

Diary Dates

Monday 16 April, 7.30pm

**Talk on
Peace activism in the US
with Joe Fahey**

Professor at the International Peace
Bureau in Manhattan

**St Mary's Cathedral Hall,
Regent St, Wrexham**

Also 17 (Llandudno) and 18 (Bangor)
Owen Hardwicke: 01978 312375

Monday 23 - Tuesday 24 April

**Faslane 365 blockade
All-Wales group**

Contact WPJF for more info.

Thursday 26 April, 6.30pm

**WPJF Planning Meeting
Quaker Meeting House, Holt Rd,
Wrexham**

Sunday 29 April, 9.30am

**Red Rope Walk: Ruthin
6.5 mile walk**

Simon Sait: sksait@btinternet.com

Saturday 5 May, 8pm

**Live Salsa Benefit
with Salsa pa' Gozar**

www.salsapagozar.co.uk

Organised by the Clywd Latin
America Human Rights Group

Clywd Theatr Cymru, Mold

Tickets £8 and £6 (concessions)

For advance tickets: 01352 740642
or 01244 531702

Sunday 20 May, 9.30am

**Red Rope Walk: Cnicht
The 'Welsh Matterhorn'**

Simon Sait: sksait@btinternet.com

Monday 21 May, 6.30pm

**WPJF Planning Meeting
Quaker Meeting House, as above**

Saturday 2 June, 10am-4.30pm

**WPJF stall at
'Volunteer Extravaganza'**

Queen's Sq/Llwyn Isaf, Wrexham
Helpers needed to look after the stall.
Contact WPJF: 0845 330 4505

Army recruitment

by Genny Bove

Members of Wrexham Peace & Justice Forum, along with a group of young people, spent a morning trying to ensure that army recruits are fully informed of terms and conditions before they sign up. This leafleting and banner action has since been followed up with press work and letter-writing, focusing on the undesirable and unacceptable nature of army recruitment activities which target children.

Wrexham "full of tanks"

It's February 24th 2007, the day of the national march and demonstration in London calling for troops to be brought home from Iraq and for no Trident replacement. I opted out of the long coach journey south the other day in favour of supporting the small action planned in Aberystwyth, but I haven't got there either.

Having been ill on and off all winter, I don't feel well enough to stand around in the stiff seaside breeze the weather reporters have promised in Aber, so instead I'm sitting at home in the warm. I'm starting to feel guilty for failing to support either of these events, when Alan comes through the door and declares that Wrexham town centre is "full of tanks." Either we've been invaded or there's an army recruitment drive in town. On the balance of probabilities, I decide it's the latter and that we should do something about it.

An hour later, after several hurried phone calls and much rooting around in my extensive banner and leaflet collections, I'm on my way to town to meet up with others who, like me, haven't quite made it to the national demos. As we arrive in Queen's Square, we're joined by a group of friendly teenagers who hold our banners and flags, hand out leaflets and, as they have the youthful confidence to express their concerns about army recruitment loudly and clearly, I begin to wish I'd had the foresight to bring our megaphone.

The army has taken over most of Queen's Square with a semicircle arrangement of recruitment trailer and two army vehicles. I'm not at all knowledgeable about war machines but one of the vehicles looks like it fires great big rockets. A portable staircase allows even very small children to make their way up into the cab of this machine to play soldiers, while round the other side, a banner confirms my suspicions about the purpose of the vehicle (pictured) and

I wonder at the process of desensitisation which must go on in the army, and perhaps in our society generally, for all these men in uniform to think that it's a good idea to have children playing on a killing machine.

Read on...



Multiple Launched Rocket System

Press release

Our press release from the morning of the action included this:

Hundreds of leaflets were handed out, mainly to young people and their parents, detailing the realities of army life. One leaflet, produced by national advice agency AT EASE, alerted young recruits to the binding contracts which can tie them into the army from before their 18th birthday until the age of 22 or later. A second leaflet outlined some of the dangers not usually highlighted by army recruiters, including the bullying regimes at army training barracks, the possible consequences - court martial and life-imprisonment - for soldiers who refuse to fight in an illegal war, and the lack of care shown by the Ministry of Defence towards serving soldiers and ex-servicemen and women.

Campaigners also put up a large banner in protest at the army's use of weapons of mass slaughter for children's entertainment...

and was, as far as we know, universally ignored by our local mainstream media.



WPJF banner on display in front of the recruitment trailer

Letter to the press

The local papers often cover stories about recruitment activities, especially those involving children, in an uncritical and pro-military manner, and I was determined that our viewpoint should be put across somehow. I wrote a letter, which was circulated hurriedly around local peace groups and email lists; by the time it was sent to the press, it had been signed by 24 peace activists from across North Wales and beyond.

The letter was printed in its entirety in the *Wrexham Mail*, *Evening Leader* and weekly *Leader*, although the latter two changed 'unlucky children' to 'someone unlucky' (to find cluster bombs - see below). Of course anyone can be a victim of cluster bombs, but it is mainly children. Presumably this was considered too shocking a fact for *Leader* readers.

The letter read:

We wish to object in the strongest terms to the presence of war machines in our town centres as part of the army's recruitment activities.

Last Friday and Saturday, the army was in Queen's Square, Wrexham, along with a Multiple Launched Rocket System (MLRS). The MLRS is a vehicle used in war zones to fire cluster bombs distances of up to 30km. As many readers will know, cluster bombs break up in mid-air, spreading hundreds of cluster bomblets over an area the size of several football pitches. Many of these bomblets fail to explode on impact and these lie on the ground until unlucky children come across them. When cluster bomblets explode, they fragment into hundreds of razor-sharp pieces of steel which can decapitate the victim, sever limbs

and cause many other terrible injuries. The organisation Handicap International estimates that 98% of all victims of cluster munitions are non-combatants.

With the UK committing itself just last Friday in Oslo to work with 45 other nations towards a new international treaty banning cluster bombs, it is ignorant and insensitive of the army to encourage our children to play on a war machine which is responsible for maiming and killing children in other countries.

Wrexham Peace & Justice Forum was also present in Queen's Square on Saturday at the recruitment event, handing out leaflets about the realities of army life and displaying a banner which pointed out that 'war is NOT family entertainment.' Please, British Army, don't bring your war machines into our town centres.

We are now following this up with letters to the regiment involved in this recruiting exercise - 39 Regiment Royal Artillery - and the Wrexham army recruitment office.

Worthwhile action?

As well as displaying our banners, leafleting and writing letters, we had many interesting conversations with parents, potential recruits, and with those who were already enlisted, including one soldier in multi, who said he had been sent to Iraq without vital kit, as described in our leaflet. If we have encouraged just one young person to think again or to double-check the terms of the contract before they sign up, it will have been worthwhile. What I hope is that our actions and letters have helped people to begin to think critically about the presence of the army in our town centres, schools and colleges.

Army is 'desperate'

An article in the *New Statesman* (Stephen Armstrong, 5 Feb 2007) describes how the British army is on a "desperate recruitment drive", offering 'encounter days' to 14-16 year olds in schools. Afterwards, the pupils receive a certificate. "On the back there's a list of local recruiting offices, and it comes with a DVD, recruiting brochures and a glossy teen magazine called *Camouflage*."

Nearly 20% of the army's new recruits have been *Camouflage* members. "They get books, a kitbag, access to a members-only website with military games,... Christmas cards from the recruiting officer and when they leave school there is an invitation to pop in to see Army Careers for a chat."

Armstrong describes "an army that actively recruits 14-year-olds" as "something usually associated with some of the world's more troubled states", but goes on to point out that the British army is now targeting children half that age. The head of the army's recruitment strategy, Colonel David Allfrey: "Our new model is about raising awareness, and that takes a ten-year span. It starts with a seven-year-old boy seeing a parachutist at an air show and thinking, 'That looks great.' From then the army is trying to build interest by drip, drip, drip."

Wrexham high schools, including Darland and Rhosnesni, have been targeted by the army's new drive. A recent article in the *Evening Leader* (12 Mar) reported that the troops arrived at the schools with tanks, and one picture shows the children being given a talk about weapons with guns lined up on the ground pointing straight at them. WPJN has also received reports of children who do not want to take part in such exercises being put under pressure by teachers to do so.

All this is wholly unacceptable. With so much current concern over youth gun culture, it seems incongruous for the army to be welcomed into schools to show off its weapons. We need to find ways to challenge these practices at every level and keep the army away from our kids.