



Peace Pledge Union

Annual Report

2019



Introduction

It has been a busy year for PPU members, as we have resisted militarism and promoted nonviolence in local communities, in the national media and in solidarity with other peace activists around the world.

A striking aspect of pacifist activism in 2019 has been the number of PPU members and supporters building campaigns in their own communities. These range from groups successfully campaigning to change their locals councils' policies around army recruitment stalls, to LGBT pacifists challenging Pride organisers who accept sponsorship from arms companies; from people organising white poppy-based remembrance ceremonies in new areas, to school students and teachers speaking out against militarism in their schools.

At a national level, the PPU has spoken out against militarist policies, challenged British politicians who talk up military tension with Iran or Russia, exposed levels of militarism in the education system and been part of movements of nonviolent resistance against the DSEI arms fair in London.

We have continued to call for remembrance for all victims of war of all nationalities, a position that was revealed by an independent poll in October to have overwhelming public support. We have worked with climate campaigns to develop the links between the peace and environmental movements and to make clear how war and climate destruction fuel each other. Through War Resisters' International, we have worked with people around the world challenging militarism, war and the abuse of human rights in their own contexts.

It's been a year of change in terms of staffing at the PPU. Jan Melichar, Sophie Morrison and Sarah Robinson left the staff (in Jan's case, after 45 years), while Kathryn Busby and Geoff Tibbs joined the staff team, as Operations Manager and Remembrance Project Manager respectively, working alongside Symon Hill who remained in post as Campaigns & Communications Manager. Katie McLean was a welcome temporary addition to the staff during the run-up to Remembrance Day. Saffron Gallup was recruited towards the end of the year, and will take up her job as the PPU's Education Service Manager in January 2020. In 2019 the PPU introduced a nonhierarchical staffing structure, with the staff managing the organisation collectively.

By the far the saddest piece of staffing news concerns the death of Annie Bebington, who died in April after a lifetime as a dedicated PPU member, including over 30 years as a member of staff. She is very sadly missed. May Annie's memory inspire us in our actions for peace.

Front cover - archive photograph of Annie Bebington at vigil outside the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall.

Peacebuilding and Nonviolence

Alongside our own campaigns, the PPU has continued working collaboratively with sibling organisations and as the British section of War Resisters' International (WRI). Throughout the year the PPU attacked the UK government's implicit backing for Donald Trump's aggressive policies toward Iran, whilst supporting the many people in Iran nonviolently resisting their own government's militaristic policies.



In January, the PPU applauded the actions of the Stansted 15, who prevented unjust deportations of refugees denied their rights when fleeing war zones – demonstrating that nonviolent direct action is an effective way to promote justice and peace. It was appropriate therefore that at the PPU AGM in June, members voted to review PPU structures and practices, with the aim of ensuring that we follow the same principles of pacifism and nonviolence in our own work as we call for in the world. This followed the adoption of the PPU's new Equality & Respect Policy earlier in the year.

The AGM was followed by a conference, *Local to Global: Solidarity for Peace* where participants explored what solidarity means in practice. Melanie Strickland of the Stansted 15 spoke about nonviolent activism and a panel debate stimulated discussion on the relationship between the peace and environmental movements. Participants split into groups to discuss ways of adapting national or international peace campaigns to their local areas.

The PPU ran a stall at the National Education Union (NEU) conference in Liverpool, where more

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than 140 people joined our Teachers' Network. We continued to be part of the Peace Education Network and to provide speakers for schools and teachers' groups. Towards the end of 2019, we began the process of recruiting a new Education Service Manager to the PPU staff.

In September many PPU members and supporters took part in climate protests and school strikes. In the same month the PPU was heavily involved in action against the London arms fair, known euphemistically as Defence & Security Equipment International (DSEI), campaigning alongside many other groups and individuals. In an act of remembrance, two PPU members stood in the road to the fair and read out the names of civilians killed in Yemen. PPU members were among dozens arrested for nonviolently resisting the arms fair.

During the general election campaign in December, PPU supporters urged local candidates from all parties to back key policies, including raising the armed forces recruitment age to 18 and diverting military spending towards tackling real threats such as climate change. Following the election the PPU promised that the government will face continuous resistance as militarist policies are implemented.

Jan Melichar, who retired from the PPU staff in May, continued his work as a volunteer on *The Men Who Said No* project. Bill Hetherington, PPU archivist, continued to expand our database of British conscientious objectors. Bill also represented the PPU at the WRI assembly in Colombia in July, as the PPU carries on its work alongside pacifists from around the world.

Everyday Militarism

The militarisation of everyday life in the UK has sadly continued. The government has ploughed yet more millions into increasing school cadet forces, while arms companies seek to promote their image through sponsorship of popular events. Thankfully, in 2019, everyday militarism was met with resistance around the UK.

The build-up to Armed Forces Day in June saw PPU supporters old and new contact the office for postcards to hand out in towns and cities hosting military parades and suchlike events. There was an increase in the number of calls and emails from parents, teachers and young people worried about military activities at their schools. In a particularly shocking example of everyday militarism, we were sent photographs of pre-school children at a nursery in Lincolnshire being dressed in real military body armour by a visiting soldier. With the National Event for the day taking place in Salisbury this year, BBC Wiltshire reported extensively on the PPU's criticisms, particularly after we drew attention to the eight arms companies sponsoring the event.

Armed Forces Day also provided evidence of the effectiveness of local activism: in Leicester this year, no children were invited to handle weapons, as the local authority ruled it out after a campaign by Leicester for Peace. This is a striking example of successful peace activism.

When the PPU attended the National Education Union (NEU)'s annual conference, our survey showed that over 85% of contacted delegates objected to biased military visits to schools.

'We were sent photographs of pre-school children at a nursery in Lincolnshire being dressed in real military body armour...'



'This year we saw that the campaign was working...'

In addition, a number of delegates approached the PPU stand to seek our support to counter the establishment of cadet units in their schools. Shortly after the DSEI arms fair in September, the PPU exposed the fact that the Department of Education had attended the arms fair to join in a panel debate about promoting arms industry careers.

One of the most effective campaigns around everyday militarism involved resistance to arms companies and armed forces backing LGBT Pride events in an attempt to pinkwash their image. LGBT members of the PPU have been working with others through the *No Pride in War* campaign. This year we saw that the campaign was working: Pride marches in York and Bristol, which had involved heavy military contributions the previous year, had no arms sponsorship or military parades in 2019. Meanwhile, *DIVA* magazine removed BAE Systems from an awards shortlist following criticism, and the Bisexual Convention voted by 81% to rule out arms company sponsorship and armed forces recruitment stands. Organisers of Pride in Surrey struggled to defend themselves in the media after removing PPU supporters from their event for carrying banners objecting to their main sponsor, BAE Systems.

Overall, 2019 gave ample evidence that PPU members and allies can work together, both nationally and locally, to resist and defeat everyday militarism. As we seek to approach this challenge more strategically, we have made plans for a new project in 2020 aimed at equipping people to expose and defeat militarism in their own communities. We look forward to announcing more details in early 2020.

Military Spending and Recruitment

As 2019 began, the army launched a particularly desperate recruitment campaign, aimed at stereotypical millennials and suggesting that people who play war-based video games would make good recruits. The Peace Pledge Union's response was picked up by parts of the media and we distributed parodies of the recruitment adverts on social media.

Also in January, the PPU spoke out against the UK 'Defence' Secretary's plans for the expansion of British military bases around the world, with polling showing that most of the UK public are opposed to having UK troops in other countries.

Early in 2019, the PPU challenged the government's threat to deploy troops in the event of chaos caused by a no-deal Brexit. We drew the media's attention to the fact that the Ministry of 'Defence' had quietly put in place the order to call up reserves in this situation. After contact with the PPU, MPs including Plaid Cymru's Jonathan Edwards and Labour's Lloyd Russell Moyle called on ministers to rule out any use of troops for social control or police functions.

Throughout the year we were a rare voice in welcoming the armed forces' failure to meet recruitment targets and speaking out against all armed forces. Increasingly desperate military leaders came up with ever more bizarre ways to try to increase recruitment, even suggesting that a more "environmental" army would attract the sort of young people who were involved in school strikes for the climate. Several pacifist climate strikers responded by pointing out that climate



'The armed forces must not be above the law...'

change cannot be defeated without the rejection of war and militarism.

Following the election result, we urged supporters of peace to continue to resist the government's militarist agenda. Boris Johnson promised to increase military spending and to water down human rights law in relation to armed forces personnel. This has been a key demand of the militarist lobby. The PPU will continue to insist that human rights apply to all and that the armed forces must not be above the law.



Remembrance and White Poppies

Months of preparation go into the PPU's white poppy campaign every year and we are very grateful to the PPU members and volunteers who helped pack and distribute white poppies in 2019. Thank you also to everyone who organised alternative remembrance ceremonies across the UK.

'83% of people agree that Remembrance Day should include people of all nationalities...'

In October the PPU commissioned an independent poll, which showed overwhelming public support for the key messages behind white poppies. 83% of people agree that Remembrance Day should include people of all nationalities who have died in war. Even more - 86% - believe that civilians should be remembered and 85% think that remembrance should carry a central message of peace.

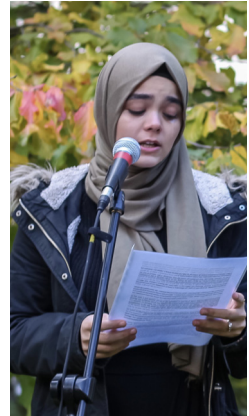
Perhaps in response to such attitudes and public criticism, the Royal British Legion, which promotes red poppies, decided for the first time to "acknowledge" civilian victims of war. The challenge for the white poppy campaign is to articulate how remembrance must go beyond

such gestures, challenging militarism and the causes of warfare today. The PPU's national Alternative Remembrance Ceremony highlighted the devastation caused by war and the British government's ongoing responsibility, with a harrowing testimony of aerial bombardment read by London Students for Yemen.

The PPU sold 86,000 white poppies in 2019. There was a drop in small orders, perhaps due to less media focus on remembrance in the context of the election and Brexit. However there was a big increase in the number of shops, cafes and other outlets we know of distributing white poppies across the UK. A large number of white poppies continue to go to Canada, Belgium and the US.

General election candidates from at least six political parties wore white poppies, some receiving criticism in the media for doing so. In a powerful intervention, veterans who wear white poppies called on the Minister for Veterans to apologise for dismissing white poppies as "attention-seeking rubbish". They wrote, "As veterans who wear white poppies, we do not expect the Minister for Veterans to encourage people to ignore us... In recent years, the government has been cutting the welfare state on which veterans should be able to rely, while maintaining the seventh highest military expenditure in the world."

We encourage all members to get involved in our remembrance campaign in 2020, whether through volunteering, distributing white poppies or social media. We are currently building up to International Conscientious Objectors' Day on the 15th May.



'We encourage all members to get involved in our remembrance campaign in 2020...'

Financial Report

	2019 *	2018
INCOME		
Subscriptions	11,054	13,568
Sales of white poppies and publications	74,432	89,432
Donations & Appeals	16,990	12,134
Grants	8,500	23,230
Legacies	36,054	129,246
Other income	6,953	1,409
<i>Total income</i>	<i>153,983</i>	<i>269,019</i>
EXPENDITURE		
Publications, promotion and website	8,085	3,247
White poppy campaign	26,498	36,533
Conferences and travel	5,641	2,976
Postage	9,624	5,483
Staff costs	78,034	83,567
Peaceworks building	7,045	13,580
Office supplies, equipment and utilities	19,555	18,854
Legal and professional	9,132	3,000
Other expenditure	2,577	2,608
<i>Total expenditure</i>	<i>166,190</i>	<i>169,848</i>
Surplus/(deficit)	(12,207)	99,171
Cash in the bank at the end of 2019	110,454	

* Provisional figures

This year we received a legacy from the estate of Annie Bebington, our friend and colleague who died in 2019 and is greatly missed. We also received a legacy from the estate of Kenneth Hutchinson and a donation given in memory of Phillip Kenwyn Wearne; both were long-time supporters of the PPU. We are very grateful for these and all other contributions. We would also like to thank the Peace Research and Education Trust (PRET) for their funding of the PPU's educational and research work – and all our members, supporters and those who bought white poppies.

PPU Council in 2019

John Andrews, Albert Beale (Chair), Lucy Beck, Amy Clark-Bryan, Simon Cole (from June), Hilary Cornish (until June), Peter Glasgow, Chris Henderson (from June), Bill Hetherington (Treasurer).

PPU Staff in 2019

Annie Bebington (until January), Kathryn Busby (from May), Symon Hill, Katie McLean (October to November), Jan Melichar (until May), Sophie Morrison (until February), Sarah Robinson (until May), Geoff Tibbs (from June).

We are very grateful to PPU volunteers in the London office and around the UK, without whom our work would not be possible.



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