. We are noting that these have become very immediate and discussable topics since the outbreak of war in Ukraine. Passers-by are not always enthusiastic to receive our leaflets, but a surprising range of people happily take stickers that feature the Picasso peace image. The number of women participating in the rebooted vigil has been increasing as the word goes out through the Network of Oxford Women and local peace-focused groups and organisations. We have benefited from great coverage in the *Morning Star*! And we hope to feature in the *Oxford Mail* before long. The Quakers at the Meeting House in St Giles have kindly agreed to accommodate our banner and placards in between vigils, and we look forward to building links with people there who might feel moved to join us on Saturdays. We welcome all who support our feminist, anti-militarist perspective.

The group meet every Saturday, 2pm-3pm at the Martyrs' Memorial in St Giles' in central Oxford. Wear black if possible, but come anyway!

Contact: Carol Stavris, carolstavris@gmail.com (from the current Women in Black newsletter)

New book by Symon Hill

As you may remember, Symon has given a number of talks to us in Abingdon and some APG members attended his WEA courses in Abingdon not long ago. He also works for the Peace Pledge Union. His latest book is *The Peace Protestors (Hardback) A History of Modern-Day War Resistance*.

From Afghanistan to the Falklands, from Northern Ireland to Iraq, British troops are nearly always in action somewhere in the world. But whenever there is war, there will be people who resist it. Sometimes, they can draw on public sympathy. At other times, they stand alone against the crowd. Peace movements large and small have been a constant part of UK history, not least in the last 40 years. This book tells their stories.

Drawing on interviews, fresh research and newly released government documents, the book sheds light on some of the most surprising and overlooked events of recent decades. Peace activists in the 1980s did not know that Margaret Thatcher's government feared that US troops on UK bases would fire on unarmed demonstrators. When the ceasefire came about in Northern Ireland, few noticed the peace work that Quakers had been doing behind the scenes for years.

While the jingoistic atmosphere of the Falklands War is much remembered, there is less talk about the protests against it that saw more than 100 arrests at navy recruitment centres and public demonstrations. Four women who successfully disarmed a warplane in the 1990s were just a few of those to be acquitted after actions that could have resulted in years in prison [see item on page 2 on Mil Rai's piece in the current Peace News]. Apparent public support for the campaign against the Iraq war masked deep and bitter divisions amongst anti-war activists. Dissent and disobedience within the armed forces continues far from the public gaze. As recently as 2011, Michael Lyons was refused discharge from the Royal Navy despite developing a conscientious objection to war. He spent seven months in a military prison.

This is a book that brings to life the realities of resistance by people whose refusal to conform has much to say about how we see the UK and British history today.

To be published by Pen & Sword History ISBN: 9781399007863 on 30th June 2022. To order visit: www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/The-Peace-Protestors-Hardback/p/21285

News about the ever more invisible conflict in Cameroon

This item, sent in by Anne Dodd, is from the current weekly update from the excellent Canadians for Peace and Justice in Cameroon. It is a sobering reminder from the highly respected Norwegian Refugee Council how 'invisible' the 6 year conflict in Cameroon has become and how important it is to do whatever we are able to do to keep it 'visible' in the hope of a peaceful resolution.



The Norwegian Refugee Council, NRC, has released a list of ten countries that are ranked according to the level of negligence. All the ten most neglected conflicts are in Africa and Cameroon is ranked 3rd.

According to the NRC, the annual list of neglected displacement crises is based on three criteria: lack of funding, lack of media attention, and lack of international political and diplomatic initiatives.

Note that the UK was a colonial power in Cameroon (France was the other) and has financial interests there. Our government and, as indicated above, our media don't seem very interested in helping to defuse the conflict there.

Another jubilee (71 years old actually): The Refugee Council

You might be interested in the information available here:

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/>

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 – 01865 252 334. Free entry.

Sat Jun 11: 'Talks not Bombs' CND Day of Action campaign to get Britain to the nuclear ban conference in Vienna June 21 - 23.' (referring to Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons - TPNW). Germany and Norway are attending, but Liz Truss says no. CND website (<https://cnduk.org/talksnotbombs/>) has lots of downloadable support material, including a campaigning 'digital toolkit', a poster and background information.

Mon Jun 13: No Knighthood for Tony Blair – Stop the War demo - meet at Queen Victoria statue, Castle Hill, Windsor SL4 1PD 1pm

Sat Jun 25: Armed Forces Day, another Blair achievement.

Sat Jun 25: The Ukraine War, Nato & Global Consequences part of conference in Madrid organised by 'No to War, No To NATO' 12h -13.30h (probably European time) www.no-to-nato.org/2022/06/2022-06-25-madrid-spain-12-1330-cest-panel-the-ukraine-war-nato-global-consequences/

Mon Jun 27: online book launch with journalist and author, Sally Hayden discussing her recently published book *My Fourth Time, We Drowned: Seeking Refuge on the World's Deadliest Migration Route*, with Labour Member of the House of Lords, refugee advocate and himself a former child refugee, Lord Alf Dubs. At noon. Visit <https://caabu.org/events/caabu/my-fourth-time-we-drowned-seeking-refuge-worlds-deadliest-migration-route-caabu-online> for further information and to register.

Sat Jul 2: Faringdon Peace Group Grand Peace Picnic. Midday to 4.00pm. Bring and Share vegetarian lunch. Teas for sale. Music. More details later. Venue 19 Coxwell St, Faringdon. The organisers have asked us to give numbers expecting to attend, so email abingdonpeace@gmail.com. We will try to organise car sharing etc and provide any extra information that comes our way.

Wed Jul 6: Faringdon Peace Group Monthly Meeting with Speaker: Roger McKenzie, Gen Sec of Liberation (formerly Movement for Colonial Freedom) <https://liberationorg.co.uk/>

Thu Jul 14: Oxon Peace Campaign demo at Lechlade highlighting the Royal International Air Tattoo. taking place at U.S.A.F. Fairford (as below). Details to follow.

Fri Jul 15 – Sun July 17: Royal International Air Tattoo. U.S.A.F. Fairford. Many toys for many boys.

Sat Aug 6: Anniversary of atom bombing of Hiroshima in 1945: silent vigil 7.45 am – 8.15 am at War Memorial OX14 5SZ.

Sun Aug 7: Abingdon Peace Group bring and share picnic tea in the Abbey Meadows, Abingdon (near Abingdon Bridge). From 3.30 pm by the Japanese flowering cherry tree, weather permitting. Close to the river and beyond the children's play area on the town side. abingdonpeace@gmail.com for latest newsletter.

Tue Aug 9: anniversary of atom bombing of Nagasaki in 1945

Sat Oct 1: Rally at USAF Croughton - 'Keep Space for Peace' week. Annual Oxon Peace Campaign event (APG is a constituent part of OPC). Details to follow.

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 the clear-up. Please note different timings from past jumble sales!

Strongly recommended <https://www.cndsalisbury.org.uk/events> (and the rest of their website) for up-to-date news and listings.

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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