

What's going on at Aldermaston?



CND was formed in 1958, at a time when the risk of nuclear conflict was high in the public consciousness. The first Aldermaston march took place at Easter in the same year. Here we are in 2008, 50 years on, still protesting at the base. Trident nuclear warheads are manufactured and maintained at Aldermaston AWE and building work is going ahead on the new Orion laser facility - a key element in the testing and design of new nuclear weapons - along with many other developments. All these are kept under close scrutiny by the Aldermaston Women's Peace Campaign, which has recently been dealing with attempts to remove its monthly presence from the base.

Challenge to Women's Peace Camp

Recent mainstream media reports have suggested that the Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp (AWPC) is no more. The Peace Camp puts the record straight:

Press reports on the camp's demise were based on the outcome of a Judicial Review of three of the MoD Aldermaston by-laws, introduced in May 2007, covering the MoD controlled land outside the fence at AWE Aldermaston. One of the by-laws sought to prohibit camping, and thus criminalise the women's peace camp.

AWPC received the judgment in the Judicial Review on 6 March 2008. Lord Justice Maurice Kay and Mr Justice Walker, who heard the case on 1 February, found in favour of the claim on some points and against it on others.

In favour of the application, the judgment confirmed that the women's case had merit. It also quashed the by-law criminalising the 'putting of any thing on any surface'. This means that women can once again hang banners on AWE's fence, alerting the public to the nuclear weapons factory. The judgment also confirmed that the test of reasonableness had to be applied in relation to any arrests under a further by-law criminalising 'annoying behaviour'.

However, the judgment dismissed the claim that a by-law, which criminalises camping - and thus the Women's Peace Camp - was unjustified. AWPC are taking advice on whether they will appeal against the judgment on this by-law.

A spokeswoman for AWPC said, 'The Peace Camp has been here for 22 years - and we mean to continue. The camp is a visible sign that freedom of expression is alive and well.'

The judgment has implications beyond Aldermaston, including on the right to protest at military and other government controlled sites.

Planning Sham

New developments at Aldermaston are being pushed through the planning process in a sham of democracy. On 6 Feb 2008, plans for a High Explosive Fabrication Facility (HEFF) were approved by West Berkshire Council (WBC) Local Planning Authority (LPA).

Di McDonald, Director of the Nuclear Information Service:

In the interests of openness and accountability, a change in planning law now requires the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to go through the planning system for building projects on MoD land. But this application achieved neither openness nor accountability. The planning meeting was a charade and the obvious truth that the MoD does not need approval from a LPA for its activities was ignored. Everyone played their part in a village hall drama of no consequence.

WBC approved the HEFF plan for AWE Aldermaston despite objections that since the MoD applicant had withheld information for national security reasons, the LPA could not determine the application nor could its consultees make an assessment. The

type and quantity of explosives and the processes to be undertaken in the building were withheld.

The Environment Agency and Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Nuclear Installations Inspectorate did not object and did not ask for extra information, nor did the Emergency Planning Officer.

AWE said that explosives would not be manufactured but 'manipulated' in the building. No mention was made of the actual regulating body with access to all the relevant information, the MoD's Nuclear Weapon Regulator, which is the actual decision-maker.

CND Call to Action

The Bomb Stops Here protest of 24 March will celebrate 50 years of campaigning against nuclear weapons, taking place on the anniversary of the arrival of the first march to Aldermaston in 1958. Thousands of protesters are expected to surround the base which produces the warheads for the Trident nuclear weapons system. Coaches from more than 50 locations will bring activists from as far as Aberdeen and Penzance, with many international campaigners also coming to Britain.

With parliament voting in March 2007 for a new fleet of nuclear-armed submarines, and with the construction of facilities for a new generation of nuclear warheads already underway at Aldermaston, it's time to send a clear message to the government that 50 years is enough!

(Report from demo on page 5)

The Bomb Stops Here

Genny Bove

Report from *The Bomb Stops Here* Easter Monday demo at Aldermaston, and the *Bikes Not Bombs* cycle ride from London to Aldermaston, which arrived on the day of the demo.



Bikes Not Bombs

Our small group from Wrexham joined the *Bikes Not Bombs* London to Aldermaston cycle ride between Slough and Reading on Easter Sunday. The 15 or so cyclists who had come all the way from central London the previous day had set off from the Ramgharia Sikh Temple in Slough in falling snow on Sunday morning, but by the time we arrived it was a pleasantly sunny afternoon and all traces of snow had melted away.

Cycling in a group is great fun, especially with a sound system, and we pedalled along to punk, reggae, electro-folk and lots of other great music, including cycling classics like Anita Ward's *You Can Ring My Bell*.

Once in Reading, we toured the town centre, announcing the CND demo, handing out leaflets and eventually arriving at Reading railway station with a puncture to be fixed. The concourse at Reading station is huge, and on Easter Sunday was more or less deserted, until some leafleting in the station brought out the station manager, her assistant and a couple of security men. They were objecting to our presence on their private property: *How would you like it if we turned up at your house and played our music? We couldn't quite see the analogy, but tried to remain friendly while insisting that we would be staying until the puncture was fixed.*

Somehow, a sticker appeared on the station manager's hi-vis jacket. Screaming angrily about this 'assault', she called in the Transport Police to deal with the situation, but the culprit was nowhere to be seen, and after a few mild warnings had failed to send us scurrying off the 'private'

concourse, the cop decided to engage us in conversation rather than carrying out his threat to have us all arrested under railway by-laws. He advised us on the best route from Reading to Aldermaston and regaled us with anecdotes while the station manager looked on, still fuming, and one of the security men accused us of being 'pasta eaters'! As the station manager became increasingly irate, her assistant – who had been just as angry and aggressive to begin with – found out what we were doing, became instantly friendly and cheerful and started chanting *Ban the Bomb!*

Eventually, with the puncture fixed, we tore ourselves away from this surreal scene and set off again. The cops, station managers and security men all stood in a line to watch our exit: round and round the roundabout and then off to find our bed for the night at Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC).

It was a small victory for common sense over officiousness, I think, that a confrontational and hostile situation had been turned into a friendly conversation. However, the station manager, who had remained frosty throughout, had her revenge on the sticker culprit on Tuesday morning. When he turned up at Reading station to attempt to travel, she refused to let him in and he had to cycle to Twyford to catch his train back to London.

Cyclists at RISC

At RISC, we unloaded the bikes, warmed up with plenty of hot drinks and an excellent vegan curry, had a couple of meetings to plan the next day's itinerary, and settled down to a participative drama evening with *Atomic Replay Theatre*. The participation involved 'replaying'

scenes from situations we have previously found ourselves in and using this to learn something new: how a confrontation could have been dealt with more effectively, for instance – interesting stuff.

The Bomb Stops Here

We were back at Reading station in the morning to meet up with more cyclists. Luckily the station manager had the day off, and we only had her friendly assistant to greet us. With our numbers up to around 25, we donned our waterproofs and set off at a gentle pace in the sleet, arriving at Aldermaston at about 11 for an early picnic lunch. It was chilly standing still, so I went for a bike ride round the base to keep warm, and to get an idea of the overall size of the demo. Each gate had its own atmosphere and it was lovely to read so many wonderful peaceful messages, admire the colourful banners, laugh at the prohibitive and warning signposts all over the place, enjoy the music and theatre and general camaraderie. As always on these events, it was also great to catch up with old friends.



When it came to surrounding the base, I have no idea whether it actually happened, but people seemed to spread out a long way from the gate I was at. Tired and a bit chilly, we set out for home not long afterwards. I was glad I'd taken part.

50 years after it was set up, I wish there was no longer a need for a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, but there is, so I'm very pleased that it's still here and thriving.

Happy 50th birthday, CND!