

# Catholic Peace Action

A journal of nonviolent resistance at  
the Ministry of 'Defence'  
(and other places)

January 1995

7 Putney Bridge Road  
London SW18 1HX

Dear Friends,

We invite you to participate in our next Lenten witness at the MoD.

As in the first few years we will be starting the Liturgy outside. Church premises are not as available this year due to cost or timing.

But never mind, a witness will be made and Lent will be observed in a matter appropriate for a nuclear weapons state.

Join us in the Embankment Gardens (between Embankment Station and the MoD) at 12:30, on Ash Wednesday, 1 March. Sarah Hipperson will give a few good words by way of a homily.

So far only Dan and Pat will be marking the building. Pat once and Dan several times during Lent; we could use some company! How about giving it a go? Your friends and family will thank you for doing so, if not right away then eventually.

If you would like to discuss the possibility of marking the MoD come to the preparation meeting on 17 February, 7.30 pm, in Kennington, London. Ring Pax Christi, 0181-800 4612, for details and RSVP. If you can not make this meeting other arrangements are possible.

The Bailiffs have not knocked on the door of the Martins, so they wait with some vigilance and try to get on with their lives.

Contact us for details of Bible study and reflection evenings.

Yours in peace

*Catholic Peace Action*

Dan and Carmel Martin, Pat Gaffney, Sarah Hipperson, and Ray Towey





# A Time for 'Foolishness'

## Return visit to NATO Headquarters, Northwood, after 11 years

On 5th January 1983 a large group of London based, Christians, gathered opposite the NATO Headquarters on the Watford Road, Northwood, to take part in a 'Prayer and Liturgy' service, and to hand out leaflets calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons, especially the planned siting of Cruise missiles on Greenham Common. (The Missiles arrived on 14 November 1983 and after 7 1/2 years of resistance were removed under the I.N.F. Treaty.)

The gathering was called by Catholic Peace Action, a newly formed group of Catholics, who were greatly concerned that the hierarchy of the Church was not speaking out decisively against the policy of 'Nuclear Deterrence', which we believed to be incompatible with the will of God. Almost 12 years on we continue to resist this policy.

We had been drawn to the existence of the NATO base during the Falklands War; it was from here, that the sinking of the Belgrano warship was ordered.

I recall how nervous I felt at the thought of such a public expression of our rejection of nuclear weapons, and during the 'Intercessional Prayers' I felt the need to ask for guidance and strength, so that I would not mind looking 'foolish' on this journey of resistance on which we had embarked.

I felt that within certain quarters of the Church and the Christian Peace Movement we would not be understood. And believing that this was what it would take to really challenge the evil of nuclear weapons, I instinctively knew I would have to overcome my inclination to self-consciousness. Over the years I have been grateful for the insight that was revealed to me on that important day. On each occasion when called upon to take non-violent direct action, I try to remind myself of that prayer, and of how the answer to that prayer has sustained me.

On the 19th of November 1994 I returned to the NATO base, this time with six women from the Women's Peace Camp on Greenham Common. We entered the base through the fence to protest against the introduction of the Criminal Justice Bill and, in spite of this added threat to our work, to continue our commitment to non-violent resistance to the Trident programme.

As soon as we were all safely through the fence we unfurled our banners and started singing to alert the military of our presence. We were aware that those who guarded the base were armed with guns, so we wanted to create a calm, non-violent atmosphere, and we were successful. After a short walk we met a naval

officer who stopped to ask, 'Is this a joke?' We answered, 'No' and walked on. We then saw a building marked with an imposing sign saying 'Command Centre' and quickly walked towards it; just managing to enter as the heavy metal gate closed across the entrance. We found ourselves in the heart of the operations room where the plotting and planning takes place for the Trident Nuclear submarine system. We announced calmly that we were from the 'Women's Peace Camp', that we were non-violent and that they had nothing to fear from our presence. One of our banners confirmed these messages.

There was only a short, initial period of confusion caused by a young Marine Soldier screaming at us to get out and inciting his guard dog to attack us. Having been in this situation on other occasions with the military, through our experience at Greenham, we brought calmness to the dog and told the soldier to behave. The sergeant in charge supported our efforts to calm things down, and we settled in to do our work of disrupting and undermining the preparations for mass murder carried out in this building. We remained there for more than 1 1/2 hours. For all that time the military work stopped and the soldiers listened to our singing and the facts about the destructiveness of Trident. I believe that the power element within this building was altered, even if only for the time we spent there. The power of non-violence was palpable. I believe that we left behind in that room the essence of that power.

When the police arrived, accompanied by some high ranking military personnel, we were in the middle of a picnic spread; after singing for more than an hour we were hungry and in need of a break. The dog had very quickly become friendly and was looking longingly at us and our food. I remember thinking that that poor creature would rather be going off with us than being left under the control of the soldier, who demands behaviour determined by the military mind obsessed with security.

We were not charged, this no doubt, as a result of the decision not to expose the military personnel to the embarrassment of revealing in open court that their security had been breached by non-violent women. We left as we had arrived, singing and displaying our banners but with an audience this time made up of very surprised members of Her Majesty's Forces.

Sarah Hipperson



# Remembrance Day

## 1994

Shortly before 11.00 am on Friday 11th November, a small group of us gathered at the MoD, with our placards, bearing such messages as 'No More War Graves', 'Choose Life', 'No to Trident', to keep watch, pray and leaflet in memory of all those who have died in wars. Our leaflet, a copy of which is enclosed with this newsletter, offered accounts of other, nonviolent ways of confronting and resisting evil as a positive way of remembering the dead and the living, a way which we believe to be consistent with the Gospels.

This time we were joined by Clare (8) and Matthew (5) Martin and for me, their presence brought with it a new urgency and clarity for being there on that day. Clare and Matthew came to stand with me and helped to hold the placards I was carrying. After a few minutes the questions started to come. "What is Trident?" "Well, it is a special kind of nuclear weapon". "What is a nuclear weapon"? "A very powerful weapon that can do a lot of damage to people". "Why not just say nuclear weapon then"? "Well, because this one, Trident is being built by our country and we are asking them to stop building it or using it". These came from Clare before she offered to help give out leaflets to passers-by. Then Matthew started. "What does it say on your poster Pat?". "No more war graves". "What's a grave?" "When people die and we bury them the hole we put them into is called a grave." "What is a war grave?". "In some wars, when soldiers die, they are put into graves too". "What is war". "Sometimes people or countries disagree about something, or one person or country wants something that another has and they fight about it. When a lot of people fight and are killed we call it war". "Who gets killed?" "Well sometimes soldiers but often it is ordinary people, poor people". "But I thought we were supposed to help the poor people".

At this moment a number of workers came down the steps of the building and how I wished that they could have been frozen in time for a few moments to listen in to this conversation. How might they have responded to them? The conversation ended at this point but I had already been challenged by the children. Their questions called me to account for the world we live in. This occasion has raised even more questions for me, some of which I offer here. Perhaps they will trigger some thoughts from you too which you may want to share with us.

1995 is a year of anniversaries. The liberation of the concentration camps, the ending of World War

II, the first use of nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the opening of the Nuremberg Tribunal and so on. These are events which are loaded in every sense of the word. They mark colossal events in modern history and they have coloured and influenced much of what has happened since 1945. They are events which have prompted both the military/state and the peace movement to say 'never again', but to act on that commitment in very different ways. How these events are presented to our children in the coming year is going to be important. Whose story will be told, whose interests presented and protected?

Like Clare and Matthew, there are thousands of children in this country who do not know what nuclear weapons are. They do not know about war graves or about the Second World War, (and it is not just small children, many adolescents have no sense of what happened in 1945, talk about Hiroshima and Nagasaki or death camps and they look back at you blankly). Do we let things ride, and wait for questions to be asked, like those of Clare and Matthew? Do we take an initiative and openly talk about the history of our time, its wars, death, suffering? Children cannot be ignorant of the reality of war today - so much comes to them through the television, but what sense do they have of past events that are to be remembered this year? It is natural that we want to protect children from things which disturb and distress them - in a sense it is their innocence and happiness that gives us jaundiced adults a sense of hope for the future. But we are a people of faith, who constantly recall a life that was full of questions, contradictions, suffering and challenge - all of which are also calling us to account for the way we live, just as the children's questions had done. Do we welcome questions or do we want a quiet uncomplicated life?

Today's newspaper carried a story about young children in this country from German families being afraid to go to school because they were being called Nazis. Recently I heard that some groups in America were trying to develop a commemorative stamp that showed the bombing of Hiroshima as a symbol of victory over Japan - thankfully the idea was rejected. Do we want our children to 'learn' enmity towards whole nations of people - not from any experience they may have had themselves but through what they have heard or been taught? Do we want our children to believe that the best way of challenging wrongdoing or evil in the world is by building and using bigger and more horrific weapons? The challenge is ours. Do we have other stories to tell and actions to recall that are both faithful to all those whose lives have been lost in warfare and faithful to Jesus who invites us to live by the nonviolent message of the Gospel?

Pat Gaffney



# Non-violence: A Viable Alternative to War

Jesus calls us to non-violent, active opposition to evil. Living by faith means believing that there is no situation in which it is impossible to be faithful to the gospel and the gospel is non-violent.

Jesus said, 'Put your sword back, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.' (Mt. 26:52) Non-violence should not be confused with passivity--it requires a commitment to resist evil, an acceptance of the consequences and sacrifice.

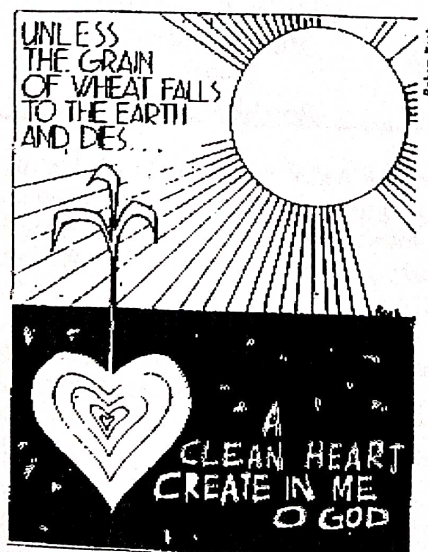
Here is an incomplete list of non-violent achievements that brought forth change for the better to oppressed people:

Mahatma Gandhi's campaign for independence of India;  
Martin Luther King, jr.'s, Civil Rights struggle;  
Caesar Chavez and the Farm Workers of the U.S.A.;  
South African Anti-apartheid movements;  
Brazilian campesinos;  
Chilean urban slum dwellers;  
Mothers of the Disappeared;  
Solidarity in Poland;  
The ousting of dictators like Marcos in the Philippines and Erich Honecker in East Germany;  
The Collapse of the Soviet Empire;  
Peace protesters in Britain to rid this country of cruise missiles, particularly Greenham Women and Catholic Peace Action members and others who made it known publicly their commitment to non-violent direct action and served time in prison as a consequence.

## The Works of Mercy

To feed the hungry  
To give drink to the thirsty  
To clothe the naked  
To visit the imprisoned  
To shelter the homeless  
To visit the sick  
To bury the dead.

For the true children of God, mercy is a duty.



(Above and overleaf is the leaflet we used at the MoD.)



# Remembrance Day

11th November 1994

## Ministry of Defence in Whitehall

We come here today to challenge the work and preparation for war that is carried out daily within the Ministry of Defence. Each year at this time, this work is justified, legitimized and sanctified by the performing of a well choreographed, ritualized 'Ceremony of Remembrance.' This ceremony draws on genuine emotion of sorrow and sadness for the loss of life which is the inevitable consequence of war.

We believe that hidden behind this ceremony is a manipulation by the State which seeks to bind the people of this nation to the concept that only the evil power of violence and war can resolve dispute and deal with oppression and dictators. That we should always be prepared for war and that loss of life--the shedding of blood--is somehow made acceptable by the enactment of this ceremony.

We reject this thinking and offer here a selective listing that reveals the evil contained in the concept of war and all its works:

		Killed
1914	World War I .....	20,000,000
1930s	Stalinist purges .....	20,000,000
1939	World War II .....	55,000,000
1941	German Concentration Camps .....	10,000,000
1950	Mao's purges in China .....	4,000,000
1975	Khymer Rouge Cambodian Massacres .....	2,000,000
1982	Falklands .....	1,000
1991	Iraq .....	190,000

### The Works of War

Destroy crops and land  
Sieze food supplies  
Destroy homes  
Scatter families  
Contaminate water  
Imprison dissenters  
Inflict wounds  
Burns  
Kill The Living

For the past four years, at this time, members of Catholic Peace Action have sought to raise a stark, clear awareness of Death by symbolically digging a grave on MoD property, or leafleting in order to remind us that the result of War is more significantly recorded in rows of graves rather than rows of names on stone memorials. Thus our sorrow for those who have died as a result of war is linked with the Gospel and human imperative to make peace.

The message for this year's red poppy sales is, 'Remember the dead but don't forget the living.' What better way to do this than to stand against those people and institutions who plan the next war? We ask you to give more consideration to non-violent means, as opposed to the means employed by the Ministry of Defence, to achieve peace and justice.



# An African Woman Weeps

I knew her name was Theresa. She was an African woman waiting for an operation in an African hospital and as the patients were so many she would have to be postponed for another day or week or perhaps month or months. Such postponements are common place and the patients usually quietly wrap their covering sheets around themselves pick up their medical records and make their way back to the wards. Disappointed as most patients are when this happens they are usually hopeful because to have got at least this far means that ultimately they will get their operation.

But for Theresa this day was different. She had lost hope and she began to cry in way that I had never seen an African woman cry before. As I passed by her I could see the tears just roll down her cheeks as she sat quietly and waited resigned and dignified. I had seen and heard many women cry in Africa. When the children die the mothers weep and wail and throw themselves on the floor in a way that is very disturbing but Theresa's tears were of a different kind and I was perplexed and curious.

From her medical history I could easily work out a large part of her story. She was probably from a remote part of East Africa living in a village where adequate medical care has never existed for many diseases. Married at a young age her pregnancy and labour would have been very poorly managed. When she went into labour and could not deliver her child, many hours of obstructed labour followed before some form of delivery, most likely of a dead baby, was carried out. By that time the pressure of the baby's head on the mother's pelvis had damaged her bladder so badly that now she leaked urine continuously. She now had a vesicoävaginal fistula that only delicate surgery by the African surgeons could cure.

In some ways she was a fortunate woman. She had not died in obstructed labour as so many thousands of women do in Africa. Eventually she had managed to find the means to travel perhaps over one hundred miles to our hospital where she was now waiting for some chance of cure. Today for some reason Theresa had lost hope and the tears quietly rolled down her cheeks but I could not see why on this day she should be so disturbed.



I called one of the nurses over to translate for me and to find some explanation for her weeping. The nurse explained that Theresa knew that the next day there was to be a plan by the government to start charging fees for operations. She was a poor woman without money. She now felt that as her operation had been postponed this day then she had lost hope of a cure. All her previous waiting would be in vain and hence the tears.

Under pressure of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank many powerless African governments have been forced to introduce cuts in health care and education and introduce charges for treatment. Theresa's tears that day were the human consequences of these policies. No doubt there are many people like Theresa in Africa. The poorest of the poor are bearing a burden with their lives for the policies of the banks. The debt repayments, and also the arms trade and the unjust trade policies rob Africa of any economic progress. A new brutal and insidious slavery is being perpetuated.

Ray Towey

(Ray Towey is a member of the Volunteer Missionary Movement and recently returned from East Africa as a missionary doctor.)