

Number 80
Autumn 2019

ISSN 1350-3006

peace matters

MAGAZINE OF THE PEACE PLEDGE UNION



Nonviolent resistance - for peace and the climate

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**“War is a crime against
humanity. I renounce
war, and am therefore
determined not to
support any kind of
war. I am also
determined to work for
the removal of all
causes of war.”**

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Peace Matters is published by the Peace
Pledge Union. Material published in
Peace Matters does not necessarily
reflect PPU policy.

Editor: Symon Hill

Proof-reading: Kathryn Busby

Typeset and design: PPU

Printing: Lithosphere

Front page photo credit: Used by kind
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The Peace Pledge Union is the oldest
secular pacifist organisation in Britain.
Through War Resisters' International it
is linked with similar groups around the
world.

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You're not the only one

Symon Hill, Editor

Shortly before Armed Forces Day, the PPU received a message from someone who wanted to campaign against a military march in her town. She was nervous, because she knew of no-one else there who agreed with her.

Later, we had a similar request - from someone in the same town. I was able to reply to them both and say, "Don't worry: you're not the only one".

People who take action for peace often find more support than they expect. This is encouraging at a time of political chaos.

So let's not forget our successes. The recent court ruling against arms sales to Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest achievements for the British peace movement in years - and



could save lives in Yemen.

Other stories on our news pages (4-7) include reports of LGBTQ campaigners successfully challenging attempts by arms dealers to pinkwash their image by sponsoring Pride events.

On the centre pages, you can read Ahlyah Ali's call to the peace and climate movements to do better at connecting up the issues. And there is news

of plans to resist the DSEI arms fair about to open in London (p.9).

As we prepare to distribute white poppies, Geoff Tibbs shares thoughts on remembrance and what we can do about it (10-11). And you can hear from the PPU's longest-standing member - who joined us 80 years ago - and one of our newest members (14-15).

Despite all the positive events at the PPU lately, we're still coming to terms with the sad death in April of former PPU Administrator Annie Bebington, a leading light of the PPU for more than 30 years. You can read her obituary on pages 12-13. She will inspire us for years to come.

Staff changes at the Peace Pledge Union

Jan Melichar, who has been on the PPU staff for an impressive 45 years, left the staff in May. Jan continues as a volunteer, particularly on *The Men Who Said No* website. Sarah Robinson has also moved on, having worked as temporary Administrator from October to May, keeping things on track at a busy time.

We're very pleased to welcome two new staff: Kathryn Busby as Operations Manager and Geoff Tibbs as Remembrance Project Manager.

New PM, same old militarism

Boris Johnson's government is refusing to rule out deploying troops onto the streets of the UK in the event of chaos following a no-deal Brexit.

The Peace Pledge Union - whose members include both Remain and Leave voters - warned that Brexit should not be used as an excuse to increase military influence.

But while the government says there are "no plans" to use troops for police functions, they have declined to say they would not consider it. The MoD has put the order in place for reserves to be called up for "contingencies" following Brexit.

However, military personnel have no legal authority over civilians in Britain unless martial law is declared.

The PPU's call for the government to rule out "troops on the street" has been backed by MPs including Labour's Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Plaid Cymru's Jonathan Edwards, the SNP's Ronnie Cowan and Lib-Dem Alistair Carmichael.

Meanwhile, new "Defence" Secretary Ben Wallace looks set to continue with militarist business as



usual. Former "Defence" Secretary Gavin Williamson has become Education Secretary. In his previous role he proposed "military schools" for children in disadvantaged areas. The PPU will be keeping a close watch on him in his new job.

Boris Johnson told *The Sun* that he wants to "end unfair trials" of British armed forces veterans - but did not specify any trials that he considered unfair. In practice, British veterans are almost never convicted of war-related crimes. The militarist lobby, in cheerful denial of reality, have whipped up the fantasy that there is a "witch-hunt" of veterans, particularly those who were based in Northern Ireland.

Foremost among the proponents of the "witch-hunt" claim is Johnny Mercer, the Plymouth MP whose attacks on white poppy wearers last year created so much publicity for the PPU that he was nicknamed "white poppy salesman of the year". Mercer, one of the most gung-ho militarists in Parliament, has been appointed as Johnson's Minister for Veterans.

As well as ending the mythical witchhunt, Mercer will be looking at veterans' housing and welfare needs. Such needs might be better met if the government had not been cutting public services and the welfare state while maintaining the seventh highest military budget in the world.

Court win over arms to Saudis

In a major success for grassroots peace activism, the Court of Appeal ruled in June that UK ministers broke the law in licensing arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

The court found that the government had failed to properly assess whether there have been breaches of International Humanitarian Law. The case was brought by the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), to which the Peace Pledge Union is affiliated.

The ruling is a significant setback for ministers who have defended arms sales to the brutal Saudi regime, which has killed thousands of civilians in Yemen.



International Trade Secretary Liz Truss has appealed against the ruling.

The campaign has been supported by Yemeni groups and others who have directly experienced Saudi violence. CAAT's Andrew Smith said, "No matter what atrocities it has inflicted, the Saudi

regime has been able to rely on the uncritical political and military support of the UK".

Not only arms companies but also UK armed forces are complicit in Saudi atrocities. Saudi pilots have been trained by the Royal Air Force in North Wales, while Saudi officers are trained at Sandhurst.

The PPU backed CAAT's call for the government to put effort and money into providing decent, socially useful jobs for people who may lose jobs in arms firms.

The PPU is joining with allies in CAAT and other groups to resist the DSEI arms fair in London in September. See page 9 for more details of our plans.

Global opposition to war with Iran

People around the world have backed campaigns against war between Iran on the one hand and the US and UK on the other. At the time of going to press, tensions had risen after the seizing of tankers by both sides. Hostility had already increased after Donald Trump withdrew from a nuclear deal with Iran.

In the UK, pro-war politicians and commentators seized on the situation to demand an increase in spending on the Royal Navy. But the Peace Pledge Union predicted that the majority of the British public would not support war. We urge solidarity between people in the UK, US and Iran as they resist those who would wage war in their name.

Pinkwashing: the tide is turning

Arms dealers are on the back foot after a string of successful campaigns against their attempts to pinkwash their image by sponsoring Pride marches.

BAE Systems have sponsored at least three Pride marches in 2019, in Blackpool, Portsmouth and Woking. Meanwhile, the armed forces are claiming that they welcome gay, bisexual and trans people - despite an internal review reporting in July on high levels of homophobia, sexism and racism among officers.

But in the summer of 2019, they have lost out to the power of nonviolent resistance.

Much of this has come from No Pride in War, an

informal alliance that includes the PPU, Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants, the Campaign Against Arms Trade and London Bi Pandas.

One of the campaign successes was in Bristol, where Pride organisers rejected a request for a Ministry of "Defence" display. This seems to have been in response to significant protests last year when Bristol Pride accepted sponsorship from Boeing, who make much of their money from arms.

In June, there was no official military presence at York Pride, following demonstrations against a military march and army recruitment stall at the event in 2018.

Meanwhile, *Diva*, a

magazine for lesbians and bi women, dropped BAE from an awards shortlist after a campaign.

In August, the UK's Bisexual Convention (BiCon) voted by 81% to rule out all arms industry sponsorship or stalls for armed forces.

But in Woking, organisers of Pride in Surrey took BAE sponsorship and refused to say how much money was involved. Critics were told to leave the event when they were seen with anti-BAE banners (pictured below). Footage shows a steward saying, "You have got to leave. That's from right of the top of the management of the event. They don't want you on the premises. You're against the sponsors."

No Pride in War make clear that they do not object to soldiers or arms company employees attending Pride events as *individuals*, but they urge Pride organisers not to give arms dealers or armed forces a platform to promote themselves as institutions.

Do you want to resist militarism in LGBTQ movements? If so, get in touch at mail@ppu.org.uk or on 020 7424 9444.



Shock at pre-school militarism

Shocking photographs reveal that a nursery dressed pre-school children in real military body armour to mark Armed Forces Day in June.

The incident took place in Boston, Lincolnshire, where a visiting soldier invited children no older than five to try on his equipment and helmet, with the approval of the nursery's management.

The PPU described it as a particularly shocking example of everyday militarism.

Other Armed Forces Day events saw children of primary school age invited to handle real weapons, including at the Armed Forces Day National Event in Salisbury, which was sponsored by eight arms

companies.

Several schools found themselves facing criticism over Armed Forces Day. A mother in South Wales (who wishes to remain anonymous) was one of those who contacted the PPU about the issue. She decided to keep her children off primary school for the day. She said, "The event is

portraying a glamorous and fun image of the armed forces, which is dangerous and hugely unfair to our children".

But events in Leicester were a reminder that local campaigning can be effective: no children were invited to handle weapons at this year's event in the city, thanks to a successful campaign by Leicester for Peace.

In the week before Armed Forces Day, the PPU experienced a rush of last-minute requests for postcards challenging the Day from people wanting to speak out against military events in their own area.

Next year the Armed Forces Day National Event will be in Scarborough. So will the Peace Pledge Union.



Ends and means must go together, says PPU

The Peace Pledge Union's annual conference in June explored questions of solidarity, asking how peace activists can meaningfully support each other across boundaries and borders. We were inspired by a talk from Melanie Strickland of the Stansted 15.

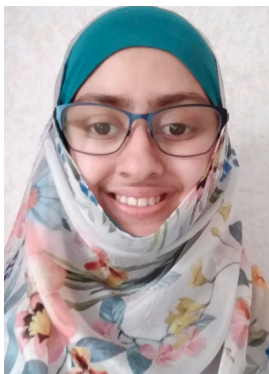
Participants split into regional groups to make plans for putting these ideas into practice.

Earlier in the day, the PPU's AGM passed resolutions committing ourselves to ensuring that we apply our pacifist principles in our everyday work. This includes prioritising the implementation of our new Equality & Respect Policy.

Climate and peace: not single issues

Movements such as the school climate strikes have this year reminded the world of the power of nonviolent direct action. Ahlyah Ali urges climate campaigners and peace campaigners to recognise their shared concerns - and to work more together.

Ahlyah Ali is a 24-year-old British Muslim motivated by faith to help win the struggle for climate justice and build a world free of war and oppression.



There is no peace without justice, a truth anyone committed to working for peace will know. And one of the greatest threats to global peace and security, as recognised by the UN, is climate breakdown. Millions more will be displaced from their homes as they face increased tensions over water scarcity, crop failure and the impacts of extreme weather in addition to the devastation of war. Dehumanised by politicians and the media, refugees are then turned away at the borders of countries most responsible for the conditions which have forced them to flee. We must fight for their rights.

Climate change is also known as a “threat multiplier”, exacerbating existing inequalities, and is fundamentally an issue of injustice. Those least responsible are facing the worst impacts, predominantly black and brown people in the global south; the same communities being systematically destroyed for the profits of the arms industry. It is the same structural inequalities which allow the lives of some to be seen as worth less than others when it comes to

profit for the arms or fossil fuel industries at the expense of communities on the frontlines of war and climate breakdown.

Calls for doing what is “politically feasible”, for making incremental changes, are nothing more than lip service when it is clear the only just solution to the climate crisis is transforming the entire system to one which puts people and planet first. Business as usual is death; a fact activists continue to draw attention to.

Moreover, the image often used to depict climate impacts is of a white polar bear on a shrinking piece of ice; perhaps a more palatable image than the human face of this crisis. Even when speaking about climate change in terms of an “existential crisis”, it is referred to as a future threat with a number of years left to act. This fails to acknowledge that many face a daily threat to their existence as their rights are being eroded in an increasingly hostile political climate, and the lives already stolen by climate violence. As it is with the faces of “casualties” reduced, at best, to mere numbers in a death toll when it comes to the victims of war. Their stories are ig-

nored under the glitz of the arms fairs and empty words of sending aid rather than ending arms. Yet we have the power to act, especially here in the UK, to build pressure holding the government and corporations to account to take real action for climate justice and peace.

Working in solidarity as activists is key to strengthening our movements if we wish to achieve our vision of a fairer, peaceful and more just world. It's impossible, I feel, to be a "single issue" activist in a true sense when all struggles for justice are interlinked. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, as is so often quoted because we see the truth in it.

We need to build a more diverse and intersectional movement to collectively work for peace and justice. And we will win, however long the road may seem. You are part of a movement of people all across the world doing the same. Take hope in that to build something beautiful together.



Issues combine at protests to stop DSEI

DSEI stands for Defence and Security Equipment International: a euphemism for the London arms fair, which allows governments and armies from around the world to meet up with arms dealers, viewing deadly equipment and doing deals over coffee.

People are needed to join in nonviolent protests in the week of **2nd-8th September**. Actions range from vigils to direct action to lawful protest to making tea. All of these are important!

We aim to resist the set-up of the fair, which takes place the following week.

There will be a different theme to the protests each day, including climate justice on Friday 6th. We need people on each day.

The Peace Pledge Union is one of many groups in the Stop the Arms Fair coalition. There will be a PPU presence each day, especially at the **Festival of Resistance on Saturday 7th September**.

At the last DSEI in 2017, nonviolent resistance disrupted the set-up, meaning the organisers were barely able to open on time. This year, let's close the whole thing down!

More details at ppu.org.uk/events

Building a culture of remembrance

Geoff Tibbs writes about white poppies, remembrance - and the danger of forgetting.

Geoff Tibbs is Remembrance Project Manager at the Peace Pledge Union.



The white poppy carries a clear and urgent message. It stands for a broader idea of remembrance, one that recognises all victims of war on all sides of conflict. It challenges narratives of remembrance that focus only on the UK military dead. It fosters a culture of peace.

But this clear message is also open-ended. Who and how we remember will depend on our personal background and our lived experience. A culture of remembrance involves foregrounding voices that have been marginalised and reading history against the grain. In this way the message of the white poppy is both simple and complex.

Last year marked the end of the centenary of the First World War. However, a hundred years ago, in 1919, British forces continued to fight around the world, in India, Afghanistan, Russia, Ireland, Egypt, Turkey and Yemen and even in Britain itself - with troops sent to Glasgow amidst fear of revolution.

Remembering inter-war colonial conflicts is no less essential to understanding the world as it is today, yet

they are rarely remembered and nor are their victims.

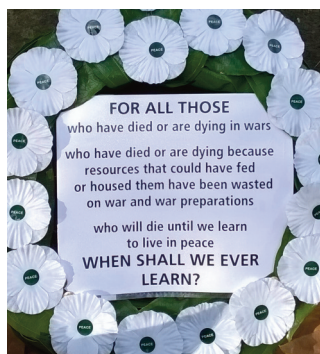
There is one partial exception. The massacre in Amritsar in 1919 is one of the most notorious cases of British colonial violence and was a pivotal moment in the struggle for Indian independence. A large peaceful crowd was gathered in the enclosed space of the Jallianwala Bagh, when troops opened fire, killing several hundred and wounding many more. In India the massacre was marked this year with a large procession to the site, where you can still see bullet holes in the wall (pictured opposite).

The UK has been shamefully slow to come to terms with what happened there. Where it isn't forgotten entirely, the massacre is usually described as a momentary aberration in the record of the British Empire. The centenary this year has been debated in Parliament but there has been no official ceremony and no apology. Theresa May said, "We deeply regret what happened and the suffering caused."

This is the extent of the official recognition of the crimes of Empire: defensive, reluctant and slow.

An apology for such an atrocity should be a bare minimum, a first step towards wider official acknowledgement of the role of the British Empire around the world.

But a different culture of remembrance is possible, one built not only on historical responsibility but on humility, education and a deeper understanding. By clearing a space for remembrance of all victims of war on all sides, the white poppy rejects triumphalist narratives of our violent past and challenges perspectives that omit large parts of the world. It encourages us to learn from the past, to question our role in the world and to insist on non-violent alternatives to present violent conflicts.



There are lots of ways to take action...

Wear a white poppy and tell people why

When you order your white poppies they will come with a short flyer and wallet card summing up the meaning. Order as soon as you can!

Distribute white poppies in your area

If you want to sell white poppies in your shop, cafe, workplace, union, university, school, faith group or anywhere else, please get in touch.

Spread the word on social media

Post about why you're wearing a white poppy. Find us at @PPUtoday and facebook.com/peacepledgeunion.

Volunteer in the office

Packing white poppies is a huge task. If you're in the area, come along to our volunteering sessions (at 1 Peace Passage, London, N7 0BT). The next session is on 17 September. See the website or give us a call for dates after that. Tea, biscuits and friendly conversation provided!

Alternative ceremonies

Visit the events page on our website to find white poppy remembrance ceremonies near you. And if you're organising one, please let us know. The national ceremony will be in London on Sunday 10 November.

Contact us

mail@ppu.org.uk or
020 7424 9444.

Annie Bebington 1953 - 2019

We lost one of the PPU's most dedicated members in April, with the death of longstanding activist and staff member Annie Bebington. PPU chairperson Albert Beale looks back at Annie's life.

There are sometimes key people in an organisation whose loyalty and persistent support - including in the organisation's "leaner" times - can be crucial to the organisation's viability (and subsequent regrowth). One such person was Annie Bebington, who worked for the PPU for over 30 years.

There can be few PPU members during this time who didn't have contact with Annie, as her work included administering the membership record. It was said - only partly jokingly - that when it came to the PPU's membership, Annie knew everything about everybody.

Anne Maureen Bebington was born on 25 August 1953, and brought up in the Beckenham area of Kent. In the early 1980s she became active in London Peace Action (LPA), a group of activists loosely associated with the PPU, which used the PPU's then offices for its meetings and as its campaigning base. Many of those involved in LPA were already PPU mem-

bers and her involvement with the group led Annie to join the PPU too.

LPA included both an Ann and an Anne, and in meetings the latter was sometimes called Ann-E to distinguish her. The nickname stuck, as "Annie", and she was henceforth always known as Annie in PPU circles.

When a PPU staff vacancy occurred in 1987, Annie gave up her existing administrative job to become a peace worker. Her particular contribution was on the administrative and financial side, subsequently also involving membership records and contact with members generally - in the now half-forgotten days before electronic communication and digitisation, when a heavy typewriter was the symbol of office.

Her work included organising meetings and dealing with the formal paperwork generated even by an organisation as un-mainstream as the PPU. At conferences, she managed to combine her organisational role of "keeping the show on the road" (and the rest of us

(Opposite) Annie Bebington at a vigil outside the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall.

in order) with involvement in the proceedings - and in the socialising alongside the event.

Her administrative work did not preclude other skills: in the 1980s, Annie took responsibility for adapting a laurel wreath with white poppies, which was laid annually by the PPU in London. This was reflected at her funeral when the centrepiece was a wreath of white poppies.

She was also frequently the office's proof-reader, taking in hand the less fastidious prose of her colleagues. But as is usual with PPU staff, she didn't confine herself to the office, commonly taking part in PPU events and demonstrations.

As the sales of white poppies kept increasing year-on-year, ensuring the distribution became a major part of Annie's work for several months each year, not to mention organising volunteers to pack them in boxes and bundles for resale, and yanking mailbags of poppies to the Post Office.

But it wasn't always work and no play. Annie was ever ready for an occasion to celebrate an



arrival, departure, birthday or whatever. Indeed, the last memory of her for some will be a pub visit for her birthday a year ago, shortly before a fall from which she never fully recovered; unbeknown to most, she was already ill at that stage with what was diagnosed as the cancer from which she died on 5 April.

Even when she was first away from the office with a broken bone, Annie would be on the phone eager to help those "minding the shop",

dealing with frequent questions about poppy distribution systems. People who hardly knew her remarked on her commitment and kindness.

Annie had already formally resigned from the staff during the later stages of her illness, but - after her 31 years in the office, and even longer as a comrade of many of us - the effect of news of her death was the same as losing someone who'd last walked out of the door the day before. She continues to be missed.

Our oldest member...

Donald Saunders is the Peace Pledge Union's longest-standing member, having signed the peace pledge 80 years ago at the age of 14. He lives in North Wales and is still campaigning for peace.

Here Donald tells us why he joined - and why he's stayed.

It came to my attention that it is 80 years this year since I joined the PPU.

I remember signing the pledge: "I renounce war and am determined not to support any kind of war". I held the strong conviction that war was immoral and wrong from an early age.

Brought up, with my older brother, in a Quaker family, and my father spending over three years hard labour in prison as a Conscientious Objector in World War One, my conviction was probably understandable.

My mother's principled conviction and work for peace all her life must have been a strong influence on me also. Active

PPU support, public peace meetings and protest against the folly of war, causing death and destruction and misery, was the background of my young life.

Registering in 1943 as a Conscientious Objector, obtaining conditional exemption, I joined the Friends War Victims' Relief Service, a Quaker organisation aiding elderly people and mothers and children bombed out of their own homes, housing them in over 80 properties throughout the country. In 1947 they received the Nobel Peace Prize for relief work performed during the war, at home and overseas.

My convictions have been maintained throughout my long life, having been a peace activist for most of those years and still talking and writing for peace. I am still a PPU member and still receiving support from them, latterly at the Armed Forces Day demonstration in Llandudno last year.

Long live the Peace Pledge Union.



**Left: Donald protesting against Armed Forces Day in 2018.
Right: Brighid in 2019.**

...and our newest member

Brighid from Warwickshire is one of the Peace Pledge Union's newest members. She is planning to join a peace protest for the first time at the DSEI arms fair in September (see centre pages).

Here Brighid tells us what has led her to campaign for peace.



I was raised in a provincial white working class culture that prizes masculinity, bigotry and political apathy. One that worships war, defending it as it does most of its traditions - through a potent blend of sentiment and shame, and by wilfully preferring fiction to fact. We turned out fine, it huffs defiantly. I've come to think of this phrase as a warning.

As a mentally ill single woman, dependent upon benefits - someone who didn't turn out fine - I have witnessed many of the abuses perpetuated by British society. So when I tentatively resolved to write an article for peace, in the midst of a breakdown, I struggled with it for a long time. Although I believed in peace, I didn't believe in our system. I admired those with the hope to challenge it, but for my own part I could only rustle up frustration and despair.

Then change came - for me, at least. Rescue. Recovery. Rediagnosis. As I became well, I began to see that people really are defeating hate everywhere with patient love,

with modern technology and old, old ideas.

There were other systems all along. They have been operating under and over and beside the one that conditioned me to believe that nothing could ever change.

With healing and insight, I have come to experience a hope that is mingled with rage.

The poor have always been collateral in the power games of the establishment. I survived its ministrations this time, and though it poisoned my body, the methods it used most effectively in my case were its most nebulous. These were fear and lies and complacency.

The challenge to war begins with personal resistance. I am humbled to join the wider cause. Thank you for waiting for me.

To join the PPU, you can sign the peace pledge and fill in the form on Page 2, or visit ppu.org.uk.

SO THEY SAY...

“I want to drive down the murder rate... It's irrational that murderers are let out only to murder again.”

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who as Foreign Secretary licensed £1.2bn worth of arms to Saudi Arabia. (11 August)

“You have got to leave... They don't want you on the property because you're against the sponsors.”

Steward at Pride in Surrey, to LGBTQ people challenging BAE Systems' sponsorship of the event. (10 August)

“No alcohol, no weapons”

Rules at the entrance to the Armed Forces Day National Event in Salisbury, which was full of tanks, guns and military aircraft. (29 June)

“No financial partnerships shall be entered into with arms companies or armed forces.”

Decision of UK Bisexual Convention (BiCon), passed by 81%. (3 August)

“It's time local councils showed some moral courage in standing against the trivialisation of violence and warfare on Britain's streets.”

Matthew Guest, sociologist, on Armed Forces Day. (29 June)

“We can produce a highly effective marketing video for your business... Our clients include BAE Systems and General Electric.”

Badly misdirected marketing email sent to the Peace Pledge Union. (19 August)

“Irrational and therefore unlawful.”

The Court of Appeal's description of the government's decision to license arms sales to Saudi Arabia without considering international law. (20 June)

“That's what happens when people like you disturb our dinner.”

Mark Field MP, to nonviolent climate activist Janet Barker, after assaulting her. He later claimed he thought she might have been armed. (21 June)

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