

WHO WOULD JESUS SHOOT?

QUAKERS RESPOND TO GUN LAW CONSULTATION

One of the greatest concerns in the UK over recent years has been the increase in crimes in which firearms are used. In May 2004, the Home Office issued a Consultation Paper. The Consultation is now closed, but you can read the consultation paper at:

www.crimereduction.gov.uk/violentstreet4.htm.

The introduction to the consultation reads:

"The possession of firearms, their parts and ammunition in England, Scotland and Wales is regulated by the Firearms Acts 1968-97... The UK already have some of the toughest gun controls in the world. But the legislation has been amended a number of times, and as a result the framework of controls can be difficult to understand and enforce. This consultation paper seeks views on how these controls should be updated."

By August an invitation to comment had filtered through to Wrexham Friends. Time was short, but the following paper was submitted in the last week of August.

RESPONSE OF WREXHAM MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS TO THE HOME OFFICE CONSULTATION PAPER ON CONTROLS ON FIREARMS

As Quakers, we are committed to a belief that war and violence are totally wrong, as being contrary to the spirit of the teachings of Jesus and self-evidently leading to further hatred, as seen recently in the attack on Iraq. Regarding firearms therefore we would urge the greatest possible control and restraint. In particular we would offer four points:

(1) In the recorded crime statistics at page 30 of the Home Office Paper, the increases in crimes using Air and Imitation weapons is comparable to that in those using Handguns; we therefore see no value in treating these groups differently from each other.



(2) It seems to us that the emphasis on lethality is inappropriate. The standard ought to be 'ability to cause serious harm' – which can of course result from a shot from a legally held air weapon of relatively low power.

(3) We can see no justification for **any** guns to be unlicensed, since criminal armourers are able to convert many imitation weapons to fire live ammunition, and even when not converted, the 'threat value' of an imitation weapon is considerable. The whereabouts and ownership of **all** guns should be known to the responsible authorities, whether Police or some other agency. We see no reason why arrangements should not be made as at present for sports/target shooting. Consideration should also be given to crossbows and their power in relation to criminal activity.

(4) We are concerned that the low figure for 2000 UK Firearms homicide at page 25 of the Home Office Paper should not be a ground for complacency, as the table on page 30 shows significant increases between then and 2003 in crimes. **No account appears of the continuing suffering often caused by gunshot wounds in after years.**

In conclusion, we emphasise that the firm message of non-violent living must be central to the life of the nation.

LEGAL UPDATE

In recent issues of WPJN we have reported on the actions of Police during peaceful demonstrations, actions which threaten civil liberties and the right to peaceful protest. Here is a brief update on two cases:

Congratulations to the nine protesters from the University of Wales, Bangor, who peacefully occupied Beaumaris Castle for 30 hours at the end of June, as reported in the last issue of WPJN. They were protesting at the Government's lack of commitment to peace, especially in the occupied countries of Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq. The protesters, initially threatened with charges of Aggravated Trespass, were in the end cautioned and all charges dropped.

Both sides in the Fairford Coach Case (protesters and the Police) are appealing against aspects of the judgement in this case involving the kidnapping of protesters by Police. The appeals were heard in the High Court on October 14th and 15th, but the case rumbles on as judgement was reserved with no final date given for a decision. www.fairfordcoachaction.org.uk

MOLD SOCIAL FORUM

Mold Social Forum was born out of the Mold Stop The War Group in May 2004. So what are social forums then? Social forums are open spaces for discussing alternatives to the dominant neo liberal processes, for exchanging experiences and strengthening alliances among organisations and people's movements. The object of the Mold organisation is to build a local network of activists to organise and assist in local, national and international campaigns and actions for social justice.

Early successes include mobilising local activists to conduct an anti BNP leafleting campaign in Mancot, hosting public meetings on climate change and campaigning on the situation in Iraq. Future plans include an alternative film season, public meetings with our MP and awareness raising in relation to the UK'S own Guantanamo: Belmarsh Prison.

For more details contact Cheryl on:
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COME CLEAN: WMD AWARENESS PROGRAMME

We all know that the WMD issue in Iraq was just a feeble excuse for committing dreadful war crimes in the interests of US Imperialism. But we do need to know where the real WMD are and to get rid of them, not by violence in Iraq where there were no WMD, but peacefully and by negotiation wherever these weapons really are located. So I was very interested to read about an organisation called COME CLEAN, whose WMD Awareness Programme is "dedicated to providing trustworthy and up to date information on weapons of mass destruction world wide."

COME CLEAN was established by Nobel Peace Prize winner Sir Joseph Rotblat, to raise public awareness of US-led developments which are encouraging proliferation of WMD and "putting the world in increasing danger of a nuclear conflict." The WMD Awareness Programme is supported by organisations such as CND, Greenpeace, The Movement for the Abolition of War, Pugwash, Quaker Peace & Social Justice and World Court Project. COME CLEAN believes that we need "to find and eliminate all weapons of mass destruction" and "to build security through international treaties and negotiation... We call on the United Nations: to create a global inventory of all WMD and their production sites; to oversee an international guardianship for all WMD sites. We call on all states to comply with international treaties on WMD."

This last sentence is crucial. With breathtaking hypocrisy, Britain and the US went to war with Iraq, citing Saddam's alleged possession of hidden WMD, while simultaneously threatening to use our own WMD against Iraq in a first strike: "... in the right conditions we would be willing to use our nuclear weapons..." (Geoff Hoon). The fact that we still possess and maintain nuclear weapons 34 years after signing up to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is bad enough. That we threatened to use them in a pre-emptive strike contravenes the United Nations Charter, is contrary to International Humanitarian Law and proves that the UK and US are rogue states which must be brought to book before it's too late. COME CLEAN goes on to say:

"The UN must create an inspection and verification regime to monitor compliance with existing international treaties and law on Chemical, Biological and Nuclear weapons. The inspections must be intrusive, systematic and even handed, with ALL states being subjected to the same regime." Indeed.

Scan across the world map in the interactive HUNT THE WMD section of the COME CLEAN web site www.comeclean.org.uk to discover which countries have nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and no, there are no WMD in Iraq. Other sections of the web site give more detailed information about different types of weapons, numbers, classification and so on, and there is a useful section containing teaching materials for use with older schoolchildren. This web site feels very much like "work in progress". Visitors are encouraged to "find out where your nearest WMD site is and tell us. 'Dish the Dirt on WMD!'" I hope that the intention is to expand the web site to include maps of each country indicating the locations of WMD sites, with information about what happens at each to encourage local campaigning.

In September, Owen Hardwicke attended a COME CLEAN event in London on the subject of "Global Security in the 21st Century". Owen writes:

"There were several hundred people attending - all the great and the good from the many peace movements, including a retired General and Tony Benn. Professor Sir Joseph Rotblat spoke with his usual dignity and commitment as an ex-atomic scientist. Ex-President Gorbachev was so warmly welcomed and spoke for an hour. From every angle: moral, scientific, economic and military, it was shown how counter-productive was the continuation of nuclear weapons possession (and worse, of development) by the great powers. A new coalition will now further a campaign... to create a global inventory of all WMD and their production sites; to oversee guardianship for all WMD sites and to pressurise all states to comply with international treaties on WMD. Central to the coalition will be the much respected Pugwash scientists."



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