

Thanks!

Frances Laing

Your readers may wish to join me in thanking Joan Meredith, of Malpas, Cheshire for her latest contribution to achieving World Peace. Following a recent protest against the Trident nuclear submarine she has again been tried for 'Breach of the Peace' in Scotland. Joan has repeatedly borne witness to the madness of global nuclear proliferation through blockades and protests which have led to over twenty convictions and prison sentences.

Speaking on the telephone from Scotland she said: *It is up to individuals to resist the lies and the twisting of words. John Berger the writer and dramatist says: 'you can't have freedom without action'. This is **my** action for freedom and justice and human rights, and the future for the children of the world.*

As a grandmother and senior citizen Joan has lived through violent conflict herself and speaks with authority.

Joan's contribution to democracy (and that of her fellow peace protestors) can be compared to that of the suffragette movement. Suffragettes took part in (sometimes illegal) 'direct actions', and were often arrested. They broke the law as a protest against a greater injustice and a double standard. Protest and dissent of this kind led to the making of some new laws which were more equal and just. A growing body of judicial evidence shows that the Trident submarine is in itself illegal according to international law. It is time that the British government acknowledged this fact and changed its policy accordingly.

Instead of sending Joan to prison again the Scottish Court has given this kind, generous and wise citizen a Community Service Order. She looks forward to making another positive contribution to her community.

For more information on these issues contact the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament:

Tel: 0207 700 2393
www.cnd.org.uk

Joan Meredith talks about the action and explains her motivation for accepting a community service order:

The action took place at the South gate at Faslane. Four of us locked on and blocked the road on Friday 13 April 2007. We were arrested and taken to Clyde Bank police station and charged with breach of the peace [Breach of the Peace in Scottish law covers a wider range of activities and is used far more often than Breach of the Peace in England and Wales].

The trial took place on 17 October and I was fined £150. I went back to court on 8 January 2008 and was sentenced to 30 hours of community service for non-payment of the fine. I had already told the court on 17 October that I would not pay.

There has been no communication from Cheshire about the community service order. I accepted the sentence because it was something new for me, and I wanted to find out just what it meant.

With my other hat on, prison reform, I have supported Pauline Campbell on demos when women have died in prison. Community service is something we have been calling for rather than a prison sentence. I think that serving one will be a valuable experience because this is another area where raising public awareness is vital if women are ever going to get justice and equality.*

Also, years ago, when I managed an old people's home, I liaised with the probation officer and two young girls, separately, served their sentences in the home. Over the years I watched them blossom into responsible women and live happily in the community. I would like to see how the community service I am asked to do compares with theirs so many years ago.

* Pauline Campbell is a mother from Malpas, whose daughter died in prison. She now campaigns to draw attention to the plight of women prisoners and the failure of the prison service in its duty of care towards these women. Deaths of women in custody are not uncommon. Most of these women do not present a danger to society and could be given non-custodial sentences.

Vigil for Iraq



Eight members of WPJF and Wrexham Women for Peace held a vigil on 19 March to mark the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. Five years on, what does the 'freedom and democracy' we imposed on Iraq look like?

It is estimated that over 1 million Iraqis have suffered violent deaths since the invasion in 2003, with very many more injured. Approximately one in five Iraqis have been displaced from their homes during this and previous troubles. Much of the land has been poisoned forever with uranium munitions. According to UN figures, barely one in three Iraqis now has access to clean drinking water. There was a serious outbreak of cholera in Iraq last summer and deaths from malaria are now common. One in eight Iraqi children now die before their fifth birthday, more than half of these in their first month of life. 28% of Iraqi children are now malnourished. Tens of thousands of Iraqis are detained, many without trial, and a recent UN report has expressed continuing concern about this and other violations of human rights and civil liberties in Iraq.

One hour spent remembering the humanitarian disaster we have created in Iraq seems totally inadequate. I am ashamed to be British, ashamed that I haven't done more to try to stop this genocide.



Beep for Burma!

Genny Bove

Reports of ongoing actions at local TOTAL petrol stations. More are planned (see diary dates for details).



Wrexham Women for Peace and supporters returned to Hoole TOTAL petrol station in Chester on two Saturdays in January, to build support in Chester for the *Boycott TOTAL* campaign, which is calling for people to buy their petrol elsewhere until TOTAL stops supporting the violent and oppressive military regime in Burma.

More information from:
www.burmacampaign.org.uk
Tel: 0207 324 4710.

On Friday 4 January, in an action to mark the 60th anniversary of Burma's independence from British colonial rule, members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) – the main opposition party to the country's military junta – held a vigil in front of the party's headquarters in Rangoon. Dressed in white convicts' uniforms, the demonstrators called for the release of detained NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi and over 1,000 political

prisoners currently detained by the military regime. Spokesperson for the NLD, Nyan Win, expressed hope that *democracy and human rights will prevail in the country one day.*

Solidarity action in Chester: 5 Jan

On Saturday 5 January, in solidarity with the Burmese struggle for human rights and democracy, we put up large banners opposite the Hoole TOTAL petrol station with the words "TOTALLY IMMORAL" and "TOTAL OUT OF BURMA", displayed a peace flag and placards, and handed out leaflets to passers-by and motorists. Many motorists decided to fill up elsewhere, or vowed not to return to the petrol station again.

A second demonstration: 26 Jan

With more people, banners and placards than the first time and a beautifully sunny morning, most members of the group positioned

themselves over the road and opposite the petrol station which is on a bit of a blind bend. From here, approaching motorists had plenty of time to take in the messages before they reached the garage; even better, we were in the warm sun. The rest of us handed out leaflets to passers-by on the other side of the road and to motorists on the garage forecourt.

Our new 'Beep 4 Burma' banner had the desired effect, and soon the air was filled with the cheery, and occasionally startling, sound of tooting horns. Using the pedestrian crossing to cross (and re-cross) with our banner also worked well.

Many motorists changed their minds and drove right on after indicating for the petrol station; others drove in and straight out; some filled up and vowed never to return; just a few refused to take the leaflets. This is a petrol station that regularly has queues for petrol on a Saturday morning. Trade for the morning was no more than a trickle, with the forecourt completely empty for long periods.

One of the campaigners said: *By taking a stand I felt I could contribute to raising awareness of Total's investment in Burma. It was so empowering to see an empty forecourt and realise that the people of Chester were no longer willing to give their money to a company that funds the Burmese junta.*

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