

Summer Diary of Events

Monday 9 July
6.15pm

**Wrexham
Peace & Justice Forum**
Planning Meeting at Quaker
Meeting House, Holt Rd,
Wrexham.

For dates of future meetings,
call 0845 330 4505 or email
wrexhamsaw@yahoo.com

Thursday 12 July
7pm

Wrexham Women for Peace
Informal meeting in the Swan
pub, Abbot Street, Wrexham.
All women welcome.
See page 5 for contact details
of this group.

Sunday 15 July
7.30pm

Anti-War Theatre Group
performs 'The Boy Who
Dropped an Egg on the World'
at Alexander's Jazz Bar,
Rufus Court, Chester.
Tickets £7/£5
Box office: 01244 340005
www.jackshardrub.co.uk

26-30 July
5-day camp

**BANg Faslane Youth Action
Academy**
At Faslane/Coulport, Scotland.
Young people aged 16-28
(approx.) are invited to take
part in the camp.
For more information,
see page 4.

All of August
Normal library opening hours

**Drawing Paradise on
'the Axis of Evil'**
Prints by Emily Johns on the
theme of Iran will be on display
in Wrexham Library foyer.
For more information,
see page 9.

4-11 August
Daily

National Eisteddfod, Mold
Welsh speakers and learners
needed on the CND stall.
Call Del/Kate on 01974 831575

Monday 6 August
From 5pm

**Wrexham Women for Peace
Remember Hiroshima**
Meet at 5pm at Tuttle Street
Car Park (by St Giles link road)
to scatter petals on the brook.
Afterwards, there will be a
picnic in the Peace Garden on
Holt Street, with storytelling.
Supportive men, women and
children are welcome at both
events.

10-12 August
3-day camp

**'El Sueño Existe'
Victor Jara Festival**
Celebration of Latin American
politics, culture and music.
Machynlleth
Tickets £25 including camping.
www.elsuenoexiste.com

Late August

**Possible Wales blockade at
Faslane 365**
For more information,
see page 4.

Saturday 22 September
All day

All Wales Peace Festival at
Y Galeri, Caernarfon.
Organised by Arfon Peace &
Justice Group.
For more information, call
01286 882134 or email
benica@gn.apc.org

1 October

Big Blockade at Faslane
For more information,
see page 4.

Army Replies to WPJF

In the last issue, we reported on our protest at the army encouraging young children to play on its killing machines in Wrexham town centre. We wrote to complain and have now (10 weeks later) received a reply, which includes the following:

We welcome any feedback on the activities we carry out in the public domain and appreciate that with the very nature of our profession, what we do does not always sit comfortably with some sections of society. On this occasion, 39 Regiment Royal Artillery were carrying out a legitimate and authorised display, using the Multiple Launch Rocket System in Wrexham town centre. This enabled groups of people to see an important piece of Army equipment close up, and those who wanted to could climb over the vehicle with the help of the Royal Artillery team. The aim of this kind of activity is to build awareness about the Army within the wider community, in turn showing just a small cross section of the capabilities we use.

We continue to visit towns and cities throughout the UK, to give the public the opportunity to meet our professional soldiers to enable them to make their own informed conclusions about the Army.

If anyone would like to respond and explain how they feel about the army bringing war machines into their town centre, then the address to write to is:
Lt. Col. Liz Walters
Commander Regional Recruiting
The Barracks, Brecon, Powys
LD3 7EA.

One wonders why, if the army is so committed to encouraging people to draw 'informed conclusions', it fails to inform recruits - many of whom are legally still children - of the detail of the contracts which can bind them to the army for years, and why the children who play on the rocket launchers aren't told that these are used to kill and maim other children just like them who are unlucky enough to live in or near war zones.

B52 Two Acquitted

“The closest an English court has come to accepting that war crimes were committed by Britain and America in Iraq.” Mike Schwarz, Defence Solicitor

by Rob Williams

Two peace campaigners charged with conspiring to commit criminal damage following an attempt to sabotage US B52 bombers at RAF Fairford have been acquitted after a jury accepted they were acting to prevent war crimes.

Toby Olditch and Philip Pritchard, from Oxford, were arrested inside the perimeter fence at RAF Fairford in the early hours of 18 March 2003 just one day prior to the start of the bombing raids in Iraq. The two men had entered the airbase with the intention of grounding B52 bombers by clogging the aircraft's engines with nuts and bolts. They carried with them photographs of Iraqi children which they intended to attach to the bombers, and signs which would warn air-force personnel that the planes had been grounded. They wore flashing headgear in the hope they would look so ridiculous that the heavily armed security would not shoot them. The two men were arrested shortly after entering the base, were charged and remanded to Gloucester Prison where they remained for three months until their release in June 2003. They were told that they potentially faced a sentence of up to ten years in prison.

The two activists never attempted to deny that they entered RAF Fairford with the intention to damage the bombers. Instead their defence was that their actions were an attempt to prevent a crime - i.e. the war in Iraq. However, in a pre-trial hearing at Bristol Crown Court in 2004, the Judge ruled that an act of aggression by the British government was not a crime in domestic law. The ruling was referred to the court of appeal and subsequently the House of Lords where it was upheld – enforcing the earlier ruling that the legality of the war in Iraq was a matter for an international court. This ruling meant that any subsequent trials would not discuss the legality of the war in Iraq.

At the first trial in October 2006, the defence for the two men argued that Philip and Toby were acting lawfully as they were attempting to protect life

and property in Iraq. They also argued that the two men believed war crimes were going to be committed in Iraq using the B52 bombers and their actions were an attempt to prevent those crimes. The use of cluster bombs and so-called bunker-busting weapons, it was claimed, would constitute a war crime. Helpfully, Judge Grigson had already outlined the definition of a war crime at the pre-trial hearing in 2004; it was defined as:

the use, to achieve a military purpose, of weapons with an adverse effect on civilian populations which is disproportionate to the need to achieve the military objective.

After twelve hours' deliberation over three days, the jury failed to reach a verdict and a date for a retrial was set.

On 22 May this year, the two activists' ordeal ended with a remarkable unanimous verdict of not guilty. During the retrial experts had explained to the jury the devastating effects of the so-called 'shock and awe' bombings in 2003. The terrible consequences of cluster bombs and uranium-tipped bunker-busting bombs were described to the court.

The jury members were advised by the judge that they did not have to make a decision as to whether war crimes had been committed; they had only to decide whether Philip Pritchard and Toby Olditch *believed* they would be committed. The jury reached a unanimous verdict – thus supporting the defence claim that the two men had acted legally in their attempt to ground the B52 bombers. Mike Schwarz, solicitor for the two men, hailed the verdict, saying it was:

the closest an English court has come to accepting that war crimes were committed by Britain and America in Iraq.

A jury verdict in a crown court ruling of this kind has limited significance in strict legal terms. However the implication of the ruling for similar pending cases cannot be under-



Phil and Toby outside court

estimated. One of the other cases was that of peace campaigner Josh Richards who was also arrested at Fairford in 2003. He had entered the base with a can of fuel and a box of matches, his intention being to set fire to the bombers. In another encouraging 'not guilty' verdict at the beginning of June, his case was dismissed, following the failure of the jury to agree on a verdict.

These outstanding rulings are cause for celebration amongst peace campaigners in general and are particularly encouraging for those who, out of desperation in the build-up to the war in Iraq, took direct action to attempt to stop it. Mike Schwarz again:

Because what Phil and Toby feared would take place was so close to what actually happened, in effect the jury implicitly was saying that war crimes were committed, and the judge, who had the power to say these defences weren't relevant, allowed them, which is in some way a judicial endorsement.

Toby Olditch thanked his legal representation and supporters, but stated:

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi people have still suffered as a result of the Government's actions. It shouldn't have come to the point that people had to take direct action to try to check the abuse of executive power.