



## WHAT WILL WE BE REMEMBERING?

Armistice Day marked the day fighting stopped on November 11 1918. The annual ceremony was cancelled in 1939 when a few weeks previously British troops once more landed on mainland Europe and the fighting resumed. The public meaning of the Armistice – victory and warning against future wars - was dependent on there being peace. The declaration of another war so soon after the last shattered that meaning. Since then the meaning of Remembrance Day has become fluid; in a new guise and periodically refreshed to meet new PR challenges, Remembrance Sunday has come to serve as a justification of war and exhortation to eternal vigilance – the passing of the torch - and selling red poppies which are now the valuable corporate logo of the British Legion. Today for some Remembrance Day has private significance; for the rest of us its public face is a spectacle appropriated for specific financial and political purposes.

**In this centenary anniversary** of World War One we are urged to think deeply about that war. We would do well to note that by the time Armistice Day was cancelled in 1939 it had already changed profoundly from its original public conception as time for mourning and reflection on loss of life to a self-validating day out for the military, a powerful recruitment tool for the Ministry of War and lots of 'victory' parties.

**In 1914** people may have thought they were fighting German militarism but not a year has gone by since then when the British military have not been engaged in fighting somewhere in the world. No other country can boast of or be shamed by such a record. Militarism is alive and well in today's Britain.

**Militarism is not** just about the outward show of bellicose rhetoric, medals and soldiers proudly marching through towns when returning from wars, or the parading in front of the monarch in serried ranks. It is the cast of mind and belief system that privilege the age-old values embodied in war fighting. A cast of mind that sends princes and prime ministers to sell weapons to even the most unsavoury despots, a cast of mind that funds

**WHITE POPPIES ARE FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE**

research and production of ever more devastating weapons and associated technology. A cast of mind that believes that men and women trained to kill can provide an especially beneficial role model in schools and pass on their values to young people. A cast of mind that without us apparently noticing is eyeing our cities as battlegrounds to be surveilled and patrolled where we are viewed with suspicion and have to prove our 'innocence'. As technology originally funded by and designed for the military is leaching into the civil sphere so is its originating mindset. The distinction between policing, intelligence and the military becomes blurred as does the distinction between war and peace and local and global operations.

**War has become** the dominant metaphor to describe much of the world around us – war against drugs and crime, war against terror, against insecurity. These are not just a sloppy use of language but reflections of stealthy militarisation of a wide range of policy debates as well as popular culture.

**War – the struggle for control** - for people in Britain has mostly been a distant event. Today that struggle for control is on our streets.

**The deeper inspiration** for the white poppy lies in the widespread movement against war and militarism in the early years of the 20th century. It urges us to challenge militarism and work for a culture of peace. It urges us to have the courage of the conscientious objector of WW1 to resist the temptation to participate in the war machine. Otherwise as President John Kennedy observed:

“War will exist until that distant day when the conscientious objector enjoys the same reputation and prestige that the warrior does today.”

More about world war one conscientious objectors at [www.menwhosaidno.org](http://www.menwhosaidno.org)

Each of Britain's nuclear submarines is capable of carrying 16 missiles. Each of these missiles can kill far in excess of the 888,000 dead represented by the popular red poppies display at the Tower of London last year. Read more <http://goo.gl/yrRjvy>