



ABINGDON PEACE GROUP

Newsletter

May 2023

CO Day is May 15th!

International Conscientious Objectors day happens to fall this year on the day of our next vigil at the War Memorial - Monday May 15th.

We will be meeting at 8.15am for 1/2 hour to remember and honour the brave people in both Ukraine and Russia who have refused to fight and spoken out against the Russian invasion, often at great personal cost.

A young girl stopped at our vigil last month and asked, "What are peacemakers?"

When we explained, she said "There are no good Russians!" and walked off.

Which makes it all the more important to let the world know that there are many good Russians trying to resist this terrible war.

Join us, May 15th, 8.15am!

There are other CO events all over the country that day - see Diary p4

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This month's meeting: Tuesday 16th May 8pm online Peace in Northern Ireland - where are we now?

This Easter marked the 25th Anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. The bombings and shootings that preceded it have now gone, but Brexit, the current difficulties over the Northern Ireland Protocol and the highlighting in the media of the 25th Anniversary have made us all acutely aware that there is still so much to be done before there is truly Peace in Northern Ireland.



We are fortunate to have Fr Gerry McFlynn as this month's speaker. He brings close knowledge and experience to the subject. He is currently the Project Manager of the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas, and is also a Vice-President of Pax Christi.

Join the meeting online on Zoom - just click the link below.

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 for help.

Last month we had our usual meeting, but then we followed up with a stall in the Market Place. This is of course exactly what we should be doing much more often. A good number of our activists turned out on a sunny Saturday to publicise one of the main issues that our speaker touched upon – the effects of military spending on global carbon emissions and hence militarism's worsening of the world's climate emergency. Of course there are other very good reasons to be appalled by military spending other than their climate consequences, but this is what we focused on, as many find resonance with this campaign.



Our speaker on the 18th April was Colin Archer, former secretary-general of IPB (the International Peace Bureau), now on the steering group of GCOMS UK, the British branch of the Global Campaign on Military Spending. Showing his wide understanding on resisting militarism, he began with a historical overview, starting with the Peasants' Revolts in the middle ages. “A lot of them were about taxation by the bloody king to finance his bloody wars”. His review went on to mention many eras right up to the present day. (His talk is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LPCHuXGUxA> – highly recommended).

Regarding the situation today, Colin spoke about the UK and NATO spending. Did you know that NATO's military outlay is 17 times that of Russia? Or that the world's poorest countries need to spend \$20 trillion a year on combating climate change?

However, Colin's interests do not only relate to the UK, the US and NATO. Far from it! He referred many times to the poor countries of the world and stressed how much support he has found in them for campaigning against military spending – it's a matter of economic equity, after all. The money we squander on arms could so easily be used to assist them to meet their needs. He also encouraged us strongly to visit <https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/>, where another altogether different approach to security is explored. (Mike Bloom)

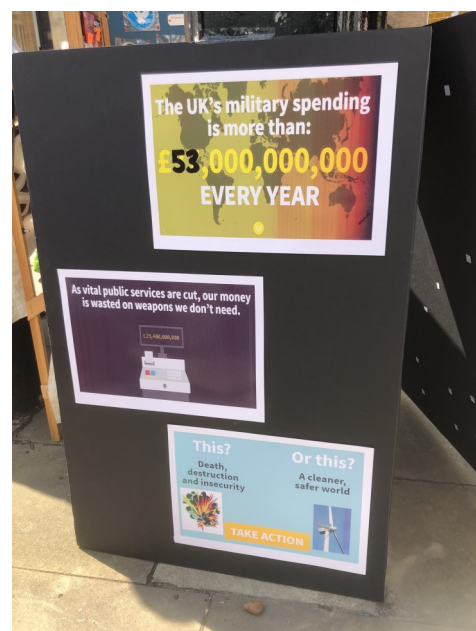


Useful links:

The GCOMS-UK website, www.demilitarize.org.uk has a very recent report by co-chair Stuart Parkinson published the day after the latest figures on military spending were released by SIPRI - very useful for countering mis-information as it has extensive references! <https://demilitarize.org.uk/global-military-spending-soars-during-cost-of-living-crisis-and-britain-is-in-the-thick-of-it/>

IPB: <https://www.ipb.org/>

Salisbury CND's Peter Gloyns updates their news section every week with fascinating stories about nuclear weapons & power & more: https://www.cndsalisbury.org.uk/news_items



Members Corner!

Sally Mears writes: I was delighted to go to the Belgian town of Sint Niklaas with a group of 11 people from different churches in Abingdon as part of a church twinning event to hear their Passion Play at the end of March. We were given a wonderful reception at the Town Hall by the Mayor, Mr Dehandschutter who is a Mayor for Peace. I handed him a letter that Sally Reynolds had drafted thanking him for contributing to our Mayors for Peace talk on Zoom and enclosing two previous newsletters. It was a very brief encounter. They have a wonderful Peace and Balloon festival in September and a Peace prize is given.

He also told me about a Peace Tree at Langemark War Cemetery (1914). In four weeks, Germany alone counted more than 100,000 casualties, wounded and missing. However, the campaign was declared a success and was the basis of the Langemark myth: a heroic attack by young soldiers who willingly gave their lives with the national Anthem on their lips! 44,067 German soldiers are buried here in a mass grave. It is also the place where the first chemical weapons were released on April 22nd at 5pm. It was a weapon of mass destruction for six km, wiping out animals and plants as well as human life.

(Sally Mears)

The next instalment of Lesley Lovell's memories of her involvement with the Peace movement will follow next month. Or something **you** might write?

April 21st - 24th in London - The Big One!

Friday 21st April was a very memorable day in more ways than one. Over 1,400 representatives and supporters of Christian charities and other groups gathered for worship and prayer at St John's church, Waterloo, with a simple message "We have no faith in fossil fuels". We had a Salvation Army band accompany the singing and heard from young people and John Sentamu, former Archbishop of York. The service and March was significant for the singular and collaborative focus on ending fossil fuel exploration. Currently the world is on a trajectory for a catastrophic 2.4-degree temperature rise by the end of this century. We called for responsible leadership and handed a joint letter to the Shell Headquarters. I blew my shofar rudely!

I was then given the amazing opportunity to wear the Pilgrimage Coat of Hopes whilst walking over Westminster Bridge. This is a special coat made of blanket material with many pictures embroidered on squares representing hopes, prayers, griefs and remembrances connected to the local landscape as it travelled many hundreds of miles to COP 26 in Glasgow being worn by many others. It felt heavy and warm. Barbara Keal composed The Song of the Coat of Hopes which was also sung to me while I walked. What a great privilege.

(Sally Mears)



I joined MAW as part of XR Peace's picket of the MoD on Friday 21st (many different government departments were picketed that day). You can watch some of the speeches here:

<https://www.youtube.com/@mawmovementfortheabolition7253/videos>

It was a joyous occasion, only surpassed by the "Biodiversity" march on Saturday 22nd, which was a huge march (70,000?) full of children, dancers, artists and people dressed as animals & birds! The message was Unite to Survive. (Sally Reynolds)

A plea for help from Sally: I don't think I can continue to pull the newsletter together every month without neglecting some other important things. Can you help?

- One job which would be very helpful would be to compile the diary once a month for the newsletter - checking the diaries in Peace News & other online sources and pulling out what people in Abingdon might like to hear about.
- Another would be to overhaul our membership lists. They are way out of date.
- A third might be to keep an eye on incoming emails, deal with anything needing action, circulate anything interesting, or put it into a folder for the newsletter.

If any of these sound like something you might consider, please contact us for more info!

Diary

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

Wednesday 3rd May 7.30pm “Monarchy & Militarism: Why We Should Speak Out Against The Coronation” 7.30pm Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Rd Faringdon. Symon Hill of the Peace Pledge Union, who made the national news after being arrested in Oxford for objecting during the proclamation of a new king.

Saturday 13th May: NAKBA 75 – National Demonstration ‘Free Palestine: End Apartheid: End the Occupation’ . Assemble 12noon at the BBC, Portland Place W1A, London. Organised by PSC, Stop the War, Muslim Association, CND etc. and supported by many unions. Details & coaches from across UK: see <https://www.palestinecampaign.org/events/nakba-75-national-protest/>

Monday 15 May International Conscientious Objector’s Day. Events around the country. In London, there will be the annual ceremony in Tavistock Square at 1pm. See <https://www.ppu.org.uk/events> for times, speakers etc.

Tuesday 16 May 23 8pm Peace in Northern Ireland - Where are we Now? Gerry McFlynn on the Good Friday agreement and its aftermath. Zoom meeting: see front page for login.

Thursday 18 May 6-8pm Inequality and Instability – a Peace Based Approach. (Uniting for Peace online Spring Conference). Global Inequality, poverty and instability are major challenges facing the world today. Glittering line-up of speakers online.
Chair: Rita Payne, President Emeritus, Commonwealth Journalists Association
Speakers: Vijay Mehta, David Swanson, John Gittings, Fabian Hamilton, & Kate Hudson, (invited)
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3482765417?pwd=dXI1WXJRUS9TbHowWVhVNDVMRIR5QT09>

Saturday 20 May 13:00 RAF Lakenheath Stop US nukes coming to Lakenheath! CND demonstration to protest this extremely dangerous and destabilising development. Coaches are being arranged from across the country. More at <https://cnduk.org/lakenheath/>

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 , 07786 055195 or (01235) 526265 & 522163.