

WHAT'S GOING ON AT ALDERMASTON?

On a chilly but thankfully dry October weekend, WPJF members Gay, Liz and Genny visited Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp(aign) (AWPC) in Berkshire. AWPC meets monthly at Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) to protest about the illegal and immoral business that goes on there. We arrived on Friday night and camped with several other women at Bluebell Wood, between the perimeter fence and a busy A road. On Saturday we were joined by more campaigners, who arrived for the day bearing trays of delicious vegan food.

These are some of the things we learned about what goes on behind the fence... and who goes over it!

WHO RUNS ALDERMASTON AWE?

AWE is at the rotten core of Britain's shameful nuclear weapons industry and has been for more than 50 years. Although the site is owned by the Ministry of Defence, a consortium of three private companies: British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., Lockheed Martin and Serco now manages the site. BNFL is responsible for leaky nuclear power stations like Sellafield, and has been criticised in many damning reports for its appalling safety record; Lockheed Martin is an American company and the world's largest arms dealer and war profiteer; Serco started with a contract to run the Ballistic Missiles Warning System in RAF Fylingdales 30 years back, but now also runs all manner of establishments like prisons, school canteens and leisure centres at minimum cost and for maximum profit under government privatisation initiatives. When the Aldermaston contract was awarded in 2000, a BBC news report observed that *"recent criticisms of BNFL and Lockheed's safety record led to demands that the government delay its decision to award the 10-year, £2.2bn management contract to AWE Management. But the MoD has given the go-ahead to the consortium in the belief that the safety of Aldermaston will not be compromised."* More on safety at Aldermaston later.

The official AWE web site www.awe.co.uk proudly proclaims that *"AWE covers the whole life cycle of nuclear warheads, in a single establishment. This includes initial concept and design, through component manufacture and assembly, to in-service support and, finally, decommissioning and disposal."* So, be in no doubt. This is the hub of the nuclear arms industry in Britain, along with its sister base Burghfield, 7 miles down the road.

NUKEWATCH www.nukeinfo.org.uk

Nuclear warheads are manufactured and assembled at Aldermaston and Burghfield, stored and fitted to the submarines at the Royal Naval Armament Depot at Coulport in Scotland, and then returned to Berkshire for servicing and decommissioning, so these lethal weapons are transported, with obvious risks to us all, up and down the country along Britain's road network including the busy and dangerous M6. Other Special Nuclear Materials convoys deliver nuclear materials such as Tritium to Aldermaston or take nuclear materials from Aldermaston to be 'disposed of' elsewhere. The nuclear warhead convoys are escorted to and from Scotland by Ministry of Defence Police under Naval command.

Nukewatch UK is a network of concerned citizens who monitor nuclear warhead and nuclear materials movements around Britain. Activists sometimes stop the convoy along the way, demonstrating its vulnerability to attack and sabotage, and protesters have discovered convoys parked up overnight at insecure military bases with inadequate protection and supervision. The latest MoD plan involves driving the whole distance from Berkshire to Coulport without an overnight stop, but this is unlikely to prevent protestors from monitoring the convoy and arranging to "meet" it along the way or at least on arrival in Scotland.

A RADIOACTIVE WASTE BIN



Medium level waste is stored in these buildings

Low level waste is burned at Aldermaston and released into the atmosphere. The discharges fall on the surrounding environment, contaminating a wide area around the site. Solid low level waste is sent to other sites by road on low loader flat bed trucks or in container vehicles, while liquid waste is sent along a pipeline and discharged into the River Thames at Pangbourne. Low level sludge waste is sent to a nearby sewage works at Silchester, and plans to close the pipeline and to dispose of aqueous waste via a new plant will result in increased Tritium discharges in the domestic sewerage system. Two huge warehouses on the site house drums of intermediate level waste. There are high levels of Plutonium in the soil around the site, and worrying clusters of cancers and leukaemias in the local population.

NUCLEAR TESTING AT ALDERMASTON

In February 2002, AWE took part in an underground nuclear test at Los Alamos in the US, contravening agreements made at the 2000 Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, which included a moratorium on nuclear explosions. An Aldermaston spokesperson also told the Guardian in 2002 that planned new facilities on the site including a new laser facility (Orion) would give AWE the capacity to design and produce "mini-nukes", which have been described, worryingly, as "useable" nuclear weapons. Along with most of the activities at Aldermaston AWE, these plans fly in the face of Britain's previous pledges to disarm.

JOIN THE BLOCK THE BUILDERS CAMPAIGN

WOMEN'S PEACE CAMP

www.aldermastonwpc.gn.apc.org

From the web site: "Aldermaston Women's Peace Campaign (AWPC) is... a women-only campaign, committed to non-violence and against militarism. AWPC's ultimate aim is to stop the production of Britain's nuclear weapons at AWE Aldermaston, and to see the site shut down and safely decommissioned. We campaign using a wide range of tactics from writing letters to non-violent direct action."

One really important thing that AWPC does is to keep an eye on what's going on at the base. Women frequently climb over the 3 metre high fences, negotiating barbed wire and razor wire to gain entry to the site. Once in, they draw attention to unsafe practices at AWE, carry out citizens' inspections of the base, and look out for new developments. The benefit of climbing over the fences rather than cutting a way in is that the fence remains intact and you cannot be arrested for criminal damage.

All women are welcome to stay at the Camps. Men are welcome during daylight hours. The next camp will take place 10 - 12 December. If you're planning to go along, don't forget your hot water bottle (HWB)!

BLOCK THE BUILDERS

www.blockthebuilders.org.uk

Earlier this year, the local Thatcham Planning Committee gave Outline Planning Permission to the MoD's proposal to build the Orion Laser at AWE in spite of hundreds of letters of protest pointing out the illegality of such a development and demanding a public inquiry. Although some preparatory work already seems to have started on the site, the main building work cannot begin until Full Planning Permission is given. There is no reason to suspect that Thatcham Planning Committee will do other than rubber stamp this detailed application to build Orion when it is submitted.

Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp has launched the **Block the Builders Campaign**, (reported in WPJN Issue 8), and much of the discussion round the fire at the weekend was about how this will be organised and co-ordinated. People all over the country are being asked to support the campaign by signing a pledge to take part in a blockade of AWE, either in an "arrestable" capacity, by blockading the gates to the base for example, or in a "supporting" role, perhaps as a legal observer, trainer or prop-maker.

Block the Builder actions will begin on the Monday after building work commences on the new laser, with the aim of drawing public attention to the development and stopping it from going ahead. In order for this campaign to succeed, as many people as possible need to pledge their support. Several training camps will be held at Aldermaston between now and then, beginning with "Spook the Base" weekend at Halloween.



Cartoon by Nick Watson: www.zmag.org/cartoons

To sign up to Block the Builders and for the latest information about the campaign, visit the web site, email btb@aldermaston.net or write to BtB, c/o AWPC, 5 Caledonian Rd, London, N1 9DY. Block the Builders also desperately need funds. Make cheques payable to AWPC, but send with a note to say that the donation is for BtB and send to: AWPC c/o 18 Greenway Rd, Bristol, BS6 6SG.

IRAQ FORCED TO COMPENSATE TOYS 'R' US

We have discussed the overwhelming mountain of debt facing the Iraqi people before: see WPJN Issue 2 (Jul-Aug 2003). Recently, more shocking information about debt repayment has come to light, reported by Naomi Klein in "The Guardian" 16 Oct 2004. Since April 2003 Iraq has paid over \$1.8 billion in war reparations (following the 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein) to some of the richest countries and corporations in the world. This invasion was not carried out by or for the Iraqi people but by their former dictator.

The beneficiaries of this bounty, administered by the UNCC (United Nations Compensation Committee) include: The occupying powers - \$37m has gone to Britain and \$32.8m to the United States; major corporations such as Halliburton (\$18m), Bechtel (\$7m), Mobil (\$2.3m), Shell (\$1.6m), Nestlé (\$2.6m), Pepsi (\$3.8m), Philip Morris (\$1.3m), Sheraton (\$11m), and believe it or not, Kentucky Fried Chicken (\$321,000) and Toys R Us (\$189,449). In the vast majority of cases, these corporations did not claim that Saddam's forces damaged their property in Kuwait - only that they "lost profits" or experienced a "decline in business".

It is a sad reflection on the twisted values of our world that the likes of Toys R Us can be paid thousands of dollars for "lost profits" when Iraq is a wasteland following the rule of Saddam, two wars and twelve years of sanctions. Where is the compensation for the Iraqis who have lost tens of thousands of their people in an illegal war, with tens of thousands more injured, ill and malnourished, and over half a million children under the age of 5 killed by sanctions?