Where wars begin

Tony Simpson

‘The problem’s us,’ says Vanessa Redgrave, speaking to camera for the People Power exhibition currently running at London’s Imperial War Museum. ‘We use the weapons.’ This thought echoes UNESCO’s founding constitution: ‘since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed’.

Constructing or building peace is a permanent endeavour, enhanced by creative impulses. Nottingham Peacebuilders recently occupied spaces around the city for music, dance, theatre and meditation. A flash mob playing ‘Ode to Joy’ at Nottingham Station, beginning with one young solo violinist and ending with full orchestra, made the British Transport Police Officer’s day. East Midlands Trains posted a film on their website. On a Saturday evening, while one or two young men squared up to each other nearby, a candle-lit procession from Old Market Square to High Pavement ended in the courtyard of the National Museum of Justice, swinging to Shell’s Belles jazz band in this place of execution. This Evil Thing, Michael Mears’ one-man play about conscription during the First World War, filled Nottingham Playhouse Studio and brought to mind the heroic resistance to war of Harry Wheatcroft, conscientious objector and rose grower extraordinary, who later introduced the fragrant Peace Rose from France to fertile soils of the Trent Valley. During the First World War, 69 men died as a result of hardship during incarceration for their conscientious objection. That COs were treated better during the Second World War, as one contributor to the post-performance

In its current exhibition, London’s Imperial War Museum charts a century of opposing war and building peace. We take its cue to broaden the narrative.
discussion remarked, was the fullest tribute to the struggles of those who refused to fight and kill during the aptly named ‘Great War’.

‘People Power’ features the steady South Yorkshire voice of Bert Brocklesby (the young conscientious objector at the heart of Michael Mears’ play) in its extensive coverage of the First World War and the founding of the No-Conscription Fellowship, which it takes as its starting point. The Imperial War Museum’s sound archive has preserved such clear voices for us all to hear.

Catherine Marshall’s nurturing of the No-Conscription Fellowship receives full tribute in Lyn Smith’s beautifully illustrated and wide-ranging book of the exhibition (reviewed on page 112 by Bruce Kent). Peace historian Jo Vellacott sorted Catherine’s archive after it was discovered in the outbuildings of the family home in the Lake District and taken to the Cumbria Records Office (see Spokesman 128). Labour Leader, organ of the Independent Labour Party, which opposed the war, described Catherine Marshall as ‘the most able organiser in the land’.

Building peace, more than ‘fighting’, narrates The Glorious Art of Peace, as John Gittings titled his unique and empowering survey ‘from the Iliad to Iraq’ (Oxford University Press, 2012). People have a deep and personal interest in keeping the peace, and power of public opinion carries democratic weight, even against those who would ignore it. Peggy Duff, CND’s first general secretary, understood this and acted on it until her dying day. We reprint some of her reflections on the Committee of 100, which figures in ‘People Power’, as well as tributes to Peggy published in the END Bulletin in 1981. European Nuclear Disarmament (END) appears centrally on the exhibition poster, held aloft by a young child. Its message resonates anew in dangerous times.


The march against the Iraq War in 2003 was a deeply felt protest by people from all backgrounds, but there was still room for humour, as revealed in the banners. I particularly liked: ‘Notts County supporters say make love not war (and a home win against Bristol would be nice).’

Sheila Hancock, Foreword, People Power
UNESCO

Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Adopted in London on 16 November 1945 and came into force a year later

The Governments of the States Parties to this Constitution on behalf of their peoples declare: That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed;

That ignorance of each other’s ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war;

That the great and terrible war which has now ended was a war made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men, and by the propagation, in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races;

That the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfil in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern;

That a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.

For these reasons, the States Parties to this Constitution, believing in full and equal opportunities for education for all, in the unrestricted pursuit of objective truth, and in the free exchange of ideas and knowledge, are agreed and determined to develop and to increase the means of communication between their peoples and to employ these means for the purposes of mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other’s lives;

In consequence whereof they do hereby create the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for the purpose of advancing, through the educational and scientific and cultural relations of the peoples of the world, the objectives of international peace and of the common welfare of mankind for which the United Nations Organization was established and which its Charter proclaims.
'Don't Mourn — Organise!'

PEGGY DUFF, veteran nuclear disarmament campaigner and a founder member of END's Coordinating Committee, died in University College Hospital, London on 17 April after a long fight against cancer.

The tributes paid to her at a Memorial Meeting held on 7 June in London illustrate the affection as well as the respect with which she is remembered. We reproduce some extracts from that meeting here and ask Bulletin readers to remember Jo Hill's epitaph quoted by Sidney Lens of the United States: "Don't Mourn — Organise!"

...the whole great resurgence of CND which is taking place in this country and indeed in many other countries and it is the greatest development of the peace movement that the world has ever known and it comes at the moment of supreme crisis for the whole of humanity. It is conceivable that we can turn back the whole nuclear arms race and install some sanity into mankind. I believe the forces that are mastering to that effect have the chance of success, and when we succeed, and we will have to succeed in these coming few years, there will be nobody who will have contributed more to that triumph of the human races in all places than Peggy Duff..."

SUSAN KOCHALSKI, Peggy's daughter, recollected some of the memories of her childhood.

"Just before the end of the war our father was killed in action so Muriel had three children to bring up alone. We all have vivid memories of her campaigning days, having to push the Tribune van to get it going before we went to school, and steering our school friends hurriedly across the road after catching sight of my mother standing on a soap box outside Kennington Town."

"She was an unconventional grandmother as well. Although she was very fond of all her grandchildren when they were babies, the bond grew much closer when they could play cards."

"I remember especially her last trip to Washington. Kath saw her off with her walking stick and one plastic carrier bag. I collected her at Gatwick on her return. She finally shot through the customs door travelling in style on top of a luggage jeep looking horribly like Queen Victoria and very pleased with herself as she now had two plastic carrier bags — one containing a skateboard for my son."

I would like to thank Dr Sahani of University College Hospital, who when a frail old lady announced that she wanted to go to Vietnam or Frankfurt or America took it without a blink and never discouraged her."

ROY SEAN, an ex Camden Council colleague of Peggy's, recalled her total lack of false immortalit..."Shew, shut that bloody door, you're making a draught."

CARMEL BUDDARDO of Tapod, the campaign for the release of political prisoners in Indonesia.

"If I can share with you just a few impressions of the last days of her life, I would like to do that. Hearing that she was in hospital, knowing that she was quite seriously ill again, I thought I'd go and see her. I also wanted to ask her a bit about her book, 'Left, Left, Left' because I was interested in the way she had written it, how she researched it and all..."
that kind of thing. But it turned out that I was too late. I went to the hospital to see her and one of her daughters, Susan, was there and it was quite obvious that she was dying. And I thought, in fact I made a vague attempt to ask her about this book, but obviously she was not able to say anything. or, 'I'll tell you later' she said. And in between snatches of conversation she sort of dozed off and there were embarrassing moments of not quite knowing what to do. When you're sitting with an ill person should you speak or should you not speak. And as I sat beside her bed saying nothing and not quite knowing what to do and then suddenly, hardly looking at me, she barked, 'Why are you sitting there saying nothing?' I said, 'Well, what do you want me to say?' 'Say anything. Read to me from the newspaper if you can't think of anything.' Fortunately, there was a copy of The Guardian, so I started reading. And I read her quite a few items. She heard all these things and made her very biting, tense comments. I was absolutely amazed because she looked as though she was sleeping all the time, but obviously she was still very 'with it.' In fact, this was 24 hours before she died. And actually I was at that moment when I asked her: 'Peggy, aren't you thinking of going to this conference in Holland?' 'No,' she said, sitting up sharply, 'too many Germans.'

'I then had to take my leave and it was the next day that I heard of her death. I'd just like to share with you the very strong feeling of my experience with her during that last day she was a person who I loved very dearly to work with and I have missed even since she died and will go on missing.'

IAN MIKARDO MP

"When I heard that Peggy was going to organise a mass march of tens of thousands of people every four days from Aldermaston to London I was absolutely horrified. I had known her in the days when she was business manager of Tribune and had seen her in that office in a permanent state of managerial and financial obsessiveness. I thought that even with the help of good people and organisational skills, her new campaign would be an inaffable recipe for nationwide disaster. But how wrong I was. How well she measured up to the challenge. How well she proved to be, in my judgement, one of the best organising managers I have struck in my life, and her secret was that she picked people for particular jobs, delegated to them totally, trusted them and then left them get on with the job. There were very few people in organisation and administration that really have got the capacity to do that to the extent that Peggy had that capacity.

"Peggy organised the liaison squad, she organised the litter men, she organised the accommodation people, the loud speaker equipment, the baggage and all the rest of it and then she thought about the feeding of the five thousand or more and she looked through her lists of members of the campaign and found, at an address at Tunbridge Wells, the name of a cafe owner – a very nice chap called Hurtington – and she called on him to provide the expertise and the equipment. He had then to get field kitchens, which of course we had to run, and she wanted someone to organise the logistics, find the staff and keep the accounts and all that. She picked Jo Richardson to do that. And then she said to Huntington and Jo Richardson: "You need a third one in your team. What you want is a big fellow with broad shoulders with not much brains. You need somebody who can load up the catering van, drive it to the next stop, unload it, put out the trestle tables, pull out the gear, and then dump the water to fill up the field kitchens, but don't get anyone with brains 'cos he'll start asking questions and start to grumble." And it was on the basis of these job specifications that I was appointed."