

Issue 84

Autumn 2021

Peace Matters

Magazine of the Peace Pledge Union



Getting in the way of militarism

**Also: peace and remembrance in the age
of Covid and climate crisis**

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blockade of an
entrance to the DSEI
arms fair by members
of Put Down the Sword.

What makes us safe?

Symon Hill, Editor

The world faces two different ideas of security.

We have seen people around the world put extraordinary energy into tackling Covid and supporting each other. Mutual aid groups sprang up as people looked out for their neighbours. Scientists co-operated to rapidly produce reliable vaccines. Millions of people are demanding meaningful action on the climate.

It is a reminder of what makes us safe: co-operation across borders, funding for public health, grassroots resistance to poverty and injustice.

We have also seen corporations and governments denying vaccine access to the poorest countries. Police have misused lockdowns to increase their powers. Underfunded mental health care has fuelled mental health crises triggered by Covid and lockdown. And militarism charges ahead.

Militarism offers a failed notion of safety - equating security with preparations for war. Weapons cannot protect us from pandemics, poverty and climate chaos. They stir up armed conflict and divert resources from real needs. As COP26 approaches, the military remain exempt from even counting their carbon emissions and arms companies farcically claim to have green policies. Despite revelations about

abuse, the military police themselves through their own courts.

So let's make a priority of getting in the way of militarism.

In this issue we have news of active nonviolence to disrupt the arms trade and exciting developments in this year's white poppy campaign (pages 4-7). Andrew Bolton questions attempts to restrict discussions in schools (8-9), Jess Amy Dixon considers sexual abuse in the military (10-11) and Rob Fairmichael offers a pacifist reflection on Northern Ireland. Following the sad death of inspiring pacifist Penny Walker, we reflect on her life (p.14), and look at how peace education in her home city of Leicester can inspire similar projects elsewhere (p. 15).

Martin Luther King said that we would either "live together as brothers" (or, as we would say, siblings) or "perish together as fools". Rarely has the choice felt more stark.

SAVE THE DATE!

12.00, Sunday 14 November

Join us either online or in person at Tavistock Square, London for the **Alternative Remembrance Ceremony**

More details at ppu.org.uk or by calling **020 7424 9444**.

Arms trade disrupted by active nonviolence

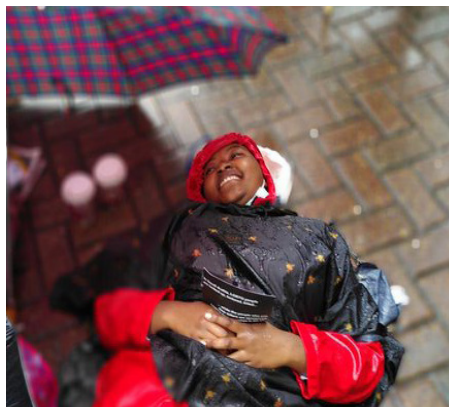
A string of arms fairs are taking place in Britain this autumn, but they all face repeated protests and nonviolent direct action.

In the week before the DSEI arms fair in London in September, the set-up of the event was impeded by people blocking roads and climbing onto military vehicles. The opening day saw an entrance to the venue blocked by women who glued themselves together (pictured on the front cover).

"So many countries that have human rights concerns have been invited to buy weapons," said one of them, Alison, a Peace Pledge Union member.

As they queued to enter the arms fair earlier that day, hundreds of DSEI participants found themselves walking past a remembrance ceremony for victims of war and the arms trade. Standing next to the entrance, PPU members and supporters read out names of people killed in wars around the world in the last 20 years. They then laid wreaths of white poppies.

DSEI was the first of four arms fairs to take place in Britain in less than three months. At the DPRTE arms fair in Farnborough in October, members of Greater Rushmoor Action for Peace contrasted government support for the arms trade with a lack of action on the climate emergency. There was a



large turnout for protests at the Liverpool arms fair the following week, with two members of Palestine Action occupying the roof for 24 hours. Resistance is also expected to the Malvern arms fair on 4 November.

This autumn's anti-militarist protests have seen a number of people taking nonviolent direct action for the first time. They include Alicia Cash and Fanny Chintu (pictured above), students from Essex who lay in the road for seven hours on the opening day of the DSEI arms fair.

Despite the rain, Alicia insisted that she was prepared to do what she could to make it more difficult for people to "make money from selling arms without guilt".

Want to resist upcoming arms fairs and similar event? Visit ppu.org.uk/events and join the resistance!

White poppies in the age of Covid and climate crisis

The Peace Pledge Union has launched this year's remembrance campaign, saying that the message behind white poppies is more relevant than ever.

"White poppies stand for remembrance of all victims of war, looking beyond national borders, as well as a rejection of militarism and a commitment to working towards a peaceful future," said Geoff Tibbs, the PPU's Remembrance Project Manager.

He added, "These messages have a renewed urgency today, as Covid and the climate crisis have shown the need to co-operate peacefully across borders and that militarism cannot make us safe."

White poppies have been worn in the run-up to Remembrance Day since 1933. They differ from red poppies, which remember only UK and allied armed forces personnel and show "support for the armed forces" - according to the Royal British Legion, who produce them.

Geoff Tibbs said, "The so-called 'War on Terror', which has lasted for more than 20 years, has been a catastrophe of global proportions, leaving millions dead and displaced. As Remembrance Day approaches, this grim legacy reminds us that remembrance must confront the true human cost of war and not be confined by a nationalist agenda."

The number of shops and other outlets stocking white poppies has more than doubled in the last five years, meaning there is now at least one outlet in almost every city and large town in the UK. The majority of white poppies, however, continue to be bought online through the PPU website.

Meanwhile, white poppy wearers in Glasgow are planning to sell white poppies at demonstrations around the COP26 summit.

The BBC announced in October that they will this year allow presenters to wear remembrance poppies "of any colour", a decision attacked on social media by far-right groups and former Labour MP Kate Hoey.

Money raised through white poppies goes towards promoting nonviolent approaches to conflict and producing educational materials. White poppy school resources are this year available in Welsh for the first time.



New military deals, less accountability

Despite Covid and the climate crisis, Boris Johnson's government continues to make the world even less safe.

In September, Johnson signed the "AUKUS" deal with the US and Australia, promising to supply Australia with the means to develop nuclear-powered submarines.

The AUKUS pact has stirred up military tension with China. Not for the first time, the Chinese and US governments are using each other's militarism to justify their own.

This was followed by "Defence" Secretary Ben Wallace committing £5bn to a new Digital Warfare Centre - only days before ministers snatched £20 per week from people on Universal Credit. The money would have been enough to keep the £20 in place for nearly a year.

Plans such as these follow Boris Johnson's announcement in late 2020 of the biggest percentage rise in UK military spending since the Korean War.

At the same time, there has been a string of reminders of the military establishment's lack of accountability.

Johnny Mercer MP effectively admitted trying to use his influence when he was Veterans Minister to intervene in trials of former soldiers to have them stopped. MPs voted down an amendment to the Armed Forces Bill that would have

ensured that cases involving murder or rape in the military would be dealt with by civilian courts. Shortly afterwards, in October, MoD statistics revealed that one in every 29 young women aged 16 or 17 in the UK armed forces has reported rape or sexual assault. The next day, the armed forces police said they had dropped all investigations into alleged war crimes by British troops in Iraq.

In response, the PPU has insisted that armed forces must lose the power to police themselves.

TAKE ACTION

Don't let militaries dodge the carbon count!

The COP26 summit brings another reminder of the ways in which militarism undermines attempts to tackle real threats. When a country signs up to cut carbon emissions, their armed forces can be exempt from the carbon targets!

Ahead of COP26, a range of climate campaigns and peace groups are calling on world leaders to scrap this dangerous exemption.

Find out more and sign the petition at ppu.org.uk/action.

Blocking roads can be legal, says Supreme Court

The UK Supreme Court has overturned the convictions of four people who took nonviolent direct action against an arms fair.

"That our simple protest, which lasted only a few minutes, though possibly disruptive, led to four years of legal to-ing and fro-ing, illustrates very well the power of nonviolence," said one of the four, Henrietta Cullinan, a member of the Peace Pledge Union.

Henrietta was arrested along with Chris Cole, Joanna Frew and Nora Ziegler (pictured below with solicitor Raj Chada) in 2017 when they contributed to disrupting the setting-up of the DSEI arms fair by locking themselves together to block an entrance to the event.

They were found Not Guilty by a District Judge in February 2018, but the prosecution appealed and

they were convicted at the High Court in January 2019.

But this summer, the Supreme Court ruled that the District Judge had been right to acquit them.

"There should be a certain degree of tolerance to disruption to ordinary life, including disruption of traffic, caused by the exercise of the right to freedom of expression or freedom of peaceful assembly," said the judges.

The judgement has already been cited in further cases, some of which have involved the convictions of Extinction Rebellion campaigners being overturned.

Celebrating the ruling, the four defendants called for resistance to the Police Bill now going through Parliament, which threatens draconian restrictions on the right to protest.



White poppies in schools: promoting 'extremism'?



Andrew Bolton works on an organic garden allotment in Leicester and other peace projects. He is a former Religious Education professional.

For more on the PPU's education work, please visit ppu.org.uk/education.

In September 2020, the Department for Education declared that schools in England "should not under any circumstances use resources produced by organisations that take extreme political stances". They added, "This is the case even if the material itself is not extreme, as the use of it could imply endorsement or support of the organisation."

Is talking about white poppies, as well as red poppies, in schools around Remembrance Sunday a problem? Or is it a good opportunity to help children think critically, in discussion together, about how we should remember war?

In a healthy democracy there are different perspectives on many issues. Red poppies are the norm around Remembrance Sunday in the UK. Those who died or suffered in the armed forces for Britain and the Commonwealth are rightly remembered. White poppies were created as a symbol in 1933 by women who had lost husbands, fathers, sons, brothers and friends in World War One. White poppies are about remembering all victims of war – both civilian and military, and from all nations. White poppies were a renewed commitment to the "War Never Again" spirit of 1918.

White poppies are more inclusive, a symbol that draws a wider circle of remembrance. It is internationalist, rather than nationalist, and includes civilians, children, as well as members of the armed forces. It is also a symbol that is suspicious about war, wants to remember the grim, awful, tragic reality of war.

Loyal opposition is very British, and an essential part of the British tradition of democracy. It perhaps grows out of British non-conformist Christian traditions like Congregationalists,

Baptists, Quakers, and Methodists. Nonconformists suffered for their stance. Today the white poppy is a symbol of opposition to the idea that the red poppy tradition is the only, or official, way of remembering war. The white poppy continues the British non-conformist tradition, albeit secular.

Today, multi-faith Britain is the new status quo of significantly expanded religious diversity. There are new expressions of the British tradition of nonconformity. I see this as something to be embraced and celebrated.

Universal ethics abound in the world religions that are taught in Religious Education in our schools, according to local agreed syllabuses. Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – have strong themes of human equality and justice for the poor. Ahimsa – the ethic of harmlessness nurtured in the womb of Hinduism – flourishes in Buddhism and Jainism and was embodied in Gandhi. Defence of human rights for all was an early commitment of Sikhism. Humanism advocates energetically for global citizenship, human dignity for all. Human Rights are also a secular global ethic.

Does teaching multi-faith Religious Education mean a preference for global rather than nationalistic citizenship? If so, then discussion of white as well as red poppies as symbols is legitimate in the RE classroom. The white poppy tradition is a symbol of global citizenship.



Quakers, with a wonderful track record of global citizenship, are one organisation supporting the white poppy movement. Are they an example of an organisation taking "extreme political stances"? From their beginnings in the late 1640s, Quakers asserted human equality and annoyed aristocrats and magistrates by their refusal to doff hats, or curtsy, or use subservient language.

Is nationalism an extremist position, even though some British governments may want to fan its flames for political ends? Again, this should be discussed in the classroom.

To teach creatively and fairly about both the red poppy and white poppy traditions through assemblies, or in history, social studies or RE, will enlarge the critical thinking capacity of all pupils. Such thinking is necessary for the future flourishing of British democracy in a multi-ethnic, religiously diverse United Kingdom, sailing in an interdependent world.

No ‘#MeToo moment’ for the armed forces



Jess Amy Dixon is a feminist writer and PPU member living in Leicestershire. She is working on a PhD on the #MeToo movement.

In April this year, a former senior army officer said that the army “needs a #MeToo moment” in response to claims that hundreds of female troops have been raped or sexually abused by colleagues. Allegations include women being forced to have sex with male instructors in order to pass training courses and being branded as “slags” after reporting assaults.

On the surface, the call for a #MeToo-style reckoning like those faced by Hollywood, Westminster, and other powerful institutions makes sense. We only have to look at last year’s Weinstein verdict to see the power of this type of collective speaking out.

Nobody ever deserves to be raped or sexually assaulted. As a feminist and a pacifist, I disagree with and resist every single thing the armed forces stand for, and I also believe that the women (and men and non-binary people) working in those organisations deserve to be safe and protected. Those two things are not in conflict. It is imperative that we believe these survivors when they speak out, and that senior armed forces officials take the issue within their ranks seriously.

But the armed forces has one issue that Hollywood, Westminster and even big business do not: the military is, at its core, an inherently violent institution. Sexual violence is not something that can be weeded out of the armed forces in its current form, because sexual violence is part of the fabric of militarism as a system.

The armed forces are violent and abusive to the people they recruit, and they train those same recruits to inflict violence and abuse upon others. The British army recruits young people from the age of 16. In every meaningful way - physically, emotionally, psychologically, legal-



(Left) In April, the Sunday People revealed hundreds of cases of sexual abuse in the UK armed forces.

ry concern is not in protecting its people, but in protecting its reputation. The incentive to downplay, minimise, and throw out as many sexual violence cases as possible is obvious. To allow the armed forces to essentially police themselves is to throw survivors under the bus in the name of protecting the public perception of the forces.

It has been understood for centuries that sexual violence is routinely used as a weapon of war, and the British armed forces are no exception. Last year the International Criminal Court in the Hague concluded that there was a “reasonable basis” to believe that members of UK forces committed war crimes in Iraq – including wilful killing, torture, inhuman/cruel treatment, and rape and other forms of sexual violence.

There cannot be an effective #MeToo-style reckoning in the armed forces. Abuse is too ingrained into the system. Even if this were somehow to happen successfully - and under the current structure, it cannot and will not - reducing or eliminating colleague-on-colleague sexual violence is the tip of a very large and very broken iceberg.

The armed forces cannot be reformed to be feminist, nonviolent, or non-abusive. The only way to change this institution is to tear it up at the roots and build a system of nonviolence in its place.

ly - a 16-year-old is not an adult. There is no way an institution that recruits children, puts weapons in their hands and trains them to kill, can be anything other than a place where violence in all forms thrives.

Last year, three British women launched legal action to stop sexual violence cases being tried in military courts, saying that conviction rates were six times lower than the already abysmal rates in civilian courts. The women had been assaulted by colleagues and their cases poorly handled by the military justice system, and none of the perpetrators were convicted. The women’s lawyer described the outcome as “second-best justice.”

This is hardly surprising. In a society where it is still considered taboo to criticise the armed forces, we cannot expect those institutions to handle these complaints properly. The armed forces’ prima-

Northern Ireland: division blatant, violence latent

Rob Fairmichael, director of the Irish Network for Nonviolence Action, Training and Education (INNATE) looks at recent developments in Northern Ireland from a pacifist perspective.

*(Opposite)
Rob Fairmichael as St Patrick at an anti-militarist protest at Spirit Aero Systems, Belfast, St Patrick's Day, 2021.*

Division in Northern Ireland is still blatant and the risk of violence is still latent. But much has also been changing. In a statelet which was set up on the basis of a sectarian headcount to provide a Protestant majority in perpetuity, Protestants are no longer in a numerical majority. But republicans and nationalists, overwhelmingly Catholic by cultural origin, are not in a majority either since the balance is held by others – people who may identify as Northern Irish or are from outside Northern Ireland, or who refuse to be pigeonholed.

Unionism has not adjusted to the new situation, pushing for a hard Brexit (when a majority in Northern Ireland voted to stay in the EU), still thinking it can speak for “Northern Ireland” when always it was just speaking for itself. While Northern Ireland remaining in the EU single market affects everyone equally, it is only unionists and loyalists who have taken personal offence at it. You can understand why. With a British prime minister who has lied, deceived and betrayed them, this has played exactly into the ‘backs to the wall’ unionist default position.

Dealing with the past in Northern Ireland has remained a thorny and intractable mess. The British government, for one, does not want more of its unsavoury dealings and misdealings in the Troubles to come out. While there is something like a zero sum game at this stage between “truth” and “justice”, British attempts to give blanket clearances to soldiers for any misdeeds has major ramifications for Northern Ireland. If you clear one group (soldiers) you have to clear everyone (paramilitaries). It took 50 years - imagine being a family member of a victim - for those killed in Ballymurphy in 1971 by British army bullets to receive a coroner’s judgement

For more information,
please visit INNATE at
innatenonviolence.org
or phone them on
028 9064 7106.

that they were all innocent.

A majority in Northern Ireland being no longer “unionist” does not necessarily entail a united Ireland, though that is likely at some point. The “middle ground” may vote on economic and social practicalities. Republicans who push too far too fast for a united Ireland are risking violence too; unionists who have always proclaimed simple majority rule may change their tune now they are no longer a majority. And if there is no process of involvement with Protestants in arriving at a united Ireland then loyalist paramilitaries could go on the offensive to “defend” their people. Any process of engagement with unionists would have to be gradual.

There is a huge amount of work necessary to build peace in Northern Ireland. Education is still largely separate, much housing too, and many people vote for parties whose actions can be very divisive. People can nominally reject violence but retain prejudices. This is all a risk for the future. Divided societies (as Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia attest in different ways) can spiral into hopeless violence very rapidly if things go awry.

The Republic is a very different, and more prosperous, state than it was some decades ago. There seems a willingness to take on board recognition of unionists’ British identity – though it has to be said it is also a very particular variety of British identity. The Republic is increasingly being drawn into the



NATO net, and certainly the EU’s rapidly growing militarisation. Full militarisation and an end to Irish neutrality would be a bitter pill to swallow for Irish unity and one that peace activists will resist strongly. Increasing involvement in the arms trade, North and South, is also a concern and an all-Ireland network on the arms trade, StoP – Swords to Ploughshares - emerged recently.

“Balance” in terms of numbers in Northern Ireland provides an opportunity for a new beginning if it can be grasped, without saying there has to be a united Ireland or a United Kingdom. Both the current and previous British governments have used and abused Northern Ireland for their own ends. Holding the British government to account for its dealings with Northern Ireland would be one service that people in Britain could perform for peace in Northern Ireland.

Remembering Penny Walker

The peace movement has been mourning Penny Walker, a PPU member who was at the centre of many peace and human rights campaigns in the Midlands, and who died in May at the age of 70.

Penny's death triggered a flood of tributes from peace groups and refugee rights campaigners.

"Every project Penny started was ahead of popularity, but each would be mainstream eventually," said Richard Johnson of Leicester CND.

Sabir Zazai, chief executive of the Scottish Refugee Council, said, "Penny was a living reflection of peace and reconciliation". Sabir was helped by Penny when he arrived in Coventry from Afghanistan to seek asylum in 1999.

Recently, Penny played a major role in the successful campaign to persuade the local authorities in Leicester to prevent the armed forces from inviting children to handle weapons when they stage events and recruitment stalls in the city.

In 1997, Penny spent a year living in a caravan outside the Alvis tank factory in Coventry (now part of BAE Systems), to witness to non-violence and to promote alternative uses of technology.

Penny later co-founded Coventry Peace House. In the early 2000s, she set up Coventry Refugee and



Migrant Centre in the Hillfields area of the city, which has since provided support to over 4,000 people.

Penny moved to Leicester in 2011, playing a major role in the community of South Highfields. Along with others, she organised the creation of a memorial to local conscientious objectors in Leicester's Peace Walk in 2016. She edited a booklet on examples of peacemaking, focused on everyday personal stories.

Among other activities, Penny was arrested while campaigning against war in Afghanistan, co-founded the Fly Kites Not Drones campaign, worked with the Afghan community in Leicester and challenged the recruitment of 16-year-olds to the UK armed forces.

Penny is survived by her children Mel Read and Charlie Walker and grandchildren Brooke and Lilly Read.

Leicester education project set to inspire others

A new project in Leicestershire has brought together local peace and organisers, activists and educators to promote and explore education for peace. The Leicester Schools Peace Project is a collaboration involving local groups, the Peace Pledge Union, the University of Leicester and Leicester SACRE (the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education).

It was inspired by the centenary of the University of Leicester. Uniquely, the University was established in 1921 as a "living memorial" after World War One, a "palace of peace", with the Latin motto meaning "That they might have life."

This project explores local stories, places and faiths to inspire young people in Leicester and Leicestershire to become "citizens of change" and acquire the knowledge and skills to work for a sustainably peaceful and just future. The project focusses on developing critical thinking and strong ethical understandings of conflict and reconciliation, justice and nonviolence, war and peace. Leicester is a wonderfully diverse city and those involved want to contribute to the peace of the city and to justice and fairness for all through this project.

The Leicester Schools Peace Project was launched with a pilot series of lesson plans and assemblies for Key Stage 2 and 3, which

To access materials produced for the Leicester Schools Peace Project - many of which can be used anywhere - please visit **ppu.org.uk/education**.

If you would like more information or to work with us on similar projects elsewhere, please get in touch at **mail@ppu.org.uk** or on **020 7424 9444**.

are available for free on the PPU website (see above)

The project has also seen the creation of guided "peace tours" of stories and the first buildings on the university campus and "remembering" through nearby war memorials. The tours will be led by especially trained student ambassadors and will be free.

Throughout the resources there is a focus on history and future, thinking and action, examining different perspectives, and local and global citizenship.

The Peace Pledge Union is looking for other local groups, educators and activists who are interested in developing similar projects elsewhere. The PPU can support with developing resources for your local schools and community that are linked to the History, PSHE or Citizenship curriculum.

SO THEY SAY...

"We hope for peace, we pray for peace, we work for peace."

Phebe Novakovic, CEO of arms company General Dynamics, May 2021

"Peace is not going to break out in the Middle East any time soon. I think it remains an area where we'll continue to see solid growth."

Greg Haynes, CEO of arms company Raytheon, January 2021.

"We can start to draw a line under the legacy of our operations in Iraq and to focus on the future."

'Defence' Secretary Ben Wallace tries to stop us all talking about the Iraq war, October 2021.

"The first trial was coming down the track and we'd made promises to these guys that it wasn't happening."

Johnny Mercer admits having tried to interfere in criminal trials when he was Minister for Veterans, April 2021.

"In the face of this shameful and culpable silence, it is our duty to confront the problem and to stop the arms trade."

Roman Catholic bishops in Britain, September 2021

"There should be a certain degree of tolerance to disruption to ordinary life, including disruption of traffic, caused by the exercise of the right to freedom of expression."

Supreme Court judges, June 2021

"Bunch of unwashed yobs."

Passer-by to PPU members at the DPRTE arms fair in Farnborough, October 2021

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