

Three reasons to be hopeful

by Owen Hardwicke

While much of the political news is regularly depressing, we should perhaps take heart from the inadequately reported items which indicate that there are plenty of people who are determined not to leave it all to the politicians. Here are three items to encourage us.

(1) Hello Peace

In November 2000, when the Intifada was raging, a young Israeli woman tried to call an Israeli friend, but a man answered and said she had the wrong number. She asked who it was, and the man said he was an Arab living in Gaza. Instead of hanging up, the woman asked him how he was. He said he was very bad, his wife was pregnant and their town was under a curfew. They ended up talking for about 20 minutes. They were talking just as individuals and at the end of the conversation he said he was amazed that Jewish people were able to talk like that; he thought they wanted all Palestinians dead.

The following day the man called her back and left a message saying that talking to her had made a real difference in the way he was thinking. He gave the number to his brother, who also called her; then he gave it to some of his friends.

Then she heard of the Parents' Circle Families Forum, a group of bereaved Israeli and Palestinian parents working together for peace and reconciliation, and took an idea to them. It took a while to organise but in October 2002 they launched "Hello



Hello Peace: www.hellopeace.net

Peace", a freephone number where callers hear a voice message:

"You have reached Hello Shalom, Hello Salaam. If you wish to talk to an Israeli or Palestinian about reconciliation, tolerance and peace, dial 1 or 2."

Callers telephone each other after terrorist attacks, or army actions on the West Bank to be sure a friend is OK. Since its launch, over half a million people have used the service.

(2) Iran/US dialogue

A delegation of 13 U.S. Christian leaders travelled to Iran in February to meet Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to foster dialogue between Iran and the U.S. and promote a diplomatic solution to

tensions between the two countries. The trip was organised by the Mennonite Central Committee and the American Friends Service Committee.

Others participating included Sojourners, the Episcopal, Catholic and United Methodist churches, the national Council of Churches and Pax Christi USA.

(3) Finding peaceful ways forward

Established at the suggestion of Ministry for Peace, a new All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) has been established dedicated to the study of conflict issues with a view to finding practical non-violent ways forward.

The inaugural meeting was held on 6 February and chaired by Simon Hughes (Lib. Dem.) There were two speakers: Sir Jeremy Greenstock, the career diplomat and former UK Representative to the United Nations, and Mary Kaldor, the co-director of the Centre for the Study of Global Governance at London School of Economics.

A short report is available from Owen Hardwicke, telephone 01978 312375.

A women's peace group?

by Genny Bove

Do we need a women's group?

There used to be a number of thriving peace groups in Wrexham in the mid-80s, including a women's peace group. Some of the members of this group were also members of the general peace group; others belonged only to the women's group, while a few really committed campaigners belonged to both groups and the Christian peace group to boot!

I've been thinking for a while about the possibility of re-launching a women-only peace group in Wrexham, not because I want to work exclusively with women - the work of Wrexham Peace & Justice Forum is important to me and I don't intend to give this up - but because I think that

women have particular strengths when we work together, which are sometimes lost in mixed groups. Also, I believe that there are women who would prefer to join a women's group rather than a mixed group, so we may end up with more peace activists in Wrexham than at present.

Just as a group working from a Christian perspective will bring its own emphasis to peace campaigning, a women's group will have unique qualities which could make a really positive contribution to peace work in Wrexham.

So far, around ten women have expressed an interest in joining such a group, which I think is probably enough to make the idea feasible.

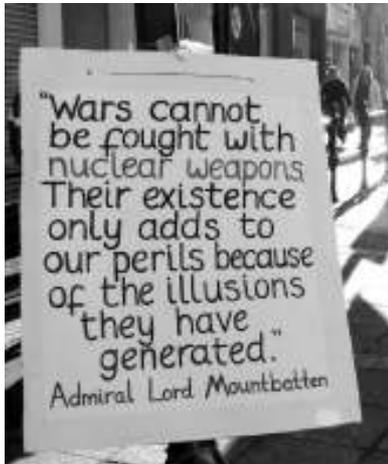
Calling more women!

This is a chance to get involved in a new group from the outset, to help shape it and make it what we want it to be. You don't need to have loads of free time - just a bit! - and you don't need to be prepared to be arrested. We will need people to do all sorts of things. Please let us know if you can help in any way at all - maybe you can't get to meetings but would like to help with letter-writing, email or telephone work.

If you're interested, or want more information, call:
Genny - **0845 330 4505**
or email
vg@genny.force9.co.uk.

Local MPs vote for nuclear weapons

Both Ian Lucas and Martyn Jones supported the government on the recent vote in Parliament on the replacement of Trident. Lucas was quoted as saying: *"I have always taken the view that disarmament is best brought about by multilateral actions, rather than unilateral actions."* Yes, this is working so well that nearly 40 years after the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was signed, we don't seem to be any nearer world nuclear disarmament. It doesn't matter how many we have - one warhead or hundreds - while we have nuclear weapons, other countries will want them too, and having nuclear warheads around puts every one of us in danger, wherever we are.



This quote (above) from Lord Mountbatten sums up the problem, which is also eloquently put by CND: *"It is like storing dynamite in your cellar as a means of protecting yourself against burglars. You will go up with the burglar."* Exactly.

Nuclear madness

Speculation about a new generation of 'usable' nuclear weapons should be ringing alarm bells for all of us, wherever we live in the world. It might be comforting for people to believe that they can fire a nuclear missile without fear of repercussions, but it's just not true. We saw how the accident at Chernobyl affected us here in Wales. Results of tests on the atmosphere at Aldermaston, obtained (with difficulty) under the Freedom of Information Act by Chris Busby, show that there were huge peaks in uranium levels which coincided with the bombing raids on Tora Bora, Afghanistan in 2002, and with the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Busby's paper (available on request from the Low Level Radiation Campaign: www.llrc.org) concludes that the increased levels measured in England are a result of the use of uranium weapons in Afghanistan and Iraq, with weapons-derived uranium oxide travelling thousands of miles in the air. Afghanistan and Iraq have been polluted forever; civilians and soldiers have been affected and many children are born with deformities and cancers. Now we must face the fact that the fallout is affecting us too.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

Perhaps it is only to be expected that an administration which has so blatantly flouted international law to wage wars of aggression would be unconcerned about its obligations under an international treaty signed in 1968, but nevertheless it is galling to hear Labour politicians (amongst them Martyn Jones in his Johnstown office and Kim Howells on Channel 4 News after the Trident vote) claiming that Britain complies with the NPT.

All countries with nuclear weapons are in violation of the NPT. Nearly 40 years after the NPT was signed and over 10 years after the International Court of Justice declared that the nuclear weapon states have *"an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control"*, no negotiations aimed at the abolition of nuclear weapons have even been started, let alone made any progress towards abolition.

Canvassing local views

WPJF held a stall in Wrexham town centre in February, and another with peace campaigners in Oswestry in March. As well as collecting signatures on a petition against the replacement of Trident, we invited passers-by to share their thoughts on possible alternative uses for the £25,000,000,000 initial cost of Trident replacement, at a time when public services are crumbling all around us.

The suggestions were many and varied and included:

- "More money spent on schools, nurses and social welfare."
- "Stop the closure of residential homes."
- "Renovating run-down areas in inner cities, especially where the population is Asian. What are we offering Muslim youth?"
- "Save Plas Madoc!"

by Genny Bove



- "Money should be spent on organisations to help neglected children."
- "Anything but this!" ... and...
- "Free issue of CDs worldwide of Sir Humphrey Appleby's 'Yes, Prime Minister' advocacy of Trident" (which is very revealing!)

London protests

The protests in London before and during the vote in Parliament were creative and pointed. Greenpeace activists displayed huge 'Tony loves WMD' banners from a crane; people from the Aldermaston 'Block the Builders' campaign locked onto concrete-filled dustbins painted with the words 'Bin Trident', and the critical mass bike ride had a cycling fish theme. The vote is by no means the end; rather, it marks the start of a new phase in what is already a huge upsurge in anti-nuclear protest. You can help by supporting the all-Wales blockade at Faslane on 23-4 April. Contact WPJF for more info.



Britain needs Trident like a fish needs a bicycle. Critical Mass, London.