

Peace Matters

Magazine of the Peace Pledge Union



DEFENCELESS: Why more warheads can't make us safe

Also: We interview Ahmed Al-Batati, the former British soldier arrested for protesting over Yemen

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Thanks to CND for their kind permission to use this image.

A year that exposed the lies of militarism

Symon Hill, Editor

The speedy creation of Covid vaccines has shown us just what can be achieved when money, time and energy are put into meeting human needs rather than devoted to waging war or making profits for the few.

At the same time, vaccine nationalism is a reminder that militaristic attitudes are alive and well.

The last year has shed light on the lies of militarism. Covid is deadly evidence that weapons cannot protect us. The deployment of small number of soldiers on helpful tasks such as building hospitals has made clear that such people's skills could be better deployed as part of civilian emergency services. The Black Lives Matter movement has exposed the dangers of relying on romanticised images of history written only by the winners.

But many politicians and generals are wedded to militarism despite its failure to protect us from pandemics, poverty or climate change. After telling nurses that they could not afford a decent pay rise, ministers threatened a 44% increase in nuclear warheads.

Thankfully, many people are ready to resist! Due to Covid, we had to postpone PPU events planned for

2020 aimed at equipping each other to tackle militarism in local communities. The events have now begun in online format and we hope to hold them in person later in the year.

In this issue of Peace Matters, you can read news of resistance to the arms industry and everyday militarism (pages 3-7). We have articles on the challenge for peace education after lockdown (10-11), an important campaign by people in Cardiff (14) and the PPU's new members' survey (15). On a sadder note, you can also read an obituary of much-valued PPU member Florence Assie, who has died aged 95 (pages 12-13).

In the centre page we have an interview with Ahmed Al-Batati, the soldier arrested by Military Police when he protested outside Downing Street about the war in Yemen. He put conscience before obedience. Well done, Ahmed!

SAVE THE DATE!
6.30pm; MONDAY 12 APRIL

Join us online for **Resisting Militarism in Your Community**.

Please visit ppu.org.uk for more details and to register (for free).

Johnson threatens 44% rise in nuclear warheads

Pacifists have pledged that the UK government's plans to increase the number of nuclear warheads will be met with widespread resistance.

Within hours of the news breaking on 15 March, the Peace Pledge Union was hearing from members and allies who were prepared to take nonviolent direct action to impede the development and deployment of new weapons - as well as many others ready to campaign in other ways.

The plan reverses three decades of policy that, at least in theory, was aimed at reducing the number of nuclear warheads in the world following the Cold War. It fails to respect the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which came into effect in January after being ratified by 50 countries. All nine nuclear-armed states have been trying to ignore it since then.

The policy, announced in the Integrated Defence and Foreign Policy Review, involves raising the upper limit on the number of warheads owned by the UK government from 180 to 260.

The PPU described the Review as a product of shallow militaristic thinking that offers no defence against 21st century threats of pandemics, poverty and climate change.

They added that the only thing



that new warheads would protect were the profits of arms dealers.

The Review came four months after Boris Johnson committed himself to raising UK military spending by more than £16bn - the largest percentage increase since the Korean War.

There was particular anger that ministers announced the nuclear warheads plan shortly after insisting that the government could not afford more than a 1% pay rise for nurses, and after cutting overseas aid by nearly a third.

Many critics argue that the policy will give the Russian, Chinese and other governments an excuse to increase their own arsenals, potentially meaning an arms race that will make the whole world less safe.

The PPU is committed to working with other peace and human rights groups on the issue.

New laws attack our human rights

Ministers have been accused of assaulting human rights in several bills recently presented to Parliament.

The **Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill** offers the police swingeing new powers to restrict peaceful protests, allowing them to specify start times, end times and noise levels at static protests as well as marches. It creates the new term "aggravated activist" to mean someone engaged in nonviolent direct action or civil disobedience. It also introduces new measures against Traveller communities.

The Home Office said the bill would restrict protests that "stop people from getting on with their daily lives". The Peace Pledge Union pointed out that if somebody's daily life involves – for example - running an arms company, then this is a licence to restrict protests against the arms trade.

The bill was presented to Parliament only days after police had misused Covid legislation to justify violent attacks on women holding a vigil on Clapham Common in memory of victims of violence against women (pictured).

There has been a new development in controversy surrounding the **Overseas Operations Bill**. As reported in our last issue, it has been

nicknamed the War Crimes Immunity Bill. Having been passed by MPs, the bill is being debated in the Lords.

It introduces a "presumption against prosecution" for armed forces personnel accused of war crimes overseas after five years. It also prevents forces personnel from pursuing legal action against the Ministry of Defence after six years.

But there was embarrassment for ministers when the International Criminal Court reported in December that "there is a reasonable basis to believe" that UK military personnel in Iraq committed war crimes including wilful killing, torture, rape and inhuman treatment of detainees. The Court did not proceed to a full investigation, citing a procedural point about their jurisdiction.

The PPU pointed out that UK armed forces personnel are almost never prosecuted for war-related crimes.



Sharp rise in white poppy orders from schools

The number of schools ordering white poppies and related materials rose sharply in 2020 despite Covid.

There were 280 orders for the PPU's new Remembrance Education Packs, which included resources for both primary and secondary students.

Lockdowns meant that there were fewer orders than usual from shops, places of worship and other outlets. While there was therefore a fall in the number of white poppies purchased overall, there was a rise in the number ordered by individuals.

White poppies represent remembrance for all victims of war, a commitment to peace and rejection of any attempt to celebrate war. First produced in 1933, they are now distributed by the Peace Pledge Union.

"The Black Lives Matter movement has reminded us that we need to explore the messy and complex realities of history," said Vix Lothian, a secondary school History teacher on the Isle of Wight, who was not surprised by the rising demand from schools. She added. "Young people are keener than ever in working for a more peaceful world."

Launching the white poppy campaign for 2020, the PPU's Geoff Tibbs said, "Many white poppy wearers this year will remember Yemen,



where British-trained pilots are dropping bombs from British-made planes".

Welsh-language white poppies were available from the PPU's online shop for the first time.

Over 300 people attended the PPU's Alternative Remembrance Sunday Ceremony online and over 2,000 watched it within 24 hours. Many were disappointed that Covid prevented the usual physical ceremony in London's Tavistock Square, but the event featured footage of people around the UK laying white poppy wreaths in socially distanced formats. There were contributions from Scottish singer Penny Stone and Yemeni-Scouse poet Amina Atiq (pictured).

"We should all challenge war in all aspects," said Amina. "This is about all victims of war, whether it's in our past or our present."

'Woke' arms dealers fail to fool young people

Recent months have seen a series of bizarre attempts by arms companies and armed forces to portray themselves as progressive, feminist and environmental.

Arms firm BAE Systems was the lead sponsor of World Skills UK Live, an online careers event in November. They claimed to be empowering young people, particularly young women, to use their skills and pursue their ambitions.

But members of the PPU Youth Network pointed out that 10 of the 24 sessions were about careers in the military or the arms industry.

PPU members who attended the online event asked challenging questions about BAE and the armed forces. They found that their questions were quickly deleted from the "chat" box - but not before other attendees had chance to see them.

Bake Off star Nadiya Hussain, who was due to be the main speaker, withdrew at the last moment. Organisers refused to answer journalists' questions about why she had done so, leading them to suspect that it was down to the PPU Youth Network, who had written to her to point out the reality of BAE Systems.

In February, the army ran what they described as "three INSPIRATIONAL, EMPOWERING FEMALE



discussion events" for young women aged 16-24. Young women in the PPU accused them of misusing the language of feminism to promote an organisation rooted in violence and obedience to authority.

"This toxic and male-dominated environment will never be somewhere I turn to feel empowered," said PPU member Farah, 17.

The Ministry of "Defence" had another go at portraying themselves as progressive in December, when "Defence" Secretary Ben Wallace said that they would use "sustainable fuels" for F-35 combat jets.

Veteran climate campaigner Tamzin Omond backed the PPU's critical response to the announcement. "Tackling the climate emergency means changing the systems we live by," she said. "Peace activists and climate campaigners need to work together to defeat militarism as well as climate change."

Ahmed Al-Batati: Why I broke ranks over Yemen

Ahmed Al-Batati made headlines around the world in August 2020 when, as a British soldier, he was arrested while protesting outside Downing Street over UK support for the Saudi war in Yemen. He has since left the army.

We chatted with Ahmed about his motivations.

What made you join the army?

I joined the army at the age of 19, looking for a job that would challenge me and develop an independent life for myself. I was into physical exercise and like many 19-year-olds I hated desk jobs, so joining the army was very appealing to me.

I didn't follow politics and as far as I knew what Saudi Arabia did was best for Yemen. Not knowing about the brutal killings of innocents and the destruction of Yemen, leading to millions having been starved due to Saudi actions with the support of our government.

What led you to take a stand against the war in Yemen?

Islam is what led me to take a stand against injustice. It was around a



year ago when I started to become a practising Muslim and I started to really self-reflect. I wanted to become of service to others so I started a charity foundation with a group of friends to help the poor and vulnerable in Yemen.

That's when I realised the truth of what was happening in Yemen and our government's involvement in what is the worst humanitarian crisis.

I felt uncomfortable and almost like a hypocrite in a way because although I was trying to help those affected by the war, I was also servicing the same government involved in promoting the war in Yemen. That's when I knew I had to take a stand and later on decided to leave the army.

What happened after you were arrested?

I was taken to a military police station where I was processed and questioned for the military laws that I had broken. I had never broken any laws previously so I didn't know what to expect but I knew that being court-martialled or imprisoned was a possibility and it was a risk I was willing to take.

What reactions have you experienced to your protest?

I had all sorts of mixed reactions. Yes, a lot of it was positive but there were others that were more focused on me protesting in uniform rather than what I was protesting about - which was a shame but not everyone will agree, so I was expecting a lot of people to misunderstand my intentions.

Do you hope to see other armed forces personnel protesting?

I was surprised to see a lot of serving soldiers and veterans showing their support but I didn't expect them to protest and risk their careers even if they did feel the same way.

What do you think of pacifism and nonviolent campaigns against war?

I think it's extremely important to

have such campaigns to put pressure on our government to do what is right and stop them from promoting wars for personal interest. That is why I have left the army and created my own campaign called Stand For Justice. We don't just raise awareness on government foreign policy but also injustice that is happening within our community. Hats off to you guys, I think what you do is amazing.

TAKE ACTION

To email your MP about British military support for the war in Yemen, please visit ppu.org.uk/action.

*(Opposite) Ahmed's arrest by Military Police
(Below) A placard displayed by Ahmed opposite Downing Street*



The 'new normal': finding space for peace education



Saffron Gallup, PPU Education Service Manager, explores vital questions as children and young people return to school.

Over the past few weeks, as schools have been preparing for and managing the return of students, the government has announced additional funding for “catch-up” projects. These include summer schools, extended school days and additional tutoring.

This past year has seen schools, colleges and universities cope well with the implications of the pandemic. They have had to manage under stressful circumstances, often with limited or conflicting guidelines. The students, educators, parents and carers are now being asked to do even more.

But this idea of “catch up” raises a number of questions. Firstly, who are the children catching up with? The national curriculum is based on attainment rather than developmental and social expectations. What has truly been “missed”? Who is going to do all of this extra teaching? And what will the longer-term impact be on the wellbeing of children and young people? Will this ‘catch up’ support them to become global citizens in a socially just future? And what space will be left for peace education to fit into this?

Many parents/ carers and students have been doing their best to continue with work set by educational establishments. Parents and carers have become increasingly involved in their children’s learning. It is the social aspects of learning that have been reduced: opportunities to develop communication skills and cooperative peer relationships; being able to express, and being exposed to, opposing views within a safe environment.

There are many people calling for art, drama, sports and music to be a part of this ‘reconnecting’ process. Increased access to outdoor learning to is



emphasised in the new Curriculum for Wales. Enquiry-based learning is key to the development of critical thinking skills and questioning sources of knowledge and power.

Where is the space for peace education within this “catch up” framework? Well, we can include it wherever and whenever we have the creativity and imagination to. We also have an opportunity to use legislation, in the form of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to promote peace education as a priority. Specifically in SDG Target 4.7:

“By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity.”

At the PPU, we have developed

lesson plans for primary students, linked to books with peace themes. These are written with links to the curriculum, but can be used simply to guide conversation and to think about vocabulary and concepts related to peace. They all include a practical, drawing or creating activity.

Our Co-operative Games sheet is for times when interaction and a break from table-based work are needed. The Peacemakers RESTORE framework has resources for primary and secondary students promoting a “safe and healthy” return to school.

We know the stress and anxiety people have experienced this past year. We see the inequality that has been exposed by the pandemic. Army recruitment campaigns are taking advantage of a desire for a sense of belonging. Arms companies are finding ways to promote themselves within the curriculum. At the same time there has been a cultural shift in normalising conversations about mental health. Many more people have become engaged in their communities and in social change movements.

Peace education is a process. Our work is to find creative ways to promote and integrate peace education to support children and young people to feel confident in resisting everyday militarism and following a different path - to understand that there are other options that will build a just future rather than destroy the possibility of ever attaining this.

Please visit ppu.org.uk/education to find any of the resources mentioned in this article.

Obituary: Florence Assie, 1925-2021

Florence Assie was a valued member of the Peace Pledge Union for many years and a former member of PPU staff. She sadly died in January, at the age of 95.

Longstanding PPU activist Lucy Beck looks back on Florence's life, her work with the PPU and her commitment to the cause of pacifism.

Florence first came to the PPU office in the 1980s. Firstly, she was a volunteer helping with whatever needed doing - which included research into the wars and casualties of current wars all over the world, for publication in our magazine. When a vacancy occurred she was appointed onto the staff, working part-time on general enquiries, dealing with new members and members' records, and reception work.

In 1988 she wrote a piece in the PPU newsletter headed Call Florence, asking members who wished to be in touch with others in their area to contact her. "The office computer has now got our membership lists sorted out and can tell us just where you all are... The widespread interest in our ideas shown by the

sale of the white poppies shows that there are many potential members just waiting to be encouraged. And there's plenty of space for them on the computer." It was the early days of office computers!

After Florence retired, with her usual good grace and consideration for her colleagues, she remained in close contact with the office. She showed her interest in world affairs with her involvement in the PPU International Group in the late 80s and early 90s. She wrote, "As pacifists, our contribution to a more peaceful world is the conviction that conflict can be handled without weapons. But, to be effective, that conviction needs knowledge. The roots of war are deep and complex but not beyond our understanding..."

The group held occasional simple meals at Dick Sheppard House, then the PPU's building in Endsleigh Street in London. Their remit was to stimulate discussion within the PPU of international issues from a pacifist viewpoint, and to strengthen contacts with other peace groups around the world, including encouraging participation of PPU members in our international organisation, the War Resisters' International.

"Nonviolence is being practised with varying degrees of success in



many conflicts around the world. We can give positive help to people in the 'front-line' by learning more of their struggles and giving publicity to their cause," wrote Florence.

Members wrote postcards for Prisoners for Peace day (1 December each year) to conscientious objectors to military service in prison around the world. They discussed dangers to the environment and peace in the Antarctic, made links with groups concerned about Indonesia and Central America, and picketed the South African embassy, to mention just a few of their actions at that time.

In view of her teaching experience, Florence was particularly interested in our work on peace education and became a trustee, then chair, of the charity set up by the PPU, the Peace Research and Education Trust (PRET), from its beginnings in 1997

until 2019.

Florence would be pleased that this work continues today. PRET is currently funding the employment of the PPU's Education Service Manager, who is reaching out to teachers through the PPU Education Network, writing new educational material for use in schools and promoting peace education resources on the PPU website. The PPU takes an active role in the Peace Education Network with other peace groups. The PPU recently prepared a schools pack about Remembrance and the white poppy, which was used by a lot of teachers and families last autumn, resulting in some very positive feedback about the discussions which had taken place with pupils.

One PRET Trustee describes Florence as "independent-minded, clear-thinking, kindly". Those of us lucky enough to have known her will miss her, but hope she would have been pleased that the current PPU staff are actively continuing the work of peace, and peace education, to which her life was dedicated.

During the Covid pandemic we are making only limited visits to the PPU office and have thus been unable to access many of our photos of Florence. We plan to add more photos to the online version of this obituary, once we are able to do so.

Cardiff residents say no to everyday militarism

Cardiff resident Huw Williams tells us why people in south Cardiff are challenging plans to build a Military Medicine Museum on their local park.

Britannia Park is a small oasis of greenery in Cardiff Bay, the erstwhile Cardiff Docks that sit next to the historic community of Tiger Bay. The area underwent intensive development in the 1990s. Flashes of character remain, not least Roath Lock, the lock-keeper's cottage and the Norwegian Church that looks out on the bay.

However, this one piece of open green space, which services residents, office workers and visitors besides, is under threat by the prospect of a five-storey building that will house a Military Medicine Museum, currently in Aldershot. The museum's official aims include the promotion of military recruitment. This is a park that Cardiff Council itself owns and



wants to sell off in the face of local opposition. Planning permission was granted in December, but the Friends of Britannia Park fight on, with support of allies such as local community group Butetown Matters and the Peace Pledge Union.

There is considerable concern at the fact that the children's park will be dug up. Local campaigners in Wales' oldest multicultural community are asking why their wishes are yet again being ignored and why attention is not been given to their history and that of people of colour across Wales – rather than a museum dedicated to an army that colonised a third of the globe.

And in amongst the incredulity is a deeper concern around the museum, both as a symbol and tool of everyday militarism, which sees working-class children in these communities targeted for recruitment in their schools. With Cardiff's proud pacifist heritage and a new Peace Academy in its Temple of Peace, the incongruity, unpopularity and perplexing nature of these proposals could not be more stark.

To find out how you can support Cardiff residents in this campaign, please visit ppu.org.uk/action.

Peace Pledge Union Members' Survey

The Peace Pledge Union aims to be an organisation where all voices are heard and all individuals feel valued and welcome.

We aspire for the PPU to be a warm, safe, open and courageous space (both physical and virtual) for all members, volunteers, Council members and potential participants.

We have developed a membership survey because we want to hear about the issues that members consider that the PPU should prioritise. We want to learn how we can better support your engagement with the PPU and we want to better understand the composition of our membership.

We would love to hear more about you!

Please see details of how to complete the survey in the box opposite.

Why are we doing this now?

At the PPU AGM in February 2020 the existing Equality and Respect Policy was reviewed in small group discussions. In response to some of the feedback given at the AGM we established a Diversity & Inclusion working group and developed a new strategy.

The PPU aims to actively engage in the process of diversifying

The survey is available to complete online:

www.ppu.org.uk/survey

Paper copies are also available: please call 020 7424 9444 if you would like one sent out to you.

Please complete the survey by FRIDAY 30 APRIL 2021.

its membership, staff and Council through unpicking structural discrimination and regularly measuring change to inclusive practice. The development of this survey is an active step toward including a range of voices within the organisation.

As pacifists, we recognise at the PPU that the society we live in is unjust and unequal. Not all people have their needs heard and met. Structural inequality excludes many from participating in organisations such as PPU. These discriminatory systems, that centre certain experiences and de-centre others, are often unconscious and unacknowledged.

We hope to better understand the composition of our membership as a result of this survey. The data obtained will inform the PPU's priorities.

Militarism in numbers

1%

Pay rise for nurses in England (effectively a pay cut given inflation), which ministers say is all they can "afford".

47%

Cut in UK aid budget to Yemen for 2021, attributed by the government of Boris Johnson to the "fiscal situation".

11.65%

Increase in UK military spending between 2020-21 and 2021-22. Bigger increases are planned for each of the following three years.

£6.8bn

Minimum value of UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia in the six years since Saudi forces (trained by UK forces) started bombing Yemen.

4th

The UK previously had the 8th highest military spending in the world. It is predicted to become the fourth highest following recent policy announcements.

260

Potential number of nuclear warheads that could be owned by the UK government, up from 180.

59%

Percentage of the British public that want the UK to sign up to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, according to a recent independent poll.

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