

ABOLISH WAR

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War – a crime of aggression

After Blair's appearance before Chilcot, there were countless demands that he be tried for the 'crime of aggression'. Sadly, he cannot. The Nuremberg Tribunal tried and convicted Nazi criminals for 'crimes against peace'. The judgement states: 'To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.' This is the 'Crime of Aggression'. But there have been ongoing arguments as to the 'definition' of this crime, and currently, rather than the International Criminal Court (ICC) having the power to act, the UN Security Council holds the power to veto any investigation or prosecution of a person or state for this crime. The majority of UN states feel that the Council's role is *political* while the Court's is *judicial*; the two

must be separate. The ICC was established by the 1998 Rome Statute. **The Review Conference of the Rome Statute will take place in Kampala in May 2010. Before then Members of Parliament should know about the urgent need to define the Crime of Aggression. They should also be aware of the need to achieve an agreement that will allow the Court to exercise its jurisdiction without the Security Council being able to block it. This is important – PLEASE WRITE TO YOUR MPs NOW AND MAKE THEM AWARE OF THE URGENCY. Make it an election issue!**

If you need more information, or help drafting your letter, please contact the Editor (see page 2), or phone George Farebrother on 01323 844 269, email geowcpuk@gn.apc.org

War – an infectious disease

Swine flu, that dangerous pandemic, turned out not to be worth the panic. Yet we suffer daily from a plague that kills millions and there is no uproar in the media, no rush to find a cure. There is no Tamiflu for war.

Having received his Nobel Peace Prize, President Obama made this statement following the attempt to blow up a Detroit-bound plane. "We will continue to use every element of our national power to disrupt, to dismantle and defeat the violent extremists who threaten us, whether they are from Afghanistan or Pakistan, Yemen or Somalia, or anywhere where they are plotting attacks against the U.S. homeland," he vowed. But what about civilians?



Afghanistan? US Special Forces were blamed for killing 10 people on 27 December, all 'militants' of course. Afghan sources said they were eight students, a farmer and a boy. The outpost attacked on 30 December killing 8 CIA employees was 'an operations and surveillance center'. It was being used as a base for directing drone air strikes. On 31 December NATO-led troops carried out an air strike outside Lashkargah, killing seven civilians and wounding two others. And the ongoing Operation Moshtarak is killing more civilians. Invisible (unless you watch Al

Jazeera) are the thousands of people who have fled to the outskirts of Kabul, living with no shelter, no food or water, no sanitation or health care. Will we count the ones who die there?

Pakistan?

On 2 January *The Peninsula* reported from Peshawar: 'According to figures compiled by the Pakistani authorities, the Afghanistan-based US drones killed 708 people in 44 predator attacks targeting the Pakistani tribal areas between January 1 and December 31, 2009. Only five hit their actual targets, killing five key Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders. For each terrorist killed by the American drones, 140 civilian Pakistanis also had to die.'

The Yemen? Their government and ours complain that Al Qaeda 'buys' the loyalty of the disaffected (and very poor) tribes in the north. Any money the West gives to the Yemen goes towards supporting the government and arming its 'counter-terrorism' action. If we must spend money, at least spend it on helping the people that need it. Surely Al Qaeda is not alone in being able to buy friendship. There is now a ceasefire in place, but the politically canny among you should know that one of the conditions was that the rebels in the north must not attack Saudi Arabia.

Somalia? Who knows what is planned for that poor country? Although one could quietly consider the fact that among its few resources are uranium and possible oil reserves. And where will the infection spread next? Iran, perhaps. War does not bring security. It does not bring peace. All it creates is more poverty, more enemies and more war.



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Movement for the Abolition of War

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Editorial

Good education isn't so much teaching people facts; it is teaching people how to find out the facts for themselves, to question what they are told, to hear both sides of a history. How else will we learn the lessons of history, and stop ourselves from repeating past mistakes? Having said that, there is just so much one can stand of having history rewritten by politicians desperate to persuade the public to their view of the world.



Blair at the Iraq Inquiry

The Iraq Inquiry has thrown up several examples of history being rewritten. Take the case of the 'dodgy dossier'. In his evidence, "Tony Blair said: "The thing that strikes me most was how the dossier was received... as somewhat dull and cautious at the time... it has taken on a far greater significance than it ever did at the time." Jonathan Powell, his chief of staff said the dossier was "not such a big deal" and was seen at the time as a "damp squib". Jack Straw said it was "treated as really rather prosaic and telling people what they knew". Alastair Campbell, of course, said nobody would ever have remembered it without the allegations I made afterwards.' So wrote Andrew Gilligan, sacked by the BBC for what he said about the dossier, pointing out that Parliament was recalled to launch this infamous document, and that while much of it was dull and cautious in tone, it had enough 'spice' in there to create 100 stories in the national press the following day.

In his evidence Jack Straw said Saddam Hussein had clearly failed to comply with the UN resolution in terms of co-operating with inspectors and providing full disclosure of his weapons capability. He said that the UN Weapons Inspectors' 2002 report convinced him the Iraqis were not cooperating. Up pops Hans Blix: "He did not focus at all on what I had said about the increased Iraqi cooperation". But neither mentioned the 12,000 plus pages of documentation of the destruction of those weapons sent by Iraq to the UN, and sequestered by the US as soon as it arrived in New York, a fact that must never be forgotten by anyone studying the causes of war.

Then, at a public meeting in Somerset, I heard Foreign Secretary David Miliband rewrite the story of our involvement in Afghanistan. He reduced Britain's long troubled history with Afghanistan to "we controlled Afghanistan from India". No. Mostly we got tossed out, sometimes terribly so, as in the retreat from Kabul in 1842, when over 16,000 lives were lost. Just as Blair at the Iraq Inquiry constantly conflated 9/11, Al Qaeda and Iraq, Miliband pushed the line that Afghanistan is the 'incubator of choice' for terrorism. This is where it all comes from, despite Al Qaeda originating in Saudi Arabia, the 9/11 hijackers being mainly Saudi and Jordanian, and, in early 2002, Robert Mueller, director of the FBI, pointing at Malaysia, Germany and the UAE as well as Pakistan and Afghanistan as places where the planning of 9/11 occurred.

On the Afghan elections and the fraud involved, Miliband commented that we simply cannot expect the same 'Western' standards of democracy from countries such as this. But even so, "the Afghans have got a government that they elected". Forget that the Afghans have had an American shoo-in (Hamid Karzai) thrust upon them, with no opportunity to vote for any other president. Forget that in April 2002, Zahir Shar, the last King of Afghanistan, returned home from exile, the king who in 1963 gave Afghanistan a new constitution making it a modern democratic state, introducing free elections, a parliament, civil rights, liberation for women and universal suffrage. He had served the Afghans well, they trusted him and there were open calls for a return to the monarchy. But, when he came to open the Loya Jirga in June, he was publicly forced to step aside at America's request, as it was clear that many members of the Loya Jirga were preparing to vote for him rather than America's man Karzai. Two elections (badly marred by fraud) later, and all they have, still, is Karzai.



Miliband the historian

'Among the calamities of war may be jointly numbered the diminution of the love of truth, by the falsehoods which interests dictate and credulity encourages.' Samuel Johnson

Consider. He said we are in Afghanistan because of terrorist threats (for which read Al Qaeda) to our own country. To prove this he cited 9/11 and the loss of 3000 lives (forget that Americans shoot each other to the tune of over 11,000 deaths each year); Britain's 7/7 (British born and raised perpetrators, unless you do conspiracy theories); and Al Qaeda's attack on the US embassy in Jordan. Then, to prove how evil Al Qaeda was, he spoke of the Madrid bomb which, he said, took place when "Spain was not in Iraq." Excuse me? Prime Minister Aznar, despite the Spaniards being vociferously against the invasion of Iraq, supported the US-led invasion and sent 1,300 troops to Iraq in April 2003. The bombing took place on 11 March 2004, only three days before Spain's general election. Aznar, who angered the Spanish by blaming ETA, was replaced by Zapatero, who was sworn in on 17 April. One day later he fulfilled a campaign pledge and ordered the withdrawal of the Spanish troops. The last combat troops had left Iraq by 26 April, but believe me, Mr Miliband, they were still there at the time of the Madrid bomb. Nor did the Spanish investigation unearth any involvement by Al Qaeda, although they did conclude the the Muslim cell responsible was probably 'inspired' by Al Qaeda.

Every day this drip, drip, drip of rewriting history goes on. Campaigning for peace also means campaigning for truth. When our leaders and their cohorts try to wipe the slate clean, it is up to us to remember all the facts, from both sides; to remember that, if terrorists deal in propaganda, so do governments; and to teach our children a new kind of history, a history of people, not nations and their 'interests', history teaching such as that proposed by Stefan Berger (see page 10).

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Our Aims and Goals

To spread the belief that the abolition of war is both desirable and possible

To raise awareness of the alternatives to war for resolving national and international disputes

To develop materials and strategies to educate us all from school children to those in government

Chair's Report

As I write, people are looking back ruefully on the failure of December's Copenhagen summit to deal effectively with climate change, struggling, in Britain at least, with the science of global warming whilst coping with an exceptionally cold winter, and watching, with varying degrees of frustration or irony, the unfolding of the Chilcot Inquiry into the invasion of Iraq. Meanwhile the conflict in Afghanistan, and the search for a way out of it, continues. This is my first report for Abolish War in my new post as Chair, so it is a good opportunity for me, and for all of us, to look at what we have been doing in recent months, and assess its relevance to what is going on in the world.

On 14 October, we gathered to hear Professor Stefan Berger in Portcullis House, Westminster, speaking on *Myth, truth and nation state* (see page 10), and showing how nationalism has made people willing to fight wars against outsiders. His examples of how this can be remedied come from education. It is important how young people are taught to view history, their community and themselves; and by implication all of us need to take off patriotic blinkers and try to see international situations globally. Relevant? I think so; many of us still lack this much-needed wider perspective.

The links between environmental damage and the impetus to war were set out by Dr. Mark Levene in his 2009 Remembrance Lecture at the Imperial War Museum (see page 6). There was not a lot of comfort here as the evidence mounted up, some examples familiar and some new, that nations are seeking instinctively to ensure maintenance of their own resources and influence, and seeing other nations as potential threats, not as fellow human beings. The scene will be set for new wars unless there is more collaboration and less competition, which is of course what Copenhagen was trying to achieve. There's that crucial need for a wider view again.

The Human Cost of War exhibition curated by Roberta Bacic, with arpilleras from Chile and Peru and quilts from other countries, featured in the last issue of Abolish War, approached conflict from an entirely different angle. It was very powerful, and I was able to perform my song *The women sew* and other relevant music at the exhibition itself, at the War Museum, St. Ethelburga's and, finally, the Whitechapel Gallery.

At the Gallery on 21 November, Bruce Kent chaired a roundtable discussion on Iraq, and Clem McCartney a gathering of those using the creative arts to counter the trauma of violence. This time the wider view came from the diversity of people around the table, contributing ideas and stories of healing. It was especially moving to take part in this against the backdrop of the tapestry of Picasso's great painting *Guernica* (see page 7).

Most recently, in January, I took part in the annual Peace Studies day at one of my local schools in Cambridgeshire, Comberton Village College. The whole group of year 11s, aged 15-16, participate in this as a Personal Development Day, part of their Citizenship curriculum. A dozen visitors led workshops on topics as diverse as nonviolent communication, Islamophobia, reconciliation, civilians in war zones and, in my case, songs of

People of earth join hands, and people of earth make plans for giving the world a future.

peace and protest. The day ended with the performance of four songs, starting with John Lennon's *Imagine* and ending with my song *People of earth*.

When I asked one of my workshop groups earlier in the day what ought to be the theme of peace songs nowadays, the answer was 'unity'. Perhaps this generation, for whom the Web and so much else are worldwide, is getting the message.

The day made me realise again how vital education is to the work of MAW. We are a member of the Peace Education Network (PEN) but still need someone to be our representative to PEN, to attend and participate in occasional PEN meetings. Is there a teacher among our members who would be willing and able to do this? Please get in touch if so. Travel expenses would be covered.

Coming soon are the weekend at Hilfield Friary in March, *Peacemaking in a time of global crisis*, and the Peace History Conference in the Imperial War Museum in April. I hope that many will be able to participate in these events, and, as always, welcome new ideas for taking forward MAW's central purpose.

Sue Gilmurray

Introducing Sue Gilmurray and Will Pritchard, elected to the posts of Chair and Vice-chair at November's AGM



Sue and Will before their first committee meeting in their new positions.

Sue is married with two grown-up children, lives in Ely, Cambridgeshire, and works full-time as a librarian at Anglia Ruskin University's Cambridge campus. She began to get involved in anti-war and peace campaigning in the mid 1990s, and has been a member of MAW from its beginning. She has been a singer and songwriter all her life, and has taken her voice and keyboard to Faslane, Aldermaston, the Greenbelt Festival and the Church of England's Lambeth Conference, in the conviction that songs can inform, challenge and inspire those who grapple with issues of war and peace.

Since the Iraq War introduced Will to peace campaigning, he has worked on a variety of issues with a range of organisations, including a youth peace and justice education group that he established in 2003. On the MAW executive for some years, he is looking forward to furthering his involvement with MAW. A keen businessman, athlete and musician, he is currently reading Politics at the University of Bristol and is exploring how the effectiveness of NGOs can be maximised through the adoption of knowledge and practices from the business world.

The Loss of Innocence



Rod Cox

Following Israel's Cast Lead operation in Gaza last year, the Viva Palestina convoy took aid out to the battered civilians of Gaza. Among their number was Rod Cox. He stayed behind to visit schools, talking to children affected by the violence, and brought back with him a collection of their paintings, done as therapy during and after the conflict. The result, Loss of Innocence, is being exhibited around the country, and clearly demonstrates what we do to children by engaging in such violence. The rights and the wrongs of any conflict become irrelevant when we fully realise the suffering of and damage to the innocent.

Once you realise that the children are painting what they saw, you can only weep.

Here are missiles raining from the sky, the F16s, unmanned drones, Apache helicopters and the yellow flashes of exploding phosphorus bombs; here too, are ambulances under attack as they help the wounded, streets littered with body parts and torsos cut in half by DIME weapons, buildings and trees being bulldozed, and a woman trapped in a burning building.



Trapped woman

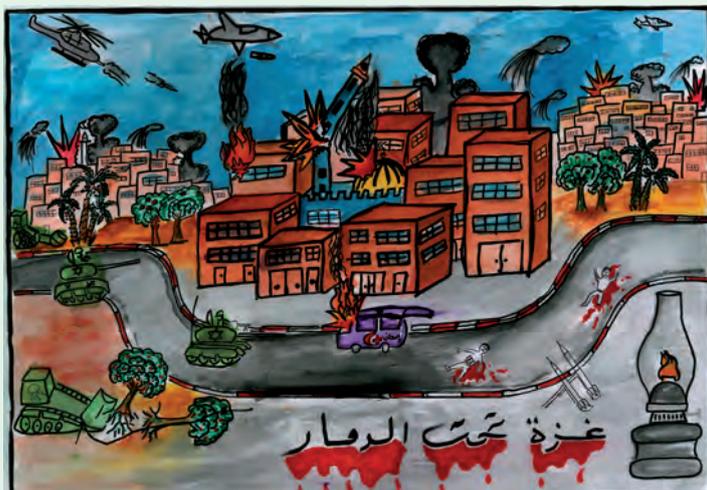
The only things missing are the noise of the explosions with the screams that follow, and the smell of fire and blood.

Mohanned's painting portrays the attack on the Abu Bakar Asadiq Mosque. He and his family were at prayer when the Mosque was attacked by an F16 plane. Everyone fled to their homes. By loudspeaker, the Israelis ordered them all to stay in their homes. But they were hungry and Mohanned's father ventured outside to find food for his family. He was shot and killed. The family stayed inside

their house, afraid to move. And that is where they were when a Caterpillar D9 bulldozer demolished the house. Mohanned, aged 11, survived but his mother and 5 siblings were killed.



Mohanned's painting



Ibrahim's painting



Peace - the way it was

The children are not without hope that things will be better, but many, quite naturally, are angry. Resistance is not the issue – the right to resist occupation even by violent means is enshrined in the Geneva Conventions.

The issue is that by insisting on our 'right' to solve our grievances through violence, by resorting before all else to war, we not only destroy children's lives, we create yet another generation of angry radicalized young people. We not only destroy all the unrealized love and gifts held by the young, we create another generation of killers.



Body parts in the road

One teacher, after her pupils had been guided round the exhibition by Rod, wrote: "Thank you so much for arranging the guided tour for my group. We found it certainly harrowing but also really inspiring and the boys came up with so many questions that I had to schedule an extra lesson at 8:30 this morning so we could keep talking about it. I have never had a whole group of boys demand an extra lesson on Saturday morning before! I have asked them to write about what they learnt and the impression they gained from the exhibition." And this is why you must see this exhibition, drag all your friends and their children along, or ask your local school to host it. There is no better

way to

get people to understand what we are doing by waging war, by refusing to give way, to compromise, to make peace. How else, unless we ourselves are children and undergo what these Gazan children suffered, will we understand the fear, the damage, the pain, the anger and the total loss of that innocence that is every child's right.

Editor

Give us our childhood
I'm without home
We are innocent
We are still children.
Ibrahim (11)



Resistance

To host the exhibition contact Rod at rodcoxandgaza.blogspot.com or CAPE, 1 City Walls, Chester, CH1 2JG

Peace History – visions and experiments
Friday 16 and Saturday 17 April
Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1

The 4th Peace History Conference organised by MAW in association with the Imperial War Museum and the International Peace Bureau.

Friday – 9.30am to 6pm

Speakers: Christine Blower, General Secretary of the NUT
 Victoria Brittain, author and journalist • Ulrike Smalley, Imperial War Museum
 6pm to 8pm A celebration of Adrian Mitchell (*see below*)

Saturday - 9.30am to 5.15pm

Speakers: Terry Charman, Imperial War Museum
 Sir Richard Jolly, University of Sussex • Valerie Flessati, Pax Christi

Both days will feature films and discussions

Registration fees: 2 days £30 – 1 day £25. Fulltime students: 2 days £10 - 1 day £5

The new Bradford Peace Museum exhibition

Nonviolent Responses to Terrorism will be on display

Full programme and booking form: www.abolishwar.org.uk

MAW presents:
Peacemaking in a
Time of Global Crisis

March 19-21

Hilfield Friary, Dorset

Led by

Tony Kempster and
Sue Gilmurray

for information/programme

www.abolishwar.org.uk

www.hilfieldproject.co.uk

01908 511948

Some places still available

TRIBUTE TO
ADRIAN MITCHELL AT MAW'S
PEACE HISTORY CONFERENCE



A special event to celebrate the life and work of Adrian Mitchell will be held during MAW's Peace History Conference on the evening of 16 April at the Imperial War Museum. Adrian, who died in December 2008, was an outstanding poet and author who described himself as 'a mixed lefty, a socialist-anarchist-pacifist-Blakeist revolutionary'. He wrote with simplicity and humour on subjects and people he cared about. His work is fierce, courageous and accessible; and he maintained his determination for and his commitment to peace until his dying day.

MAW was one of Adrian's favourite causes and part of the proceeds of the book, *ADRIAN: Scotland celebrates Adrian Mitchell* (Markings 2009) is being donated to us. The book has contributions by 40 major poets including the Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy, Michael Horowitz, Martin Espada and Paul McCartney.

Our tribute will feature performances by Adrian's wife Celia (actress and his muse) and daughter Sasha (singer), Michael Horowitz (author and poet), Adam Horowitz (poet), Pete Brown (poet, singer and songwriter), John Hudson (poet and editor), Elspeth Brown (poet), Chrys Salt (poet and editor) and Tim Whitehead (jazz musician). Our new Chair Sue Gilmurray will also be performing.

The celebration starts at 6 pm **and will be open to all – not just people at the conference.** Further details will be posted on the MAW website (www.abolishwar.org.uk) or phone 01908 511948. *ADRIAN: Scotland celebrates Adrian Mitchell* (£10.95 inc. p&tp.) is available from www.markings.org.uk and The Bakehouse, 44 High Street, Gatehouse of Fleet, Dumfries and Galloway DG7 2HP. Tel: 01557 814175.

Jassim, the Little Poet –
a talent that did not survive the damage of war

One child, for me, encapsulates all those trashed childhoods and childhood dreams. I met thirteen year old Jassim, from Basra, another victim of depleted uranium, in a ward in the Al Mansour Hospital in Baghdad. Learning that I was a writer, he glowed with excitement. He was going to be a poet when he grew up, he said, and asked if he could read me one of his poems. He pulled a notebook (a real luxury in embargoed Iraq) from under his pillow and read this poem. It was called *The Identity Card*.



The name is love,
The class is mindless,
The school is suffering,
The Governorate is sadness,
The City is sighing,
The street is misery,
The home number is
one thousand sighs.

He watched my face for reaction. Near speechless: "Jassim", I said, "if you can write this at thirteen, think what you can do at twenty." I quoted James Elroy Flecker reaching out to infinity: 'Oh friend, unseen, unborn, unknown, read out my lines, at night, alone. I was a poet, I was young.' We understood, in our huge age differences, a heart's passion, for the truth of words and their beauty. His eyes never left mine, nor mine his. I told him he had to hang on, to follow in the footsteps of Iraq's towering poetry tradition. Three months later, I sent him, via a friend, his poem and story, widely published. When my friend returned, I called: "How is Jassim, was he pleased?" I imagined him glowing again. He died three days before my friend arrived and never saw his poem in print.

Felicity Arbuthnot

The Remembrance Day Lecture:

Weapons of the Strong, given by

Dr Mark Levene

This was one of the most hard-hitting and powerful lectures MAW has presented. Climate change is serious, and we are still not dealing with it or changing our behaviour in any meaningful way. Governments of powerful countries, rather than taking the actions needed on forcing cuts in greenhouse gas emissions and creating a sustainable future for us all, are spending much of their time looking at how they will 'control' the situation and also, in the face of cumulative or abrupt climate emergency, provide the necessary justifications for increasingly militarised politics.

These are the 'weapons of the strong', the subject of Mark Levene's lecture at the Imperial War Museum. He made these points: despite the arguments of climate sceptics, the evidence from around the world is clear – global warming is accelerating; the financial crisis has not been seen as an opportunity for a move towards necessary contraction, but rather a scramble to regain the 'business as usual' model; and apart from some fine words and small actions, the climate crisis is being seen as a matter of state security.

Facing the certainty of mass migrations from drought, flood or sea level rise, governments' only question is 'how do you keep out the hordes?' So we have Perimeter Denial technologies – walls and fences such as a 2500 mile steel fence replete with landmines India is building around Bangladesh, where an estimated 70 million of its 120 million inhabitants are expected to be flooded out in the not too distant future – barriers designed as much to keep people in as out. Add in tasers, chemicals, heat and noise weapons. And consider NATO's belief that it should maintain its nuclear first-strike option, citing climate and energy challenges and mass 'environmental' migration.



India's Security Fence along the Bangladesh border

More and more, the military and security organisations are planning how to control our future. To take one example – urban slums are seen as 'nests' for terrorist actions against the rich. In a world of extreme privation and ongoing climate emergency the logical (but not rational) reaction of those in power would be to treat hungry and desperate slum-dwellers as part and parcel of that same terrorist threat necessitating techniques to ensure bottling them up in containment zones.

But while trying to secure our own borders and resources, we are busy buying up other peoples'; vast areas of good agricultural land or tropical forest being given over to bio fuel crops for the West, while people go without food; South Korea has taken over half of the agricultural land in Madagascar to grow maize and palm oil. China has also moved into Africa in a big way. The EU is in Southeast Asia, the USA in South America.

Geo-engineering is also being considered as an answer to serious climate problems. China, to cope with massive drought in the North, is proposing to build a 'water highway', taking water from an already depleted Yangtze and from the Himalayas, which could deprive both Indians and Bangladeshis of their water supply - a recipe for major conflict, with both China and India being nuclear powers. Researchers are looking at the possibilities of changing the

biosphere itself, but of course, what is altered to suit one area could, probably would, be disaster for somewhere else. All this, rather than look at the obvious solution, which is to change the way we live.

We (in the First World) shall perhaps find ourselves being put under constraint by our own governments as they struggle to protect themselves and their interests, and the danger is that too many of us will think 'what else can be done but accept government advice and assistance?' As Mark said, this raises the question: how do we not go there? There is a hint of an answer.

We assume that Third World people will suffer most from the effects of climate change, that we in the rich countries will be protected. But it is actually the poorest, most dispossessed people who are the most resilient. Western society is now built in such a way that it could collapse overnight. Our water, food and fuel supply lines could easily break. We have no resilience and we need to build some fast. Looking at the situation in Haiti following the earthquake, the island flooded with American soldiers, the world's media and aid workers, and much of the population still without food aid three weeks after the quake, I read this: '...people, again and again, in the worst of times, actually do without the help of the authorities. ... generally, they take care of each other in remarkably creative ways.*' We need to learn how to take care of each other and how to make do with less. And we need to learn now.

Editor

**In Haiti, Words Can Kill, Tom Engelhardt & Rebecca Solnit.*

This is only a very brief outline of the information contained in Mark's lecture. The event was recorded. If you would like a copy please phone 01908 511948

Presentation of the Arthur Hewlett Peace Award

I was delighted to be asked to make the first presentation of the Arthur Hewlett Peace Award, in the Imperial War Museum on Remembrance Sunday, 2009.

This annual award has been instigated by MAW as a way of honouring Arthur Hewlett – a long time Quaker and peace advocate - who left us a large legacy. At the time the legacy represented most of our financial resources, enabling us to undertake projects that we might not otherwise have been able to



Brian (left) with Glen Burrows and Dave Chappel of the Bridgwater Peace Group

**Bridgwater
Peace Group
Motto**

**Make
Cider
Not
War**

do. An appropriate, practical award was decided upon earlier this year - a sum of money (£300) to go to a local UK peace group that had achieved a lot with few resources.

We thought the most outstanding group in 2009 was the Bridgwater Peace Group. Its activities included helping other local peace groups, leading a county-wide campaign against Trident, organising speakers, workshops and musical events; a good mix of activities by them while often taking the lead and encouraging others. This sets an excellent benchmark for other peace groups that wish to apply for this year's Arthur Hewlett Peace Award.

Brian Heale

Note: The Bridgwater Group are hoping to put on a weekend course run by the Anti Violence Project, for Somerset peace people. They aim to take what they learn out to local schools. They are also planning 'Give Peace a Dance - 2010 festival of peacemaking'. If you want to nominate a group for this year's award, please get in touch with the editor (contact details on page 2).

Playing a part in 'The nature of the beast' exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery

The final day of MAW's week of London events in November took place at the Whitechapel Gallery. Two events were held around the circular table in front of the tapestry of Picasso's *Guernica*, as part of *The nature of the beast* exhibition by the Polish



Goshka Macuga at the Whitechapel Gallery

artist Goshka Macuga. 'The nature of the beast' refers to the destructive impulse that ignores the lessons of history. The exhibition revolves around the presentation of Picasso's original painting "Guernica", at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1939 and the installation of a tapestry version at the UN headquarters in New York from 1985. It has been used as a backdrop for political debate, but in February 2003 when Colin Powell made the case for the invasion of Iraq at the UN, the tapestry was covered up because of its stark anti-war message. The tapestry is currently on loan for Macuga's exhibition, which also includes a bust of Powell holding up a vial of liquid to emphasise the dangers of Saddam Hussein's WMD.

The morning event, chaired by MAW vice-president Bruce Kent, was concerned primarily with the Iraq War, focussing on the impact of war on both civilian populations and the military involved in the fighting. Among those taking part were Iraqis Sabah Al-Mukhtar (President, Arab Lawyers Assoc.), Tahrir Swift and Nofa Khadduri, describing how the Iraqis themselves felt about the invasion and how they were coping with the aftermath. They were supported by journalist (and frequent visitor to pre-invasion Iraq) Felicity Arbuthnot. Norman Kember spoke of his experience of being kidnapped and held for some months in Baghdad. Other participants were Chris Chang, senior investigator at Reprieve (which helps Guantanamo Bay detainees), Aly Renwick (see page 8), who spoke about the psychological damage to soldiers, peace activists Michael Culver and Jim McClusky and Canon Paul Oestreicher.



Sabah Al-Mukhtar speaking about Iraq

The discussion ranged widely, touching on the political machinations which led to the invasion of Iraq, the immeasurable suffering it produced and the way it has weakened - rather than strengthened - human security in the Middle East and increased the threat of terrorism worldwide.

The afternoon event, facilitated by Clem McCartney, an international consultant on peace and conflict issues, grew out of MAW's quilt and arpillera exhibition, *The human cost of war*, held in the Imperial War Museum on Remembrance Sunday and subsequently at St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace. The aim was to link the themes of the Whitechapel exhibition with *The human cost of war*. People whose quilts and arpilleras were exhibited and others working on related subjects using different materials spoke about their craft and the experiences which drove them to create.

Goshka Macuga started by explaining the background to *The nature of the beast* and how she hoped the records of the different meetings held within the exhibition would be publicised. Then with three themes in mind - making connections between past and present, raising public awareness and the destructive impact of war - the participants described their experiences, often using their art as illustrations.

Roberta Bacic, curator of *The human cost of war* explained how she had chosen the various items and the general concept behind the exhibition. Alba Perez Hernandez and Maria Vinola Berenguer from Spain spoke of working with women quilt-makers affected by the Spanish Civil War. Linking this to Chile, from where several of the arpilleras had come, Christian Leon (Chilean cultural attaché) introduced the poem *The Winnipeg* by Pablo Neruda (The Winnipeg was a ship commissioned by Neruda to bring refugees of the Spanish Civil War to Chile).



Roberta Bacic (centre) speaking to the round table participants

The textile artists, Heidi Drahota, Mara Lovtved-Hardegg, Teresa Huhle and Helen Heron talked about the relationships to the different wars that inspired their works. Nick Dubois, curator of the Combat Paper exhibition at the Courtauld Institute used photographs to show how, as therapy, US soldiers had converted their uniforms into paper to produce artwork. Lesley Docksey, Abolish War's editor, spoke about the inspiration behind *Images of War* and Julie Obermeyer, manager of Bradford's Peace Museum talked about moving experiences she has had with visitors to the Museum's exhibitions. Sue Gilmurray (now MAW's Chair) performed *The women sew* (featured in issue 15 of Abolish War), which she wrote for *The human cost of war*.

Tony Kempster

A catalogue of *The human cost of war* with illustrations of all the items and their provenance is available. If you would like a copy of the catalogue please send a cheque for £3 to MAW distribution, 1 Thesiger Road, Abingdon OX14 2DY.

A full film recording was taken of both debates and will be placed in the Whitechapel archives. Two shorter films comprising highlights from the debates have also been made, and are available. Please call 01908 511948 for further information about these.

Treating the Damage of War

The South Somerset Peace Group welcomed consultant psychiatrist Dr Daffyd Alan Jones who, having dealt with more than 2,500 cases in over 20 years, gave a talk titled *A Clinician's Experiences with Ex-servicemen*. He spoke as a clinician, and made no judgmental observations; he described himself as not



Dr Jones with Kate Vanovitch who chaired the meeting

Ex-soldier Aly Renwick, who took part in the debate on Iraq at the Whitechapel Gallery (see page 7), wrote the book *Hidden Wounds*, on the damage suffered by British Forces who had served in Northern Ireland. What prompted him to start researching this was reading about Jimmy Johnson, who, as a result of PTSD, is still in prison having killed twice after he left the Army. (Jimmy's

According to a report that came out last year from Napo, the Probation officers' union, 'the number of former servicemen in prison or on probation or parole is now more than double the total British deployment in Afghanistan. An estimated 20,000 veterans are in the criminal justice system, with 8,500 behind bars, almost one in 10 of the prison population. The proportion of those in prison who are veterans has risen by more than 30% in the last five years.... The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Defence have so far taken more than a year to complete a basic survey of the number of veterans in prison. At one point the exercise was hindered by claims it contravened the Data Protection Act.' No surprises there. (*Revealed: the hidden army in UK prisons*, The Guardian, 24/09/09)

The Ministry of Defence acknowledged that a 'small minority' of ex-service personnel can face serious difficulties, although in March last year an MoD doctor was admitting "we have no idea how many troops suffer from trauma." But do they want to know? As always, it is easier to get the US figures for this kind of damage. For instance:

According to an Al Jazeera documentary *The War Within*, it is estimated that one third of US service men and women have



Camp Bastion Field Hospital, Afghanistan

a military person in any way, but as a white-robed Druid bearing no arms.

Some 10% of our prison population is made up of neglected and traumatised ex-servicemen and there are clear links between trauma (now more commonly known as PTSD) from active service and depression, drink problems, and volatile or violent behaviour.

Dr Jones cited the typical symptoms of trauma as recurrent memories, flashbacks, distress at exposure to symbols, sights and sounds (such as a barbecue or a car backfiring), sleeplessness, anger, lack of concentration and hyper-vigilance. He said that ex-servicemen who felt their service had been in a just cause were less likely to suffer trauma than those who doubted the moral purpose of the conflict they had been engaged in.

He was clear that there are effective treatments for PTSD, and that peer group support is particularly useful. He has also succeeded in obtaining a ruling confirming that war pensioners are entitled to priority treatment from the NHS.

He gave us an insight into the problems faced by ex-servicemen that was all the more telling for being so dispassionate, and quoted a mother who said, 'I sent two of my sons to the Gulf and I got two monsters back.'

Martin Shirley

story was featured in the Guardian: *Erwin James: why are so many former soldiers in prison 09/02/10*). He and Aly set up *Vets in Prison* and their website is well worth a look. Aly kindly donated some copies of *Hidden Wounds* to MAW. They cost £6 (inc. p&cp) and are available from MAW distribution, I Thesiger Road, Abingdon OX14 2DY (cheques payable to MAW)

PTSD. Those suffering with PTSD are simply given pills – "tranqs, sleeping pills and anti-psychotics" said one soldier, fighting to get out of the army, and coming up against the Army's Catch 22. He's had enough, he tells the Army psychiatrist. He doesn't want to kill people any more. "You don't want to kill people?" asks the psychiatrist, "that means you're not homicidal, you're perfectly sane." And back to the front line he went. Is it any wonder that 18 veterans a day (over 6,500 each year) commit suicide and 20% of all US suicides are veterans? The suicide toll is now greater than the loss of life in combat.

Another huge problem is brain trauma:

'There is a growing medical consensus that a significant factor in PTSD is actual physical damage to the brain. Developments in vehicle and body armour, combined with advances in medical treatment, have enabled thousands of soldiers to survive bomb blasts that might have taken their lives in earlier conflicts. They survive with trauma to their brain however.

The Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury estimated in early 2009 that between 45,000 to 90,000 veterans of the two wars (Iraq and Afghanistan) had been left with 'severe and lasting symptoms' of brain injury. Overall, the Defense Department estimates that as many as 20 percent of veterans had suffered some degree of brain injury due to bomb blasts while in Iraq or Afghanistan - a staggering 360,000 men and women.' (*Suicide claims more US military lives than Afghan war*, James Cogan, 06/01/10)

Instead of hiding behind the Data Protection Act, the MoD must face up to this level of damage within British Forces. They are having to do something, it seems, but that is with the more visible injuries. A Parliamentary independent report says that field hospitals are working almost flat out, and that (due to good medical care) more seriously injured personnel are surviving. Which means that the facilities at Selly Oak and Headingly will have to be enlarged.

There is a simple cure for all this damage – stop fighting wars!

Editor

Images of War

Survivors



Photo: Ahmad Masood/Reuters

1 **Bombs, Nato air strikes and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) all take their toll in Afghanistan. Somehow, people survive.**



Photo: Massoud Hossain/AFP/Getty Images



Photo: RAWA



Photo: AP/Manish Swarup

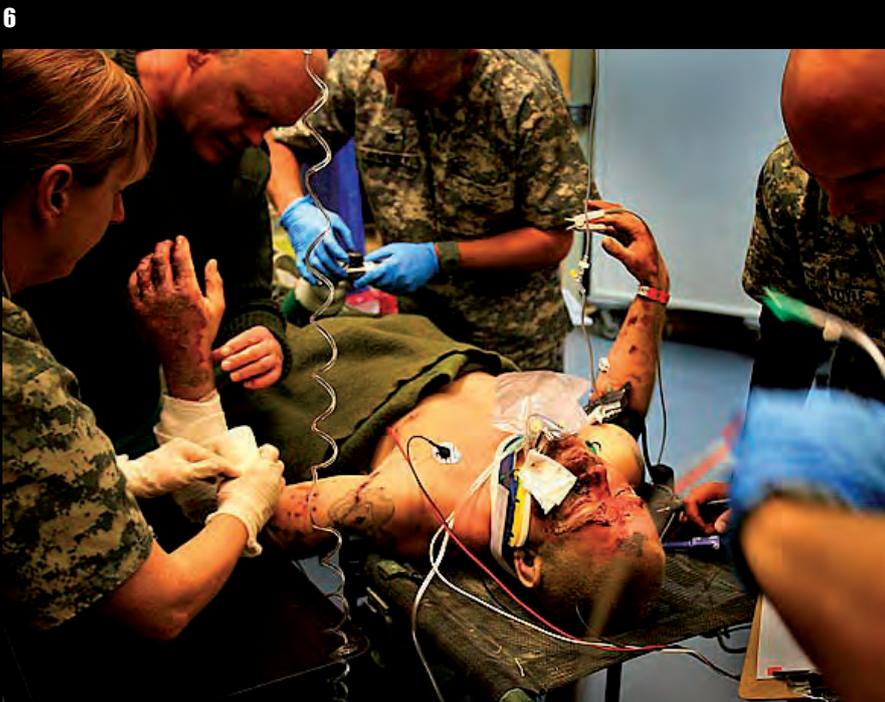


Photo: Peter Nicholls/The Times



Photo: The Times

1. Heetal Hotel bombing, Kabul 15/12/09 (8 people killed)
2. Survivor of Heetal hotel bomb
3. Survivor of Bala Baluk air strike (100 civilians killed)
4. Survivor of Kunduz air atriike 04/09/09 (150 civilians killed)
5. Survivor of Bala Baluk air strike 05/05/09
6. Survivor of an IED, Helmand, 16/11/09

History teaching – a new stream of consciousness



Christine Titmus with Stefan Berger at Portcullis House

An event (organised by MAW) in Portcullis House last October provided an opportunity for Stefan Berger, Professor of Comparative History at Manchester University to give a talk: *Myth, Truth, and Nation-State: How Do Our Histories Help Create Wars?* Among the concepts discussed was the strong link of history teaching to personal, group and national identity. Identity, he argued, is partly formed by the teaching of nationalistic history. Examples were given of how rigid national identities probably played a role in 'a range of catastrophes' in 18th, 19th and 20th century Europe, including the following:

The setting up of the first national archives in France in the C18th, along with the 'construction of *Frenchness* centred on citizenship' seems to have been a major strand to the French revolution, with the revolutionary wars turning into expansionist wars.

In the C19th definitions of *Germanness* evolved (the parliament in Frankfurt contained a number of history professors), conveniently fitting in with territorial claims for a future German state. This led to Czechoslovakia setting up a counter-plan.

In C20th communist Yugoslavia intermarriage between peoples of different ethnic, cultural, regional states occurred alongside the different states developing their own individual histories, sometimes 'clashing' strongly with each other. With the break-up of the Soviet bloc, the states in Yugoslavia descended into violence – in which the individual versions of history must have played a major role.

With other examples from Asia, Africa and elsewhere, Professor Berger made clear that the degree of exclusiveness and violence varies over time and place. On the positive side, he gave examples of ways of teaching history that might help to bring about more 'understanding and tolerance' between nations:

A French/German history textbook, published in 2006 (and now in a second edition) from which school children learn almost identical histories – with hardly a second thought, it seems.

Teaching national histories as 'broken mirrors' – meaning from different perspectives. National histories can be read differently, depending on which fragment of the mirror a person is looking into and the perspective the person brings; developing this idea might make an understanding of national history 'less exclusive, less homogenising...' - though national history is unlikely to disappear altogether.

Replacing nationalistic histories with 'entangled' histories – that is utilising 'histories of cultural transfer and comparative history' would also help. Recent initiatives have emerged along these lines in some universities, Professor Berger said, which gives hope; but it will be a long road before such initiatives reach the consciousness of the public.

A long road perhaps, but it takes a different direction from the conventional. It needs many people to walk this new prospect towards a more peaceful world. This event has taken the early steps a little further along the road.

Brian Heale

For a greater understanding of this subject read *Uses and Abuses of History* by Margaret MacMillan, reviewed by Brian on Page 12.

The Vision

The Vision is a community play telling the remarkable story of three women who, in the 1950s, founded The Ockenden Venture, a charity dealing with refugees and displaced people. Ockenden (named after the home of Joyce Pearce, one of the founders) began its work with some victims of WW2. The beginning was modest; five young girls were brought from refugee camps in Europe to Ockenden House in Woking, Surrey, to be given a safe home, health care and education. This small beginning led to Ockenden becoming an international charity working for victims of war in many parts of the world. The work involved countries such as Latvia, Poland, Tibet, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Sudan, Bangladesh, Laos, and Bosnia. The charity's finances were minimal, with support coming from donors and well wishers. When the UN and the British Government realised the extent of the work being done, grants were made to support many of the projects. Overseas, these projects involved training in self-sufficiency, education and income-generating. Here, they involved residential centres where refugees were taken in, cared for and eventually re-settled.



Ruth Hicks, Margaret Dixon and Joyce Pearce

The Vision will involve the community of Woking and district and it tells of the horrors of war and the struggles of the victims, but also of the enduring dedication of the founders, workers and the local communities that became involved with Ockenden, its visions and beliefs. It tells the stories of people torn away from their families. It tells of the problems of getting enough finance and the determination of founders Joyce Pearce, Margaret Dixon and Ruth Hicks to make a difference to the lives of people no matter what it took.

Professionally written, *The Vision* will be staged at the Winston Churchill Comprehensive School, Woking. There are ten performances and the first night is on April 27th. For details and booking of seats visit www.thevision.org.uk, email enquiries@thevision.org.uk or phone 07588 058503

Want To Buy Stolen U.S. Military Wares In Afghanistan?

The small market, tucked behind a commercial building in the northwest side of Kabul, is a US taxpayer's nightmare. It used to be known as Brezhnev Market. Then it became the Bush Market. The name now taking over is the Obama Market. And what does it sell? All around are stalls offering cases of MREs (meals-ready-to-eat), new-in-the-box military cots and goods usually sold on base stores, such as American-made shampoo, military ID holders and the huge plastic jars of the food supplements used by bodybuilders. One shop offered an expensive military-issue sleeping bag, tactical goggles like those used by US troops and a stack of plastic footlockers, including one stenciled "Campbell G Co. 10th Mtn Div." Another had a sophisticated "red-dot" optical rifle sight of a kind often used by soldiers and contractors. (From the newsletter *Military Resistance*). A sort of Taliban supermarket, perhaps.

Events Diary - from Network for Peace

6 March YORK. Campaign Against Arms Trade Universities Network Gathering at York University. Info: www.caat.org.uk annemarie@caat.org.uk 020 7281 0297

6-7 February ABERYSTWYTH. Climate Camp Cymru gathering to decide 'What next?' <http://climatecampcymru.org/>

8 March KINGSTON. Low carbon energy: is nuclear the answer? Organised by Kingston Peace Council/CND as part of Think in Kingston, Kingston Borough Council's annual festival of ideas. All welcome. Info: Hilary evans39@gotadsl.co.uk, 020 8898 4850.

13 March HEXHAM. Hexham Debates - a series of talks on the theme of 'War, Peace and Democracy', organised by Northumbrians for Peace and Hexham Quaker Meeting. Info: www.hexhamquakers.org.uk/hexhamdebates2010.pdf

19-21 March HILFIELD FRIARY, DORSET. MAW - 'Peacemaking in a time of Global Crisis' with Tony Kempster and Sue Gilmurray. For info: www.abolishwar.org.uk, www.hilfieldproject.co.uk, 01908 511948 See page 5.

20 March EDINBURGH. Demonstration - Cut Trident not Jobs. Assemble Scottish Parliament 11 am March off 11.30 am to city centre rally at 12.30 pm Organised by Scotland's for Peace

2-11 April THE FLAME OF HOPE WALK FROM DOVER TO PORTSMOUTH. The flame will go to New York to join a flame from Hiroshima. World leaders negotiating at the UN about nuclear weapons will see our flame and know what we want - Abolition of nuclear weapons! Come for a day or an hour, but be there. To register: <http://www.peacebourne.serifweb.com/FlameGen/index.html> or contact George, 01323 844269

16-17 April LONDON. MAW Peace History Conference. See page 5.

26 April WORLDWIDE. Chernobyl Day

3-28 May NEW YORK Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference (RevCon)

8 May LONDON. Musicians Against Nuclear Arms (MANA) Concert for Peace. With: The Chilingirian String Quartet. Hinde Street Methodist Church. Info: 020 8455 1030. admin@mana.org.uk www.mana.org.uk

15 May EVERYWHERE. International Conscientious Objector's Day.

24 May WORLDWIDE. International Women's Day for Disarmament.

Annual General Meeting Report

Our AGM was held on 8 November at the Imperial War Museum. Roberta Bacic, curator of *The human cost of war* exhibition and our Northern Ireland representative, was the speaker. Changes were made to the committee. Tony Kempster (chair) and Christine Titmus (vice-chair) stood down, but will continue on the committee in different roles. Sue Gilmurray was elected chair and Will Pritchard vice-chair. Four new members were elected to the executive in place of those standing down. Hilary Evans was appointed committee secretary during the year and is a co-opted member of the committee. Caro Wilkinson has become our regional representative for Scotland. MAW now operates a significant programme of anti-war activities, which is beginning to focus more on education and the use of the arts and music in campaigning. Regular events like the Peace History Conference and Remembrance Sunday lecture are well established. *Abolish War* is a respected publication and MAW's new website had settled down well although it now needs a dedicated manager. The finances are sound (as reported to the meeting by our treasurer, Andy Cheatle). Since April, we have received a £10,000 grant to make a school's DVD on climate change and conflict, and £5,000 to assist our media work and the quilt exhibition. Tony had one main concern. The committee has no shortage of ideas but needs volunteers to realise them, particularly people with an interest in the arts, education and the media (remember that MAW's work is essentially carried out by volunteers). Can you help? Tony thanked those who had supported him over the four years and wished Sue Gilmurray and Will Pritchard well in their new roles.

Technology – some you win A Pentagon document reveals Taliban improvised explosive devices, a major problem for U.S. and coalition service members, are now being made from plastic and other non-metallic components, making them almost impossible to detect. The Pentagon is showing a level of anxiety not seen before over the IEDs, described as smaller, simpler and less complicated. The report said the Taliban is using two non-metallic ingredients of a salt solution and carbon for IED trigger mechanisms. Because the carbon comes from batteries, the lack of the battery casing makes them non-metallic and makes them harder to find. (From Joseph Farah's G2 Bulletin Troops facing new IED dangers. Secret report says Taliban is making undetectable explosives)

And some you lose

Last November the Times reported that: 'Iraqis spent \$80m on ADE651 bomb detectors described as useless'. In the past two years

Iraq's security forces have spent more than \$80 million (£47 million) on the detectors made by ATSC Ltd, based in Yeovil, Somerset, despite the manufacturer's admission that they work on the same principle as a dowsing rod. Each detector bought by the Iraqi Government cost up to \$60,000 (£35,000). The devices, which consist of little more than a telescopic radio aerial on a black plastic handle, are in use at army and police checkpoints across the bomb-ravaged country. The managing director of ATSC said: 'We have been dealing with doubters for ten years. One of the problems we have is that the machine does look a little primitive. We are working on a new model that has flashing lights.'

The problem *was* solved by a flashing light – a blue one attached to a Somerset & Avon police car. The managing director has been arrested and charged with fraud.

Why should you join MAW!

Our aim: to create a world where war is no longer seen as a way to solve a problem; where it has ceased to be an option; where conflict resolution means resolution, not more conflict. We have the tools, the skills and the laws that we need. We also need you. We work through education and dialogue, both nationally and in our own local communities; ordinary people taking action to realise our goal - **THE ABOLITION OF WAR.**

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Reviews

Voices Against War

Lyn Smith, Mainstream Publishing
(in association with the Imperial War Museum)

I had been looking forward to this book since Lyn Smith gave a talk at the last Peace History Conference. It was well worth the wait. Taken from the Museum's archive of recorded interviews, many of them conducted by Lyn herself, it charts all the strands of anti-war campaigning from WWI to the present day, and will be an invaluable resource for campaigners and historians. And, as Lyn says, it will provide a counterbalance to the endless military accounts of war.

There are many levels of conscientious objections to war, from the 'absolutist' position of complete pacifism, through those who refused to bear arms but worked under fire with ambulance units, right down to those whose consciences told them that while war itself was wrong, it was sometimes necessary to defend their country. In their own words we hear how the absolutists suffered, from imprisonment, abuse and discrimination; what it was like to serve in the Field Ambulance Units or the Parachute Field Ambulance; how people persevered in their campaigning for peace.

After WW2 and the end of conscription, the need for conscientious objection has lessened, but the work for peace goes on. There is a fascinating section on the women of Greenham Common, including comments from the Base Commanders, and the book ends with the massive public objection to the invasion of Iraq. From the great and famous down to the humble unknowns, all the voices are here and demand to be heard.

The Green Zone: the environmental costs of militarism

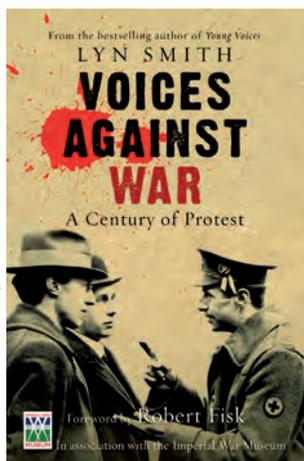
Barry Sanders, AK Press

Given the crisis of climate change, military carbon emissions are a matter of concern, but facts have been hard to come by. Barry Sanders, basing his research on the American military machine, illustrates what an enormous environmental threat all military activity poses.

He gives numerous examples of the pollutants and toxic substances released by the military, from depleted uranium to CFCs (we may have banned chlorofluorocarbons, but the military still use them). There is leaked perchlorate, used in the manufacture of solid rocket fuel, contaminating much of the US food and water supply. The clean-up programme includes 28,000 sites in the US alone. Then there's the oil.

At supersonic speed, the F-15 plane uses 4 gallons of jet fuel per second. The B-52 Stratocruiser uses 3,334 gallons per hour. The B-52H Bomber can carry 47,975 gallons of fuel but still requires mid-air refuelling, and the US Air Force owns 94 of these greedy beasts. Now add in all the petrol used by military vehicles. And all that used by contractors and ancillary civilians.

Bit by bit, Sanders adds the figures together and the totals are startling. In places he uses estimates, and he is clear when he does so. But he must be getting something right, judging by the slating of his work by pro-military people in the States. And even if his figures were only half as bad as he concludes, the result is obvious – the earth and all the life on it simply cannot afford the military any more.



ABOLISH WAR

Newsletter No. 16

Spring 2010

A Million Bullets: the real story of the British Army in Afghanistan James Fergusson, Corgi Books

James Fergusson gives us a picture of the fighting in Afghanistan in 2006 that does not match that given through our media. For all our high-tech weapons, this is the story of a frontier war told by the soldiers themselves, reminiscent of some of Kipling's tales of the Northwest frontier, or forts besieged by Indians in the Wild West. They describe the highs and lows, the desperate holding on under daily attacks, the small triumphs and mismanaged missions, coming to terms with killing for the first time.

It is clear they are proud of their profession, but not so clear what they are achieving. We know about Sangin and Musa Qala, but not about Now Zad, where a small company first of Ghurkhas then Fusiliers were under siege for 5 months. Nor did we know about Operation Augustus, when the Chinook helicopters full of Paratroopers had everything go wrong. At the end, Fergusson shifts the focus with a riveting chapter about spending time among the Taliban. His conversations with them give real insight into their thinking, their belief, above all their certainty that time is on their side. They will win as they always have, against superior weapons, because this is their land. But these men are also Pashtun for whom the guest is sacred so, as Fergusson writes, 'And then I fell asleep, confident that among these people my vulnerability would protect me better than any gun or body armour. Apart from the threat of another Coalition bomb, I could not have been safer.'



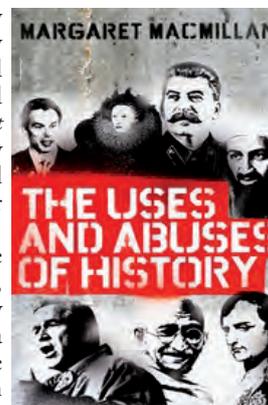
The Uses and Abuses of History

Margaret Macmillan, Profile Books Ltd (2009)

The uses and abuses of history covered by Margaret MacMillan include the popularity and limitations of history on TV and cinema; the way history has been used selectively to suit the 'needs' of current generations; and the way history, particularly military and political, helps form individual and collective identities nationally, or through religious and other organisations. She suggests that history is to some degree always biased, continually being modified, suppressed, and sometimes completely re-invented. No era or geo-political area seems immune, though distortions are clearly worse in some power structures than in others.

Formal history-teaching, even in 'democratic' nations, can be hugely biased. As she points out, textbook publishers often have no compunction in publishing blatantly biased histories. However, she brings in recent initiatives that challenge this – French and German schoolchildren learning from almost identical history textbooks, while a more 'mature' view of national history is evolving in South Africa and Ireland.

The main goals of the book are admirable; complex issues are written in a readable way; while traditional ways of teaching history are challenged, although a reference section would be helpful. This has very relevant implications for organisations such as MAW, particularly when the deliberate distortion of history not only leads to war, but is sometimes intended to lead to war.



**MAW news
please!**

You want to read about events that are not all London-based. **We** want to hear from members around the country, and we want your actions to inspire others. So if you have organised events/actions, or are planning some, and would like to have them reported in the newsletter, then send your news to the editor (see page 2 for contact details)

