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peace matters

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Winning campaigns in your community

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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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supporters in Hackney in 2018.

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.

**For information, please visit
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Making change happen

Symon Hill, Editor

In 2018, Leicester became the first British city to ban the armed forces from inviting children to handle weapons at their street stalls.

In the same year, Glasgow City Council agreed never to host an arms fair in their city again. The next year, LGBT Pride marches in York and Bristol rejected military and arms company sponsorship following protests the previous year. Several schools in Wales signed up to provide peace education as part of the curriculum. A few weeks ago, students in Cambridge voted against military recruitment at freshers' fairs.

What all these developments have in common is

that they were a result of people campaigning nonviolently against militarism in their own local area. These campaigns involved people of many ages and backgrounds who share a passion for peace.

Of course, more examples could be added - and many more will be in the next few years.

Grassroots activism can be effective. This doesn't mean we should charge in unprepared and hope for the best. Activism needs focus, planning and co-operation. That's why the Peace Pledge Union is delighted to introduce a new project this year, supporting people to learn from each other and to build campaigns against every-

day militarism in their own communities. There will be a series of training events and new resources both online and in print. We owe many thanks to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust for funding this initiative.

There's more information on pages 8-9, along with a first-hand account of the successful campaign in Leicester. You can read recent news on pages 4-7, and you can find more examples of grassroots peace activism on pages 10-13. The final few pages include a look at an important peace charity and a re-view of the film *A Hidden Life*.

Welcome Saffron!

The Peace Pledge Union's staff team increased from three to four in January, with Saffron Gallup (right) joining us as Education Services Manager.

"Seeing how active and engaged young people have recently been in political issues gives me hope as an educator," said Saffron. "I look forward to building on the excellent educational work developed by the PPU."

Saffron worked in the NHS as a Speech & Language Therapist for 17 years, providing support to a number of schools, families and educational staff. She still has the peace badge she wore as a child in the 1980s.



PM tries to put troops above the law

Pacifists have promised relentless resistance to Boris Johnson's militarist policies after he threatened to increase military spending and water down human rights laws in relation to armed forces.

The plans were set out in the Queen's Speech – the government's legislative programme – on 19 December. The Peace Pledge Union is working alongside other peace and human rights groups to challenge them.

The speech promised legislation to end so-called "vexatious claims" against armed forces personnel. The PPU described the phrase as a dog-whistle term for the militarist lobby, who use it to refer to almost any prosecution for war-related crimes.

The announcement came barely a month after the *Sunday Times* revealed widespread evidence of the murder of civilians by UK armed forces in Iraq and Afghanistan (pictured below).

In reality, armed forces personnel in the UK are almost never prosecuted, let alone convicted, of war-related crimes.

Johnson pledged to amend human rights legislation so that it will not apply to troops on active service. But critics say that the concept of human rights becomes meaningless if it does not apply to all people at all times.

The PPU pointed out that armed forces leaders are allowed to abuse the human rights of their own personnel, who are denied

the right to join a union and to leave their job when they choose.

The Queen's Speech also promised high levels of military spending. This is frequently demanded of NATO members by US President Donald Trump.

Several ministers made clear their support for Trump after tensions with Iran reached boiling point in January. While the immediate threat of war with Iran seems to have receded, at least for now, there is likely to be strong resistance if the UK government tries to join in a war on Trump's side. The PPU is in discussions with Iranian peace activists about building solidarity against the militarist policies of the US, British and Iranian governments.

PPU members are also calling on candidates for the Labour leadership and deputy leadership to clarify their policies on war. Disappointingly, several candidates say they would press the "nuclear button", although several say they want to reduce British involvement in military action.

The PPU urged them to have the courage to rule out war altogether.



Death-dealers' dodgy dinner disrupted

Sports presenter Clare Balding has been praised for pulling out of speaking at a swanky dinner for arms dealers.

Balding made the decision after the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) drew her attention to the arms trade's role in fuelling war in Yemen.

Several arms dealers who travelled to Mayfair to attend the dinner on 22 January turned back when they saw vocal, nonviolent protesters outside the Grosvenor House Hotel.

Also attending the £470-per-head event were politicians and senior armed forces officers, giving the arms dealers chance to exercise



behind-the-scenes influence.

The dinner is held annually by Aerospace, Defence & Security (ADS), the euphemistically named trade body for the arms industry. Among the resisting the event were

supporters of CAAT and other groups, with Peace Pledge Union members well represented.

Two PPU members, Henrietta Cullinan and Alison Parker, blocked one of the entrances by gluing themselves together while draped with a banner reading "Stop Arming Saudi".

The protest came four months after an estimated 2,000 people, including members of the PPU and a wide range of other groups, took part in protests against the DSEI arms fair in east London. Over 100 people were arrested there in September after taking part in nonviolent direct action.

Cambridge students say no to armed forces

The Cambridge University Students' Union has voted by 55% against allowing military recruitment at freshers' fairs. The decision was applauded by the Peace Pledge Union.

The vote is a blow to the Officer Training Corps, whose recruitment of Cambridge students allows them to promote pro-military attitudes among people who may go on to careers in business and politics.

If you are campaigning about militarism at university (or want to), the PPU would love to hear from you. Email mail@ppu.org.uk or call 020 7424 9444.

White poppy-wearing veterans challenge minister over insults

A group of armed forces veterans are awaiting a response from Johnny Mercer MP after he encouraged people to “ignore” white poppy wearers.

Mercer (pictured right), who was made “Minister for Defence People and Veterans” last year, didn’t let his ministerial position prevent him from launching his annual attack on white poppy wearers in November. Twelve white poppy-wearing veterans of the army, navy and air force wrote to him to demand an apology.

Independent polling published in October suggested that most people don’t share Mercer’s gung-ho approach. The poll found that 85% of UK adults agree that Remembrance Sunday

should primarily have a message of peace. In addition, 86% believe it should include civilian deaths and 83% agree that it should cover people of all nationalities. These are all key messages of white poppies.

“It is now clear that the British public want a more inclusive Remembrance that carries a message of peace,” said the PPU’s Geoff Tibbs. “Most people now reject the nationalist narrative that focuses overwhelmingly on the British military.”

Belatedly sensing a shift in the public mood, the Royal British Legion - producers of red poppies - said for the first time that they “acknowledge” civilian deaths.

As usual, we were able to distribute thousands of



white poppies only because of the hard work of volunteers, both in the PPU and around the UK and beyond. We sold around 86,000 white poppies in 2019, a drop that reflects the lower level of media coverage caused by the general election. But while there was a fall in the number of small orders, there was a big increase in the number of shops and cafes selling white poppies.

White poppy wreaths were laid at alternative ceremonies around the UK. At the national Alternative Remembrance Sunday Ceremony in London, members of London Students for Yemen read out a first-hand testimony of the effects of aerial bombardment. It was a powerful reminder of why remembering the suffering of war cannot be separated from working against war today.



Mixed messages for VE Day anniversary

Government plans to celebrate the 75th anniversary of VE Day have come unstuck after criticisms of the message, the timing - and what they are asking us to celebrate.

VE ("Victory in Europe") Day took place on 8 May 1945, the day after Germany's surrender. Thousands more people died before the Second World War was over.

The official plans for the anniversary involve "celebrations" over the week-end of 8-10 May 2020.

The Peace Pledge Union will also mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day, but said that it was a more appropriate day for mourning and learning from the past than celebrating. They warned that the day should not be used to promote militarism.

Unsurprisingly, many are unhappy that the May Day bank holiday, associated with working class solidarity, has been scrapped to make way for the VE Day holiday on Friday 8 May.

At 3pm on 8 May, the government wants us all to drink a toast to "the heroes of World War Two". At

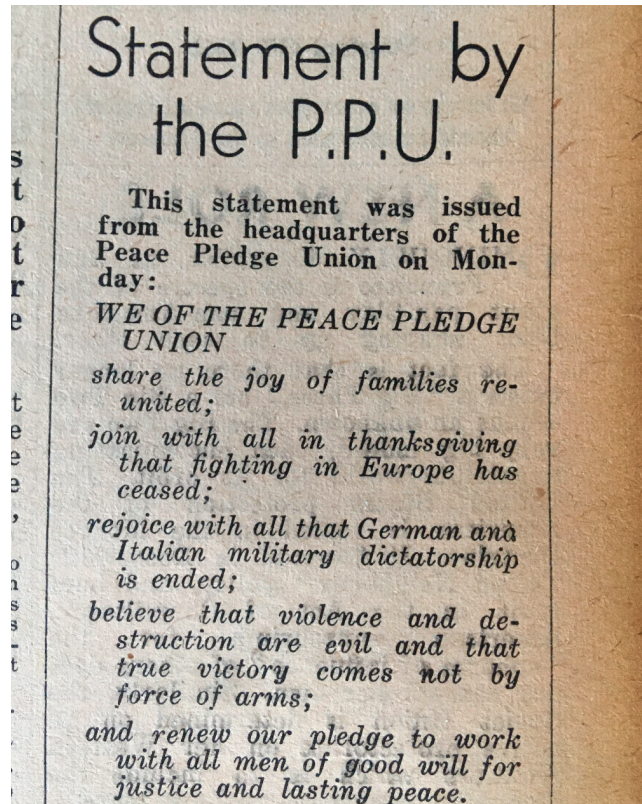
6.55pm, we are encouraged to join in a worldwide "cry for peace", followed by church bells ringing out for peace at 7.

The Peace Pledge Union welcomed plans for a commitment to peace, but said politicians who join in could be taken seriously only if they pursue peace-building policies.

At the time of VE Day

75 years ago, the PPU rejoiced at an end to war in Europe and the fall of military dictatorships in Germany and Italy, while insisting that "true victory comes not by force of arms".

(Below) The Peace Pledge Union's response to VE Day in 1945.



Learning from Leicester: Winning a local campaign

Members of Leicester for Peace have taken action against militarism - and won! Penny Walker, one of Leicester's most active peace campaigners, tells us how they achieved a significant policy change in their city.

In Leicester our focus on military recruitment came out of a World War One project that we did at Leicester CND, thanks to a Heritage Lottery Grant. We researched those who had refused to fight in our area and the issues they faced. We wrote a book, *Uncovering Resistance*. We produced an educational resource and we held several events.

We worked with the drama department at a sixth form college to explore signing up in 1915 and signing up in 2015. At the end of the project we erected a stone to those who refused to fight and on Conscientious Objectors' Day (15 May) each year at

that stone we pledge to honour those people by working actively for peace now.

Out of that pledge came "The 2017 Leicester Charter on the reduction of the militarisation of young people". This included specific ways in which this could happen.

We were appalled to see how often the armed forces arrived in the city centre with tanks and guns and how young children were invited to handle these "exciting" weapons.

To stop this we needed to know when they were coming so we could be prepared. We sent Freedom of Information Requests to the army who refused to say when they would be there on the grounds of security and we

Right: Campaigning on the streets of Leicester. Penny is third from right.

Above right: Before the change - soldiers showing weapons to children in Leicester, 2017.

Photo credits: Ambrose Musiyiwa/ Civic Leicester





sent them to Leicester City Council, who took the bookings, who told us.

We were then able to organise a presence. Many peace people came along including Quakers and at our first demonstration we were joined by Veterans for Peace who chatted to the public about the reality of military life and war. Subsequently we held silent vigils standing in a long line opposite the army with placards, and cards promoting the "Before You Sign Up" website.

Photographs were taken and letters written to the local press. A petition was raised about children

handling guns.

We met our elected mayor, Peter Soulsby. He was supportive, agreeing that the armed forces should not invite anyone under 16 to handle weapons.

A few months later, the practice stopped.

On Armed Forces Day in 2019 no guns were on view and the few at the back of one gazebo were closely guarded so no children could touch them.

But we have to continue to be vigilant. In the spring, when young people are deciding what to do when they leave school, the armed forces will be back. So will we.

Do you want to run a campaign about an aspect of militarism in your own area?

During 2020, the Peace Pledge Union will produce resources and run training events to help people to learn from each other's experiences and build campaigns in their own communities.

Resources and details will appear on the PPU website throughout the year.

But you don't have to wait! You can reach us at mail@ppu.org.uk or on 020 7424 9444.

Many snowflakes make an avalanche

Tomos Williams-Mason is working with other young people to develop PPU youth actions. Here he tells us how, and why, he became a pacifist and joined the Peace Pledge Union.

Tomos Williams-Mason, 18, is an A Level student and PPU member from the Ystradgynlais area near Swansea.



I feel privileged to be able to stand up for my beliefs, considering so many people were castigated around 100 years ago for it. But it is now 2020 and I am not only wearing my badge of pacifism with pride, but writing an article about it, almost like some sort of modern, non-religious evangelist whose belief in peace is his Bible.

Many may consider me one of these moaning “snowflakes”, but with enough snowflakes there can be an avalanche.

My name is Tomos and I am just finishing my A Levels amidst working for an ethical cosmetics company. Although I’ve only been an official PPU member for about five months, my work around pacifism and the right to be a pacifist have long been at the forefront of many a debate. I think this passion for debate has been something I’ve naturally, and subconsciously, worked on. Although originally I thought being in a small community in South Wales would mean an unwritten embargo on progressive mindsets and philosophy, I have noticed that if one comes at the aim of promoting human pledge

rights, in this case pacifism, from a relatable and not too conceptual standpoint then people will start to think for themselves and one day wear the white poppy with us.

This goal of changing mindsets meant I delivered, for the first time ever in the school’s history, a speech on pacifism and the white poppy in Ysgol Maesydderwen’s Remembrance Service of 2019. It started with making a white poppy wreath. With a growing feeling of moral need to promote the work of the PPU but also the message that peace is the only fair and virtuous answer to conflict, I stood up with confidence. I’m so pleased I inspired people to question things!

My avid activity on Twitter, the battleground (excuse the war pun) of us “snowflakes”, has become part of my everyday life as I see it as a place to publicly share my burning passions for human rights, in pacifism and related human rights issues such as LGBTQI+ rights, and it is this platform that mainly inspired me to sign the peace

pledge and thus officially become a member of the PPU. Many people mock it, and yes the landscape of Twitter can be negative sometimes, but it also is instrumental in advocating human rights. I think it is one of the best ways to serve the Peace Pledge itself and "work to remove all causes of war".

In further regard to the stem of my pacifism, but more generally the root of pacifism for people as a whole, it is hard to really place a reason why people identify themselves as pacifists. My sentiment is that pacifism, in the conceptual sense, comes from personal experience of the opposite. Although I am lucky enough not to have come from a war zone, or experience really any first-hand violence, one could postulate that pacifism for me came from the experiences I felt that others had - through empathy. In turn came my desire to join the PPU. Conceivably, well without a doubt really, there is a link between my pacifism, my veganism and my existence within the LGBTQI+

community. Perhaps too this explains my support for human rights, as in my eyes a moral duty, not just of my own affiliated communities.

More topically however, my pacifism leads me not just to dislike militarism (strongly might I add), but to have a growing concern for the community of the UK, and the body of the world as a whole, since over recent times, the blood-stained propaganda of military groups has become ever more present.

I look forward to many more years of promoting peace through the espousement of human rights.

Do you want to join in PPU youth actions?

Or join in campaigns to challenge the militarisation of youth?

***Then please drop us a line at
mail@ppu.org.uk,
020 7424 9444 or
@PPUtoday***

(Below) Newspapers such as the Daily Star regularly portray anti-militarist young people as 'snowflakes'



Yemen: A responsibility to rebel

Adhiyan Jeevathol writes of the need to act in the face of UK complicity in Saudi war crimes.

Adhiyan Jeevathol is a 3rd year Zoology student at University College London and a member of London Students for Yemen.

“The massacre of innocent people is a serious matter. It is not a thing to be easily forgotten. It is our duty to cherish their memory.”

Decent people would accept this statement by Mahatma Gandhi as uncontroversial. Yet, it is surely a miserable truth that the opposite is practised. Namely, that we tend to remember the victims of those we despise while victims of our crimes are ignored—Malayans from 1948-60, Kenyans in the 1950s, East Timorese in the 1970s and the Chagos Islanders to name a few.

The most recent, and on-going, example is in Yemen. Here the UK-armed Saudi coalition have helped induce a humanitarian catastrophe where 75% of the

population are in need of humanitarian assistance. Millions are at risk of famine and 12,000 civilians have been killed in military operations – the latter is in part due to “widespread and systematic” attacks on civilians by the coalition.

All of this need not be. An ex-officer of the Royal Saudi Air Force stated that without British support, the coalition would not be able to keep its crucial Typhoons in the air. Consequently, the war would end.

Similar comments have been repeated by others including CIA veteran Paul R. Pillar.

Apart from verbiage, our government has done little and continued to aid the coalition in its operations – even sending British troops

(Right) Adhiyan Jeevathol with Shadia Robertson at the PPU's Alternative Remembrance Sunday Ceremony in London, 2019.

(Above right) A vigil organised by London Students for Yemen.



to Yemen and training Saudi forces within the UK, including at Sandhurst and at RAF Valley in North Wales.

Regarding the media, during the last two elections, our complicity in the "worst humanitarian catastrophe in the world" was scarcely bought up, let alone discussed. It is no surprise then that most Brits are, as with East Timor and the Chagos Islanders, unaware of the blood on our hands.

Upon learning this, it's normal to ask what's one's own responsibility is in such affairs. Pacifist A.J. Muste hints at an answer: "Human beings acquiesce too easily in evil conditions; they rebel far too little and too seldom". Thus, a responsible human, pacifist or not, must "rebel". I feel this is true especially for the Brit who needn't worry about such severe punishment for their dissent as a Russian or an Iranian might. Hence, our responsibility is even greater.

It is because of this responsibility that I joined London Students for Yemen last year. Since then, we have organised a



a vigil, talks and protests. Recently, at the PPU's Alternative Remembrance Sunday Ceremony, we read out a survivor's testimony of a coalition airstrike in Sana'a. Abdullelah's account is harrowing and uncomfortable because of how he ends his account, writing, "It made me wonder how human lives are so cheap for those people". By those people he means the United Nations.

But the comment could potentially be turned to us. Its legitimacy will depend on how you and I respond to these criminal acts.

Want to take action around Yemen?

You can contact **London Students for Yemen** at @LS4Yemen or at facebook.com/londonstudentsforyemen.

The Peace Pledge Union (PPU) is challenging the role of UK armed forces in training Saudi forces. Contact mail@ppu.org.uk or 020 7424 9444.

The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) is campaigning against arms sales to forces fighting in Yemen. Contact 020 7281 0297 or visit caat.org.uk.

Review: *A Hidden Life*

Stephen Canning
reviews the film
A Hidden Life,
directed by Terence
Malick.

*Stephen Canning is a
nurse and PPU member
living in South London.*



A church bell rings in the Austrian countryside, the year is 1939.

Inside the church an artist paints pictures that comfort, though one day he might be brave enough to create a painting that makes the people face great truth. In this valley above the clouds Franz and Fanny (Franziska) meet, marry and start a family. Farming and village life continue unhindered, in the bleak yet beautiful surroundings, until in true Terrance Malick style storm clouds gather both narratively and visually.

Franz Jägerstätter, an Austrian conscientious objector, is conscripted to the German army but makes a personal stand, refusing to swear allegiance to Hitler. This results in his imprisonment, bringing shame and social alienation to the family he leaves behind. Despite the physical and psychological trauma that Franz faces he finds comfort in memories of his wife and daughters.

Franz and Fanny, played by August Diehl and Valerie Pachner, are often seen in moments of quiet or stillness. Understate-

ment that conveys the torment of the long night of the soul as well as the joy of epiphany. Some of this is explained further in voiceover while other moments are left to ponder.

This is a telling of a story based on real events. A look at the inner motivations of Franz Jägerstätter stylised for the screen.

Occasional intrusions by the score pass quickly and the film avoids slipping into pretence.

This drama plays out to the back drop of violence on the micro level of an Austrian village in the hills and the macro level of the Second World War. Despite this violence, joy is found in the fresh grass and the changing of the seasons. As viewers we catch glimpses of the inner architecture of Franz and Fannie's emotional and spiritual lives.

This is a long film, a tough film, a film that though beautifully shot and well-acted will make you face great truth.

Terrence Malick is interested in big questions and deep existential issues. What is a story if it remains untold? What is a life if it remains hidden?

Funding education for peace

The PPU relies heavily on voluntary donations, especially as our campaigning means we cannot be a “charity” in law. Thankfully, the law deems our educational work to be charitable, and it is partly funded by the Peace Research & Education Trust (PRET). John Morris explains more.

John Morris is chair of the Peace Research & Education Trust and a longstanding PPU activist.



For some years I had helped in a small way with the work of three (or was it four?) of Peace Pledge Union’s education workers. Our small committee met in one of the “lower ground floor” rooms at Dick Sheppard House in Endsleigh Street, London (the PPU’s offices until 1995). My contribution was mainly some school teaching experience in secondary education – although I had later been employed in the administration of school examinations and in adult education.

Then, fairly soon after the establishment of the Peace Research and Education Trust (PRET) in 1997, I was invited, or perhaps, as I had just retired, I volunteered, to join that august body. I was thus helping to raise funds specifically for the peace education and research work of the PPU. Income Tax-paying members and friends of the Union could choose to allocate a proportion of their donation to that work and the government would return to us the amount of tax paid on their donation. Nowadays,

this is done through Gift Aid. My commitment as a trustee is to attend three or four meetings a year to receive and consider applications for funding, mostly from the PPU. We have had requests, however, from a handful of other bodies and have sometimes given small amounts when the cause was close to our own.

A glance at early minutes of the Trust shows that we were suggesting work that might be undertaken by the PPU. More recently, we have been responding to requests from PPU Council and staff members.

For some time, I attended meetings of the Peace Education Network. Nowadays, I only keep in touch with it electronically. It is so helpful to know from those active for peace in the classroom what is going down well with pupils and teachers.

More information about PRET and its work may be found in its publicity leaflet.

If you feel that you would like to join the trustees, please make your interest known to me, c/o 1 Peace Passage, London, N7 0BT or at mail@pret.org.uk

SO THEY SAY...

“There may be unlawful violence.”

Police officer at the DSEI arms fair, justifying restrictions on the movements of peaceful protesters. (7 September 2019)

“I was... pulled off my bike, taken to the side, stopped and searched, handcuffed and arrested for possession of a marker pen and a tube of glue... I was held for eight hours.”

PPU member Richard Barnard describes the reality of policing at the DSEI arms fair. (6 September 2019)

“That gives the British army... the right side of the environmental argument, especially in the eyes of that next generation of recruits.”

General Mark Carleton-Smith suggests that more young people would sign up if the army were a bit greener. (13 September 2019)

“The military trying to recruit us by making themselves more environmentally friendly is disgusting... Without social justice and peace we cannot reach climate justice. We are strong, we are educated, we know our rights and have our own morals! I will not let the military strip me of this.”

17-year-old climate striker Anya Nanning Ramamurthy. (20 September 2019)

“Remembrance Sunday should primarily have a message of peace.”

Statement backed by 85% of people in an independent poll of British public opinion. (16 October 2019)

“As veterans, we believe we have the right to choose what colour poppy to wear.”

Letter from white poppy-wearing veterans to Minister for Veterans Johnny Mercer, who encouraged people to “ignore” white poppy wearers. (10 November 2019)

“It’s little wonder that these stocks are racing ahead... It’s a good time to be in bombs, bullets and bugs.”

Unnamed “city defence analyst” quoted in the media over global military tension. (10 January 2020)

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