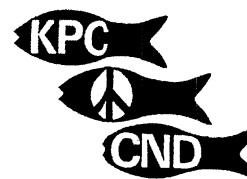


July/August 2023

KINGSTON PEACE NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF KINGSTON PEACE COUNCIL /
CAMPAIGN FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

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What is happening in Russia? What will this mean for Ukraine?

What will this mean for the Russian Government?

Of course it is much too early to give any answers to these questions, but most commentators think Putin's grip on absolute power will be weakened by the extraordinary u-turn he made, first denouncing the statement made by Yevgeny Prigozhin on June 23rd and declaring him a war criminal, and then offering him the escape route to Belarus if he called off the Wagner Group march on Moscow. Personally I felt I was reading a scene from a Shakespeare play – these things do not usually happen in this way in the 21st Century.

Was money involved? It seems very likely. Will we ever know how much? Apparently Russian nuclear weapons are now also in Belarus. Was this part of the deal?

And how will the Wagner troops behave? Who will lead them? Will they continue to support the conventional Russian military considering the harsh words their leader spoke about the “misguided attack upon Ukraine”? And if not, how will the Russian troops get on without their support, which has apparently been very crucial to them.

And last but not least, what is the unfortunate Russian public to make of all this? How can they possibly distinguish truth from fiction? We should also remember how many casualties there have been, the exact numbers and names of whom will probably never be known.

Looks as if we will have an interesting summer.

Written on Sunday 25th June (Ed)

Something to look forward to in November – put in your diaries now:-

Movement for the Abolition of War has just announced that **Michael Mears, Actor and Peace Activist, author of “The Mistake” and “This Evil Thing”,** will be giving the **2023 Remembrance Lecture on Saturday, 11th November at 2pm.** The title will be **“The role of the arts and culture in promoting peace and opposing war”.** The venue will be the Oasis Hub, 1 Kennington Road, London SE1 7QP, and it will be free.

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The world is “drifting into one of the most dangerous periods in human history”, according to a leading security research centre, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

At the root of its concern is that, though the number of nuclear warheads is still far lower than during the Cold War years, nuclear modernisation and development programmes in the nine nuclear-armed states are leading to an expansion in the number of warheads held. The numbers are small, according to the SIPRI Yearbook 2023: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security, just 86 more warheads than in January last year in a global inventory of 12,512. So why the concern? Who has the warheads and why is the number increasing rather than decreasing?

The great majority are held by Russia (4,489) and the United States (3,708), followed by three middle-ranking states: China (410), France (290) and the UK (225). Russia and the US also have warheads that are ‘retired but not yet dismantled’ (1,400 and 1536 respectively). These five countries are the permanent members of the UN Security Council and also signatories of the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Article VI of this treaty requires them to work towards nuclear disarmament – but they are failing to do so.

As well as these five, there are four more states with nuclear weapons: Pakistan (170), India (164), Israel (90) – though it has never acknowledged having them – and, most recently, North Korea, assessed by SIPRI as now having 30 warheads. Out of SIPRI’s estimated global total of 12,512 warheads, it believes 9,576 are in military stockpiles ready for use, meaning that they are either fitted to missiles or available as bombs to be delivered by aircraft.

Most of the additional new warheads have been added by China (60) and Russia (12), with Pakistan and North Korea both adding five and India four.

Given that it would only take a dozen or so nuclear warheads to wreck a country, it seems nonsense to talk about the ‘need’ for more than 10,000 weapons. And it’s worth remembering,

for context, that back in 1985 the United States was reckoned to have 23,500 warheads and the Soviet Union 39,200. This was during the Cold War days of ludicrously massive ‘overkill’.

Many of the superpowers’ weapons at that time were later withdrawn, with most of them now dismantled, and there was the added hope at the end of the Cold War that the cutbacks would continue, and the pace of warhead development would slow. But the opposite is happening now.

More recently, the UN’s Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) gave some hope. Voted in by the majority of all UN member states in 2017 and requiring 50 states to ratify it, this was achieved, with the treaty entering into force just over two years ago.

Already, 92 member states, almost half the UN membership, have signed it and 68 have ratified it after approving it within their domestic legal systems. In view of this, why do SIPRI analysts, along with many other peace researchers, still have concerns?

There are several reasons.

The TPNW is a strong treaty in that signatory states must not design, develop or manufacture nuclear weapons of any sort, nor must they allow nuclear-armed states to base their own weapons on their territory. But none of the nine nuclear states have signed up to it, or shown any sign of doing so. Neither have those states that allow foreign nuclear weapons to be based on their territories, including the half dozen European states that host US nuclear weapons, or Belarus, with Russian nuclear weapons. Most of the states that have signed or ratified the treaty are not ‘big powers’, even if some have leaders who speak out readily against nuclear weapons, while all of them demonstrate an opposition to a nuclearised world – in marked contrast to the postures of the actual nuclear-armed states and many of their close allies.

If anything, the attitude among nuclear-armed states has hardened, with the UK being an example. Just two years ago, the Johnson government declared that it would no longer be transparent about the size of the UK nuclear arsenal and its number of deployed warheads or missiles. Increased global tensions were cited as the reason, but it was a change in what had previously been an informal cross-party agreement to be more open.

More generally, despite what some may suggest, many nuclear-armed states are prepared to use nuclear weapons first, and even use them against states that do not have their own nuclear weapons. NATO has maintained a clear first-use policy since 1968; the UK even deployed two types of nuclear weapon to the South Atlantic during the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War; and Putin, of course, has implied that there are circumstances where Russia would threaten nuclear use in the current war in Ukraine.

One of the clearest implications of the near-cavalier attitudes of nuclear-armed states to fighting “small nuclear wars in faraway places” came shortly after the end of the Cold War, when nuclear-armed states on both sides of the divide had to decide on their way ahead.

In 1991, US Strategic Air Command produced the Reed Report on the future nuclear posture for the country. According to a leaked draft, this stated that “the growing wealth of petro-nations and newly hegemonic powers is available to bullies and crazies, if they gain control, to wreak havoc on world tranquillity”.

The report called for a new nuclear targeting strategy that would include the ability to assemble a “Nuclear Expeditionary Force... primarily for use against China or Third World targets”. There were indications that just such a capability, for what was called “adaptive targeting” – being able to re-target a nuclear missile very quickly – existed within a year of the Reed Report being delivered.

The Reed Report’s terms of reference, with its use of the words “bullies and crazies”, may be in highly colloquial language, but it is merely using a style of writing to say what others might avoid saying – a view of the place of nuclear weapons in strategic thinking that is realistic yet a thousand miles away from the typical public belief that peace is maintained through deterrence by mutually assured destruction.

It also explains why the likes of analysts at SIPRI have concerns about the continuing threat from nuclear weapons. It may be more of a risk of “small wars in faraway places” than a sudden global cataclysm of the Cold War era, but such a scenario has its own huge dangers.

Conscientious Objectors Day 2023

Several members of KPC/CND attended this event on 15th May. It took place in London in Tavistock Square, by the memorial stone which is dedicated to the right to refuse to kill. It was good to see a large number of people there after three Covid years when it had to take place only on Zoom. This year it was hybrid – so on Zoom also. There was music from Raised Voices choir and a speaker from War Resisters International, who reported that Russians and Belarusians, Ukrainians and Israelis are among those currently being punished for refusing military service. The event ended as usual with the reading out of the names of many conscientious objectors, one from each country where they have been persecuted and often imprisoned, and in many countries still are. For each person/country named a white carnation was laid on the memorial stone. This was followed with a minute’s silence.

Lakenheath US Air-Base – CND Demonstration on 20th May

KPC members attended this demo, taking place because it is feared that US nuclear weapons are about to be installed once more at the Base.

Michael Mears introduced the event with this rousing dramatic recital:-

I am the voice of a speaking clock. A clock that speaks of annihilation and of doom. The Doomsday Clock. I started telling the time in 1947.

A few years earlier a group of brilliant scientists had discovered how to split the atom and this discovery led to them inventing a weapon – a weapon so hideous that the only thing remaining of its victims would be their shadows.

In 1945, two of these weapons, known then as atomic bombs, were dropped by the United States on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The cities were obliterated:- by 1950, over 340,000 people had died as a result and subsequent generations were poisoned by radiation. The explosion’s effects killed indiscriminately by vaporising human tissue.

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Many survivors of the initial blast burned to death, while cancers caused by the radiation affected countless others and their children, causing years of untold misery. Homes, schools and livelihoods were destroyed with communities decimated.

And so it was, in 1947, that the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists launched the Doomsday Clock, setting the time at 7 minutes to midnight as a metaphor for the precise danger posed to humanity from nuclear weapons. The Bulletin was particularly concerned about the prospect that the United States and the Soviet Union were headed for a nuclear arms race.

In the decades that followed the hands on the Doomsday Clock have ebbed and flowed nearer to midnight and then pulled back again; then nearer to midnight, then pulled back again...

In 1953, as a result of the Soviet Union producing their own nuclear weapon, the hands on the clock had reached 2 minutes to midnight. But by 1963, as disarmament treaties began to be agreed upon and implemented, the hands on the clock moved backwards to a relatively reassuring 12 minutes to midnight.

By 1984, however, as communications between the US and the Soviet Union completely broke down, the hands on the clock moved perilously close to midnight again. 3 minutes to midnight.

At the turn of the new millennium the prospects for the human race were starting to look more positive, but during the past few

years there has been an inexorable descent towards the danger zone - 3 minutes, 2 and a half minutes, and in 2019 just 2 minutes to midnight.

Then in 2020, the hands on the clock edged even further forward, to just 100 seconds to midnight. Surely that was far enough. Surely mankind would act upon this warning, and come to its senses, and ensure the hands on the clock would retreat backwards, however slowly, away from midnight.

But no. Events that shook the world in 2022 meant that this year, 2023, the hands on the Doomsday Clock moved forward another 10 seconds.

They now stand at 90 seconds to midnight - the closest to global catastrophe the world has ever known.

Demolitions on the West Bank and treatment of Palestinian political prisoners

We agreed at a recent KPC meeting to write to MPs of members of our Group about the dreadful and worsening situation in the occupied West Bank and about the case of Palestinian political prisoner Walid Daqqah. **Phil Cooper wrote the following excellent letter on our behalf.**

Please feel free to adapt this letter yourself to send to your own MP.

Dear (MP)

I'm writing to you on behalf of Kingston Peace Council/CND to seek your support on two issues concerning the appalling treatment of Palestinians by the Israeli Government and armed forces. We are requesting that you press the Government and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office on both of these matters.

Firstly, the demolition of Palestinian homes and other buildings by the Israeli regime continues apace despite international condemnation of this action by the UK and nine other European countries.

Some 100 demolitions took place during May and others have continued in June. One of the May demolitions was a school that had been set up with funding from international donors. After the building was demolished, the local community attempted to set up classes in tents. A few days later the Israeli army returned and destroyed the tents.

The demolitions of homes and other structures are 'justified' on the grounds that they lack permits by the Israeli authorities although these are rarely granted despite Palestinians spending many thousands of dollars on legal and application fees. During the first five months of 2023 there has been a 33 percent increase in demolitions across the West Bank and in East Jerusalem.

In a joint statement released on May 26th the UK joined with Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Ireland calling on Israel, as the occupying power, to halt all confiscations and demolitions and to give unimpeded access to humanitarian organisations in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem areas.

The statement also urged Tel Aviv to "return or compensate for all humanitarian items funded by the consortium of donors," in reference to Israel's demolition of buildings funded by the European Union since 2015 estimated at 1,291,000 euros (£1,106,186).

The statement also went on to condemn the recent demolition of the Jubbet Adh Dhib school and expressed "their grave concern about the threatened demolition of another 57 schools in the West Bank."

As demolitions have continued since this statement was issued it is clear that merely raising such matters with the Israeli

Government has no effect. We urge you to press the UK Government and, in particular, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office to take decisive and, if necessary, punitive action to hold Israel to account for so flagrantly ignoring the international community.

The second issue we would like to raise concerns the continued detention of Palestinian political prisoner Walid Daqqah who is suffering severe health issues and requires urgent medical care that is being denied him by the Israeli authorities.

The 61-year-old has been diagnosed with a rare form of bone marrow cancer. His prison sentence was completed in March this year but the Israeli authorities have extended his sentence by two years with spurious charges. Palestinian human rights experts have reported that doctors, including Israeli physicians, suspect that Walid Daqqah's worsening health is a result of the Israeli Prison Service's systematic practice of deliberate medical neglect, including a recent denial of emergency hospital transfer after he suffered a stroke in prison in February 2023.

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office has noted Israel's repeated violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention in relation to the transfer of prisoners from occupied territory, as well as the systematic violations arising from the detention of children, and Israel's frequent use of administrative detention against Palestinian prisoners. Medical neglect is also a fundamental violation of the prisoners' rights and must be treated with the utmost seriousness.

As a contracting party to the Fourth Geneva Convention, the British Government has a legal obligation to uphold Palestinian human rights and the implementation of international humanitarian law, including in the case of prisoners' rights.

Can you please urge the Government and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office to press Israel immediately and unconditionally to release Walid Daqqah to safeguard his rights and ensure access to the medical treatment he needs.

As with the previous issue it should be made clear to the Israeli Government that ignoring such a request would result in decisive action.

Thank you

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/ CND**

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£8 annually,
£10 family membership,
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SECRETARY**

Positions vacant.

Please offer if you could help as secretary. At present several people are sharing these jobs.

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Next Issue (September)
Gill Hurle, see above.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this edition are not necessarily those of Kingston Peace Council/CND

Our Regular Stalls in Kingston Market Place take place on 1st and 3rd Saturdays of the month, outside the gates of All Saints Church Kingston. The next dates are Saturdays July 15th, August 5th and 19th. We start at 11am and have 2 or 3 one hour shifts. If you can help, please contact Angie Cooper on 020 8399 5537 or angecooper47@hotmail.com (If you are new to this, you will always be with an experienced member)

Forthcoming Events (Some online)

Women in Black meet every Wednesday, 6-7pm, around the statue of Edith Cavell in St Martin's Place outside National Portrait Gallery. They are very happy to welcome new women to the vigils – even if they can only come once in a while.

Sat. 8th July KPC will have a stall at New Malden Fair. If you can help please contact Maggie on 020 8549 0086, or maggie@galdor.co.uk

Tues. 11th July and 8th Aug. KPC/CND Monthly meeting on Zoom. If you are on our email list you will receive the Zoom link. Otherwise contact Gill Hurle (see blue panel) to be added to the list.

Sunday 6th August Hiroshima Day events.

We shall have 2 events in Kingston:

12 to 2pm opposite the Bentalls Centre Entrance. A silent vigil with boards and leaflets. All welcome – please join us.

8 to 9pm Canbury Gardens, Kingston. We shall hold our usual riverside candle-lit commemoration near the bandstand. The Mayor has been invited. Please bring white flowers to float on the river and lanterns to line the path.

Sun. 6th August 12 to 1pm London Region CND's annual Hiroshima Day event at the commemorative cherry tree in Tavistock Square. More details:- londonregioncnd@gmail.com / 020 7607 2302

Wed. 9th August 7.30pm Nagasaki Day. Evening Peace Walk from Westminster Cathedral, Victoria Street, to the London Peace Pagoda (Battersea Park, Carriage Drive N, London SW11 4NJ), followed by a Lantern-lighting ceremony. The walk assembles at Ambrosden Avenue, behind the Cathedral, following the ecumenical service for Franz Jagerstatter (executed for refusing to serve in Hitler's army), which will take place at 6.30 pm in the Crypt chapel. Organised by Pax Christi.

Mon. 28th August, Bank Holiday: KPC stall at EcoFair (10.30am to 8pm) in Carshalton Park, SM5 3DD. If you can help please contact Maggie on 020 8549 0086, or maggie@galdor.co.uk

Get Ready for DSEI the big Arms Fair – Sept 4-15 at Excel Centre, many events. Details in next Newsletter.