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# peace matters

MAGAZINE OF THE PEACE PLEDGE UNION



## Militarism on our streets

Also in this issue:

Progress in Korea - but a lot more to do

Choosing nonviolent resistance

The philosophy of Martin Luther King

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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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secular pacifist organisation in Britain.  
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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# Building the resistance

*Symon Hill, PPU Co-ordinator*

It was the most bizarre moment of a bizarre day. I was supporting members of Conwy County Peace Group campaigning against Armed Forces Day in Llandudno (pictured opposite), when a police officer asked me not to hand Peace Pledge Union postcards to children. Nearly all the postcards had been given to adults, but one or two had found their way into the hands of children and a parent had complained to the police.

Opposite us, the armed forces were setting up displays of weaponry, along with stalls and posters giving a glamorised image of war. Throughout the day, children as young as six or seven were invited to handle guns and climb into tanks and military planes.

There were no images of the victims of these weapons, no description of the devastation of civilian populations or the trauma that afflicts many who fight.

In Southampton, activists challenging Armed Forces Day were physically attacked by people shouting, "They died so



you could have free speech!" Do supporters of free speech assault people they disagree with?

But there is good news! Armed Forces Day was met with protests in more places than ever before. In the run-up to the day, the PPU received a steady stream of requests for our postcards challenging the day's events, designed to be given out in local areas.

As we campaign in local communities, let's remember that we are part of a global community. People from Russia and India to the US and Colombia are resisting militarism in their own countries as we resist militarism in the UK.

You can read some inspiring examples of local

activism on the centre pages (8-9). We have a range of news items (4-5), a statement from pacifists in South Korea (6-7) and a reflection from a new PPU member about how he came to believe in nonviolence (10-11). We take a look back at British pacifists in the Spanish Civil War (12-13) and the philosophy of Martin Luther King (14). We have a poem by Scottish poet Ashby McGowan (page 15) and lots of ideas on the back page for joining in the PPU's work.

Now is a good time to sign the peace pledge, join the PPU and become part of the resistance to militarism.

## Pacifists gather to plan campaigns

Pacifists and other anti-militarists from around Britain gathered in London on 12 May 2018 to share ideas, learn from each other and make plans for resisting militarism.

The event - entitled 'Remember & Resist: Grassroots action for peace' - formed the annual conference of the Peace Pledge Union (PPU).

Leicester-based poet Ambrose Musiyiwa set the tone with an opening speech on the impact of militarism on local communities. He was cheered as he reported on a successful campaign to persuade the Mayor of Leicester to back a ban on the armed forces inviting children to handle weapons at events in the city.

Ambrose drew links between militarist attitudes that promote war and hostility towards people seeking refuge as they flee war.

He also spoke of military visits to schools, saying, "You won't hear an army recruiter anywhere talk in



a school about the people they are bombing".

A presentation on the PPU's work saw an emphasis on supporting people engaged in grassroots activism in various communities, as well as offering solidarity to pacifists around the world. The PPU forms the British section of War Resisters' International.

Workshops explored topics including militarism in schools, nonviolent resistance at university and the way that issues of gender and sexuality relate to militarism.

A panel discussion asked 'How can I challenge militarism in my community?'. Student Jay Sutherland spoke of how grassroots campaigns led

Glasgow City Council to cancel a so-called "Armed Forces Fun Day". Sahdya Darr of Quaker Peace & Social Witness urged peace groups to reach out to diverse communities. Jane Harries of Cymdeithas y Cymod said that 16 schools in Wales have signed up to be Peace Schools.

The event ended with a performance by stand-up comedian Sian Docksey.

Earlier in the day, the PPU's Annual General Meeting saw the re-election of Albert Beale as chair and Bill Hetherington as treasurer. Others elected to PPU Council were John Andrews, Lucy Beck, Amy Clark-Bryan, Hilary Cornish and Peter Glasgow. Ben Copsey was thanked for his work as he stood down after two years on Council..

## Army abuse controversy goes on

The UK army is facing continuing criticism over its treatment of teenage recruits, following the collapse of a court-martial of army instructors.

Sixteen instructors from the Army Foundation College in Harrogate went on trial in February, accused of assaulting 16- and 17-year-old recruits. They were alleged to have smeared animal faeces into the boys' faces, held their heads under water and repeatedly punched them.

The trial collapsed on 19 March, with the judge putting much of the blame on the Royal Military Police, who had made no arrests until more than two years after around forty recruits made allegations of abuse against army instructors.

The Military Police blamed the delay in part on "pressure from other more urgent enquiries", triggering outrage that they do not regard investigating the alleged abuse of young people as a priority.

The UK is the only country in Europe to recruit people as young as

16 into the army. Military leaders insist that the Army Foundation College provides a safe and supportive atmosphere.

But less than a week after the trial collapsed, it was revealed that recruits at the college had made fifty allegations of abusive and violent behaviour between 2014 and 2017. In addition, there had been around fifty investigations by Royal Military Police into staff at the College over

the last decade. In about fifteen cases, the allegations were declared proven.

The figures emerged following Freedom of Information requests by Child Soldiers International and Liz Saville Roberts MP.

The Peace Pledge Union insisted that it was absurd and dangerous to allow the armed forces to maintain their own police forces and run their own criminal trials.

### International Conscientious Objectors' Day

On 15 May, people around the world remembered conscientious objectors and offered support to people still locked up for refusing to fight.

In London, white flowers were laid at a ceremony organised by the First World War Peace Forum. It was addressed by Eritrean anti-conscription activist Selam Kidane, while Hannah Brock of War Resisters' International read out a statement from South Korean pacifists (see pages 8-9).

Meanwhile in Leicester, local people drew attention to the fact that many of the city's Eritrean refugees are conscientious objectors. Events were held in British towns and cities including Bradford, Brighton, Edinburgh, Manchester, Norwich, Sheffield and Swansea. The PPU's Jan Melichar took part in a ceremony in Dartmoor, where British conscientious objectors were detained in a work camp in the First World War.



# Peace inches forward in Korea

*As Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump prepared to meet for peace talks, the South Korean pacifist group World Without War - allies of the Peace Pledge Union in Britain - released a statement welcoming moves towards peace but insisting that far more is needed to overcome militarism in Korea. The statement was read around the world on International Conscientious Objectors' Day, 15 May.*

*Over 250*

*conscientious objectors remain in prison in South Korea. The number in North Korea is not known.*

*In London, the statement was read at a ceremony in Tavistock Square. This was followed by a visit to South Korea's London embassy to hand in signatures urging Moon Jae-in to act on his election promise of recognising the right to conscientious objection. Signatures were also collected in other British cities - including Liverpool, Edinburgh and Cambridge - and around the world.*

***This is the statement released by our allies in World Without War, in South Korea:***

The Korean Peninsula is a place where strong militarism and different types of violence have existed for over seventy years since World War II. This violence and militarism exist primarily due to the Korean War and consequent division of the two Koreas.

An atmosphere of peace is being created on the Korean Peninsula for the first time in seventy years. Following the inter-Korean summit in April, the U.S.-North Korean summit will be held in May. South Koreans and world citizens who want peace hope that the recent truce agreement between the two Koreas will lead to a declaration to end the war. They hope, furthermore, for a peace treaty concluded between North and South Korea and a Korean peninsula free of nuclear weapons.

The signing of the



peace treaty and the abolition of North Korea's nuclear weapons are of course very important, but overcoming the violence created by militarism and division on the Korean Peninsula will be more difficult and will require more time and effort than improving relations among the two Koreas and the U.S. government.

A key consequence of militarism produced by this division is conscientious objection. Since Korea's liberation from Japanese colonialism in 1945, more than 19,000 South Korean conscientious objectors have been imprisoned, and since 2000, when this social issue gained visibility in Korean society, more than 9,000 young people have been imprisoned for refusing military service.

Many citizens, critical intellectuals, and the international community have asked the South Korean government not to imprison objectors. The current president Moon Jae-in also spoke several times about the necessity of an alternative



*A poster supporting Korean conscientious objectors (above) and a protest against conscription (opposite).*

service system, not only during his days as a human rights lawyer but also during the presidential candidacy.

However, the Korean government still does not recognise the right to refuse to perform military service. As a result, 258 people are still in prison for conscientious objections (as of February 2018), which is more than the sum of all imprisoned objectors in other countries around the world.

On International Conscientious Objectors' Day, we ask the Korean government to acknowledge the right to conscientious objection and release the conscientious objectors

who are currently in prison.

Recognising the right to conscientious objection to military service does not only involve guaranteeing objectors the freedom of conscience, thought, and religion. In addition, overcoming deep-rooted violence and militarism will be possible only when we acknowledge this right to object. In order for Korea to make the most of the most precious opportunity for peace that has come in seventy years and to become a country of permanent peace, the right to conscientious objection must be recognised.

## Resisting militarism in local communities

As militarism seeps into more areas of everyday life, resistance is growing around the UK.

In **Leicester**, local campaigners had a big success earlier this year, with the city's mayor agreeing that armed forces should not invite anyone under 16 to handle weapons on recruitment stands.

But at an event in Leicester on 23 June, children were repeatedly invited to handle weaponry. Members of Leicester for Peace were holding a vigil across the road, but an army officer called the police to try to have them removed. Attendees at the vigil asserted their lawful right to be there and politely refused to move.

"Many passers-by thanked us for being there," explained Penny Walker, one of the organisers, who will be raising the issue of children handling guns with the mayor.

Meanwhile in **York**, the organisers of LGBT Pride allowed armed forces to march in uniform for the first time. The army also ran a recruitment stall at

the festival following the parade.

News of the plans broke only days before the event took place, on 9 June. PPU member Rachel Melly, an LGBTQ activist who lives in York, quickly liaised with others in the city to write to Pride organisers and plan nonviolent resistance. The army's recruitment stall was greeted with LGBTQ activists and allies holding banners declaring that they had "No pride in war" (pictured opposite).

Like the PPU, they were not objecting to members of the armed forces joining Pride as individuals, but were challenging the presence of uniformed blocs that

"pinkwash" the armed forces' image.

In **Glasgow**, anti-militarists are celebrating a major success. Members of Scotland Against Militarism, the Campaign Against Arms Trade, the PPU and other groups challenged the Glasgow Arms Fair on 26 June with nonviolent direct action and other protests. Shortly afterwards, the City Council announced they would not allow arms fairs to take place in Glasgow again.

Armed Forces Day on 30 June saw resistance to militarism around Britain, with protests, vigils and similar events in more towns and cities than ever before.

At the "national event" for the day, held this year







in **Llandudno**, members of Conwy County Peace Group organised a string of alternative events, from art displays to a protest march along the route of the military parade. In a particularly bizarre moment, they were asked by the police not to hand PPU postcards to children, even though the vast majority of cards were handed to adults. A few yards away, children as young as six or seven were invited to handle artillery pieces and subjected to a barrage of military propaganda.

While Theresa May spoke on Armed Forces Day about her support for

veterans, members of Veterans for Peace were threatened with arrest in **Blackpool** when they tried to hand out leaflets on the promenade challenging military recruitment.

In **Southampton** (pictured opposite), locals were offered not only leaflets but free food, as the Southampton group of Food Not Bombs staged 'A bit of sense on the side', during a celebration of Armed Forces Day. One member was physically assaulted and their display table trashed. Well done to the campaigners in Southampton, who brushed themselves

down and carried on. Many locals agreed with their concerns about the display of military vehicles and the effects on children.

Although several protests against Armed Forces Day were organised by established peace groups, in many places PPU postcards were handed out by one or two local people who were fed up of militarism in their area and wanted to do something about it. We were very happy to give them support.

Armed Forces Day next year will be marked on 29 June 2019, with, the "national event" taking place in **Salisbury**. The armed forces, politicians and royalty will be there. So will we.

***Do you want support, advice or resources to challenge militarism in your area? We're happy to help!***

***You can email  
coordinator@  
ppu.org.uk,  
call 020 7424 9444  
or tweet @PPUtoday.***

## Choosing active nonviolence

**Lee Clarke gives a personal view of the history of nonviolent resistance and how he came to believe in it.**

*Lee Clarke is a Zen Buddhist, writer, linguist, believer in nonviolence and postgraduate student. He is based in the Midlands. Follow him on Twitter: @OneAndOnlyLee05*



Many people think that the idea of nonviolence is a mythical, unrealistic doctrine of the East. Indeed, nonviolence does have roots in the Indian religious doctrine of “ahimsa” meaning “non-violence”. This is a part of all four Indian faiths and a primary doctrine in Buddhism and Jainism. Though the Buddha and Mahavira were the first to really talk about and define a nonviolent doctrine, this wasn’t political – there was no “resistance” in their doctrines.

The Western world however, does have a history of the idea too, dating back from at least the nineteenth century. Percy Bysshe Shelley in his 1819 poem *The Masque of Anarchy* wrote about the idea of nonviolent resistance, saying that people should resist oppressors, in a way remarkably similar to Gandhi’s Satyagraha. In 1848, US writer Henry David Thoreau penned his famous essay *Civil Disobedience* in which he wrote that people have a duty to resist a government and unjust laws, if they infringe upon one’s conscience and morality. Both these predecessors inspired Gandhi in

his later “Quit India” campaign against the British Empire.

Mohandas Gandhi was the person who inspired me to adopt nonviolent resistance and I still remember the day that I decided to do this. My great-grandfather actually had the pleasure of meeting Gandhi. He was responsible for repairing typewriters for him and told my grandfather that Gandhi was “very kind”. After finding out about this very interesting family connection, I decided to research Gandhi more, his life and philosophy.

Nonviolent resistance was something I knew of, but had never really considered as viable. Then, one day, I was reading about Gandhi and his tactics and I had a sudden “lightbulb moment”. I realised that nonviolent resistance was the way to solve things, that it was morally superior to using violence and it can be an effective weapon against oppression. But I wanted some intellectual backing to my theory so I began to research it.

I picked up the excellent book *Nonviolence: The History of a Dangerous Idea* by Mark Kurlansky, as well as

other works. I found out that the first Christians were pacifists, that a Maori leader named Te Whiti had led a nonviolent campaign against the British in his native New Zealand and saved thousands by doing so, that the Quakers had run what is now the U.S state of Pennsylvania for over 70 years as a pacifist state that refused to kill Native Americans, that nonviolence was even used successfully against the Nazis.

After my conversion to Buddhism three years ago, I began to research the history of “ahimsa”. When I reached university, I found out about the French-Algerian writer who would become one of my biggest inspirations – Albert Camus, and his ideas on violence in his essay *The Rebel*, that true rebellion stems from realisation of common humanity in oppressor and oppressed, along with the ideas of Spanish priest, Francisco De Vitoria who was one of the only ones to criticise Spain’s brutal conquest of the Americas. This allowed me to better con-



**(Above) Pacifists take nonviolent direct action to block traffic entering the DSEI arms fair in London, 2017**

struct my ideas on violence intellectually.

Nonviolent resistance, to me, is a way to address and solve the injustice in the world without having to harm others in order to do so. It seeks to remind people that they share a common human bond with others, no matter what nation we happen to be from. By meeting violence with nonviolence we meet hate with love and lies with truth. Nonviolent civil disobedience is the best response to oppression, no oppressive regime can stand when it is not held up and supported by the people and nonviolence has caused

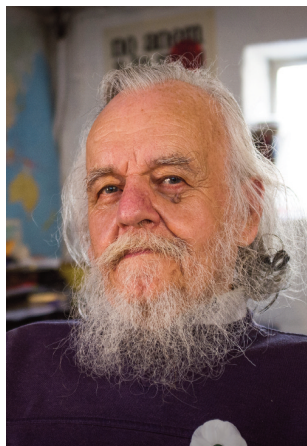
regimes to fall in countries from India to Ukraine and Egypt – and will continue to do so.

Most importantly, nonviolent resistance provides a way to solve disputes and conflict where nobody has to be harmed or killed. Nonviolent methods have been adopted in the United Nations and are increasingly being used to manage international disagreements as an alternative to war. On a final Utopic note, we can hope for a future where war becomes a thing of the past. That day may not come in my lifetime, but when it does – humanity will rejoice.

# Under the Oak Tree: the PPU and the Spanish Civil War

**Bill Hetherington looks back at the Peace Pledge Union's support for refugees in the 1930s.**

*Bill Hetherington is the PPU's honorary archivist and a member of PPU Council.*



The Peace Pledge Union was founded in 1934 primarily to try to prevent a second major 20th century conflict, but a peripheral war was the first organised slaughter it faced.

The 1936 military uprising by Francisco Franco against the Spanish government led many on the British left to support the Republican cause, but the PPU distinguished between political sympathy and taking up arms.

Then on 26 April 1937 Nazi Germany perpetrated the first saturation bombing of a town – Guernica, ancient Basque capital, and now prototype for Coventry, Rotterdam, Dresden...

Wide revulsion among British people coincided with an appeal by Basque parents, "Take our children away! Save them, at least, from the horrors of this war." Remarkably, by 21 May a Basque Children's Committee had been set up, and 3,840 children sailed that day from Bilbao. Aged two to late teens, accompanied by teachers and volunteer carers, they crammed an 800-berth liner, weathering a storm and landing at Southamp-

ton two days later.

Although the British government had grudgingly permitted the children to come, it was conditional upon travel and maintenance of the children - estimated at ten shillings weekly per head - being borne by donations. The children went to a tented camp outside Southampton, while charitable, religious and political groups arranged care in "colonies".

The PPU saw its peacemaking role as providing for some 60 children, using a large house in Langham, near Colchester in Essex. The Oaks had for a year been the Adelphi Centre, a socialist/pacifist study community run by John Middleton Murry, and the PPU took over the lease for its new purpose.

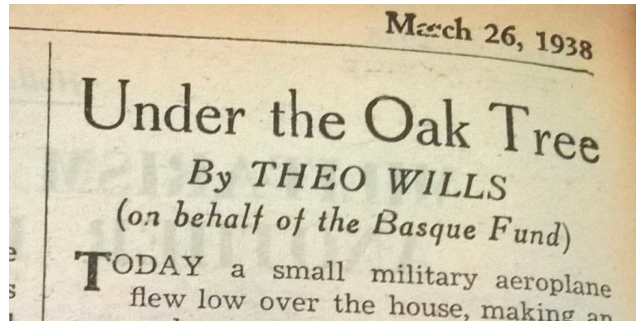
On 8 June 1937, with the arrival by charabanc of 53 children from Southampton, it opened as Basque House, and so began a regular column, "Under the Oak Tree", in *Peace News*, which was then the PPU's weekly paper. As Dorothy Plowman



explained, near the house was a majestic oak, counterpoising an ancient oak, almost all that was left in Guernica. She identified both oaks with the tree of life in the *Book of Revelation*: "and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations".

The children, expanded to 64 with the transfer of "difficult" individuals from other colonies, were looked after by Silvia Dobson, warden (succeeded by Leonard Read), two of the Spanish teachers and some of the *senoritas* who had come on the ship. There were also two Spanish-speaking British teachers and a British nurse.

The children spoke no English - for some their mother tongue was Basque - so it was impractical to attend a local school, and classrooms were set up in Basque House. It avoided becoming an isolated community, by village children asking the Basque children out for walks etc. Out of school hours, groups came to play with each



other in the Basque House grounds, language not being the barrier it often is for adults. By early 1939 the Basques had learned enough English to attend the village school, each Basque guest being put next to a local child as helpmate during lessons.

Another form of integration was inviting PPU members to "foster" a Basque child, which involved sending letters, cards, gifts etc, but also taking them on an outing, or inviting them to stay a weekend or even longer.

After an appeal for £2,000 as soon as the children arrived, fundraising was a constant theme of the column, together with requests for clothing, bedding, toys, books. During the 28 months the House was open, the Basque Fund

had a total turnover of some £7,000.

On Franco's vaunted "victory" in March 1939, repatriation began, with 25 children returning home. However, with the displacements of war, and some parents being killed, 15 children were transferred to a colony at Margate, Kent, before Basque House closed on 25 September 1939. Twenty-four teenagers had been placed in longer-term fostering, for training/apprenticeships, and at least two settled permanently in Britain.

The Association for UK Basque Children '37, covering the whole shipload (and descendants) has kept in touch, and a comment by Felix Irazola has come to light: "Our two years at Langham were the best years of our life".

## Remembering Martin Luther King

*On 4 April this year, it was 50 years since Martin Luther King was killed by a racist's bullet. He was 39. As an influential theorist and practitioner of nonviolence, King did much to dispel the idea that nonviolence is about doing nothing.*

*Here we have an extract from King's most famous piece of writing, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail", in which he made clear that nonviolent resistance is an alternative to both violence and passivity.*



"You may well ask: 'Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?'

"You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.

"My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word 'tension'. I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half truths to the unfet-

tered realms of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.

"The purpose of our direct action programme is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue...

"The question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?...

"Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists..."

# Afterwards

And yes, afterwards  
Perhaps there shall be what the humans once called, "Weeds"  
Yet pretty in the ruins  
Green urgent shoots, they do not know they were once called, "Ugly"  
There may one day be trees  
All over the World, surviving  
Covering the scars. Giving out oxygen for what remains.  
So much lives on through the radiation  
Yet still, many species have been cruelly mutated  
But lichens? Yes, beautiful lichens will survive,  
Afterwards

The United States of America, Lecanora, The United Kingdom, Lepraria,  
Israel, Xanthoria, Russia, Parmelia, France, Physcia, China, Hypogymnia

The unquestioning masses are silent now for ever. No longer worried by  
doubts.

The believers are in their heaven - if it exists  
And the Politicians have fought their war to the best of their abilities  
But, the cost

Ashby McGowan

*Ashby McGowan is a published poet and PPU member living in Glasgow.  
He performed this poem, along with others, at the Alternative Remembrance  
Sunday Ceremony in London in 2016.*

# Take action with the Peace Pledge Union

There's lots of ways to be involved with the PPU, such as signing the peace pledge or reading *Peace Matters*! Here are some ideas for other ways to take action and be part of the PPU's work.

**Organise a stall in your community.** We can provide you with leaflets and other materials. You can use the space to discuss pacifism and nonviolence with your neighbours. If a stall isn't your thing, why not get in touch with us to get some leaflets to put in your school, university, workplace, library, place of worship or community centre?

**Get active.** If you're thinking of doing a sponsored event this summer, why not raise funds for PPU? Your support will help us to challenge militarism in our society, and further build the white poppy project.

**Host a film screening or event.** Another good way to raise funds for the PPU is to host an event such as a film screening, concert, or party. If you have a friendly local venue, ask them about hosting an event to raise money.

**Hold a talk or lecture in your school or university** about

issues of pacifism, nonviolence, militarism or conscientious objection. You'll find lots of resources on the PPU website to help you plan your talk. Get in touch with us if you'd like more information or advice.

**Join a local peace group.** Find out if there's a peace group in your area, or consider setting one up! We're happy to put you in touch with others and to give you advice about making a start.

**Sign the peace pledge and become a member of the Peace Pledge Union.** You can declare that you don't want to be part of the war machine and will work against war. You can also play your part as a full member of an active pacifist movement. Turn to page 2 or check out our website.

**Keep up to date with the Peace Pledge Union**

**[www.ppu.org.uk](http://www.ppu.org.uk)**

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