

"A SOFTENING-UP PROCESS"

Peaceful campaigners are so often charged with threatening the peace, while the Army killing machine is presented as being all about peacekeeping. I think they've got peace muddled up with status quo. Anyway, at least one soldier wasn't under any illusions. "Peace?" he said with incredulity, looking at our flag. "What're you doing **here?**"

As well as protesting at the Recruitment Fair, Wrexham Peace & Justice Forum has also contacted local schools to offer speakers to work with pupils on matters of peace and justice, peace-building career paths and the reality of Army life.

In the US, there has been a great deal of protest about the presence of Army recruiters on school campuses. For example, in Seattle, a local high school's Parent Teacher Association has recently adopted a resolution that "*public [state] schools are not a place for military recruiters,*" and campaigners used the Army recruitment 'Stand Down' day on May 20th to hold protests at Army recruitment offices, high schools and colleges across the US.



www.NoDraftNoWay.org comments on US Army recruitment of Latino American children.

In the US, the *No Child Left Behind Act* requires high schools receiving federal funding to supply recruiters with the names of its pupils; the Supreme Court has also recently agreed to rule on whether funding can be withheld from schools which ban military recruiters from their campuses. So there is a lot to protest about in the US, but the situation this side of the Atlantic is really not much better, although it attracts hardly any complaint or protest apart from the occasional demonstration at university-based army recruitment events. From schools, we hear not a murmur of objection.

The Army is in the process of setting up a web site to promote its work in schools. In the meantime, there is a helpful page of information about the Army in schools on this web site http://www.ebea.org.uk/ebea/enterprise/page_15.htm. Although not written by the Army, I'm quite sure it's an accurate reflection of how things are and has the Army's full approval:

"The Army have [*sic*] a remit to make links with schools in the UK. The objectives of these links are 2 fold: **Recruitment [and] public relations...** the Army are **more than willing** to visit schools to support enterprise

*activities in any area of the curriculum. Alternatively the Army are willing to **take students off site** and organise a visit to Army facilities... The greatest advantage of links with the Army Careers Service are that they **really want to get into schools and colleges.** The Army expects teachers to deal with disciplinary problems ... but their **personnel are very forgiving about student behaviour...** In the first instance invite your Army Careers officer to come into school... ensure that you **give the officer a chance to suggest activities...** Wrap up the visit with a more formal meeting where you **write down** what you understand the Army are willing to support... and **any other activities that they suggest.**" (my bold).*

So, the Army goes into schools to recruit and to improve its image. No pretence about offering anything to pupils, then. The Army is so desperate to get into schools and colleges that it has made up programmes to fit every area of the curriculum and doesn't care too much about whether the kids behave or not. Recruiters will take over classes for hard-pressed teachers and will even bus the kids off to an army camp for a while. They ask to be invited to an informal meeting where they can set the agenda and suggest how the pupils are to be indoctrinated, and then to be invited back for a formal meeting to get it in writing. I would say that the Army has it fairly well stitched-up.



School visits are only part of the Army's armoury of recruitment ammunition. The Army regularly recruits in town centres including Wrexham on Saturdays and during school holidays. When desperate, it organises expensive events like the one at Chirk Airfield. It has a web site called My Camouflage www.mycamouflage.co.uk, aimed at children aged 13+, with shoot'em-up games, lots of stuff about tanks and guns, freebies and video propaganda. It runs the Army Cadet Force, which has over 40,000 members in 1,700 units, and which gets children into military activities and uniform from the tender age of 12. It has a magazine, *ARMY*, the key objective of which is "to encourage teenage boys and girls under the recruitment age of 16 to move from a simple 'interest' in the Army to a position where they actively consider a career."

ARMY won the Association of Publishers 2004 Award for Most Effective Public Sector Title for being "on brand and appropriate" according to the judges, who also praised its "innovative format and balanced and informative articles." I can't imagine this balance extends to articles about how recruits under the age of 18 have to stay in the Army well into adulthood, or about what soldiers should do if they think they're being asked to carry out illegal orders.

Bill Hetherington, of the *Peace Pledge Union* sums up these shameless Army recruitment activities with young people as "a softening up process before the 16th birthday... the younger the better." ∪

STOP ARMY USING KIDS

Britain is the only Western European country where under 18s may be sent to fight, even though this is at odds with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Although Article 38 of the Convention states only that 'Governments should not allow children under 15 to join the army', Article 32 requires additionally that 'the Government should protect children [all those under 18] from work that is dangerous', while Article 19 places a responsibility on Governments to 'ensure that children are properly cared for, and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.' This places a duty of care on the MoD towards all recruits under the age of 18, yet no less than 92 recruits died between 1982 and 1999 while in the armed forces, some of them on the battlefield.

A recent Quaker submission to the Defence Select Committee in the wake of the Deepcut scandal concludes that "the disproportionate number of deaths of young people in the army is an indication that the Ministry of Defence is manifestly failing in its duty of care towards young recruits." The submission urges the government to "end enlistment into the armed forces below the age of 18."

I would add: "and put an end to all propaganda activities aimed at or involving children."



Young children used in an online advert for The Aldershot Army Show 2005.

Can you help WPJF, either in our work with young people in schools or in action against Army recruitment practices? If you want to get involved, please contact us (details on back cover). ■

EU CONSTITUTION IS A TREATY FOR WARMONGERS

Recent referendums in France and The Netherlands have shown the people of those countries to be decisively against the proposed European Constitutional Treaty (ECT), despite heavy propaganda from governments and the media. I was not clear about the issues, finding it difficult to get to the actual wording of the 350-page ECT through all the spin.

I've discovered, through research on the Internet, (largely on blogs; these issues seem to have been ignored by the corporate media) that the ECT demands all states' subservience to NATO: "Member states shall undertake progressively to improve their military capacities." (Article 1-40-3). Article 1-40-2 says that European defence policy shall be compatible with members' NATO obligations, a direct recognition of the superior status of that unelected, unaccountable military organisation. The article continues "participating member states shall work in close collaboration with NATO". I'm not sure how this squares with the declared neutrality of some members, e.g. Ireland and Austria. Even in situations of "internal serious disturbances affecting public order, in cases of war or of the threat of war", member states are obliged to work together in order to avoid affecting the functioning of the internal market!

Perhaps even more disturbing is clause 17 of the third section, regarding the question of the break-up of public services: It is permitted that a member state can be in favour of maintaining a public service. But public services have "the effect of distorting the conditions of competition in the internal market, [and] the Commission shall, together with the state concerned, examine how these steps can be adjusted to the rules laid down in the Constitution."

The ECT attempts to enshrine military build-up and the break-up of public services within the very fabric of Europe. Well done to the people of France and The Netherlands for their opposition to this profoundly undemocratic treaty.



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