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# peace matters

MAGAZINE OF THE PEACE PLEDGE UNION



## **Pacifist, not passive**

**Putting pacifist principles into action**

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humanity. I renounce  
war, and am therefore  
determined not to  
support any kind of  
war. I am also deter-  
mined to work for the  
removal of all causes of  
war.”**

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Through War Resisters' International it  
links with similar groups around the  
world. It is one of the original sponsors  
of the Campaign Against Arms Trade, a  
member of Liberty and a co-operating  
organisation of Landmine Action.

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## Clean heart, dirty hands

Symon Hill, PPU Co-ordinator

It was cold and dark at the BAE Systems base in Warton in the early hours of Sunday, 29 January.

Two pacifists found their way through fences and alarms. Sam Walton and Dan Woodhouse (pictured on the front page) were within yards of a warplane when they were discovered by security guards. They were arrested and taken to Blackpool police station.

Sam and Dan stated quite openly that their plan had been to save lives by nonviolently disarming a warplane bound for Saudi Arabia, for use in Yemen.

Sometimes, people tell me that they have rejected pacifism because they don't want to be passive, or because they believe in "getting their hands dirty".

Such comments involve a total misunderstanding of pacifism. Pacifism involves active nonviolence as an alternative to both violence and subservience.

There was nothing passive about Dan and Sam's actions when they put their pacifist principles into practice. Out on bail and awaiting charges, they face the very real prospect of a

prison sentence. They can hardly be accused of refusing to get their hands dirty.

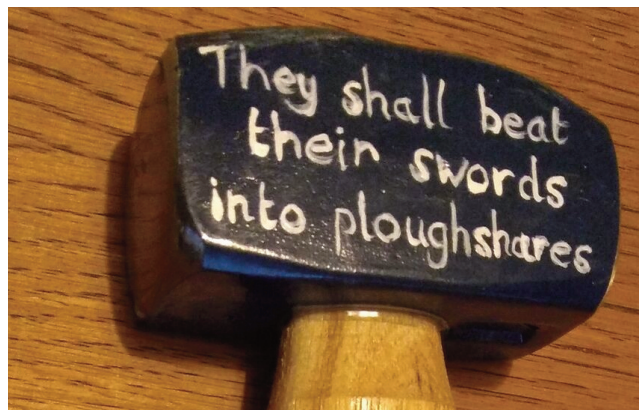
Not all pacifists, of course, are able to engage in actions that risk imprisonment. Pacifist action is varied. In this issue of *Peace Matters*, as well as Dan's account of the action at the BAE base, you can find news of varied events last Remembrance Day to remember all victims of war, promote peace and challenge militarism. You can read about the use of White Poppies and the ongoing demand for them.

We also have Chloe Skinner writing about "embodied resistance", which guides her yoga practice and her action against war. You can

read a poem by Samira Idmessaoud, co-winner of our Writing for Peace award, and feminist author Jess Amy Dixon on how to resist both militarism and patriarchy.

We have news on recent issues of war and peace and an update on our work against the militarisation of schools.

All these articles are a reminder that pacifism is active. The nonviolent activist and writer Walter Wink wrote that if we are nonviolent for the sake of looking good, we are giving into a temptation to die with "clean hands and a dirty heart". To live instead with a clean heart, we need to have dirty hands.



## Army accused of abusing recruits

"If you ever question what they say, they're just going to brutally punish you," says Wayne Sharrocks.

"They" are the British army authorities. Wayne was describing his time as a new recruit at the age of 17.

A decade on, Wayne is a peace activist and filmmaker. He has made a series of short films to draw attention to the shocking treatment of vulnerable teenagers who enlist in the armed forces. He describes a brutal training regime designed to turn him into "a robotic mindless killer".

The films have been released by Child Soldiers International as part of their campaign to raise the minimum age of enlistment in the UK armed forces from 16 to 18.

"They want to get you into a way of thinking where you'll just follow what they say without question," says Wayne. "If they told you to, for instance, take all your clothes off and run around the block naked, at the start you'd probably question it and think 'Why am I doing this?'. But six months down the line... you'll just do whatever they say, whenever

they say it."

Wayne's films include disturbing accounts of young people being punched, publicly humiliated and forced to drink water continuously until they vomit.

It's a reminder that militarism depends on dehumanisation. New soldiers must be brutalised before they can be made to do appalling things to other human beings.

The campaign by Child Soldiers International comes only a few weeks after a report by MedAct focused on the experience of young recruits. It found that soldiers and veterans aged 16-24 are 47% more likely to kill themselves than 16-24-year-olds in the general population.

The UK is the only country in Europe to recruit 16-year-olds into the armed forces. The Peace Pledge Union readily supports campaigns to raise the enlistment age, although we also object to the brutalisation of people at any age. Human dignity is not compatible with militarism and armed forces.

### Is this belonging?

Have you seen the army's new recruitment campaign? Posters show soldiers joking together, with captions declaring, "This is belonging".

The army admitted that their previous campaign led to recruitment levels 10-15% below targets. Despite cadets forces, Armed Forces Day and all the other trappings of everyday militarism, it seems many young people are not keen on signing up for violence and unquestioning obedience.

Militarism thrives on poverty and injustice. If people have to join an army to experience a sense of belonging, then we are doing something very wrong as a society.

## Pacifists in the dock

On 23 January, "Defence" Secretary Michael Fallon was in the Commons dodging questions about a failed Trident missile test. He said, "I don't believe in transparency" regarding nuclear arms.

MPs wanting to hear the truth about Trident could have taken a trip to Reading. On the same day, five people, including members and supporters of the Peace Pledge Union, were in the dock for blockading an entrance to the Atomic Weapons Establishment in Berkshire last June.

The trial came only weeks after five other ac-

tivists had been acquitted after blockading a different entrance on the same day.

Unlike Michael Fallon, they were upholding the truth about Trident: that weapons don't protect us, they make us all less safe.

"As a pacifist, I'm proud that I played a part in stopping preparations for such an act if war, if only for a morning," said PPU member Alison Parker.

The campaigners were found guilty on 26th January of "wilful obstruction of the highway", given a conditional discharge and told to pay £120 each in costs.

The five are members of Put Down the Sword, a Christian group committed to direct action against war. They received support from both religious and non-religious groups, including secular organisations such as the Peace Pledge Union.

Three days later, Sam Walton and Dan Woodhouse were arrested in Lancashire while attempting to disarm BAE planes destined for Saudi Arabia (see centre pages). They are awaiting charges.

Meanwhile, we're not expecting to see Michael Fallon and the arms dealers in the dock any time soon.

*The defendants (l to r):  
Joanna Frew, Nina Carter-  
Brown, Nick Cooper, Angela  
Ditchfield and Alison Parker.*





# Remembrance Round-Up

## White Poppies

The run-up to Remembrance Day 2016 saw around 100,000 orders for White Poppies. This marks the third consecutive year of sales much higher than we saw even a few years ago.

Shop sales in particular were unusually high. Exeter Peace Shop, for example, had to reorder three times.

It was encouraging to take orders from people new to White Poppies as well as those who had been wearing them for years. The whole operation was made possible by people around the UK and beyond distributing White Poppies in their own communities, work-

places and local groups.

However, we have become victims of our own success. We were overwhelmed by the number of poppy orders and our office systems have been creaking under the strain.

We are very sorry to all who did not receive their poppies in time for Remembrance Day. The good news is that we are reviewing all aspects of our White Poppy work and we will be upgrading our systems and practices ready for a large-scale operation in 2017.

We owe a big thank you to everyone who volunteered to pack poppies in the PPU office. Particular thanks go to our much appreciated temporary staff, Amy Clark-Bryan and Becky Vaal, who joined us between September and December.

Annie Bebington, our administrator, was sorely missed during the White Poppy campaign after she broke her shoulder in September. We're pleased to report she's now back at her desk and well on the road to recovery.

*PPU activists packing poppies at a volunteer evening.*



# Remembrance Round-Up



*PPU wreath at the Alternative Remembrance Sunday Ceremony.*

## Poetry in London

Scottish pacifist poet Ashby McGowan received a warm welcome at the PPU's Alternative Remembrance Sunday Ceremony in Tavistock Square, London. He performed several of his poems before two minutes' silence was observed to remember all victims of all wars of all nationalities. White Poppy wreaths, and individual poppies, were then laid by those present.

Peace activists in several other cities, including Glasgow, laid White Poppy wreaths once official ceremonies were over. Pacifists in York marked Armistice Day by giving out thousands of White Poppies for free to local students.

*White Poppy campaign launch in Ayrshire.*



## Threats and theft

In some areas, White Poppies were sadly met with anger and even threats from local militarists.

In the Forest of Dean, local Quakers were prevented from laying a mixed wreath of White and Red Poppies after the local authorities were threatened with "trouble" if White Poppies appeared on a war memorial.

In Lewes, a White Poppy wreath laid on 11th November had mysteriously disappeared by the time the Remembrance Sunday ceremony was held two days later. The removal was defended by local British Legion chair Jack Neil, who described White Poppy wreaths as "disrespectful and totally inappropriate".

He has perhaps not spoken with his British Legion colleagues in Aberystwyth, who have for several years been laying a red wreath at the same time as local peace activists lay a white wreath.

## Hammers and a sense of calm

*In the early hours of Sunday 29 January, two pacifists were arrested at the BAE Systems base at Warton in Lancashire while attempting to disarm a warplane. They were Dan Woodhouse, a Methodist minister from Leeds, and Sam Walton, a Quaker from London. It was 21 years to the day since the Seeds of Hope group had entered the same base and disarmed a plane.*

*Both Dan and Sam are PPU members. **Dan Woodhouse** tells us why he did it, and how it felt.*

The most peculiar thing about attempting to disarm multimillion-pound death machines is that at no point did it seem odd.

Also strange was the sense of calm that I had driving to the base. I well remember the tactical loop break at the side of the road while peacefully, and in wonder, looking up at the thousands of stars in the winter's perfectly clear early morning sky.

Which is not to make myself out to be some kind of rock and roll activist that takes all in his stride, nor to say that it was easy or without apprehension.

I felt under great stress in the days running up to it. Generally having an almost constant sense of heightened anxiety as well as suffering a panic attack; a thing I have not experienced even once since my teens when debilitating panic attacks were commonplace.

So why then did it seem so normal? To many our actions seemed to come out of nowhere; much like a meteor suddenly blazing and burning out in the sky. However, there was a long journey to reach this point. It is this journey that makes

the action make sense and to me feel normal and imperative, despite, at times, overwhelming anxiety.

I have campaigned for years against the arms trade. Most of this pursuit has been spent through more conventional means; meeting with other campaigners, talking to MPs, signing petitions, marching.

At the heart of this has been my faith as a Christian, the example of Christ and the prophets. Scripture teaches us to peacefully resist evil, to speak truth to power; always looking to those who have no voice.

This time the voiceless, or covered screams, are found in Yemen and the vicious, repressive killers are the UK arms industry's most valued customer, Saudi Arabia and its coalition.

The official target of the Saudi-led, BAE-built, aerial bombing campaign are rebels. However, at the point where it is being widely reported that many civilian targets, including mosques, schools, hospitals, transport infrastructure and markets, are



being hit, often repeatedly, questions are raised as to what the unofficial targets are.

Either way, despite the rising death toll and reports that over three million people are on the verge of starvation in Yemen, the UK government turns a blind eye and continues to court Saudi, even sending high-ranking royals over to seal more arms deals.

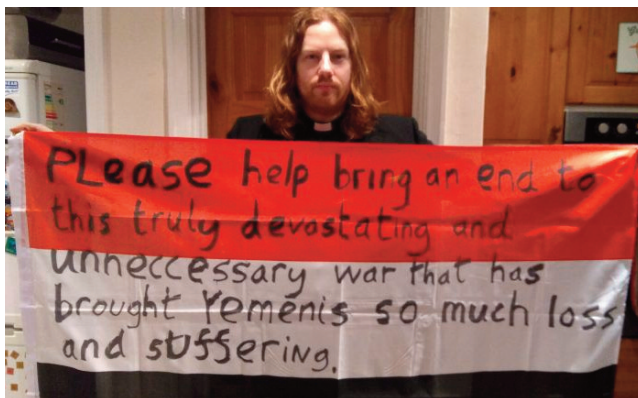
The campaign to stop UK weapons sales continues without success.

The UN votes to suspend all arms sales to Saudi Arabia without success.

Humanitarian organisations working in Yemen present evidence of war crimes and demand arms sales cease, without success.

Independent lawyers deem UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia to be breaking UK, EU and international law and MPs speak out demanding weapons sales stop, without success.

All around people cry



out for justice, without success.

Simply put the Government of the UK is complicit in war crimes and will not listen to reason, justice or even law.

When such weight of people and organisation cry out and the government and arms dealers refuse to listen the conventional is no longer an option and the unconventional becomes the most normal and vital thing in the world.

So it is for this that I found myself under stress and fear, but on the night at peace, with my friend Sam, ready to physically stifle at least some of the

UK-complicit Saudi atrocities.

Though, sadly my regret is that we were stopped at the final door and it will be my lasting memory waiting with security thinking of the lives we didn't directly save that night.

However, it is my hope that through all campaigning, including our action, that I or any other will never be forced into such a position again, because I hope that never again will the UK be so complicit in unbridled butchery.

*Above: Dan holds a Yemeni flag with a message from supporters in Yemen.*

# My pacifism will be feminist

**Jess Amy Dixon**  
*argues that feminism  
and pacifism cannot  
be effective without  
each other.*

It should not be controversial, in 2017, to say that people of all genders are equal. But it can be. And it should not be controversial to say that violence is wrong and rarely, if ever, solves problems. And yet it is, as anyone who routinely speaks out against violence will know.

We live in a patriarchal world (as defined by Oxford Dictionaries as “a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it”). Patriarchy influences all our lives, often in ways that have become so normalised we are no longer consciously aware of them. I argue that patriarchy is a system of violence and that no-one of any gender is free from it. This misogynistic – and, by extension, homophobic – cycle of oppression and dominance is the reason one in four women will be raped in their lifetime. It’s the reason male victims of domestic abuse aren’t taken seriously. It’s the reason for Elliot Rodger and Virginia Tech and Orlando.

Violence is often physi-

cal, but it can just as easily be sexual, emotional, mental or spiritual.

The little girl who is told she can’t be good at maths or science because they’re for boys will internalise the idea that her thoughts are worth less because she was born with a vagina. The little boy who is mocked for crying and learns that to show emotions is “girly” and therefore bad, will grow up thinking that to be manly means to be brutish and uncaring. The teenager who is ostracised for being a “slut” or a “prude” will learn that her body is not her own and that her choices are free for public consumption and judgement. The woman whose boyfriend yells at her and calls her terrible names will think that she should be thankful – at least he doesn’t hit her.

As feminists, we fight and long for this suffering to stop. We weep for our sisters, for our daughters, for our friends and ourselves.

Violence is so normalised in our culture that it is glorified. Have you ever tried to suggest that the armed forces are not the



“heroes” they’re lauded as? Try it. I dare you.

Intelligent people will argue, with a straight face, that invasions and bombing are necessary precursors to “freedom”. They can rarely articulate how one transitions to the other:

Step 1: Drop bombs!

Step 2: ???

Step 3: Freedom!

From the young men and women who are sent out to “die as cattle”, to the fatherless and motherless children, to the women and girls treated as rewards for victorious soldiers (rape has been normalised as a spoil of war for all of recorded history), nobody is free from the suffering war brings.

As pacifists, we fight and long for this pain to stop. We weep for our siblings, our parents, our children and our world.

At their core, pacifism and feminism both seek justice, equality, an end to cycles of violence, and safety and freedom for all people. Both ideologies challenge us to come together as human beings

and say, “we are better than this”. To extend a hand with love and compassion, not raise a fist or a gun with fear and hatred. Patriarchal violence and state-sanctioned violence exist hand in hand and each one must be destroyed in order to destroy the other.

We cannot fight for freedom from patriarchal oppression at the same time as considering armed warfare morally justified. We cannot call ourselves pacifists while turning a blind eye to the

types of violence that don’t involve bombs or guns.

Only in a world with no more rape, no more sexual and gendered violence, will women be equal. Only in a world without armed conflict will all human beings be safe. Only when violence in all its forms is eradicated will we finally have freedom.

*Jess Amy Dixon is a novelist, blogger and charity fundraiser. She lives in Leicestershire.*



*The Women's Peace Congress of 1915: Women peace activists from countries at war with each other met in the Netherlands to work for peace.*

## Embodied resistance

**Chloe Skinner** explores yoga and the art of embodied nonviolence.

Bodies are powerful. Whatever glorious form your body takes, it is powerful.

I must state that this body of mine is a white, female, relatively youthful and “able” body, and so the various walls that I do, or do not, have to push through to assert and access this power differ to those experienced by others in given contexts. Nonetheless, I am powerful. You are powerful.

Violence, in its many expressions - sexual, structural, symbolic, physical - seeks to disarm the body of that power. So then, our nonviolence - our refusal to be dominated - must be embodied. That is

what I told myself anyway, in “reclined butterfly pose” while held in an Israeli military base - much to the bemusement of military personnel attempting to enforce “co-operation” (that is, interrogation without access to a lawyer).

I write from the perspective of an avid yoga practitioner and teacher, and an ever-persistent peace activist. Among other things, I’m engaged in direct action against militarism in the UK and was formerly a long-term solidarity worker in occupied Hebron, Palestine. Daily exposed to various ammunition, intimidations and control in Hebron, through which I witnessed the at times fatal oppression of the Palestinian people, yoga became my sacred medicinal practice.

For me, yoga is intimately connected to a powerful pacifism through the practice of embodied resistance, teaching me to (1) induce struggle to soften into intensity, (2) nonviolently

*Chloe Skinner is a yoga teacher and pacifist activist who previously worked with Chrisitan Peacemaker Teams in Palestine.*



assert self-contained control, (3) relax into and after adrenaline, and, (4) practise the all-important-yet-of-forgotten art of self-care.

These practices are accessible through other physical disciplines. But I do love yoga.

We all face struggle. To which our body, invariably, responds. Through practice, we can begin to navigate that response, softening into and expanding around that which confronts us. In stress or fear our body tenses, and our - very wise - fight-or-flight response activates. It is important here not to deny but to soothe tension, positively harnessing the energy of fight-flight. Willfully inducing struggle through a strong embodied practice teaches the art of attention to the body's response to difficulty.

For me, this has proved indispensable as an act of resistance. Let 'em try to intimidate you when you are breathing into your root, and softening through your face as though the military commander is offering a

cuppa rather than knocking your leg with his gun (I realise this is far easier and safer with privilege as a white peaceworker).

Awareness of the shapes you make with your body in the space you occupy can communicate an untouchable embodied power. Much as though intimidation may make me want to curl in and submit, yoga teaches me to stand strong, powerful and present - feet grounded, head lifted, shoulders down, heart open.

That desire, to grow small, protect, cry, is also necessary in resisting the domination system. We are, after all, as soft as we are strong - as strong as we are soft. After moments of confrontation, I have learnt (through error - that most infuriating of teachers) that I must listen to, embrace and soothe vulnerability and fear, lest I become adrenally exhausted, or grow hardened by violence. Yoga too teaches the importance of inducing rest and digest. Our body must process all it encounters, releasing traumas to which it has

been subject. It ain't always comfortable, but it is necessary.

Here is the need for self-care. To pull as much energy inward as projected outward. My mat is the site of hours of self-love, of conscious realisation and return to the liminal space which is beyond even the domination system.

The body knows the score. Everything that has and is happening is written onto the landscape of your body. Embodying resistance means tuning into the body's gifts to remain connected, integrated, and strong enough to hold openness, vulnerability and love in all contexts.

Learn about your body, devote yourself to it, and then apply these gifts. Change though it does, my body is the only home I can ever be fully certain of. Whatever happens, nobody can take that reality away. Your body is the most powerful site of resistance you have.

Welcome home.



# The Scarlet Price

*Samira Idmessaoud*

I want no man's blood on my hands,  
We are the same,  
The languages we speak reflect many colours and hues,  
But blood is only one colour and that is red,  
I want no man's blood on my hands.

The storm of war beguiles and deceives;  
It is hard to fight against what is held to be just and true,  
The storm is fierce and holds us all in tight embrace.

Peace is censored, silenced and condemned,  
The piper calls and the young are entranced by the echoes of glory,  
Oblivious to the scarlet price.

In the roar of war, I do not deny the courage to fight,  
But it takes another kind of courage to hold high the hand of peace,  
I will join the few that stand aside and lose my freedom.

I want no man's blood on my hands.

*Samira Idmessaoud is a student at Ratton School in Eastbourne. Her poem, The Scarlet Price won joint first place in the PPU's Writing for Peace award, which involved entries from young people across the UK.*

*Co-winner Georgina Melia featured in the last issue, while our next issue will include the contribution of runner-up Holly Thompson.*



*Samira Idmessaoud receives her Writing for Peace award from the PPU's Peter Glasgow.*

## Disarming schools

"They are militarising schools in Ayrshire," says 16-year-old local peace activist, Jay Sutherland. "We must oppose it."

That determination led Jay and his comrades to found Scotland Against Militarism, a campaign led by young people against the militarisation of schools.

It's an aim that receives the wholehearted support of the Peace Pledge Union.

The PPU will be taking this message to the annual conference of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) in Cardiff in April.

The government has talked explicitly of a desire to promote a "military ethos" within state schools.

In practical terms, this has involved a large number of armed forces visits to schools. The forces insist that these have nothing to do with recruitment. In contrast, Scotland Against Militarism estimates that explicit discussion of recruitment has

taken place in at least a third of recent armed forces visits to Scottish schools.

Other examples of a "military ethos" include the expansion of cadet forces to state schools (though thankfully not in Scotland), highly simplistic learning resources produced by the armed forces and the unworkable Troops to Teachers scheme.

The PPU has been talking with young people, parents and teachers who share our concerns. We have been liaising with other groups resisting the militarisation of young people, such as Forces Watch and MedAct.

At the NUT conference, we will promote the PPU's educational resources and hear the views and experiences of teachers regarding militarised schooling. We will encourage them to join with us in resisting any sort of "military ethos".

But the PPU's position is not just about opposition. We believe that

schools should be funded to enable exciting activities, whether outward bound schemes, vocational tasters or individual and team sporting opportunities - without a "military ethos".

What people need - and young people in particular - is to be more questioning, not less questioning. Education should develop critical thinking and the ability to explore different ideas and viewpoints.

***Are you a school student, parent, teacher or other school worker?***

***Get in touch at  
peaceeducation@ppu.  
org.uk or on  
020 7424 9444.***



# Make a date for peace in 2017

## 14-16 April

### **PPU and NUT in Cardiff**

The Peace Pledge Union will run a stall at the National Union of Teachers conference in Cardiff. Watch out for news of a public event in Cardiff around the same time.

## 20-23 April

### **Global Days of Action on Military Spending**

There will be events around the world, including in the UK.

## 15 May

### **International Conscientious Objectors' Day**

We will stand in solidarity with people resisting militarism around the world. In the UK, ceremonies and other events are expected in London, Norwich and elsewhere.

## 3 June

### **Peace Pledge Union conference and AGM**

Save the date! Our annual gathering in London is open to all. There will be speakers, discussion and a chance to plan our ongoing resistance. More information closer to the time.

## 24 June

### **Armed Forces Day**

Once again, the government and their allies will attempt to ramp up support for militarism by pressurising us to cheer the armed forces. The PPU will

promote an alternative message and there will be resistance in many places. Watch this space.

## 12-15 September

### **London arms fair (DSEi)**

One of the world's largest arms fairs is taking place in London. The Campaign Against Arms Trade (to which the PPU is affiliated) have big plans for the week beforehand, when many will be demonstrating and taking nonviolent direct action as the organisers attempt to set up the event.

## 12 November

### **Remembrance Sunday**

In the run-up to Remembrance Sunday, we will call for remembrance for all victims of all wars, of all nationalities. We will speak up for peace and challenge the misuse of remembrance to glorify war. We expect our White Poppy campaign to be bigger than ever.

## **Keep up to date with the PPU**

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