
NO MORE ARMY AT NEWTOWN FESTIVAL?

The Newtown Festival in mid-Wales is a community arts and culture festival, but in recent years the Army has had an increasingly large recruiting presence, undermining the peaceful nature of the event. Last year, the Army were placed right next to the children's play area, and soldiers were seen handing out spent bullets to small children, which was clearly inappropriate and generated many complaints to the Festival organisers.

This year's Army presence was to be bigger than ever, with five regiments on site, co-ordinated by Tony Watson from the Army Careers Office in Wrexham. The Mid-Wales Peace Group applied through the legitimate channels to have a stall at the Festival but, in a move which clearly undermined the principle of free speech, the request was refused, even though the group is non-party political and promotes peace. This is a decision which Festival Organisers, and certainly the Army, may now regret, since the actions carried out by activists on Saturday were far more effective than a simple stall would have been.

Tim and Genny from Wrexham Peace and Justice Forum joined Mid-Wales Peace Group to stage hugely successful Peace actions at the Festival. We set up our stall right in front of the Army Recruitment trailers, flying peace flags and banners, and remained there for the whole of Saturday, virtually isolating the Army behind us. Hardly anyone except for a few small boys made their way over the Army recruitment area, and they shut up shop soon after 4pm. We understand they had gone home by 3.15pm on Sunday too!

We laid paper plate "landmines" across the field to draw attention to the terrible effects of these weapons, millions of which have been laid by British soldiers. Landmines maim and kill twenty-five thousand people every year, including many children, and render huge areas of otherwise productive agricultural land unusable. People approaching the Army Recruitment area across the "mined" field were addressed with a megaphone and advised not to continue.

Other protesters invited people to add their thoughts to a "Peace A-Z" and to a Peace Dove, and leaflets were handed out throughout the festival to explain the actions and to outline reasons not to join the Army. Activists also joined the Festival Parade with their banners, and staged a "funeral march" around the site with a white coffin painted with a very long list of all the countries which have been at war in the allegedly peaceful years since the end of World War II.



All in all it was a very successful day in the sun in a lovely Welsh town. We hope the Army will realise in future that there is no place for them at peaceful family events.



IS POST-WAR IRAQ GOVERNABLE?

The continuing loss of life and chaos in Iraq prompts the question: Is it really possible for an occupying force to govern post-war Iraq? Also, were the governments of the U.S. and U.K. adequately prepared to administer a post-Saddam Iraq? After years of Baath Party control, can sufficient competent Iraqi administrators be found who are acceptable to their compatriots and to the occupying forces? If Iraqis were to choose their own government, would they elect an Islamic one? And if they did, would this government be recognised by the U.S. and U.K. governments? Why is there so little involvement of the United Nations in administering post-war Iraq? What is really meant by "liberation"?

Please send your thoughts on these questions to us for the next edition: contact details on back page.