
LOOKING BACK - A YEAR OF CAMPAIGNING IN WREXHAM



As Wrexham Against War transforms itself into Wrexham Peace and Justice Forum, it is perhaps time to look back at what we have achieved in the past year and consider our future direction.

In September 2002, a coach left Wrexham for the first national demo in London against war in Iraq. That was when ideas for a local peace group really began to circulate. WAW's first local demo took place on 31st October 2002 on the National Day of Action called by the Stop the War Coalition. We held a protest, hung a banner and organised a stall and rally in the town centre.

On 18th November we held our first public meeting, 'Stop the War on Iraq!' at NEWI. Milan Rai, an internationally renowned peace activist, founder of Voices in the Wilderness UK, and acclaimed author of 'War Plan Iraq' spoke, as well as local veteran peace campaigner, Owen Hardwicke.

The following month, two of our members travelled down to London to take part in "Warzone Whitehall", a "die-in" organised by Voices in the Wilderness and ARROW. Several hundred protesters gathered and about a hundred wrapped themselves in bandages and lay down for three hours blocking traffic in Whitehall to demonstrate visually the terrible consequences of war for the ordinary people of Iraq.

As Christmas approached we decided to make a Christmas card for Tony Blair. The giant card depicted the PM as a reindeer pulling a sleigh, driven by George Bush as Father Christmas. Inside the card were messages from Wrexham people, collected on our stalls in the town centre. The serious message to Tony Blair was *Don't let George Bush drive you into war!*

(Top of page: Janet Ryder AM speaking in Queens Sq. Wrexham March 18th)

The card was presented to Wrexham MP Ian Lucas, who delivered it to the PM. This was the start of a lengthy correspondence with the Wrexham politician about his inconsistent position on the war.

A new year called for a new idea to let people know about the group and raise awareness about the situation in Iraq, and in January our 'Beep for Peace' rush-hour demos began. A group of us would demonstrate on various Wrexham roundabouts and junctions, inviting motorists to show their support. These demonstrations continued at least weekly until May.

The New Year also brought a second national demonstration in London, on February 15th. WAW organised two coaches taking over a hundred people to join the biggest-ever political demonstration in the UK, with well over a million protesters marching against an immoral, unjust and unnecessary war.

On February 19th we held our half term action - a display of 167 pairs of shoes in Queens Square, symbolising the number of Iraqi children who have died each day since the end of the first Gulf war. Information sheets alongside the shoes explained that the deaths were the result of UN economic sanctions that restricted food and medical supplies. We also held a Hands Up For Peace stall where children could make cut-outs of their own hands and decorate them with peace messages. This action was organised by children for children, and all the handshapes were sent to London to be displayed in Parliament Square.

The month of March brought much activity from WAW, not least because it was the month war started. On the 5th it was National Student Action Day and pupils from Darland School, supported by WAW, held a demonstration in Queens Square. In the weeks leading up to the war, we held frequent stalls in town, made a display of messages for peace on the railings of Trinity Church, and undertook a cycle ride around the town demonstrating opposition to the war.

On the 17th we held our first "die-in" in Wrexham Town Centre during a national week of non-violent direct action. Hope Street was filled with bloody "war casualties" and the sound of sirens to demonstrate the human cost of war. This event was covered by television crews, radio and news reporters. War was by then inevitable, and it was crucial to continue our campaigning on the streets and in the media.