



# ABINGDON PEACE GROUP

Newsletter

April 2023

## GDAMS stall 29 April

The season of Global Days of Action on Military Spending will take place from April 13 to May 9 this year.

Can you spare an hour on a stall in the precinct at the corner of the market place on Saturday 29th April? Probably 10.30am - 12noon

Ideas to make visible the imbalance between what we spend on the military and on health, education, the climate crisis or overseas aid welcome!

If you can help, email us on [abingdonpeace@gmail.com](mailto:abingdonpeace@gmail.com)



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**This month's meeting: Tuesday, 18th April 8pm online**

## Can we afford the cost of defence?

Our speaker this month is Colin Archer, former secretary general of IPB, now on the steering group of GCOMS UK, the British branch of the Global Campaign on Military Spending, You may remember that Colin spoke to us in May 2022 about the huge number of questions raised by the Ukraine crisis, and the extraordinary rise in military spending that both preceded and followed it.



In a powerful article in the newsletter of the Columbans Network recently, Colin made a telling analogy: "Our military budget is like a huge tree that dominates your garden, blocks out the light, undermines the foundations of your house, and crowds out all the other plants. It's been there for generations but really your home would be more secure without it."

Colin will tell us exactly how big this "tree" has grown, and suggest ways we can campaign to cut it down to size.

The [GCOMS-UK website](http://www.demilitarize.co.uk), [www.demilitarize.co.uk](http://www.demilitarize.co.uk) has a huge amount of useful but horrifying information.

We would recommend especially two new articles by Stuart Parkinson, co-chair of GCOMS-UK:

<https://demilitarize.org.uk/military-spending-boosted-more-than-health-education-environment-or-overseas-aid/> and

<https://demilitarize.org.uk/eight-reasons-why-we-shouldnt-increase-uk-military-spending/>

To join our Zoom meeting, click this link any time after 7.30pm:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/91315134101?pwd=RmxHLzBQaXlHYjFSRm5nREVzYjdSdz09>

Meeting ID: 913 1513 4101 Passcode: 015836 . You can also join by phone: email [abingdonpeace@gmail.com](mailto:abingdonpeace@gmail.com) for help.

Anne Street was our speaker in March. Late last year she visited Palestine for three months as one of 26 people from 13 different countries who went to serve as ecumenical companions on the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, a programme of the World Council of Churches. Their task was to act as human rights observers in various locations. Anne was based in the south of Palestine in the Hebron hills. The EAPPI observers compiled reports every evening which were entered into a database and sent to the UN. But their object was to deter breaches of human rights by their mere presence. Although Israeli soldiers and settlers (some of the latter liable to become very aggressive) were well used to the EAPPI observers and did not resort to violence against them, the fact remains that they were armed, so it was a courageous undertaking to be there.

It was eye-opening and moving to hear her experiences and insights. For most of the time she stayed in the South Hebron region and would travel out to a Palestinian settlement nearby to be a presence and observer and to give help and support to those local people. She told their individual stories and they became very real to us; they were all shown to be very determined to hold fast to their rights and their land despite their situation being painful and shocking. Anne's understated description made the powerlessness and sense of humiliation seem more vivid and powerful.

Her excellent talk was illustrated with photographs of the unforgiving barren landscape and text which gave us detailed information but also furnished us with details of everyday life. We heard of a poor working woman whose land is now near to a new Israeli settlement high on a hill. She lives in a constant atmosphere of threat. Some of her land has been designated of historical interest by the Administration – so she is actually forbidden to use it. There are numerous apparently innocent rules which curtail any development. For instance, olive trees, a source of income, can be demolished so shepherding can take place. Land can be acquired so that rifle ranges can be used for defence purposes. Another humiliation is when Palestinians own land, it can be taken over because it can be declared unused land. The rightful owners have to find work a long way off and cannot get to their property very often.



Anne's presence and that of others working on the Accompaniment Programme serves to limit the harassment from the new Israeli settlers and makes life more tolerable. To be fair there are brave objections from some Israelis against the unfair treatment of Palestinians. We are grateful for the role of Anne, showing great bravery bringing this situation into prominence. It is a situation so often downplayed, if not virtually ignored, by the media. Indeed, EAPPI sees its principal task as telling the story when they get back and 'advocating for an end to the military occupation'.

Tony Godfrey & Mike Bloom

In the Q&A we were encouraged to **write to our MP** about the situation. We are lucky to have as our MP Layla Moran, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for International Development & Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs since 7 Sep 2020, whose mother is Palestinian: but that is no reason NOT to write - Layla has told us before now that a bulging inbox on a subject actually empowers her to stand up in parliament and ask questions. The easiest way to email her is via <https://www.writetothem.com/> - tap in your postcode and scroll down. Or you can send a letter to Layla Moran MP, House of Commons, LONDON SW1A 0AA

Sally

Do you have memories, experiences or insights which you could share with the rest of us? Send them in! Lesley Lovell has written what she remembers of the early days of CND and we include the first part below. More next month!

### CND's origins - part 1

*In 1957 I attended a meeting in Caxton Hall in central London about nuclear war. The main speaker introducing it was JB Priestley, with others: Ritchie Calder, a science journalist and author and family friend, and a young philosophy lecturer at Oxford, Iris Murdoch. She started by stating 'War is Evil' which was a shock to me; I just accepted it as a fact of life, like rainstorms, or being bombed at night, having lived in London through the Blitz. I can feel the shadow of the frisson even now. It had never occurred to me, just a fact of life. There was huge concern among the more thoughtful people: generals always fight the last war and seemed unable to understand the wholesale destruction of nuclear war. We lived through the Blitz? Yes, yes a bit worse than that but we survived. No acceptance that a handful of bombs would turn London into a radioactive wasteland. We young were sure that, should we survive, we would be made infertile. The following year a large public meeting inaugurated CND, with Bertrand Russell in charge. The symbol is the roman one for death; it is also a combination of semaphore for C and N and D.*

Lesley Lovell



<https://cnduk.org/>

### **Unite to Survive!** Join CND, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and XR on 21 April

The Doomsday Clock stands at 90 seconds to midnight, the closest to nuclear and climate disaster we have ever been. The war in Ukraine - past its first anniversary with no signs of ending - means the threat of nuclear war remains incredibly high. Meanwhile, world militaries are some of the biggest contributors to global greenhouse gas emissions.

We need to keep the pressure on the government to meet its climate promises. That's why CND is supporting Extinction Rebellion's 'The Big One' - a series of protests actions, vigils, and events taking place in central London from 21-24 April. Friday 21 April will focus on Govt departments.

As part of the XR Peace collective, CND is asking you to join us: to stand up for the planet - and against nuclear war. Get yourself to London on Friday 21 April and head for the MoD in Whitehall. There will be banners, placards, street theatre and a stage for speeches. There may even be a coach going from Abingdon - contact us if you are interested in a seat.



**Declassified UK** (<https://declassifieduk.org/>) carries a rich seam of reports on militarism, for instance "Smear, frame, mislead: The British army in Ireland" by Richard Norton-Taylor (Feb 23rd).



It's a website well worth visiting, if only because "**Demilitarise education/dED\_UCATION**" (<https://ded1.co/>) is part of it, campaigning for education systems that support peace, not war, particularly in the Higher Education sector. They have launched a petition, calling for UK universities to divest from arms companies, end their academic and research partnerships with the arms industry, and reinvest in sustainable and peace-seeking sectors instead. [Sign now!](#)

Meanwhile, in 2022 Quakers in Britain published "Peace at the heart", a report by David Gee presenting strong evidence for the positive difference peace education makes to schools and young people. The report and a brilliant series of videos of peace education in action in UK schools can be seen here: <https://quaker.org.uk/our-work/peace/peace-education/peace-education-case>

**Clubs & Societies Day in the Guildhall, 18th March.**

Barbara Micklem & Anne Dodd created a colourful presence in the Council Chamber with lots of good conversations and several new sign-ups for the newsletter. Well worth being there to put our views across!



**Diary**

**Every Monday except Bank Holidays, 8.15 - 8.45am.** Abingdon War Memorial, The Square. Vigil for peace in Ukraine, supporting Ukrainian & Russian Peacemakers.

**Tues 18 April 23 8pm** Online APG meeting with Colin Archer of GCOMS-UK. See front page.

**Friday 21 - 24/04/23 "The Big One": Unite to Survive.** See p3. Lobby the MoD on Friday 21st. Sat 22nd is "Earth Day", come dressed as an endangered species if you like.

**Tuesday 16 May 23 8pm Gerry McFlynn, Vice president of Pax Christi** on the Good Friday agreement in the light of the current situation in Northern Ireland. Online APG meeting via Zoom.

**Saturday 3 June 23 10.30am Celebrate 40th Anniversary of Peace Blockade of USAF Upper Heyford .**

**Tues 20 June 8pm.** Drones in current war-fighting. APG meeting with Peter Burt of dronewarsUK.

Corrections and contributions to this newsletter are very welcome. Abingdon Peace Group meets on the third Tuesday of each month except August, either on Zoom or at Northcourt Centre, Abingdon OX14 1NS. All who are interested in peace and campaigning for it are welcome to take part. The Group has no party political affiliations. Contact us on [abingdonpeace@gmail.com](mailto:abingdonpeace@gmail.com) , 07786 055195 or (01235) 526265 & 522163.