

Africa	Exploitation	Landmines	Palestine	
Aid	Food	Manifesto 2000	Patriotism	
Animal Rights	Geneva Conventions	Militarism	Peace	
Arms Trade	Global Warming	Minority Rights	Private Finance Initiatives	
Art		Music	Racism	
Biofuels	<p style="text-align: center;">A year of <u>One World Columns</u> October 2004 - September 2005</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">... mainstreaming ...</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Peace, Environment, Human Rights, Sustainability, Anti-war voices in the UK Eastern Region</p>			Refuseniks
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The One World Column started in May 2004 as a regular weekly feature in the Eastern Daily Press (EDP), a daily mainstream newspaper with readership throughout Norfolk, UK. The columns aim to bring radical voices to this mainstream platform on a range of topics such as international development, poverty, globalisation, peacemaking, human rights, international relations, and the environment. We hope to provide a positive voice for the future, whilst being lively and critical scrutinisers of the current global system. We represent a wide group of concerned Norfolk people, and we welcome feedback and healthy debate.

The columns reproduced here are the original unedited columns, as submitted to the newspaper by the columnists. The first six months columns may be found on our website and at www.oneworldcolumn.org/pdfs/all.pdf.



Andrew
Boswell



Marguerite
Finn



Jacqui
McCarney



Rupert
Read



Ian
Sinclair

Please read our columns, constructively criticise them and, if you live in Norfolk, add to the debate on the EDP letters page (email : EDPletters@archant.co.uk). All proceeds from the column will be donated to charities which work in the areas highlighted. This year money has gone to Buddhists working with those affected by the Tsunami, Medical Aid for Iraqi Children, and in sponsoring a "Conflict Resolution" conference in Norwich, October 2005.

We are always looking for material to cover in this wide area. If you would like to participate by providing research or material for columns, then please contact Andrew Boswell (email: info@oneworldcolumn.org, 01603 613798).

Leading the way beyond animal testing

Oct 1 2005
Rupert Read

There are many reasons to be against testing cosmetics, diseases and medicines on animals. Some of those reasons have been explored in recent 'One World' columns.

But the most basic reason of all is perhaps the least understood one. It is this: animal testing just doesn't work. 'Europeans for Medical Progress' (EMP) is a new organisation representing thousands of doctors and scientists who oppose animal experimentation exclusively because it is harmful to human health. In fact, a survey that EMP commissioned in August 2004 revealed that 82% of doctors are concerned that animal data can be misleading for humans. Sadly, the mainstream national media seems to have little interest in this perspective, preferring sensational stories of "thugs" threatening "men in white coats".

Meanwhile, we hear constantly that animal experimentation is essential for medical progress – but where is the evidence to support that claim? Whereas there is a mountain of evidence from the scientific literature against it. For example, animal experiments showed that cigarettes were safe, that high cholesterol diets were safe, that Aidsvac would protect against HIV (it doesn't), and that HRT would protect women from heart disease and stroke (it doesn't). [See www.curedisease.net for many more examples.]

Overwhelming evidence shows that testing drugs on animals is meaningless for people, with a successful prediction rate for side effects of only 5-30%. Tossing a coin would predict drug safety as 'effectively' as animal tests do.

'Side-effects' of prescription medicine are now the fourth biggest killer in the western world. How are these drugs tested for safety? On animals! Pharmaceutical companies have known for decades that animal testing is mostly scientifically worthless – pure junk science -- but they use it to provide liability protection when their drugs kill or injure people. Juries are easily swayed by volumes of safety data from rats, mice, dogs and monkeys – even though it is meaningless for humans. Vioxx (the recently-withdrawn arthritis painkiller) alone has killed tens or more probably hundreds of thousands of people through heart attacks and strokes – yet tests in monkeys and mice showed it protected their hearts!

As to finding cures for our most dreaded diseases, it is vital that we abandon animal experiments if we expect to see any progress here. In 1998, Dr Richard Klausner, director of the US National Cancer Institute (NCI), admitted, "The history of cancer research has been a history of curing cancer in the mouse. We have cured mice of cancer for decades - and it simply didn't work in humans". The NCI believes we have lost cures for cancer because they were ineffective in mice. How can animal testing actually prevent us from finding cures to diseases? Through the tests showing substances as being dangerous to animals, even though they may be harmless for – and beneficial to – humans. Just think: without animal testing, perhaps we might already have figured out a cure not only for some cancers, but also for killers such as multiple sclerosis.

I believe the idea of cures for human disease efficiently being found via research on animals to be an expensive and dangerous lie. As respected elder statesman Tony Benn has said, "There is every reason why the public should be sceptical about claims that animal testing benefits human health. It is astonishing that animal testing has never been scientifically evaluated, and the process of doing so is long overdue."

The positive news is that we already have much safer ways to test new medicines – such as DNA chips to identify who will benefit and who will suffer side effects, and sophisticated microdose studies with volunteers monitored by PET scanners – providing information that could never be obtained from animals. Switching to these 21st-century technologies will benefit both people and animals.

Forward-looking scientists have already given up animal experiments, and are using exclusively non-animal based methods, as they endeavour to uncover the basic mechanisms of human diseases. Here, for instance, is the 'Statement of policy regarding applications for funding' of the Humane Research Trust, which is based in Cheshire (and has a laboratory at the University of East Anglia): "No animals or animal tissue to be used. Applications need to show some advance in technique, or use existing techniques in area where it is the norm to use animals, which will lead to a reduction in animal usage and a benefit to human health." It's good to know that British 21st century non-animal-based medical research is showing scientists the world over the way to go.



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Suspicious Minds

Sep 24 2005
Marguerite Finn

*"We can't go on together
with suspicious minds
and we can't build our dreams
on suspicious minds"*

Thus sang Elvis Presley when I was a youngster. I was reminded of it again last Saturday when the Iranian President spoke at the UN General Assembly in New York. I was intrigued by the hostile reporting of his speech, and by the fact that the American delegation walked out in the middle of it and the British Foreign Secretary called it "unhelpful". So, I read the speech for myself. What I discovered was a respectful and honest appraisal of the current global situation - albeit delivered in a language using a more religious vocabulary than is usual at such events. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad caught the mood of the Summit precisely in his opening sentence: "Today we have gathered here to exchange views about the world, its future and our common responsibilities towards it." No disagreement there. "Truth will shine the light of faith and ethics on the life of human beings and prevent them from aggression, coercion and injustice". Yes, O.K. - but are some delegates beginning to shift uneasily in their seats ?

Maybe a smidgen of 'aggression, coercion and injustice' had crept into the foreign policy of some of the powerful countries attending the Summit, enabling them to acquire weapons and power that they wished to deny to other countries - not all countries, just certain countries.

Let us imagine why President Ahmadinejad would go out of his way to try to establish a level playing field in international affairs. He may not have had much confidence in the playing field's existence but he spoke in the fervent hope that one might develop.

A quick look at the history of Iran might help us understand his suspicions. Iran is not a motley colonial confection like Iraq, but a proud and ancient country three times the size of France, with a population of 70 million. It is OPEC's second largest oil producer and has the world's largest reserves of gas. Back in the 1950s, Iran was ruled by the Shah and with his acquiescence, British Petroleum produced and controlled Iran's main source of income: its oil - and therefore, its destiny.

BP's oil revenues were greater than those of the Iranian Government, which was paid royalties of 10% to 12% of the profits. The British Government received as much as 30% in taxes alone.

A few Iranian parliamentarians profited handsomely from this arrangement and were persuaded to maintain the status quo. Then Dr. Mohamed Musaddiq became Prime Minister. His government was democratic, popular, nationalist, anti-communist and as the British Ambassador privately admitted, "free from the taint of corruption". In 1951, Dr. Musaddiq nationalised Iran's oil operations. He offered to compensate the British. His offer was rejected. Iran's nationalisation and offer of compensation were perfectly legitimate under international law - but that was irrelevant to the UK government of the day.

Britain boycotted the purchase of Iranian oil in the hopes of bankrupting the country and causing a revolution. In 1953, the CIA and MI6 jointly organised a military coup overthrowing the popular government of Dr. Musaddiq and replacing him with the pro-western General Zahidi. The British Foreign Secretary at the time believed this was "evidence that United Kingdom interests could not be recklessly molested with impunity". The Shah, backed by Britain and America, thenceforth used repression and torture to institute a dictatorship that lasted until the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The Islamic Republic of Iran today has good reason to mistrust Western Powers. It is sandwiched between nuclear Pakistan and nuclear Israel, with nuclear Russia to the north and nuclear America everywhere in the skies above. Far from posing a threat to anyone, Iran is surrounded by nuclear states of which at least one is openly hostile. Israel is determined that Iran can not be allowed to develop a civil nuclear programme - let alone nuclear weapons - and the smart money is on any future attack on Iran coming from Israel - not America.

Mistrust and Suspicion thrive in such arenas. President Ahmadinejad focussed attention on Iran's predicament and on the "nuclear apartheid" preventing it from developing nuclear technology for peaceful use.

America and Israel - even Britain - can't overcome their suspicions about what Iran might do next. Perhaps they feel Iran couldn't forgive them and the only way to assuage their guilt is to label Iran the perpetual 'enemy'. Kahlil Gibran wrote in *The Prophet*: "if it is fear you would dispel, the seat of that fear is in your heart and not in the hand of the feared"

If only we could exist without the need for an "enemy".



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The Law Must Protect Black Americans

Sep 17 2005
Jacqui McCarney

Hurricane Katrina washed away the glossy façade that America likes to project on to the world. "Liberty", "Democracy" "Equality" and the "American Dream" looked as washed up as the poor of New Orleans. The stench of poverty, segregation, neglect and blatant racism hung around the Superdome stadium and in the surrounding water.

The kind of racism that allows the government in the richest, most powerful country in the world to treat its largely black people with such casual indifference does not appear overnight, nor is it an accident. While the constitution declares "all men are born equal", the law has worked in the opposite direction, upholding and strengthening racial inequality at all levels of society. And where the "letter" of the law is non racist, the "spirit" of the law is blatantly, and apparently, unashamedly, racist. America TV is a witness to such prejudice, in its nightly showing of black young men in shoot outs, and arrests. Even during Katrina, we saw this constant negative coverage as white survivors were reported "finding" bread and soda in local grocery stores, and black people "looting" it.

America's racist history goes back to the slave trade where white slave owners were protected by law. With the end of slavery the law jumped in to protect white supremacy. And it was in the city of New Orleans that a landmark case was fought. In 1892, a mixed race old man, Homer Plessy, challenged segregation in public places by sitting in the white compartment of a train heading out of New Orleans. The Judge upheld the law and cemented what had come to be known as "separate but equal" ruling legitimising segregation in the South.

Free from slavery, black people are still not equal. This legacy of injustice was all too apparent in the scenes emanating from New Orleans. The civil rights movement of the 1960s, under the leadership of Martin Luther King, has had little impact against powerful opposing forces of the law.

George Bush has said "The decision of the Supreme Court affects the life of every American" and it is strangely ironic, therefore, that as New Orleans struggled with the collapse of law and order, Chief Justice William Rehnquist died. His legacy in New Orleans was writ bold and large in those desperate days.

It was 1952 when a major challenge to racial segregation was launched in Brown vs. the Board of

Education, Rehnquist, then, a mere clerk to judge Jackson, took it upon himself to intervene with a memo to the Judge in which he argued that "separate but equal" had been correctly decided and should be upheld. And so began a career dedicated to implementing a right wing agenda in opposition to civil liberties and racial equality.

As a Republican activist in Arizona in the 1950s and 1960s, he opposed the desegregation of restaurants. He also worked as a volunteer challenging the African-American voters at the polls, trying to get them stricken from voting on the day of the election. This tradition was continued in the first Bush election of 2000. Bush lost the popular election by 500,000 votes but "won" the election by taking the hotly contested State of Florida (see Greg Palast's book: The Best Democracy Money Can Buy). Here 57,700 names were removed from the rolls on the grounds that they were felons - later research showing that 90.2 % were completely innocent of crime except for being African American.

As less than 10% of African Americans vote Republican, these votes would have lost Bush the election. It was Judge Rehnquist who oversaw the Bush vs. Gore election and refused a recount.

Black Americans have entered the 21st century unrepresented, poor, angry and segregated. A pervasive and persistent form of Apartheid separates their neighbourhoods and schools.

Still "separate" but certainly not "equal" Black neighbourhoods are poorer and black children are more likely to fail at school, become unemployed, and are seven times more likely to end up in prison. Rehnquist took his mission to oppose integration personally, and had covenants on his houses in Phoenix and Vermont prohibiting their resale to minorities. His career thrived in a culture where he felt free to write "It is about time the court faced the fact that white people in the South don't like coloured people. It is not part of the judicial function to thwart public opinion".

The America constitution boasts "all men are born equal" - its society won't survive unless black people's 200 years of demands for equality and justice are really met. As in this country, racial discrimination should be made illegal (although we should not be complacent). Black people should be given support to bring cases of discrimination against the police, employers and schools. Black History month in Norwich and Norfolk starts on Monday 28 September (www.norfolkblackhistorymonth.org.uk).



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Animal, vegetable or criminal?

Sep 10 2005
Rupert Read

When there is so much human tragedy in the world, who has time to spare a thought for our kin, the billions of non-human animals who share this planet with us? Well, I do, for one.

It seems to me that when we are trying to help fellow human beings who are suffering, we start from the assumption that those who are most powerless are the ones who most need our support. For example, people who are imprisoned and tortured for their political convictions; those whose homes or livelihoods have been devastated by natural (or manmade) disasters; refugees; women or children who have been sold into slavery; those on the receiving end of bombings or threatened with death in whatever way: all such groups of people, we aim to help the most, just because they are temporarily powerless to stop themselves from being abused or oppressed or simply destroyed.

The thing about our non-human cousins is that they are always in such a condition. Non-human animals cannot rise up in revolution against their oppressors; they cannot speak out in the media about what is being done to them; they cannot even begin to tell us (at least, not in words) what it is like for them. We have far more power over our non-human cousins than ever a tyrant has over his people, or a pimp over his prostitutes.

And this, I think, places upon us an absolute responsibility to treat our non-human kin with love, care and respect.

As a Quaker, I feel this especially strongly. We Quakers have a strong history of principled (non-violent) struggle against injustice and violence. In particular, against slavery, and for peace.

Obviously, it would be meaningless if human beings declared world peace but continued to wage an endless war against our non-human kin. And it would be a terrible omission, to free human beings, but to enslave animals the world over. And yet that - the mass enslavement and destruction of animals, for our commercial use - is exactly what is happening.

We have a clear kinship with non-human animals. They feel pain, they suffer, they scream; some of them can reason and care and empathise, too. And yet we subject them to the most extraordinary attacks. For example: Each year inside British laboratories, approximately 4 million animals are experimented on.

Every 7 seconds, one animal dies in a British lab. Meanwhile, about 750,000,000 animals are slaughtered every year in Britain for food. That's right, you didn't read that wrong: 750 MILLION. That's almost 20 animals every second. By the time you finish reading this column, approximately 6000 British animals will have been killed inside farms and slaughterhouses, for casual human benefit. Most of these animals moreover are raised and killed in conditions that are -- throughout -- miserable and natureless.

Many readers will have seen the recent TV programmes on 'Supermarket Secrets', which depicted in graphic detail the way that animals suffer, in the course of becoming food for those of us who eat flesh. In particular, the programme showed the appalling conditions on a Norfolk factory farm raising broiler chickens for slaughter. Such farms are nothing less than the equivalents, for the animal world, of concentration camps and extermination camps.

It can sometimes be easy to evince concern for the plight of humans suffering in New Orleans, or Indonesia, or Palestine, or Abu Ghraib. And it is of course both vital and wonderful that we do so. But care for our fellow creatures, like charity, needs to begin at home. Next time you reach for your wallet to give to the victims of wars and disasters abroad, spare a thought too for the mass torture and extermination of animals that is going on all around us, every day. In Norfolk, in shoots and traps and hunts across the country, in our seas; in factory farms, in scientific laboratories, in slaughter houses.

As a Quaker, I believe that there is 'that of God in everyone' -- including in my friends, the non-human creatures with whom I share this world. But you don't have to believe that, in order to take action (A good place to start is by going vegetarian). And action is sorely needed to stop this holocaust of suffering that I have merely begun to gesture at, in this article. Non-human animals are suffering, as you read these words, in their billions. For instance: in disguised 'concentration camps' scattered across the green and pleasant countryside of Norfolk alone, millions of chickens and other birds are suffering, right now. And all over the world, the pattern is repeated.

Non-human animals are in this pain, because of us humans. It is a moral crime, to ignore their wordless screams.



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A Country Whose Time Has Come

Sep 3 2005
Marguerite Finn

When my country takes her place among the nations of the earth, then, and not till then let my epitaph be written"

Thus spoke Irishman Robert Emmett in his speech from the Dock prior to being executed in 1803. In our house, a large print of Robert Emmett hung on the wall at the bend in the stairs. I passed the picture on my way to and from bed every day for 23 years. I used to wonder who would write Emmett's epitaph - and when. Perhaps the time has come?

In 2004, The Economist Intelligence Unit reported that the Republic of Ireland is the best country in the world to live in. Irish adherence to family values on the one hand, while embracing economic growth on the other, enables Ireland to maintain the delicate balance between tradition and modernity.

I was born in Howth - a fishing village 9½ miles north-east of Dublin. It was a wonderful place to grow up in. The population was a glorious mix of Catholic, Protestant and other faiths (the Dalai Lama took refuge in Howth for a while!). In this close-knit community, Catholic children met up after school with their Protestant friends to go swimming or play tennis. Catholic Priest and Protestant Minister were buddies, invited jointly to all village functions. Both churches were a vital part of the community, an integral part of daily life. That was Ireland in 1967, just one year before the ambush of a Civil Rights march in October 1968 triggered the onset of Northern Ireland's recent "Troubles".

It must be said that the denial of civil rights denied to Northern Ireland Catholics in the years leading up to 1968 was unjust. Readers today may find it hard to believe that a substantial group of UK citizens were denied a vote and were discriminated against in housing and employment. This continued unchecked by Westminster for decades. Thirty years of pain and terror followed.

There has been an unwillingness to face up to the injustices of Northern Ireland, both on the part of the UK government and the UK media. It was tempting to concentrate on the terrorist activities of the "Sinn Fein /IRA" rather than paint a more balanced picture of a failing society.

How many readers know that Catholic families in County Antrim, have now been issued with fire blankets by the

Ulster police, to thwart sectarian attacks by loyalist paramilitaries? Last month, a Catholic Primary School was fire-bombed, and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) warned Catholic families living peaceably on a mixed housing estate near Belfast, that they would be burned out if they did not leave. It is easy to pretend that such things don't happen in our democracy. But this 'blind spot' allowed years of pent-up resentment, mistrust and suspicion to harden into extremes, manifested in the revival of the IRA and Loyalist paramilitary groups.

In July, the IRA formally announced the end to their armed campaign and signalled their willingness to "assist the development of purely political and democratic programmes through exclusively peaceful means." This was a groundbreaking statement. The British and Irish Prime Ministers responded in kind. But much remains to be done. The people of Northern Ireland need our unbiased support. Northern Ireland stands on the brink - it can move forward into the 21st Century, with a just and peaceful society, or it can slide into a sectarian hell. All of us, as members of the 'civil society', can help prevent that by being aware of the problems facing the divided community on our doorstep, and by being interested in resolving them.

August saw the untimely death of Mo Mowlam, former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and a good friend to that country. Mo worked very hard for all the people of the province, enabling nationalists to engage constructively with the British Government, leading to the Good Friday Agreement, which still remains the best hope for peace.

Mo Mowlam appealed to the basic humanity of ordinary people and this humanity may yet prevail where politics fail. A group of Protestants in Ballymena are planning a vigil to show their support for Catholics whose church was repeatedly attacked. Our Lady's Church was paint-bombed and daubed with sectarian graffiti four times in August. Protestants from a nearby Presbyterian church helped clean up the mess, wanting to show Loyalists that they did not support sectarian violence. Protestants from throughout Ballymena plan to join them and pray at our Lady's Church - a gesture deeply appreciated by the Catholic congregation.

The Protestants of Ballymena are giving Robert Emmett a reason to be proud of his country.



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Dancing in Thetford Forest

Aug 27 2005
Jacqui McCarney

I was sitting in the garden when a haunting and poignant song drifted down from my husband's study, strangely familiar and forlorn - I almost hoped it would end quickly but it was also compellingly beautiful. I remembered the steps that accompanied it; it was in fact a dance, The Elm Dance.

It was fitting that I should be reminded of the Elm Dance after a day spent at the very moving exhibition at Saint Peter Mancroft remembering the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 60 years ago. This song is a reminder of a more recent nuclear catastrophe, the horrific accident at Chernobyl in 1986, and of the townspeople upwind at [Novozybkov](#).

I first saw the dance and heard the story of it at a workshop with the Eco-philosopher, system theorist and Buddhist scholar [Joanna Macy](#), who starts each day of her workshops with the joining of hands to follow the simple steps of the Elm Dance. She does so to remember the suffering people of Novozybkov whom she had promised she would never forget. Each time she leads this dance, it is in recognition of their suffering, in solidarity with them, and in hope for the future of humanity.

As the burning reactor in Chernobyl exploded in a volcano of radioactivity, the winds shifted to the north east, carrying a cloud of poisoned smoke in the direction of Moscow. To save the millions in that city, a quick decision was taken to seed the clouds and cause them to rain. So an unusually late April heavy rain bearing intense concentrations of radioactive iodine, strontium, caesium and particles of plutonium, drenched the towns and countryside of the Bryansk region. The people there were not informed of their government's decision and even now, although it is common knowledge, it is rarely mentioned.

Joanna Macy and her team had travelled from one town to another, offering workshops to help with the psychological trauma of those affected by the contamination of Chernobyl. Novozybkov was the last town she visited, and although the most badly affected, nobody wanted to talk about Chernobyl. Sitting in a circle, these people wanted to talk about the anger and breakdown of their community, from sullen children, absent spouses, to backbiting neighbours. But the nightmare of the contamination was taboo.

They also remembered happier times and their own childhoods - harvest time, sleigh parties and picnics in the forests. Even during the Nazi occupation, they fought from the shelter of the forests. Even under Stalin, they went into the forests every weekend - walking, picnicking, mushrooming. They said that they were "people of the forest". They could not move forward from 1986. They refused to accept the horror that happened to them, but felt compelled to speak. They recalled the searing hot wind from the south east, the white ash that fell from the sky, the children running and playing in it, the drenching rain that followed the rumours, and the fear.

As the workshop progressed, a number drew pictures - many of trees, and the road to the trees blocked with a large X, blocking the way for wood absorbs most radiation and the forests had become the most dangerously contaminated area.

When they returned to the circle, they were angry and distraught. One woman cried: "What good does it do? I would be willing to feel all the sorrow in the world if it could save my daughters from cancer. Each time I look at them I wonder if tumours will grow in their little bodies. Can my tears protect them?"

The next day, calmer and clearer, they acknowledged how hard it had been to face their pain, but they also spoke of how it had connected them to everyone else "as if we were all branches of the same tree". Breaking the silence was painful, but cathartic - a man who had left silently every day to visit his young daughter in hospital said: "It is like being clean, for the first time in a long time".

In Norfolk, we are at considerable risk - on our doorstep, we have nuclear warheads at the US base at Lakenheath, and reactors at Sizewell. In June, we heard that the government is considering using a site in Thetford Forest for storing/dumping nuclear waste. There was also the exercise called "[Dimming Sun](#)", which simulated what would happen if a US plane carrying nuclear weapons crashed in the forest. Those wishing to rid this area of nuclear weapons will be holding a vigil at the Lakenheath base on September 25th. I hope they too will find time to join hands in solidarity with the people of Novozybkov for the Elm Dance.

A CD of the Elm Dance and booklet can be obtained from info@scottstudio.co.uk.



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Hard Weapons for Soft Targets

Aug 20 2005
Marguerite Finn

Human Rights Watch published a [report](#) on August 3 2005, indicating that the George W Bush administration would soon resume production of antipersonnel mines, in a move that is at odds with both the international community and previous US policy.

This coming December, the Pentagon will decide whether or not to begin producing a new type of antipersonnel land mine called a "Spider". The first of these mines would then be scheduled to roll out in early 2007. Funds have already been earmarked for Spider's production: the Pentagon requested 1.3bn dollars for the mine system - as well as for another mine called the Intelligent Munitions System, which is expected to be fully running by 2008.

Landmines continue to kill or injure between 15,000 and 20,000 people annually. Many more suffer and die as a result of the indirect but equally lethal impact of landmines as an obstacle to sustainable development. Landmines render potential agricultural land unusable and so contribute to food shortages and nutrition deficit. Landmines restrict access to potable water and thus contribute to diarrhoeal diseases, the greatest cause of preventable death on the planet. Landmines stop schools from being built and hinder the construction and maintenance of roads - with devastating economic and social effect. Landmines breed insecurity that tears the social fabric of vulnerable states and creates further instability.

So why does the most militarily powerful nation on earth still need to produce these deadly devices?

The US has not officially used antipersonnel mines since the 1991 Gulf War, when it scattered more than 100,000 landmines from planes over Iraq and Kuwait. In 1996 President Bill Clinton said the US "would seek a worldwide agreement as soon as possible to end the use of all antipersonnel mines". The Mine Ban Treaty became international law on March 11 1997. In February 2004, however, the Bush administration abandoned all pretence of joining the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty (the Ottawa Convention), saying: "The United States will not join the Ottawa Convention because its terms would have required us to give up a needed military capability -- Landmines still have a valid and essential role protecting United States forces in military operations - no weapon currently exists that provides all the capabilities provided by landmines."

Steve Goose, Director of Human Rights Watch Arms Division, says: "We are beginning to see the bitter fruit of the new Bush administration land mine policy. The US appears well on the way to resuming production of antipersonnel mines. Renewed export and renewed use of these inhumane weapons will not be far behind."

The Pentagon has yet to confirm or deny reports that the US government intends to deploy a remote-controlled antipersonnel land mine system called "Matrix" in Iraq. Twenty-five of these mine systems, which can be detonated from a distance via radio signal, were allegedly sent to Iraq in May of this year for use by the US Army's Stryker Brigade. At the same time, US First Lady Laura Bush was entertaining at the White House Farah Ahmedi, the Afghan teenager who lost her leg to a landmine in Afghanistan and now lives in Chicago. On May 5, Farah joined Adopt-A-Minefield as Youth Ambassador to encourage young people to become more involved in helping resolve the global landmine problem.

Laura Bush may work just as hard in America as Sir Paul McCartney does here in the UK to promote the work of 'Adopt-A-Minefield' and help rid the world of the impact of landmines - but what is the point of all their hard work if as fast as they clear one mine field, the US military is busy developing new and nastier antipersonnel mines to contaminate yet more countries?

Given the immensity of international support for the banning of antipersonnel land mines, if the Pentagon does resume production of these weapons, diplomatic problems are certain to ensue - and so they should do. The 145 parties to the Ottawa Convention are forbidden to "assist" others in acts prohibited by the treaty. Therefore US military allies could also be at risk of breaching the treaty in joint military operations where antipersonnel mines are being used. November 3 2005 has been designated as "No More Landmines Day". Surely the best thing we can all do for world peace between now and then would be to point out to our MPs, councillors and Rotarians (who do a lot of work with Adopt-A-Minefield UK) the dreadful irony of raising funds to clear mines from one patch of land only to have our government, or that of our closest ally, infest new lands with new mines.

For further information check out www.landmines.org.uk



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Our Muslim Neighbours

Aug 13 2005
Rupert Read

Two years ago, I was in Syria, learning about the history of that troubled nation. I visited the town of Quneitra, entirely flattened in cold blood by the Israeli Army just before they returned it to the Syrians. I visited the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights area. And I was deeply fortunate to be invited to attend a friend's wedding in a huge Palestinian refugee camp.

Syria has had to absorb enormous numbers of refugees, since they were expelled / fled from Palestine in 1948 and '67. The 'temporary' camp I spent a day in has been there for a whole generation.

The spirit of those attending the wedding festivities was nevertheless tremendous. Many of the guests, and the children, were very poor - there is little work in the camps. But, so far as I could tell (virtually no-one spoke any English; I had to rely on my girlfriend to translate from their Arabic), many of them seemed happy...Especially the kids, when I agreed to take digital photos of them! It was a wonderful experience for me, to share this day with them, to dance with them.

Back in England, I felt more surer than ever that the world owes these Palestinian people justice: a home. And my understanding of them as people had been immeasurably enriched.

Two weeks ago, I was privileged to take part in a private meeting at the University of East Anglia - in the Islamic Centre (the mosque), there - between leaders of the Muslim group on campus and various representatives of the broader Norwich community - Councillors, peace and anti-racism campaigners, religious leaders. I was deeply impressed by the vivid desire for peace and mutual understanding that the Muslims that we met with showed. They reached out to us, as we did to them, in this difficult time of reflection on the truly appalling bombings in London -- and on our own government's actions in Iraq and across the Arab world, on the police in London shooting dead an innocent man, and, sadly, on senseless attacks on mosques (including in Norwich).

These devout Muslims, like virtually all practicing Muslims, have no sympathy whatsoever with violence or intolerance. And their views have been misunderstood.

If they believe in the fundamentals of their religion, it is only in the following sense: they believe in worship and peace and brotherhood, and in reading and holding to the teachings of the Koran, which do not condone the taking of any innocent life. And they explained to us with great care that the very meaning of the word 'jihad' has been perverted: the word really means simply 'struggle'. So, when one tries to do good in the world, as (say) an aid worker, one is engaged in 'jihad', in the word's true sense! The most valuable aspect of the meeting was to actually get to know some of those folk. To meet and talk with Abdullah, who converted to Islam many years ago - and who has a great sense of wit. Or Mansour, who comes from Saudi Arabia - and who has five kids, and a lovely smile.

Yes, he has a beard; so do I, sometimes! When one looks more than superficially at these neighbours of our's, one sees people, not stereotypes.

If we can come to understand something of life in a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria - a life in many ways extraordinarily different from our relatively easy, secure lives - then surely we can come to understand British Muslims. After all, you or I have far more in common with those people I met with recently than we do with those wonderful wedding guests I met in Syria two years ago. We share a common language, for starters - that helps!

If you get the chance to meet some of Norfolk's Muslims, then you too will discover what I have: that they passionately desire peace. That they are ordinary people with children and jobs and hopes and fears just like you. That they are longing for a happy and secure life. And if you walk pass a Muslim person on the streets of Yarmouth, or at UEA, or wherever, bear in mind that they are relying on you -- on all of us -- not to make the disastrous error of presuming that they have any sympathy whatsoever or any association whatsoever with the outrages recently perpetrated in London. No more than you have anything to do with the disgraceful attack on the Norwich City centre mosque that took place after that outrage, as a 'revenge attack'. As you are guiltless, then never forget: so are Norfolk's Muslims.



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Nuclear or spiritual : you choose

Andrew Boswell
Aug 6 2005

60 years ago today humanity entered a new era as the first atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Each year, there is much soul searching and arguing about the morality of this event. Whatever the arguments and counter arguments, few ordinary people would disagree that nuclear weapons should never be used again.

With this very significant anniversary, it is more valuable, then, to look to the future. We can't change the past, but we can choose to do differently in the future.

Yet, since Hiroshima and the end of the 2nd World War, each generation of UK leaders has chosen again the 1950s notion of a British nuclear deterrent. Like mice on a treadmill, without the will or imagination to do anything different, this decision is taken in the utmost secrecy. This reflects a grave crisis in leadership and decision making - our leaders repeatedly sleepwalk into choosing weapons of mass destruction.

Within the nation, too, people are increasingly disconnected from the issue and in denial - part of a growing spiritual crisis. Earlier this year, I collected signatures for nuclear disarmament in Norwich. The depth of people's denial came home to me, as several people commented they thought nuclear weapons "were no longer a problem". Only under an opiate daze of consumerism can people be so unengaged.

As Martin Luther King said "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." These prophetic words were made in 1967 - now we must wonder if our nation has reached the point of spiritual death.

The death cycle of WDM is continuing once again - press reports suggest that the government has already made a decision to replace the current Trident nuclear weapons system.

In fact, early work on this huge new nuclear weapons programme is very likely to have already started, with Defence Secretary John Reid's announcement to parliament on 20 July that an 'agreement has been reached with AWE Management Ltd. (AWE ML) to take forward a programme of investment in sustaining key skills and facilities at the Atomic Weapons Establishment. This will involve an investment of £350 million a year for the next three years.'

Bearing in mind, that we are continually told we are "fortunate" to live in a democracy, why are these momentous decisions made by a very few individuals without even reference to Parliament?

No wonder people feel disillusioned and sooth themselves in the next new shopping Mall.

If we were in any doubt before, since July 7th, we can be sure that our greatest security threat comes from a small number of people prepared to blow themselves up. What purpose can a continuing British nuclear program have in the face of asymmetric warfare, here and globally?

Despite the few who are in denial that there is any link between Britain's involvement in Iraq and the emergence of home grown terrorism, most British people know in their hearts that our foreign policies, and particularly the Iraq misadventure, are a significant influencer of recent tragic events.

Replacing Trident continues a supremely aggressive foreign policy from the mid 20th century. The government is unaccountable and undemocratic in continuing this incredibly dangerous and expensive Dr Strangelove project.

It is a risk to the world - increasing the risk of nuclear weapons being employed in some future war. It is a risk to our people - increasing the risk of nuclear weapons being used against us. It is a risk to the future - increasing the appeal of nuclear to terrorists and other nations.

Why, 35 years after Britain made a commitment under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), do we allow a small number of men continue to break that commitment? How can people trust us around the world? This flagrant violation of international treaties sends the wrong signals to all countries, particularly those who may be encouraged to develop their own nuclear systems.

Then what about the tens of billions of pounds of taxpayers' money that could better be spent on life affirming projects - here and worldwide? We simply can't "make poverty history" without making rampart militarism history too. The spiritual death of our nation is certainly inevitable unless we break out of the cycle.

The vibrant campaign for unilaterally disarmament in the 1980s, and the fall of the Berlin wall, tells us that a British nuclear deterrent is past its sell by date. A truly democratic government would engage its citizens in a real debate about whether there is still any requirement for a British nuclear capability.

To mark the 60th anniversary of Hiroshima, the Exhibition "Hiroshima to World Peace" is at St Peters Mancroft Church from August 6th to 18th, 10.30am-3.30pm daily.



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Pure and Dirty

Jul 30 2005
Jacqui McCarney

"Pure and dirty" was how John Berger described the political artist, Peter Kennard's work. As I headed for Norwich Art School, where Kennard and Cat Picton Phillipps are resident artists (for the EAST international exhibition until 20th August), I recalled some of his iconic images and knew what Berger meant.

The first thing you notice on entering the basement room are the images themselves. Startlingly direct and at the same time oddly familiar. Familiar because many of the photographs come from the pages of newspapers and are juxtaposed in surprising but powerful ways. Familiar, also because Kennard has been making these photomontages for 30 years and they have seeped into our unconscious minds.

Then you notice the room and how these images are displayed. They are festooned informally amidst a busy clutter of magazines, newspapers, photocopied images and in the midst of all this the artists working, chatting informally, and helping visitors explore their creativity. This is not just about clean finished displays, but you see work in progress as the artists attempt to de-mystify art and reveal the route of exploration and struggle that goes into the finished item

One of the most uncompromising works is "Know your Enemy", a photomontage, shows the backs of George Bush and Tony Blair, shoulder to shoulder, entering Downing Street and behind them on the pavement is the image of an Iraqi prisoner, bound and enclosed in a net, lying helplessly on the ground as a soldier punches him. War is "dirty" says Kennard and the shocking honesty of these images give them a kind "purity". In a society where the reality of human suffering becomes "collateral damage", he says he is "ripping apart the veil" and "putting what is really happening". In that naked honesty, there is certainly a kind of purity. He is showing it "as it is", but his work is not voyeuristic, it is clearly begging the next question - what can we do?

This collection called "War on War" assumes that the majority of global opinion is not represented in the media or the visual arts. He says you get a largely "homogenous voice" in the media and that questioning voices are marginalized. While many have found a voice through the internet, we also need to see our expression in real physicality, actually out there in the environment.

Kennard has achieved this by creating many of the iconic images of the anti-nuclear movement, most famously the broken missile caught in the CND symbol, used widely in the 80's in protests against the bomb. Another is his infamous "Haywain with Cruise Missiles", based on Constables original.

The V and A has bought a set of works called "Award", which shows a collection of military medals with the ribbon disintegrating. Another is a petrol nozzle becoming a gun, an amazingly economic expression of the relationship between our oil dependent lifestyles and war. Black humour surrounds the image of Tony Blair, a huge smoky explosion behind him, capturing himself on a camera phone, grinning widely, oblivious to the destruction in his wake.

He and Cat added their voices to those in the recent anti-war marches. These creative and vibrant events are largely ignored by the mainstream media, but Kennard says what is really dispiriting is how the politicians completely ignore them.

He asks, "What do people do with the frustration and despair?" There is a lot of anger about and he has witnessed this, especially since the London bombings. Cat explains that people are coming into the studio and saying "this is exactly what I am thinking". When she is in her private studio, she is often shocked to come out and "find much of the city carrying on as if there was nothing wrong". Her time as an artist in residence has been very affirming of people's real concerns about war and injustice.

Peter Kennard is doing much to democratise art by bringing it into the streets, and allowing it to act as a counter to the pervasive advertising in our public spaces. For the whole of his career, he has been a maverick, telling the truth in a way that few other artists have dared. His ambition is clearly to speak out against injustice and killing in all its guises. At this time when so many people want to see killing, in all its forms, war and terrorism, come to an end, it is hopeful to know that there are artists like Peter Kennard and young artists, like Cat Picton Phillipps, speaking out.

You can join Cat and Peter and members of CND "shadow painting" outside Peter Mancroft Church at 8 pm, 5th August, in remembrance of the 60th anniversary of dropping the Atomic bombs, on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



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The Policeman's Tale

Jul 23 2005
Marguerite Finn

If Chaucer had met Inspector Robert George on one of his pilgrimages, he would surely have immortalised his tale after hearing how this Norfolk policeman became embroiled in the terrible problems the world was unable to prevent happening in Bosnia. On 11 July 1995, Bosnian Serb troops systematically slaughtered some 8000 unarmed Muslims who had taken refuge in the UN-designated "safe area" of Srebrenica. This month, a decade on from the massacres, thousands converged on a muddy field in a remote corner of Bosnia to bury the dead and mark the 10th anniversary of Europe's worst post-second world war atrocity.

Leading up to the slaughter there had been a legacy of five centuries of Turkish oppression, of royal dictatorship, of fascist annexation by Italy and Germany, and of the civil war that went on at the same time as the communist partisans were fighting the Nazis. All this ensured that the cauldron of Yugoslavia, over which Tito came to preside, would contain a very potent brew. When Tito died, both cauldron and brew together melted down into mayhem.

Robert George recently retired from 37 years policing in London and Norfolk, and decided to tell the story of what became for him a life-affirming experience during a short spell in Bosnia near the end of his career. In November 1995, the "Dayton Accords" ended hostilities and a UN Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina was established to assist and restructure the local police and monitor the performance of all those involved in the maintenance of law and order.

Inspector Robert George joined the International Police Task Force (IPTF), which was one of the main components of the mission. Forty-six nations provided police officers for the IPTF, whose total strength was around 1600. Britain contributed 80 officers and their average tour of duty lasted one year. Before arriving in Bosnia no one knew where they would be posted to, or what jobs they would be expected to undertake. He was posted to Mostar, a divided town with a definitive border between the two ethnic populations - Bosnian Croat (Christian) and Bosniak (Muslim).

Not a single pre-war building was undamaged. A number were derelict or totally gutted.

Yet renovation continued quietly, every day bringing a little change for the better - a new roof completed or a shop re-opening.

One of Robert's first jobs was helping people recover

their homes, which had been confiscated during the war. Returnees were not always welcome. In the town of Stolac, which had changed majority ethnicity from Bosniak to Bosnian Croat, a returning family whose house had been rebuilt with international aid might find that the day before they were due to move in, the house would be blown up.

Mostar had been split into six police administrations, each using separate channels - with the result that the three administrations on the east side did not communicate with the three administrations on the west side. Robert's team introduced a single working channel, which greatly improved communication and interaction between the different ethnic police forces and the communities they served. An even more delicate task was auditing and investigating police performance on human rights, which was central to the UN Mandate.

Recent events in London have heightened the sense of a widening gap and lack of mutual understanding and trust between Islamic and Western societies - an environment that can be exploited and a situation that can be exacerbated by extremists on both sides. This is why UN Secretary General Kofi Annan announced an initiative this month to help bridge this gap. He called it an "Alliance of Civilizations" and it is intended "to respond to the need for a committed effort by the international community - both at institutional and civil society levels - to bridge divides and overcome prejudice, misperceptions and polarization which potentially threaten world peace."

Initiated by Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero and co-sponsored by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan, the Alliance aims to advance mutual respect for religious beliefs and traditions and be a positive reaffirmation of humankind's increasing interdependence in all areas from the environment to health, from economic and social development to security. Inspector George and his multi-ethnic team can testify to the benefits of such an approach. The year's secondment enriched his life far more than he had imagined it would. He came to love the country and its people. He made some very special friends both within the local community and the UN International Police Task Force. Above all, although he could not undo the carnage and misery that had gone before, he felt that he, and the officers he worked with, had been involved in the implementation of significant and positive change.

My sincere thanks to Inspector Robert George for his help and inspiration for this column.



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Blue Energy : Sea Snakes, Stingrays and Lagoons

Jul 16 2005
Andrew Boswell

I recently joined thousands marching for climate justice at Gleneagles. The G8 climate communiqué shows sadly, that our voices were not heard - it triply fails the future by not setting emissions targets, relying on long-term technological fixes, and downplaying the role of renewables now.

Yet, Britain is really well placed to exploit renewables along our 10,000 kilometre coastline with its large tidal range. Graham Sinden, from Oxford's Environmental Change Institute says wind, tidal and wave power could provide 40% of the UK's power needs. Whilst, the Open University's, Dr David Elliott, suggests that potentially as much as 68% of UK electricity could be generated using just tidal and wave:

- Tidal current turbines - underwater "wind" turbines on the sea bed (20%),
- Wave energy (20%),
- Tidal barrages (20%), and
- Tidal basins and lagoons where water is trapped at high tide and released to drive turbines at low tide (8%)

With real investment and political will, "blue energy" can make a huge contribution to UK energy security.

Why, then, is the Government's public stance on "blue energy" so "low key"? Can one smell the carbon rich, whiff of the lobby power that the big power generators have with the DTI and Government? Or even the Caesium-137 whiff of nuclear industry lobbying that was recently exposed in the New Statesman?

To great media fanfare, new Energy Minister Malcolm Wicks, announced £40m funding for the "Carbon Abatement Technology Strategy" last month. This is to research capturing carbon dioxide output from coal fired power stations and storing it in depleted North Sea oil and gas fields - a technology which might possibly start delivering by 2015.

Compare that to the quiet DTI announcement last August of £42m funding to kickstart large scale tidal and wave schemes into the national grid within 3 years, even though then Energy Minister, Mike O'Brien, said "The sector is at a critical point in its development from pipe dream, through R&D, to commercial viability."

Like preventative medicine, it is surely better not to create the (carbon) disease in the first place, than fix it afterwards. I am hugely concerned that renewables were marginalised by the G8, and that only a paltry £42m. has been made available to the innovative UK tidal/wave industry, now on the brink of producing carbon free Mega Watts.

This sunrise industry needs funding far more than the wealthy carbon based energy industries, who can afford their own research. Research, which might, only might, develop mechanisms, of dubious safety, to hide their dirty waste on a timescale of decades.

Exemplar UK "blue energy" demonstrators are already turning into real commercial enterprises. Take the June 16th announcement of the first phase of a 20MW wave farm to power 15,000 Portuguese homes using Pelamis "Sea Snake", which flexes and bends with the waves, and is developed by Edinburgh based Ocean Power Delivery Ltd.

When twenty such farms could power a city such as Edinburgh, one has to ask Mr Wicks, why the first large scale use of this UK developed technology is not in the UK itself?

In our region, Essex based Trident Energy Limited has received initial Government and private funding and are now seeking major backing for its first full scale sea trial of systems which may scale to 100MW. Meanwhile 1MW underwater turbines are being developed by Bristol based Marine Current Turbines Limited and East Yorkshire-based Lunar Energy Ltd, off North Devon and Orkney.

A novel oscillating hydrofoil tidal device, the Stringray, sits on the seabed. Successfully tested in a 150kW prototype, the project is now stalled, seeking funding for a 5MW version.

On a larger scale, a 60MW lagoon scheme is proposed for Swansea Bay which would, according to WS Atkins Engineering, generate electricity competitively at an estimate 3.4 pence/kWhour.

Tidal fences or barrages offer exciting, large scale developments. A proposed fence between islands in the Philippines is expected to generate up to 2200 MW (peak), equivalent of two nuclear power plants. The President of the Vancouver company behind this scheme, travelled to London early this year for key meetings with the UK's emerging tidal energy sector and the DTI - is it possible the UK could have the foresight to invest in such a large scale scheme here?

A last thought, as the EU and G8 try to convince Iran to give up their nuclear program, why don't they offer the Iranians the latest renewable technologies and the engineering expertise? Their nuclear skills came from the West. Why not help them now build a renewables industry to meet their energy demands? Surely Lagoons, Sea Snakes, and Stingrays in the Persian Gulf are better than nuclear reactors?



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Making history

Jul 9 2005
Rupert Read

The G8 summit, which finished yesterday, takes place in this country only once every 8 years. That's why, last Saturday, I travelled up to Edinburgh, to play my part in trying to 'make poverty history'.

The atmosphere on the march through Edinburgh – which may well have been the largest march in Scottish history, rivalled only by the enormous anti-war march in Glasgow on Feb. 15 2003 – was really tremendous. Despite having to wait for hours queuing in the Sun – we were queuing to get onto the march route, because there were so many of us! – we remained entirely good-natured. (It felt like, right there and then, we were building some of the sense of community that the world needs, if those who are poor are really to be helped by the richer countries.)

And the thing which really surprised me was just how diverse 'we' were. I had expected that, like me, most of those who turned out to march through Edinburgh would be wearing white, as the march organisers had asked. And so it proved. But I had not expected the banners that we were carrying to be so incredibly varied.

Besides the more obvious participants, like the Tearfund, War on Want, and Save the Children, I saw banners from numerous environmental groups (there was a particularly large Friends of the Earth presence). I walked beside protesters from Campaign Against the Arms Trade, and from CND. The Scottish Greens were there, and the Scottish Socialists. And trades unions; and community groups; and so many more...

This made me stop and think. Why, for instance, were Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace taking part in a 'Make Poverty History' march? Were they just jumping on a bandwagon? Or was there more to it than that?

The answer came, in one of the speeches that I heard in Edinburgh Meadows, on that amazing long afternoon. Poverty can't be separated from environmental issues, such as climate change, because it is the world's poor who are bearing the brunt of climate change.

While in Britain we can cope relatively easily with the heatwaves and droughts which are growing in frequency as a result of human interference with the climate, very poor countries such as Chad or low-lying Third World countries such as the Maldives find it far harder to do so.

And the anti-war groups? Did they have a good reason to be there? Or were they trying to hijack the Make Poverty History event?

One stark fact makes the answer clear. Last year, for the first time ever, British arms exports to Africa topped £1 billion pounds. How can we hope to make poverty history, while African nations are being encouraged by our government and our corporations to spend such vast quantities of money on weapons?

Most interesting of all, perhaps, were the slogans of groups such as War on Want and Christian Aid. These 'mainstream', anti-Third-World-poverty organisations were not just calling for more aid to go to Third World countries, nor even merely for the cancellation of debt. They were calling for the brakes to be put on economic globalisation. This Christian Aid slogan, on a banner that I picked up myself and carried for an hour or so, made the point very nicely: 'Trade justice, NOT free trade.'

Putting these three things together – the environmental groups calling for serious action to stop climate change, the anti-war groups calling for an end to First World sponsoring of wars in the Third World; and the aid organisations for Third World countries themselves calling not for free trade nor for charity but for trade justice – for allowing African countries to protect their own economies, just as we do – makes up a powerful message.

And so I realised that there was a good reason, after all, for that great diversity of groups and slogans, last Saturday. It was the wisdom of the people that was speaking, on the streets of Edinburgh, in this multi-tongued way.

And after all, it is the people and not their so-called 'leaders' who usually really make history, in the end. It is up to 'us' to keep working so that the goals of the 'make poverty history' campaign are really achieved, long after the posturings of the leaders at the Gleneagles G8 summit are forgotten.

The fact that a week ago today hundreds of thousands, myself among them, marched in Edinburgh to 'make poverty history', and that we did so intelligently -- under the banners of stopping climate change, war and unchecked globalisation -- gives me hope for our world.



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The people must lead on Climate

Jul 2 2005
Jacqui McCarney

All discussions on Climate Change have become very focussed on next week's G8 summit.

And by now, most people are fully awake and aware of the severity of the threat posed by climate change. The extensive media coverage has meant that only the eccentric, the mad or the very young can still be in ignorance of the imminent threat to our planet and way of life. The deniers are either wholly irrational, in the face of overwhelming scientific evidence, or very cynically protecting the oil industry.

A Guardian poll last month showed that 83% of us are worried enough to believe that Tony Blair needs to challenge George Bush on his refusal to help combat climate change, and 73% believe that consumers need to take action. Yet, only a committed minority 26% have made a substantial personal step to help counter the effects of climate change. Why the difference between aspiration and action?

Well we are waiting. We are waiting for leadership and to be told what to do. There are hopes from the G8, not just on the plight of Africa, but on the plight of the planet. Tony Blair, has made clear his determination, but before discussions even begin we learn that proposals on climate change have been watered down by the White House. The extreme US administration has objected to the statement "Our World is warming" and "in large part to human action", and thereby deny the basic science of climate change.

Politicians actually have the least power in this situation. They are too hampered by playing political games to be able to take the necessary action. So while they can be in no doubt of the seriousness of global warming, they are extremely anxious not to upset business interests and are under huge pressure from big business. For them, the immediate political risks are as terrifying as the imminent Armageddon of catastrophic climate change.

In the mean time, the planet burns, and despite endless talk of meeting targets, carbon emissions from the UK have actually increased in the last couple of years.

Locally too, we see little if any evidence of climate change been taken seriously. Lacking nerve to take decisive action, the local Councils are waiting for their queue from "the adults" in Whitehall.

Meanwhile, it's business as usual. For example, County and district Councils, and the new "Visit Norwich" Ltd.,

are encouraging cheap flights, road building and massive development and expansion of our region, with little thought given to the effects on the environment. These local politicians, myopic, in their singular focus on business interests, are doing nothing real about mitigating climate change.

History has shown that when radical change is needed, it comes from the people themselves. It was ordinary people taking to the streets, demanding and campaigning, who led to the ending of slavery, the emancipation of women, the end of Apartheid in South Africa.

Where is the movement to save the planet? Like Make Poverty History, we need a global Save the Planet people movement.

But we must not wait for this, before taking action. When our children or our grandchildren ask, what did we do when there was still time it will be shameful to say we did nothing. We are all citizens of the earth and are individually responsible for climate change.

Here are five actions, we can all do:

- Switch off electrical appliances at the wall. Appliances on standby pump one million tons of carbon into the air per year.
- Buy local goods - foods flown in from all over the world create huge levels of emissions. Make sure imported food has come in by ship.
- Stop using plastic bags and return unnecessary packaging to the supermarkets. In Austria female shoppers changed legislation by dumping packages at supermarket check outs and forced supermarkets to operate a packaging take back service.
- Stop using cheap flights - the largest growing source of CO2 emissions. Cheap now, the real cost will be catastrophic.
- Use cars less - cycle or walk instead. Two thirds of all car journeys are less than two miles and could be easily covered by cycling or walking with huge health benefits. Change to a small car with low petrol consumption and share your car by offering lifts to others in your village or town.

What will come out of the G8 for the climate? We have been warned by the politicians not to expect much. The planet can not wait while the politicians dither. History is calling us to act now.



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Why we need World Refugee Day

Jun 25 2005
Marguerite Finn

"On World Refugee Day we honour the indomitable spirit and courage of the world's millions of refugees. Many endure enormous suffering without losing hope and find the strength to overcome despair and start a new life against seemingly overwhelming odds" (Kofi Annan - UN Secretary General - 20 June 2005)

In 2000, the United Nations passed a resolution designating 20 June as World Refugee Day, to encourage everyone to pause and reflect on the 50 million people uprooted and driven from their homes since 1945.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1950 - its primary purpose to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. They rely on the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. This key legal document defines who are refugees, their rights and the legal obligations of states - and that is where things start to get seriously complicated.

The UN defines refugees as "persons who are outside their country and can not return owing to a well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group".

Things have moved on since then. Today, the majority of those forced to flee their homes do so because of internal civil wars and environmental disasters - making them "Internally Displaced People". The UN classifies them as "People of Concern" rather than "refugees" and at the end of 2004 they numbered 19.2 million.

Statistically, the global refugee population has fallen by 24% over a four-year period; yet while on paper the number of refugees is decreasing, there has been an increase in the numbers of 'People of Concern'. In addition, some 4 million Palestinian refugees - the responsibility of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) - are not included in the figures.

Where are these 'people of concern'? A glance at the daily UN News Bulletins confirms that they are everywhere - across all five continents. Statistic-lovers can find out about global refugee trends from UNHCR website: www.unhcr.ch/statistics ; Thinking about the human tide of displaced people sloshing constantly back and forth across the face of the earth reminds me of a flight of starlings - the way they curve and flow and turn as one, in mid-flight.

There are many reasons why refugees flee from places they would rather not leave. Take the example of Svetlana the Russian maternity nurse in Tajikistan where civil war raged between 'Pamir Tajiks' and 'Kulyab Tajiks', where neighbour killed neighbour and where Russians born and bred in Tajikistan were no longer welcome. For Svetlana the breaking point came as she delivered a baby in the local hospital.

Just as the child was born, armed men burst into the ward demanding drugs and alcohol. On seeing the baby they asked whether it was "Pamir or Kulyab". Not waiting for an answer from the terrified mother and nurse, they grabbed the infant and threw it out of the window. It never even had a name. Svetlana and her family fled. They went to Chernobyl. The settled in the ghost town and were left in peace - with only the radiation for company. As Svetlana's mother said: "We came to Chernobyl because no one's going to chase us out of here. No one will kick us off this land". The family, having lost their homeland, preferred peace and possible cancer from irradiated soil - to the irrationality and hell of civil war.

In our quest for 'progress' and economic growth, we inflict misery on millions of our fellow human beings

The news is not all bad. In 2004 alone some 30,000 refugees were resettled with UNHCR assistance and 1.5 million were repatriated voluntarily to their country of origin. In May 2005, refugees from Myanmar were settled successfully in Sheffield as part of a UK-UNHCR resettlement initiative. British people are encouraged to participate in the joint UK/UN Gateway Scheme, but this week Amnesty International(UK) has challenged our Government's increasing use of Immigration Act powers to detain asylum seekers at some point during the asylum process. They expressed concern at the lack of statistics on the numbers held in detention and the length of time they are detained.

It is only through increasing public awareness that we can learn to welcome asylum seekers and the variety of ways by which they enrich our society. That is why we need to set aside at least one day in the year to consider the victims of persecution, war and environmental degradation - and resolve to do something positive about it.

Further information is available from NEAD, 38, Exchange Street Norwich (01603-610993) www.nead.org.uk or Refugee Council: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk



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The U.N., the U.S., the U.K. - and Uzbekistan

Jun 18 2005
Rupert Read

Uzbekistan is on the boil. Its President blames Islamic extremists. This easy allegation of 'terrorism' goes down well with Western governments. It also comforts Moscow, as Putin fears Islamic militants in Chechnya and elsewhere.

But Islam Karimov, President of Uzbekistan since before his country declared independence from Russia in 1991, is himself an extremist. Political opponents have been gaoled or assassinated; widespread nepotism, corruption, and medieval torture are sponsored under his rule. Karimov is in fact a state-terrorist, continuing the very worse of the excesses of Soviet-style rule.

Uzbekistan held presidential elections in December 1991, at the time of the break-up of the Soviet Union. Karimov, the then president, was re-elected by an overwhelming majority of the vote. Because, as in former days, most political groups were simply not allowed even to field candidates!

Ever since, Karimov has bolstered his authoritarian rule. His government crushes political debate, by banning all genuine opposition parties. His puppet parliament has amended the constitution, so that (like Mugabe) he can be re-elected again and again. Any opposition now is fragmented and frustrated. Karimov claims that he did not order troops to fire when peaceful anti-government demonstrators bravely took to the streets in Andijan, last month. But the evidence already, despite very strict government censorship, is that over 500 people died that day, mercilessly cut down by Karimov's government troops.

Karimov is an ill-concealed tyrant. He has looked to the Mongols for even more brutal methods of oppression. His government sanctions the cauldron, which boiled alive two of his critics in 2002. Uzbekistan is holding at least 6,000 political prisoners, who are routinely tortured. Independent economic activities, branded extremist Islamic businesses, have been eliminated. Religious practice is severely restricted. There is no free press; even the internet is censored. On Boxing Day, while the world was mesmerised by the tsunami in the Indian Ocean, Karimov held 'elections', which again returned his party to overwhelming power.

Craig Murray, the former UK ambassador to Uzbekistan, fell out with the Foreign Office for its turning a blind eye to the Karimov regime. When Mr. Murray visited Norwich a few months ago (he hails from north Norfolk), he argued that Britain was "selling its soul" by giving credence to garbage intelligence gathered by such barbaric methods. I have been fortunate enough to get to know Craig Murray personally over this last year, and I strongly recommend readers to find out more this honest man and his astonishing revelations concerning Uzbekistan and Britain: a good place to start is <http://www.craigmurray.co.uk/weblog.html>

For the terrible truth is that our government is complicit in the Andijan massacre. How? Because the British army runs a training programme for the Uzbeki army. As revealed in PRIVATE EYE on June 10: even after hundreds of peaceful demonstrators had been murdered by that army, UK-Uzbeki military cooperation was not suspended. The MoD programme of training for Uzbek officers covers "the full spectrum of operations", including "counter-insurgency" and "peace enforcement" (sic.). In other words: our taxpayers' money has financed the training of an army that has recently massacred several hundreds of its own citizens in cold blood -- and yet our government has not taken action to break off support for this army!

The first sentence of the United Nations Charter affirms faith in fundamental human rights, in dignity and worth of the human person. The US and UK governments now say that they invaded Iraq so that its people could be freed from oppression, and given their human rights. Yet, in Uzbekistan, they support a government that is killing its people more openly than Saddam Hussein did, in the last years of his reign, before Bush and Blair toppled him. Is it possible that the difference between the two cases is this: Karimov is a friend to Bush and Blair, whereas Saddam openly defied them?

Perhaps it is time for the West to turn to peaceful methods of conflict-resolution, and so help to strengthen peacebuilding in the world of the 21st century. If the U.S. and the U.K. worked to strengthen the U.N., and if they pressured their friends such as Karimov to stop being butchers, then perhaps countries like Uzbekistan would start to know happier times, and perhaps the 21st century would be a period that we could look forward to living in -- rather than a time to be ashamed of our own government.

[My heartfelt thanks to David Roberts of Norwich and District United Nations Association for assistance with the writing and research on this article.]



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Where is the frank and open debate on animal testing?

Jun 11 2005
Jacqui McCarney

Open debate and animal testing are not natural bedfellows. Polarised accusations abound in the media - "terrorist" (campaigner) or "monster" (scientists). This plays into public fears - the subject has become such a hot potato that few politicians are brave enough to tackle it.

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics has listened to experts on all sides and thrown some much needed light on the subject, via a two-year study and report (just published) on the ethics of animal experimentation. They call for all sides to improve the quality of the discussions, introduce more openness about research on animal testing, and engage in a more democratic debate.

Would anybody want to cause unnecessary suffering to animals? Most people feel very deeply about this issue. In the UK public concern led to the runaway success of companies like "The Body Shop" whose cosmetics were free from animal testing. The Government followed suit with a ban on animal testing for cosmetics, alcohol and tobacco.

Unfortunately, the law is not without loopholes. Most crucially, the Government has not banned the importation of cosmetics, alcohol and tobacco products that have been tested on animals. Another example is that botox, intended for cosmetic, anti-wrinkle treatment is tested on animals, is also a medicine, and in production no distinction is made between batches destined for cosmetic as opposed to pharmaceutical use. In these tests, mice are subject to toxicity tests, described by the UK Government as a "severe procedure", outlawed in 1999 except in "exceptional scientific grounds", as the mice involved suffocate as their diaphragms are paralysed.

Whilst it is commonly argued that animal testing is essential for research into disease and cancer, recent Home Office statistics indicate that the growth in animal testing is for household products (75% annually).

Each "New" "Improved" "Mountain Fresh" product, whether it is washing powder or bathroom cleaner is tested on animals - sprayed into eyes, ingested, and doused on skin. The competition between companies means that results of experiments are not shared and experiments are duplicated many times. Yet, these companies could use combinations of the thousands of ingredients for which safety data already exists - it is surely unnecessary to continue these "new" product developments.

What about medical research? A frightened public confronted with cancer and other ills are often willing to accept animal experimentation as "a necessary evil". Perhaps the real question is how effective is animal testing in medical research?

Evidence, over the years, shows that animal models in medical research are an unreliable predictor of how humans will respond to the same drugs, giving both false "negatives" and "positives". This has led to both huge number deaths and injuries due to undiscovered toxicity, and the unnecessary delay in successful treatments which showed problems in animals.

Perhaps the most famous false negative is Thalidomide - no animal tests detected it. Dogs failed to predict the heart problems caused by encainade and flecainide which led to an estimated 3,000 deaths in the USA. Asbestosis was denied for decades because asbestos had no adverse effect on animals. Conversely, benign to humans, aspirin and insulin cause birth defects in primates.

This leads to the strange paradox that 50 drugs on the market, which cause cancer in laboratory animals, are allowed because it is admitted that the animal tests are "irrelevant".

These limitations of animal experimentation are reflected in case law. With thalidomide, despite the human cost, producers were acquitted in court after numerous experts agreed that animal tests could not be relied on for human medicine.

Medicines, tested on animals, which consequently prove to be harmful, can not be prosecuted against because, in the words of the medical expert in the "Surgan" case, "data from animals could not be extrapolated safely to patients". Indeed 88% of doctors agree that animal experiments can be misleading "because of anatomical and physiological differences between animals and humans".

There are research organisations committed to humane methods, such as Dr Hadwen's Trust, who fund research without the use of animals. There are 450 methods that could replace animal testing from computer modelling, synthetic skin, magnetic resonance (MRI) and human volunteers.

Do 22 animals have to die every second in labs? A German doctors' congress concluded that 6% of fatal illnesses and 25% of organic illness are caused by medicines, all animal tested. The Nuffield Council concluded that alternative ways of conducting medical research should be found. This change will not only protect animals from suffering but will also protect many humans from unnecessary suffering too.



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We need an Open debate on Energy

Jun 4 2005
Andrew Boswell

Novozybkov is a Russian city which was heavily drenched with radioactive fallout when the Chernobyl nuclear reactor melted down in 1986. Here radiation moves ghostlike from place to place sensitive to pollutants and chemical toxins, winds dust and rain. For their safety, children and families need to use radiation monitors daily to know where the radiation is (see <http://tinyurl.com/cbvyn>).

Although the recent election was distinguished by a lack of debate on the key issue of our time - climate change and future energy security - the future of nuclear energy in this county is now on the agenda. Now the pro-nuclear lobby is briefing fast and thick. "Please let us build just one more generation of nuclear power stations - we'll make 'em safer and create less dangerous waste."

Can the people of Novozybkov, or Norfolk, ever believe a nuclear power station can be "safe"? Can hundreds of future generations and those, now, in whose countries the waste is currently dumped agree that "waste can be less dangerous"?

Perhaps the most ironic argument is the one which calls for us all to be more "open-minded" about the nuclear option. We are asked to give up our "prejudices", born of the nightmare experience of Three Mile Island and of Chernobyl, and to give up the small step in imagination of a jet crashing into Sizewell rather than the Twin Towers.

Yes, very ironic, because the environmental movement has called for years for an open discussion on climate change - most recently during the election, when their calls were largely ignored by Westminster politicians (some waiting silently for the post-election nuclear frenzy) and by the press alike.

Still, I agree we need an open debate - and in this light of openness, let's look seriously at every option and alternative. The discussion on our future energy needs must be framed as part of a "bigger than nuclear", and bigger than any single solution, discussion including:

- energy efficiency in industry and in buildings, rapid implementation of regulatory and tax policy to curtail inefficient energy use.
- a national programme of grants to encourage greater domestic energy self-sufficiency through small scale wind and solar energy generation.

- all renewable energy sources - we need a basket of approaches. Whilst wind energy is the most exploited renewable in this country, and is beginning to make a significant contribution despite its nuclear lobby detractors, wave, tidal and biomass must be developed. Tidal power is being promoted to meet the entire needs of Auckland, capital of New Zealand with over 1million people. With many estuaries and harbours, why are we in the UK not making more of the huge potential of this safe energy source?
- the rich nations should help the uptake of renewables in the third world - so they can increase energy security without the same cost in greenhouse gases (ghgs) emissions.
- all forms of transport "paying their real cost". This means taxing air fuel, and stopping the subsidy of the aviation industry. It means abandoning the £30billion road building programme, and investing instead in public transport and sustainable transport policies.
- eliminating the worst aspects of free-trading globalised economies - for example, the absurdity of flying vast amounts of food around the world. Why can I often only find apples from far flung continents - China, USA, and Chile - in most Norfolk supermarkets, when Norfolk apples are superb, different and surely the best?

Common sense ideas and technically solutions available now abound - see <http://tinyurl.com/bubk6> for more.

Beware too, the misleading propaganda that nuclear provides a "catch-all", single solution to climate change - it does no such thing. UK electricity production only contributes to ¼ of ghgs, and, of this, currently just ¼ is generated by nuclear energy - at current levels, nuclear power can make no more than 1/16th or 6% contribution to ghgs reduction in the UK. Promoting nuclear as a generic panacea is, then, an extreme deception, when we actually need to reduce ghgs by 60%-90% by 2050.

The argument now should not be about whether to go nuclear or not, but how we can achieve so much more by a joined up, sustainable approach. Yes, let's have a truly open and committed debate on the full spectrum of energy policy. Such open debate will show that further nuclear development would divert resources in investment and engineering from much more creative and ecological sound solutions. We are at a crisis time - it is no time to look at expensive, short sighted solutions. I, for one, don't want to read Norwich for Novozybkov in 2033.



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Earth - A Common Treasury For All

May 28 2005
Marguerite Finn

*"The fault is great in man or woman
Who steals a goose from off a common;
But what can plead that man's excuse
Who steals a common from a goose?"*

(The Tickler Magazine 1 Feb. 1821)

When a friend shouldered his spade recently and went off to fill in a ditch that a landlord had dug around a Norfolk common to keep people off it, I thought of the age-old struggles against the enclosure of common land.

In 1649, when Gerrard Winstanley and his band of twenty Diggers peacefully occupied St. George's Hill in Surrey and proceeded to cultivate it, the Law was definitely not on their side. The communal activities of the Diggers alarmed the Commonwealth government and roused the hostility of local landowners who were rival claimants to the common lands. But Winstanley saw the practice of extending private property rights to common land as fundamentally flawed. He believed passionately that the Earth was: "-- a common treasury for all, both rich and poor --- not enclosing any part into any particular hand, but all as one man - -"

In the early 1980s, latter-day Diggers occupied the unfenced, disused airfield at Molesworth in Cambridgeshire when it was about to be given by our government to the Americans, to house their nuclear cruise missiles. These lorry-mounted weapons were supposed to "melt into the countryside" undetectable by the enemy, in order to be first to fire their genocidal pay-load. The Diggers bullock-ploughed the airfield, hand-sowed and hand-reaped it and sent wheat to help relieve famine in Ethiopia.

Readers may recall that Defence Minister Heseltine, resplendent in flak-jacket, led a sizeable military force to Molesworth to uproot the campers and fence in the land against further encroachments - an operation which earned him the nick-name 'Tarzan'! The missiles were duly installed. The up-rooted Diggers morphed into a 'Cruise Watch' team and thenceforth every cruise missile convoy in England was successfully followed and logged by them, and the only "melting into the countryside" occurred when the missiles were furtively recalled to the United States. There was little publicity about this at the time!

The ecologist Garrett Hardin identified a trend he called: The Tragedy of the Commons; Suppose that five commoners have rights to graze a certain number of sheep on a common - all rights carefully allocated to sustain the common's resources.

If one of the commoners cheats by grazing one more animal than agreed - a fateful imbalance is set up which leads irreversibly to the destruction of the whole common. The detriment to each of the commoners is shared between them; each suffers from the extra grazing to the extent of one fifth of an animal. Yet the cheat profits by one whole animal, so the tendency to cheat is greater than the individual tendency to object. Even when the land becomes overgrazed, people will continue to put their animals on to the damaged common and may even add to their flock or herd.

So it is with the 'Global Commons' and the problems of globalisation and the accompanying environmental degradation. Individuals - or countries - see no point in making a sacrifice if others continue to use a common asset. Even if everyone is aware that selfishness, competitiveness and unregulated exploitation will eventually make the land unusable for all, once having acquired a disproportionate share of the world's common resources - there is a danger that countries may feel driven to "defend their vital interests" with disproportionate power - even to the point of threatening the global commons with nuclear annihilation.

Who in our One World, will defend the dwindling global commons?

In 2002, Indian scientist and activist Dr. Vandana Shiva, identified two key areas requiring urgent defence; one to reclaim the 'water commons', the other to reclaim the 'genetic commons'.

Vandana Shiva sees privatisation, based on exclusive rights of corporations to vital resources like biodiversity and water, as an enclosure of the commons. She believes that reversal of this enclosure requires a combination of actions at local, national and global levels - putting water and biodiversity beyond monopoly, private ownership and 'commodification'.

This week we learned of the collapse of a "flagship" water privatisation scheme in Tanzania. The World Bank and the UK Government supported the scheme with £76.5 million but Tanzania claims that no new pipe-work had been installed and water quality had declined - not a good advertisement for the privatisation of a common resource.

Some 40% of the world's population now live in countries with water shortages; millions of children die of water-borne diseases that could be eliminated with improved sanitation. It is time to recover the commons.



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If I were wealthy...

May 23 2005
Rupert Read

Music, we are often told, was better in the 1960s. The Beatles, Bob Dylan, The Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, Joni Mitchell, The Kinks - with artists like this I find it hard to disagree. Importantly, all of these artists sang about -- and were part of -- the wider social rebellion of the period. Who can forget songs like 'A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall', 'The Times They Are A-Changin'' and 'Big Yellow Taxi'? Or how about John Lennon's deeply-moving 'Imagine'?

But what about today? It is striking that Bob Dylan - the man who more or less wrote the soundtrack to the 60s - long ago stopped referring to politics in his music. Most mainstream musicians today are the same as him.

A recent hit that seems to sum up what is wrong with current pop music had the catchy refrain, "If I were a rich girl... I'd have all the money in the world, If I were a wealthy girl." No politics - just money-grabbing. True, this is a reworking of the famous old song by Topol, from 'Fiddler on the roof', "If I were a rich man". But the song seems to have got much more unpleasant in the retelling. Topol only wanted enough money so that he "wouldn't have to work hard". This 'material girl' by contrast wants "all the money in the world".

What would it be like, to have all the money in the world? It would mean that no-one could sell anything, except to you. Everyone in the world would be a slave to whatever wage you were willing to pay them.

This song begs the question, What is wealth? Are you wealthy if you have enough money to cajole other people to do your bidding? Or is true wealth something different? Are rich rock-stars necessarily wealthy? Or is someone who has meaning in their life, someone who is loved not because of the size of their wallet but because of the size of their heart, someone who is trying thoughtfully to do the right thing in the world, perhaps wealthier, at the end of the day?

Since the US/UK invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, a new wave of political protest music has emerged, driven by musical artists who, thankfully, don't seem to care if their principled stance denies them access to great financial wealth.

They are perhaps more interested in this other kind of wealth.

Take for instance country music rebel Steve Earle, who has written the uncompromising and soulful 'John Walker Blues', an attempt to understand the California-born Taliban fighter. For his pains, Earle was branded a traitor by sections of the US media.

After being an eyewitness to the events in New York on September 11th, the singer/songwriter Ani Di Franco wrote the pro-peace prose-poem 'Self Evident' in response: "You can keep the Pentagon/ keep the propaganda/ keep each and every TV/ that's been trying to convince me/ to participate in some prep school punk's plan to perpetuate retribution." The US punk trio Sleater-Kinney also take a critical stance in their song 'Combat rock', singing "Where is the questioning? Where is the protest song?/ Since when is scepticism un-American?"

In Britain, Asian Dub Foundation released 'Enemy of the enemy' in 2003, an album written in the shadow of September 11th. The song 'Blowback' is described by the group in the album notes: "Blowback is the CIA term for the unintended consequences of secret operations. Or when the monsters you have created like Saddam no longer serve your interests and start to bite you. And September 11th was the biggest blowback of all."

And then there are musicians locally here in Norwich and Norfolk who are doing their bit. I would like to single out the wonderful local 'klezmer' band, KLUNK. Drawing on the traditions of Jewish folk music, KLUNK play songs of love and protest, of dance and joy and sadness - and they play these songs most frequently where they can support good causes by doing so. For instance, the major 'Start the Peace' Conference at UEA, as reported on by this newspaper, was graced by a long KLUNK performance that left delegates startled, and full of joy and hope.

Popular musicians are in a very privileged position. They have the ability and opportunity to comment very publicly on what is happening in the world. Steve Earle commented after the bombing of Afghanistan, "This is no time to sing about girls".

How does your favourite popular musician stand up to this judgement? Do the musicians you like to listen to play their part in 'speaking truth to power'? Or do they merely glorify hedonism -- and money-grabbing?

[Many thanks to [Ian Sinclair](#) for help with this column]



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We need to understand Romani history

May 14 2005
Jacqui McCarney

From the poignant diaries of Ann Frank, to "Sophie's Choice", "Schlinder's List", "Life is Beautiful", to the seemingly endless TV documentaries and dramas we have all shared in the grieving and remembering of the Jewish deaths in Nazi concentration camps during the 2nd World War. No where had we seen such spine chilling evidence of "Man's Inhumanity to Man"; by repeatedly reminding ourselves of this brutality, we perhaps, hope to guard against its repetition. We have become acutely sensitive to any charge of Anti-Semitism, and rightly so.

Another group targeted for complete extermination by the Nazis were Travellers particularly the Romani and Sinti tribes. Today the Romanies are the largest group of Travellers in the UK. They have a long history dating back to Northern India, 1000A.D., and are not, as was assumed, E - gyptians or gypsies.

They were murdered in proportions similar to the Jews, up to 80% of them were murdered in Nazi occupied areas, and in some areas even more. Only 1% survived in Croatia. It is thought that as many as 1.5 million were exterminated. They too, died in Auschwitz, in Mengel's medical experiments and where they were captured, sometimes a few at a time and sometimes by the hundreds. Their children, 250 of them were used as guinea - pigs to test the efficacy of the cyanide gas crystals later used in the gas chamber.

History had set the scene; hundreds of years of discriminatory laws and rampant racism made the Travelling community potential prey for the Nazi's, just as it had for the Jews. Like the Jews they were treated with hostility and suspicion. "Gypsy Hunts" where they were hunted down as animals and murdered were a popular pastime. By the 19th century scholars were writing about them and Jews as "the excrement of humanity". Ten days before the Nazi's came to power Government officials in Austria called for the withdrawal of all civil liberties.

A popular myth and one that protects the rest of us from responsibility is that Hitler, like Saddam, was uniquely evil. The reality is that they ruthlessly exploit the prejudices, greed and fears that they find. As Edmund Burke said "All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men do nothing".

Unlike the Jewish people, the Romani post- war experience is unchanged by the lessons of the 2nd World War. While the main stream media regards any hint of Anti-Semitism as unacceptable, we are incited to "Stamp out the Camps"; "to stop the Gypsy invasion" and to tell us you're Gypsy stories. In 2003 we saw the torching of a caravan painted with a Gypsy family used as a Bonfire night effigy. This hatred is aimed at all nomadic groups including Irish Travellers and New Age Travellers. It is abhorrent enough in this context, but even more tragic when the target is the Romani people; the descendents of holocaust survivors.

This racism is so implicit that major political figures attempted to exploit this in the recent election campaign. Michael Howard wanted to repeal and amend the "so called Human Rights" act in connection to Travellers. As Home Secretary in John Major's Government he got rid of the rules requiring local authorities to provide legal campsites for these groups. He now wants to preclude Travellers from challenging refusals of planning permission to set up on their own land. It is a frightening position of refusing to provide sites, and refusing to allow them to provide their own sites; it amounts to a refusal to their existence. This has led to accusations such as that from, Labour MP Kevin Mc Namara who said the policies have about them "the whiff of the gas chamber".

Unlike the Jews there are no blockbuster films, books, documentaries and no public acknowledgement or shared grieving for the injustices suffered by the Romani people. Nobody was called to testify on behalf of these victims at the Nuremberg Trials and war crimes reparation has never been paid.

The trauma of the Holocaust is captured in their language;. "O Barro Porrajmos" means "great devouring" and "rape" as well as "gaping". Their suffering is forced inwards by a society that barely tolerates their very existence.

To deny the Romani people their place in the history of the Holocaust is in effect to try to deny their existence. They deserve to be given the same status as the Jews--- who were given a home in Israel, They ask only for the right to travel and the right to safe permanent sites and not just the cheapest land next to motorways and public dumps.



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Tough On The Causes Of Terrorism?

May 2005
Rupert Read

I was recently assaulted, for no reason. I was cycling on Marriott's Way, when a teenage lad punched me in the face, hard, as I cycled by. My girlfriend and I phoned the police: they came to find us in a patrol car, which was unfortunate, given that the kid who assaulted me was on foot, on a cycle-path!

But however well the police were resourced, and however effectively they responded to crimes, it wouldn't actually solve the problem. What is really needed is to prevent this kind of mindless violence. What is needed - and this isn't easy, nor is it quick - is to end the societal malaise that makes some young people want nothing more than to punch a stranger in the face.

New Labour once had a slogan, a slogan we've heard little of recently: 'Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'. People resort to crime because they are poor in an individualistic society which appears above all to value wealth, because they are not encouraged to value neighbours and strangers.

Being 'tough on crime' is pointless unless one is prepared to be tough on crime's causes. It's pointless tackling the symptoms while ignoring the underlying disease. We need a real sense of community again. We need what Tony Blair is reluctant to countenance: redistribution of wealth. What community can someone living in socially-deprived parts of Mile Cross feel with relatively well-off total strangers from 'the Golden Triangle'? Two worlds collide, on Marriott's Way.

What real sense of community can any of us have with the super-rich: Rupert Murdoch, Madonna, the Duke of Devonshire?

If Britain fought a war on poverty, and gave people shared goals to believe in, crime would fall drastically. That would be: tackling the causes of crime.

And that's why campaigns like 'End child poverty' (www.ecpc.org.uk) -- a campaign, supported by the EDP, to transform the lives of the 3.6 million British children living under the official poverty line -- are so important. This campaign provides a lead where perhaps the government is not doing.

Now, what about terrorist crime? If we were going to be 'Tough on terrorism, tough on the causes of terrorism', what would we do differently?

Well, we might start by acknowledging where our own country takes part in terrorism. The Oxford Dictionary defines terrorism as a "policy of seeking to obtain political demands by violence and intimidation". Remember 'Shock and Awe'? Remember the systematic terrorisation - the torture - of prisoners in Abu Gharaib and Guantanamo, and more recently the shameful photos of British squaddies found guilty of humiliating and torturing Iraqi civilians? Say no more.

Next, we might look deeply to see what turns someone into a non-state terrorist (e.g., a suicide-bomber). What drives people to such despair that they turn themselves into human bombs?

Maybe the grinding poverty suffered by most people in the non-Western world. Maybe feeling that there is something hypocritical in the West's insistence that we (including Israel) can have nuclear WMDs, but if you people ever try to get your hands on WMDs, we will annihilate you. Maybe the West's propping up of human-rights-abusing regimes across the globe, provided that their leaders are willing to do our bidding and sell us their oil. Maybe a searing sense of injustice at the seemingly-endless U.S. military presence in the Middle East, at the killing of a million Iraqis by U.S./U.K. sanctions in the 90s, and of over 100,000 Iraqis since March 2003; above all, at the vicious occupation of Palestine by the (U.S.-sponsored) Israeli army.

Maybe it is understandable then why ordinary people no different at birth from you or I become 'terrorists'. If you'd been brought up in a refugee camp, seen your parents humiliated daily, been deprived of economic opportunity, and given no effective non-violent outlet for your sense of injustice, maybe you too would have despaired.

The truth is sometimes uncomfortable: it is our (Britain's and America's) unjust foreign policies - crucially, our propping up of the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine - which are a pre-eminent cause of non-state terrorism.

If global society fought a war on poverty, injustice and oppression, terrorist crime would fall drastically. That would be: being tough on the causes of terrorism. This week's Indonesian earthquake brought back memories of our world's wonderful response to the Boxing Day tsunami. Would it not be just as wonderful to pre-empt future terrorism; for instance by providing aid to the developing world on an unheard of scale? Let's 'Make Poverty History' (www.makepovertyhistory.org). Worldwide.



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Science Sheds Little Light On Radiation

May 7 2005
Marguerite Finn

The nuclear power debate will break out afresh soon, because we must decide whether nuclear power is the way to combat global climate change - or not.

The lack of consensus about how dangerous radiation is worries me, because the nuclear question cannot be solved until we know. One expert will say that the danger is X. Another will say it is 100 times X, and yet a third will say it is one hundredth of X. There is no agreement, particularly about the type of radiation that gets inside our bodies - whether through the skin or by inhalation.

Standards of risk assessment are based upon evidence from the atomic bomb attacks on Japan. The problems with those ancient data is they involved massive levels of radiation. To extrapolate for the lower doses that might occur from functioning nuclear reactors, scientists had to guess what would happen much lower down on their graphs. So they drew smooth curves from those huge values down to zero. No real evidence, but it looked pretty. (1)

When clusters of radiation-type sickness have occurred near power stations, and the radiation levels measured are only slightly raised, experts have denied the sickness could be attributed to radiation, because the curves on their graphs showed that it couldn't be. Yet the lower parts of those graphs were largely guesswork!

Among those unhappy about this was the former Environment Minister, Michael Meacher. In 2001, he appointed an expert Committee Examining Radiation Risks of Internal Emitters (CERRIE). Its remit was "--- to explain the disagreements in accessible language and to propose research which might resolve them". (2)

When CERRIE reported last year, however, Meacher was no longer a Minister and, to quote him again: "Unfortunately it seems that the procedures which prevailed in the Committee --- have produced a Final Report which does not accommodate a full and fair representation of all views." (3)

That is putting it mildly.

The Chair of CERRIE refused to accommodate the views of a minority of the Committee in its Final Report, so the minority obtained a grant and published their views in a minority report themselves. There is still no agreement.

You may wonder whether the widely ranging casualties of the Chernobyl disaster could not provide enough firm evidence of damage at all levels of radiation, to complete the graph beyond all doubt. Many Ukrainian and Russian scientists who attempted to publish details now languish in jail.

However, the CERRIE minority succeeded in obtaining nearly a hundred reports from Russian scientists prepared to risk disfavour, and submitted them to CERRIE. Astonishingly, these reports were ignored and excluded from the Majority Report, although they offered boundless opportunities for exactly the sort of research Meacher was proposing. (4)

However bad the Chernobyl disaster was, it could have been a lot worse.

A fortnight after the explosion in April 1986 that tore the heart out of Chernobyl's reactor No. 4, spreading a plume of radioactive smoke around the world, a far worse explosion was brewing out of control amongst the still hot debris. Professor Vasily Nesterenko of the Belarussian Academy of Scientists describes it thus:

"An explosion of this magnitude would cause massive radiation burns in the population within a radius of 300-320km ---- resulting in the whole of Europe being exposed to an enormous radioactive contamination, making life impossible. --- For this reason --- tens of thousands of coal-miners were urgently dispatched --- to Chernobyl to dig a tunnel under the reactor and install a cooling coil to cool the concrete base of the reactor and remove all possibility of cracks appearing in the slab"(5)

According to the Chernobyl Union Association, more than 20,000 men who took part in the operation, died". This was only revealed on 15 January 2005. Despite courageous attempts by Russian journalist Svetlana Alexievich in her book, "Voices from Chernobyl" (6) to tell us more, attempts to play down the true scale of that disaster have been too successful.

8.4 million people were exposed to radiation. An area half the size of Italy was contaminated. Agricultural land was ruined. Without the Russian coal-miners, Europe might have been wiped out.

Do those 20,000 men not deserve our gratitude? Who stood to benefit from our ignorance?

This is the 19th anniversary of "the worst technological catastrophe in history". Funds are now urgently required to deal with cracks that have appeared in the concrete sarcophagus. The cracks are leaking radiation. There is risk of the structure collapsing.

On 12 May, a donors' conference takes place in London. The Ukrainian government hopes to raise \$300million. We must pray that they succeed - before another 20,000 men are sacrificed on the altar of nuclear power.



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May The Food Force Be With Us All

Apr 30 2005
Marguerite Finn

The UN has come in for a lot of stick recently. Former UN Secretary General, U Thant, once remarked: " The United Nations is a mirror of its members." So we, the peoples of the UN, now have an opportunity to reform this battered, creaky but internationally legitimate leviathan.

As a member of the Norwich Branch of the United Nations Association, I am continually amazed by the extent and variety of the activities conducted throughout the world, on a daily basis under the UN banner, activities its critics seem determined to ignore.

The Bulletins I get detail the actions of up to 30 UN Agencies on any particular day. These might involve anything from fighting the first outbreak of polio in Yemen for nine years (WHO - World Health Organisation) to helping Congolese refugees cross some of the world's most rugged terrain to return to their homes (UNHCR - UN High Commissioner for Refugees). Simultaneously, OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) in the Horn of Africa swings into action after torrential rains sweep away entire villages in Ethiopia and Somalia.

Meanwhile, UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) continues its daily task of repairing buildings and providing food and education to around a million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. UNRWA's 'Special Hardship Programme' also targets the most impoverished families living in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In 2004, approximately 50% of the Palestinian population was living below the official poverty line. Standards of health and education had deteriorated and unemployment had increased as Palestinians encountered problems reaching their places of work, schools and hospitals due to the construction of the Israeli Barrier.

The UNHCR is now warning that fighting is threatening the existence of Colombia's indigenous peoples, caught between Government, rebels and armed militia, while at the same time, it struggles to provide water and food for 1.8 million people uprooted by the conflict in Darfur.

Here comes news of another disaster: chronic poverty, combined with failure of the rains in 2004, has left 2 million Kenyans in need of food aid. Between May and August 2005, the World Food Programme (WFP) will provide 83,000 tons of food to these drought-affected people. While in Niger, locust infestation and scanty rainfall has left an estimated 350,000 children under 5 years suffering from malnutrition and stunted growth.

What can be done? WFP, the world's largest humanitarian agency rises to the challenge. Each year, it provides food aid to an average of 90 million people, including 56 million hungry children, in more than 80 countries. (www.wfp.org)

Most of us know little about this life-saving work being done by the United Nations. The statistics seem literally mind-boggling and too uncomfortable to read.

So the World Food Programme has come up with a novel way to spread the word. It has just launched the world's first interactive humanitarian video game (comprehensively reviewed in EDP Centro 20.04.2005), which shows how WFP responds to actual food emergencies - just like the real life situations in Kenya and Niger.

"Food Force" is a PC based video game which can be downloaded free from www.food-force.com. It offers a welcome change to the gratuitous violence of most of today's video games. While playing Food Force, youngsters will avoid video games that reward players for killing innocent bystanders and blowing up islands again and again. Neither are Food Force characters predominantly male or white - gender and racial balance ensures that all play a vital role in the operation - just as in real life.

This is a wise move by the UN Agency - to use today's technology to reach out to the wider public. Are games-players, however, too steeped in violent "blow them away" games to overcome their feelings that "Food Force" is "uncool" and "a bit cissy" ?

No one these days can be under any illusion about the dangers faced by humanitarian aid workers in the field; many have lost their lives bringing aid to others. What better way to celebrate their dedication and bravery than to learn more about the difficulties they routinely face and "Food Force" offers a great way to do it.

As Kofi Annan says: "Humanity will not enjoy security without development, it will not enjoy development without security, and it will not enjoy either without respect for human rights. In their modest ways, all local United Nations Associations are involved in the great humanitarian work of the UN, whether raising vital funds or lobbying M.P.s., they support and sustain a global institution which remains the last best hope of mankind. www.una-uk.org.



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Off My Trolley

Apr 23 2005
Jacqui McCarney

My very personal, very grassroots and admittedly unusual eco-friendly campaign for 2005 is to establish the shopping trolley as a fashion accessory superior to a Saab or BMW - more subtle, more refined more intelligent by aeons and definitely way, way cooler. This may look like an uphill battle, it may sound like the ramblings of a very deeply disturbed mad woman - the shopping trolley after all seems to fit snugly into that gap between the last vestiges of independent living and institutionised care. The forward moving ones are often used as a kind of walking frame, and the pull along types are reminiscent of bag-ladies who carry all their worldly possessions around with them.

This is, however, a deeply unfair and superficial view. Why is it only ridiculously expensive items are valued so religiously? Why can't older people be leaders of fashion too? Why, Oh Why, do we reserve such gluttonous desires for machines that poison the very oxygen we breath, destroy the health of our children in a multitude of ways eg: they can't get good healthy exercise by playing in their streets as children a few generations ago did and so they are becoming increasingly obese. There is a huge increase in the number of children with asthma caused by breathing in car fumes and unprecedented numbers are killed every year by cars when they do venture onto our street! This is before we mention the huge global problem of CO2 emissions from cars contributing heavily to climate change.

The unfortunate offspring of western civilization, if they do make it to the age of 18, may then find themselves packed off with inadequate protection to fight an unjustifiable war in order to procure more cheap oil for our oil guzzling society. As decent responsible members of the literate class we all claim to love our children! But how much! Enough to think! Enough to stop for a moment and look at the direction we are heading in.

The humble shopping trolley makes a gigantic leap to a simple and intelligent approach to hunter gathering in the 21st century. It enables the family provider to carry sufficient items without having to pile them, as quickly as possible in to the back of car.

It enables the fore mentioned provider to walk some distance with their consumables perhaps even all the way home, or to the nearest bus stop, or better than private car, a taxi - thus reducing congestion and pollution in the city. The trolley does away with the necessity of using plastic bags - a throw-away item made primarily with our scarce oil reserves

Watching unthinking shoppers use plastic bags as if there were no tomorrow makes me quite literally C Red. And then, this makes me think of our very local initiative to cut carbon emissions and help our children to have a future. I can be then be heard muttering to the checkout girl about not wanting to go to war again so that we can get enough oil to make more plastic bags so that we can throw them away - so "no thank you I do not need a plastic bag". I mostly feel like a lone voice in the wilderness! But by now there is no stopping me and the next question is when is this supermarket going to start charging for plastic bags? I go to customer services and repeat the question and then I write it down and post it in their suggestion/complaints box. The hypocrisy of the supermarkets leads to blood pressuring, vein popping fury by the time I have reached those gracefully sliding exit doors. All the apparently, ethically sound, re-cycling bins stand like over stuffed elephants in the car park and yet supermarkets do nothing to pressurize manufacturers to reduce their hideous overpackaging and do nothing to encourage shoppers to reduce their consumption of plastic bags.

They did it very successfully in Ireland, they set a date for the introduction of charging on plastic bags; they explained their motives to the shoppers and won their support and on the big day shoppers turned out sporting their own shopping bags.

I appeal to all shoppers; let's see you out there with your own bags and to those really up market, fashion conscious ageless hip types I look forward to seeing you with your Rolla trolley. I will just smile and know that there goes a person with a brain and a soul.



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Collective Rights - and Wrongs

Apr 16 2005
Marguerite Finn

"An Englishman's home is his castle". This old saying reflects an attitude towards property that is enshrined in the laws, customs and emotions not only of this country but in most countries throughout the western world.

Is it not remarkable then, that there are upwards of 300 million people in the world for whom the notion of individual property has no meaning at all? These are Indigenous Peoples such as the American Indian tribes, the Inuit and Innu of the circumpolar regions, the Masai of Tanzania, the Aborigines of Australia, the Sami of Finland and thousands of other groups, for whom the idea of 'land' is a collective notion. Many of these peoples live in western countries whose property laws are based upon individual rights and therefore have no meaning for them.

To Indigenous Peoples, their land is sacred as a 'communal whole' - not in individual patches. The land's sacred nature sustains them spiritually only if it remains intact and inviolate. Likewise for the produce of the land: it sustains them only if it is husbanded by collective agreement. Their law is based upon the indivisibility of the land therefore individual property ownership is unthinkable to them. Their housing, too, is often a communal unit - such as the 'yanos' - the huge communal building that is home to the Yanomami Tribe. Because they live in concord with their lands, Indigenous Communities have tremendous knowledge of the plants and animals with which they share their territories. Their knowledge of medicinal plants, hardy plant species and disease-resistant cattle, developed over generations, is shared and used collectively. Now these communities are vulnerable to corporate globalisation and "development". Their lands, rich in natural resources and biological diversity, present great opportunities for profit; and because their sovereignty is not recognised or protected by international trade agreements, corporations are not required to compensate or consult with Indigenous Peoples before coming on to their land, displacing them from their homes, destroying their way of life, to drill for oil, cut down forests or mine for minerals.

The World Trade Organisation's rule concerning intellectual property rights is particularly threatening because it does not recognise collective intellectual property. As a result, precious tribal knowledge is being appropriated by individuals and corporations, with a view to claiming patent rights.

In addition to robbing Indigenous knowledge and wealth, current global trade agreements undermine the entire basis of Indigenous Knowledge by creating incentives for

individuals to keep new knowledge for themselves rather than share it with the community. Indigenous Peoples have a completely different concept of knowledge, wealth, development and progress to that of non-indigenous people. They tend to value environmental sustainability, cultural preservation and spirituality over economic growth. They offer a radical alternative to mainstream individualism.

Some Indigenous Peoples have reached working agreements with their western-style governments, who recognise that they have collective rights, (mysterious though they may seem to a western capitalist society), upon which their survival depends and which governments must respect. A British Royal Proclamation of 1763 recognised the legality of Indian territorial possessions in Canada and Florida. The Waitangi Treaty of 1840 referred to lands in New Zealand that Maori Peoples "may collectively possess". Sometimes the arrangements have not been so satisfactory. The 1887 Dawes Act split US Indian land into individual plots which outsiders could obtain by trickery, bribery or violence. The plight of Australia's 450,000 Aborigines was significantly improved by two High Court Rulings in the 1990s, but fierce lobbying by the powerful mining and farming industries, forced the Australian government to undermine the Aborigines' legal victories and render them meaningless.

Aborigines remain the most disadvantaged group in Australia's 20 million population. This month, Australian Premier, John Howard, raised the prospect of a major change to aboriginal land rights by replacing an ancient communal system with private ownership. In a wilful misunderstanding of the notion of collective rights, he insisted, "every Australian black or white, should be able to own their own home as a symbol of a person's worth."

A UN Working Group recently completed a draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, encompassing collective rights and sovereignty. But Britain, with Australia, Canada and the US, is blocking this new Declaration - insisting that 'collective' human rights don't exist. Where previously it accepted the concept of collective title to land, it now says this is an individual right "exercised collectively"! Norway, Denmark and 33 other countries have signed up unreservedly - only the post-colonialists prevaricate. Why? Survival International believes that the UK's actions in this case are reprehensible and should be firmly opposed.

Survival International: 0207-687-8700; e-mail: info@survival-international.org ; website: www.survival-international.org



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Resurrecting Gaia

Mar 26 2005
Andrew Boswell

Spring and the annual rebirth of nature have arrived. In the sacred, Easter Saturday is a time before suffering is transformed to new life. Today in 2005, the Easter meaning must be the very suffering of the planet, its eco and life systems.

Our planet is sacred, and daily, we hear more about damage to it. Climate Change is no longer a distant threat. The truth is simple - we are crucifying the planet and it cannot take much more. Yet, really, we have no idea of what the path of Gaia's resurrection might be.

Under this threat, we need a synthesis of pragmatic policy, technology and behaviour change. We are not short of creative ideas, but we are short on political leadership, and real climate governance.

At the G8 summit in Scotland in July, it is crucial that global leaders move beyond words to immediate action. The build up has started already: think-tanks and policy gurus are hard at work, and last week, the first-ever meeting of G8 Environment and Development Ministers was held in Derbyshire. (They kept that quiet, didn't they?)

"Catalysing Commitment on Climate Change" is a report from the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR), published to coincide with the Derbyshire meeting. It gives excellent pro-active policy suggestions for the G8 ministers on decarbonising the global economy, whilst contributing to poverty eradication too.

In the authors' words, to prevent dangerous climate change, a level playing field must be created for energy producers, so that clean, renewable energy technologies can thrive globally. The G8 should:

- stop multi-billion dollar hand-outs given to the fossil fuel industry, and
- support the growth of renewable energy and energy saving technologies in developing countries, particularly small-scale renewable projects which can alleviate poverty too.

They suggest a multilateral framework. I agree. Without a great many nations involved, little can be achieved. A climate leadership group should be formed from both industrialised and developing nations, which has annual summits. Further, they suggest a system of international accountability where:

- companies should be made to disclose their emissions.
- the industrialised countries should accept their current and historical responsibility for climate change in developing countries, and make compensation for disaster mitigation and relief.

All this addresses the current vacuum of leadership, policy and international agreement on climate change. It is a shame that the authors didn't go a step further and propose a global system of carbon budgets for individuals and countries. This would really give a fair and pragmatic basis to their proposed climate accountability, and generate wide international buy-in from poorer countries.

This means stabilising the planet's environment by contracting global carbon emissions under the "Contraction and Convergence" (www.gci.org.uk) scheme that allocates a per capita carbon budget to each nation. Carbon trading allows heavy polluters to buy carbon budgets from the poor, less polluting countries forcing high carbon emitting industries to start to pay the real cost of their emissions. They are then driven, by the market, to reduce their emissions, whilst developing nations can continue to develop sustainably. Over time, there is a convergence of the carbon emissions between the north and south - a fair balance of industrialised and developing nations being reached sometime between 2025 and 2100.

As a high emitter, the UK should lead with strong national policies for contraction. Where are they? They barely exist yet as the media and government still do not address the real dangers of climate change, and the climate issue has been marginalised in the current election build up,

This is not to say the other issues, such as health, taxation, terrorism, education and crime, are not important - just that voters are owed a really informed environmental debate. Instead electoral fatigue has set in as the same policies and issues are rolled-out as in previous elections.

Green policies will make a real difference to our future, and deserve real debate and scrutiny. Whatever the election result, the UK should establish a national Department of Climate Sustainability, as sustainability is currently addressed between departments, and largely falls between them.

Such a ministry should have two senior ministers to reflect its urgency, one focusing nationally and the other internationally (cf Home Office, Foreign Office). They should roll out radical policy to start contracting our carbon usage: huge public transport investments, incentives for domestic and industrial energy efficiency, localized sustainable transport and development. Their mandate should be also to ensure participation and accountability for carbon usage of local authorities, industry and citizens.

Resurrecting Gaia, our planet, will take generations, but we will, at least, have made the first step.



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Let's Talk Giraffe

Mar 19 2005
Jacqui McCarney

There's a new language called "Giraffe". Appealing as it sounds, this is not a way to communicate with our long-necked friends, but much more challenging, a way to communicate effectively with our fellow humans. As the land animal with the largest heart, the giraffe has come to represent a way of connecting directly and effectively with our real heartfelt needs and the authentic needs of others. Last year, I attended a workshop where Dr Marshall Rosenberg, the founder of Non-Violent Communication (NVC), presented this connection with humour, playfulness, pathos and puppets.

Rosenberg's work on conflict resolution takes him into fraught and dangerous situations - the most violent high schools in America, prisons, mental hospitals, tribal violence in Africa, Palestinian refugee camps and - not least - marital conflict. NVC, which he also calls "a language of compassion." is useful, not just in these crisis situations, but also in everyday life.

This new language invites us to abandon habitual, culturally enforced ways of communicating, which Rosenberg calls "Jackal". This is a language based on judgments, competitiveness, moral superiority, prejudice, aggression, control - "a need to win and a need to be right". Our language is so conditioned that we are often unconscious that we are thinking, and then speaking, like this. Schools and workplaces increasingly encourage competitiveness, and sadly all too often negative mindsets of arrogance or inferiority, judging and aggression flow from this. The soaps, magazines and tabloid press, full of Jackal language, fuel this unhealthy tendency to compare and compete.

None of this leads to happiness and very quickly we fall into the game of blaming or guilt - partners, children, work colleagues become the scapegoats. Often we don't know how to get our needs met or to really hear the needs of others. Many suffer from years of low-level unhappiness, which may lead to mental health problems or explosive acts against society or people. Learning to speak and listen in Giraffe, rather than Jackal, offers a way to be happier.

Rosenberg's quantum leap is from the head to the heart, challenging us to stop playing mental games and begin to listen to the fundamental needs of ourselves and others. With his Giraffe and Jackal hand puppets, he explores these different ways of communicating, and shows how we can learn to hear our own and other's needs better.

With a hint of irony, he admits that his hand puppets may be left at home in some of his more fraught conflict resolution, or taken out only after his audience has warmed up.

If we know how to express our needs, then we have more chance of getting them met. Human needs are universal and while cultural differences might affect how these needs are expressed, that does not affect the needs themselves. Rosenberg sings a folk song "See Me Beautiful" in his talks - about seeing ourselves and others in the beauty of our unique humanity - this is the core of his simple, profound philosophy.

Teenagers often have low levels of self-esteem, not seeing their own beauty. The Centre for Non-Violent Communication (www.cnvc.org) is working in a high school in California where two teenage girls committed suicide and one attempted suicide on a series of successive Tuesdays. One of the mothers turned her grief into a call for the school to reach out to other students before the loss was repeated.

Jackal language thrives when people undervalue themselves and others - when middle-aged women can be so fearful of losing their attractiveness that they go under the knife, old people are lonely and isolated, middle-aged men suffer the mid-life crisis, thirty-somethings are stressed and overworked, young children are obese or dieting, imprisoned in their own homes. So who is happy? I suspect it is those who naturally speak and hear Giraffe. They will be open and interested in people and not slaves to cultural images - they see the beauty in themselves and others.

NVC won't stop conflict, but it does offer a different approach to dealing with it, and allows us to change habitual and unhelpful patterns of communication.

I have only just touched on the philosophy of this approach, but NVC is a practical tool which can be learned by anybody and used in everyday life. It is a skill that we should encourage from an early age, it needs teaching and practise like other key skills. Rosenberg's methods are taught across the UK (www.nvc-resolutions.co.uk), including at workshops in Norwich (contact nlscott@europe.com). We need NVC as part of the National Curriculum and as a prerequisite for all politicians. Imagine Prime Minister's Question Time in Giraffe!



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Wake Up and Smell the Fairtrade Coffee!

Mar 12 2005
Marguerite Finn

When I arrived in Norwich in 1969 I did not expect to stay long. Norwich and North Norfolk however, worked their magic and now - 36 years later - I would find it hard to live anywhere else. So, what is different about Norwich?

For me, Norwich tries to live up to being a "Fine City" in all aspects of the name. It has managed to strike a balance between an all-out drive for economic growth on the one hand and the pursuit of ethical policies on the other. As I reported in a recent column, the Lord Mayor of Norwich is a member of the World Mayors for Peace Initiative, launched in 1982 to promote the solidarity of cities worldwide working for the total abolition of nuclear weapons. By 2003, a total of 554 cities around the world had signed up to the project and Norwich is with them.

Another ethical milestone was reached on 25th February 2005 when Norwich was declared a "Fairtrade City". So, when I noticed the distinctive Fairtrade logo on some goods in a Supermarket recently, I wondered about all the other goods that were not so marked. Did that mean that they were "unfairly" traded? In search of an answer I discovered 'Fairtrade in Norfolk' (FIN) and I learnt that the city's new status was achieved after four years of solid campaigning by them to persuade shops and cafes to stock Fairtrade goods. Their success was built on the efforts of those pioneers of the local Fairtrade movement, who for 20 years or more quietly worked through their Churches or through NEAD (Norfolk Education and Action for Development) to highlight the problems of unfair trading.

What difference can a Fairtrade City make to producers on the other side of the world?

Fairtrade organisations buy direct from farmers who are guaranteed a fair and stable price for their products. This provides a decent income for farmers and their workers, investment in local communities, greater respect for the environment, a stronger position in world markets and a closer link with consumers. The FAIRTRADE Mark is a guarantee of independent Fairtrade certification, ensuring that working conditions at the far end of the production chain are independently monitored.

The consumers benefit too. They can buy good products with a clear conscience, knowing that the producers are being helped to a better life because of their action.

This is empowering because in an over-regulated world, it is one of the few things consumers can do, simply and cheaply, to improve the lot of fellow human beings less fortunate than themselves. So, get your copy of the "Fairtrade Guide to Norwich" available from The World Shop, 38 Exchange Street, Norwich NR2 1AX (or www.fairtrade-in-norfolk.org.uk) and wake up and smell the (Fairtrade!) coffee.

The Fairtrade Foundation has provided a working model of good trading practices and by so doing, proved that fair-trading can work. Consumers are increasingly prepared to pay a premium to ensure that producers in the developing world are protected against wildly fluctuating market prices - sometimes caused by British farmers dumping exports, which depress farm prices in Africa and drive small farmers there out of business.

Those working with the Trade Justice Movement - who see what life is really like in the poorest parts of the world - bear witness to the brutalising impact of unfair trading, which constantly drives down prices to offer us "bargains" in our shops. But as Margaret Hunter, Secretary of Fairtrade in Norfolk, said: "One person's bargain is another's raw deal".

Today there are more than 500 Fairtrade products to choose from - and the list is growing. The Fair Trade Foundation recently published figures showing that sales of approved products in the UK rose by 52% last year to £140million - compared to £92million in 2003. The Government, in recognition of this, has just announced a grant of £750,000, over three years to help bring more products to the market.

Fair trade helps an estimated 5 million farmers and their families. There's much more to do but Fairtrade alone cannot do it. Existing trade rules and practices must be changed and big businesses must be made more accountable. The Trade Justice Movement is "on the case", trying to change expectations of what is economically and socially acceptable.

So, in answer to my earlier question; No, those goods without the Fairtrade label are not necessarily unfairly traded. Their producers might not have heard of the scheme. Ask your favourite shopkeeper to tell his supplier about it; then they won't have any excuse.

I am indebted to Margaret Hunter of Fairtrade in Norfolk for her contribution to this column.



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Is our NHS being killed?

Mar 5 2005
Rupert Read

Last week, I stood alongside 80 'support' workers (cleaners, porters etc.) protesting at the doors of the Norfolk and Norwich (N&N) Hospital. They were not asking for more money, nor for better conditions, for hospital workers. They were simply asking for those of them who work for a private company there (SERCO) to be allowed the same pay and conditions as those of them who work directly for the NHS. At present, SERCO workers in some cases do exactly the same job as others working for the NHS -- and yet get paid less, and work longer hours. Is that fair?

This is the result of long-standing Westminster policies of 'contracting out' an increasing proportion of NHS work. In plain English: the NHS is gradually being privatised. It is gradually ceasing to exist as a state-run service for all - it is gradually being opened up to profiteers. That's why hundreds of workers at the N&N are now reluctantly contemplating strike action: to abolish the 'two-tier' workforce. To stop the otherwise relentless privatisation of our beloved National Health Service.

The government says that improvements in health care depend on the 'modernisation' of the NHS. Does 'modernisation' mean simply privatisation by stealth? 'Modernisation' means patients being given 'choice' in where they are treated for non-emergency conditions. According to my near-namesake, John Reid, the Health Secretary, we will be able to choose between up to 5 hospitals -- of which at least one would be private. Those hospitals that get the thumbs-down from patients would be regarded as 'failing' and might well be closed.

According to this view, decisions to close hospitals would of course not be government decisions, but the result of 'consumer choice'...

Mr. Reid assures us all that even if a local hospital were to be closed down, everyone would still have emergency and acute services within easy reach. But how? Effective accident and emergency (A&E) departments depend on other hospital departments to which patients can be referred, often very urgently.

We have already seen the loss of A&E departments within Norwich, since the opening of the N&N at Colney. And this newspaper has recently covered in depth the threatened closure of Wells Hospital.

There is a pattern here. With fewer hospitals open, where are these hospitals going to be that we can 'choose' between? Will an ill person have to go to Cambridge, or London, in order to get the treatment they deserve?

Let me be frank: I don't want to choose which hospital I go to, when I am ill. All I want is for there to be a good, reliable NHS hospital fairly near to where I live, a hospital I can trust. Is that too much to ask?

Do we 'choose' as tax-payers to have private companies providing essential services at public expense? Come to that, did we ever choose to have private consortia paid enormous sums over decades in return for building new hospitals? The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) seems now to be the main way of funding investments in public services -- but, as Mark Nicholls's reporting in this newspaper has clearly illustrated, it is highly questionable whether this appallingly complicated scheme is the most economical and effective way of funding the building of hospitals (or of anything else!). In the Norwich area, we had a graphic illustration of the perils of relying on PFI, when it was revealed that the consortium which built the N&N University Hospital had made up to £100 million from 'refinancing' the loan they raised for the purpose, at a much lower rate of interest. Public good - or private profit?

Meanwhile, PFI schemes across Norfolk have descended into chaos. Again, it is the EDP that has documented in dramatic detail the fiasco of the PFI funding of improvements to Norfolk's schools. Jarvis, the firm responsible for this disaster, is now in effect being bailed out by the County and the government: so it seems that PFI does not really spread financial risk to the private sector after all? Because when they get into real trouble, it is we who end up footing the bill. Private profit? - public loss.

If you care about the NHS, if you want to stop and reverse its privatisation, then do express your solidarity with the N&N's support workers. Brussels and Westminster are at present threatening the NHS with more privatisation than it has ever had to endure; this really is the last chance saloon for a National Health Service, that still stands as a beacon to the world.

My thanks to UNISON at the N&N and to Jean Davis for invaluable help researching this article.



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Norfolk needs less development, built better

Feb 26 2005
Andrew Boswell

This week's column is an open letter to the Deputy Prime Minister on the East of England Regional Authority's (EERA) draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), currently under public consultation at www.eera.gov.uk until March 16th 2005.

Dear Mr Prescott, The RSS is a plan of enormous significance for the future of the East of England. Despite efforts by our local media, many in Norfolk have probably still never heard of it, and EERA are widely thought not to have promoted the consultation effectively.

I hope, though, that the response this time may be better than the previous consultation, to which only 88 individuals from a regional population of 5.4million responded - that is, about 0.001% of the adult population. A "public" consultation with such a limited response cannot provide a true representation of people's views.

Norfolk born people are familiar with the region's environmental and natural beauty, relaxed pace, quality of life, and local character, whilst others of us have come here to enjoy these lifestyle benefits. Yet the majority in Norfolk may still be blissfully unaware that the RSS proposes 478,000 new homes to be built across the East by 2021 - a build rate of nearly 24000 a year, with 72,600 being in Norfolk.

These new homes will inevitably bring new roads, shops and other commercial infrastructure. Expansion in schools and hospitals will be needed too - although the plan fails to show how this public infrastructure will be funded. We can expect triple accounting and further PFI Fiascos to leave Council Tax payers with the bill for decades to come.

Not just costly, supercharged growth and business development will destroy this region's way of life: business and construction industry interests will come first, the needs of our people poor second. Similar growth plans for the South East will fry that already overheated region, and extend the pressure on our Eastern region too. Fast-life stress and London/SE pace will become ever more common place in Norfolk.

Whilst some growth is inevitable, it should be at a natural pace, not rapid and forced. Many Norfolk people feel their justifiable concerns are being ignored by your government's policy to "develop" the South East and Eastern Regions at the expense of other UK regions, as rapid large-scale private construction will spread concrete and tarmac over ever greater areas of our beautiful county.

The enormous strain on local services, the environment and infrastructure, lagging behind development in both regions, will fuel a housing crisis amongst the worst off in our society

- the RSS also doesn't offer enough low cost housing to keep pace with such massive growth. In short, your regional development plans need rethinking. You should:

- rebalance economic activity across the whole country;
- bring empty homes back into use in regeneration areas, such as the North, via an effective empty homes policy.

Then less development would be necessary in the South East and East.

The RSS directly contradicts your own Government's stated position of making climate change a key global issue. EERA accepts "climate change will be inevitable over the period of this strategy" and only advises reactively 'adapting' the region to it. Beyond some small scale sustainable energy, the RSS sets no pro-active policy vision for Norfolk's role in reducing carbon emissions. This is an unacceptable renunciation of responsibility - planners and developers must take responsibility for carbon reduction, as much as governments, industry and individuals.

This can only be achieved by making all planning processes "carbon emission aware". You should show a real commitment to tackling climate change by legislating that all planning and transport decisions must quantify their carbon emissions, and prove they meet strict limits. Without existing legislation, the EERA plan should put be on hold until it is resubmitted with a full assessment of the carbon emission costs of its every development.

Greenpeace have recently suggested ten "climate steps", necessary to your government's credibility on climate change: immediately adopting the following would enable the "built better" sustainable development of our region:

- setting tough environmental standards (zero emission levels) for all new buildings;
- subsidizing domestic renewable power such as solar and state-of-the-art energy efficiency;
- requiring all new buildings to include combined heat and power plants; and
- promoting a much greater expansion of renewable energy production.

We need clear policy and vigorous action on Climate Change from the top. Please will you, and Tony Blair, address this. At the level of regional planning, your office could rapidly make significant beneficial impact on all our climate projects by adopting the above "Less Development, Built Better" policy. Norfolk people who cherish our unique "Do Different" way of life would benefit greatly.

Yours sincerely. Andrew Boswell.



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Selling Non-Proliferation on the streets of Norwich

Feb 19 2005
Marguerite Finn

Visitors to Norwich City Centre yesterday may have seen the veteran peace campaigner, Bruce Kent, engaging members of the public and persuading them to sign a petition calling for the abolition of all nuclear weapons. Bruce - formerly a Catholic priest and currently Vice-President of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament - has been active in this cause since 1958. He is 76 now and his visit to Norwich is part of a 2-month, nationwide tour taking in 21 cities. The tour is organised by CND and Bruce will be meeting Mayors and local dignitaries and inviting them to become 'Mayors for Peace' in time for the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in New York in May. The Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are bringing 100 Mayors from around the world to the Conference calling for immediate negotiations to eliminate nuclear weapons. We can be proud that the Lord Mayor of Norwich, Joyce Divers, is one of a growing number of Mayors for Peace.

The petitions collected by Bruce will be taken to the NPT Conference to signal the British peoples' desire for nuclear disarmament.

What drives a 76 year old man, in the depths of Winter, to embark on such a gruelling campaign? Why should he - or we - care so much?

Let us look at the history of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is a cornerstone of international security. It aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons to states that do not already possess them and obliges existing Nuclear Weapon States to negotiate, at an early date, the elimination of their nuclear arsenals.

When the Treaty became law in 1970 it was signed by 5 nuclear powers: US, Britain, Russia, France and China. Despite this, nuclear weapons proliferated - first in Israel, then India and Pakistan and recently in North Korea. When the NPT was reviewed in 2000, a six-point Plan of Action for progress in nuclear disarmament was agreed.

Unfortunately, since 9/11 the US now regards this plan as 'history' and 'incompatible' with the new "War on Terror". It is feared that they - possibly supported by Britain - will not re-affirm their "unequivocal undertaking" to pursue total nuclear disarmament, which is the key part of Article V1 of the original Treaty. Without this undertaking, the nuclear arms race could escalate out of control.

This is what concerns Bruce Kent and drives him on to the chilly streets of our cities. It should concern all of us. We are facing a new, unpredictable and largely invisible enemy - terrorism - against which nuclear weapons are useless. Terrorists are stateless adversaries without the infrastructure to build/house nuclear weapons systems. Nuclear proliferation and escalation is already happening and the Non-Proliferation Treaty remains the only internationally accepted barrier - however imperfect - to further incidences. In 2002, in flagrant breach of the spirit of the NPT, the US administration launched its Nuclear Posture Review, calling for new types of nuclear weapons to be built and proposing new roles for their use.

The dangers inherent in this policy cannot be overstated. In the first place it sends a signal to nuclear and non-nuclear states alike: 'Smarten up - Proliferate!' Secondly, 'low-yield' nuclear weapons blur the distinction between nuclear and conventional warfare making nuclear war more "thinkable." Regardless of what they are called, they are still nuclear bombs and the designing, building and testing of them directly contravenes the Non-Proliferation Treaty. A third danger lies in President Bush's decision to merge the forces carrying out nuclear and conventional global strikes - by allowing an intercontinental ballistic missile to carry either a nuclear or a conventional warhead and to put in place a new computerised planning and command structure that would make it faster and easier to launch a nuclear attack. In a crisis, it would be impossible for countries to distinguish what kind of weapon a plane, or missile was carrying, thus increasing the possibility of escalation.

So, where does Britain stand with regard to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons? Apart from 110 US nuclear weapons stationed at Lakenheath, Britain has its own Trident Nuclear Submarines. Defence Secretary, Geoff Hoon, recently announced that the decision on whether to replace or upgrade Trident would be taken during the next Parliament. That decision-making process has almost certainly begun, as evidenced by the huge new building programme at AWE Aldermaston.

That is why Bruce Kent wants people to sign the petition for the abolition of nuclear weapons and why it is so important that both the US and UK honour their pledges to the Non-Proliferation Treaty - because, without Britain and America on board, the Treaty is doomed - and so, possibly, are we.

I am grateful to Norwich CND for their input.



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Supporting the people of Aceh

Feb 12 2005
Jacqui McCarney

We are awash with table top sales, fund raising lunches and coffee mornings for tsunami victims. The bucket is out in pubs, churches, community centers and local shops. This pattern of generosity is repeated throughout the country with businesses and celebrities becoming involved.

The shocking events of Boxing Day tsunami, which killed and made so many people homeless, touched our hearts and moved us to act to ensure these people had a future. We are now familiar with the names of remote areas like Aceh. This hardest hit area was levelled, with the disappearance of vast areas of coastline and whole communities wiped out. The Indonesian people have suffered unimaginable losses.

Our connection with these people is now one of deep sympathy and support. However, there is a connection forged between the people of Norfolk and the people of Indonesia long before the tsunami. A connection less advertised, more shameful and sadly more sinister.

As well as giving these people money to build new lives we are also, rather illogically, helping to destroy their lives. Currently Norfolk County, through its Pension Fund, has 663,215 shares in the arms company GKN, which has total military sales of \$2.1 billion and sells arms to Indonesia. Our City council is involved too, as a participating employer in the County Council pension scheme

The Indonesian government is engaged in a "dirty war", against the people of Aceh and West Papua who it has colonized and subjugated. In its 2002 report, Amnesty International says the action of the Indonesian Government has led to "hundreds of cases of extrajudicial execution, "disappearances", torture and unlawful arrests" Brad Adams, executive director of Human Rights Watch's Asian Division notes, "in case after case, soldiers have gone into Acehnese village and publicly executed or beat people seemingly at random". Tragically, these attacks on the people of Aceh - as they struggle not just for their freedom but for bare life itself - resumed within a week of the devastating Boxing Day tsunami.

Alison King, the Leader of Norfolk County Council and the chairperson of the investment Committee, deciding on investment policy, defends the Council's investment in the arms trade "in order to keep down the costs to the council taxpayers".

However, ethical investment does not necessarily cost a penny more; and some local authorities, such as Nottinghamshire County Council, have made a positive first step of investing a percentage of their Pension Fund in portfolios which exclude arms companies. Such ethical restrictions then could be introduced here in Norfolk, too. I do not think Norfolk County Council, whose role is to look after people in this county, should invest in companies that cause misery to other people around the world.

Britain is a major global player in the arms industry. It is the second largest arms exporter (after the United States), with a quarter of global trade. The majority of people killed in wars are the victims of small arms, and Britain has granted 1,500 small arms export licenses under the Labour Government to dozens of countries. Since 1997 weapons have been sold to Algeria, Columbia, Israel, Nepal, the Philippines and Russia. All of these countries have terrible human rights records and are currently involved in conflicts. We are therefore, complicit in massive human rights abuses in several countries, exacerbating regional tensions in areas of conflict and violating our own and EU's guidelines on arms export.

In 1997 East Timor's Bishop Belo implored the British Government, "my people have suffered terribly from the effects of armaments made in countries far from our shores.....I appeal to the government of the United Kingdom.... Do not sustain any longer a conflict which without these sales could never have been pursued in the first place, nor for so very long."

It is clear that the people of Norfolk wish to express good will and generosity to all those who suffered in the tsunami. In a democracy, these sentiments should be fully represented by our local and national Government. The Campaign against the Arms Trade, (www.caat.org.uk) recommends you write to the councils, and to your City and County Councillors. As council tax-payers, the people of Norfolk, have the status of beneficiaries, and therefore the right to comment on Norfolk County's Pension Fund. It is time to end the hypocrisy, if we truly want to help the victims of the tsunami, we the citizens of Norfolk must stop investing in the very arms that are used so cruelly against them.



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Ethics or Aesthetics ?

Feb 5 2005
Marguerite Finn

When Cervantes made his knight errant Don Quixote ride at full tilt against a windmill, that impulsive charge was the principled reaction of an honourable if eccentric man against a monstrosity defiling the green and pleasant Spanish landscape. Whether wind turbines creep towards National Parks or raise their questionable heads around Shipdam, they provoke the same sort of intuitive objection. The Bishop of Hereford described a plan for turbines on Cefn Croes in mid-Wales as an act of vandalism equal to the destruction of the Buddhist statues of Bamiyan by the Taliban. One's aesthetic senses bristle against such disfigurements.

The International Climate Change Task Force suggests that the threat of irreversible climate change is even more urgent than we supposed. Stringent measures have to be taken within the next ten years if we are to avoid reaching the levels of carbon dioxide in the air that trigger run-away climate effects; we have not got until 2050 as we thought, which itself did not seem long enough to save the planet. We begin to see maps that show the North Sea lapping at the doors of Norwich Cathedral; but even so, our problems will be trifling compared with low-lying Bangladesh. There, irregular and extreme weather would probably kill millions, displace tens of millions and destroy thousands of square kilometres of unique habitat. Cataclysms of comparable scale involving desertification may affect China and South American countries from loss of snow-melt water. As always, the poor would suffer disproportionately from the greed of the rich.

That is what is to blame for excessive global warming gases: our desire, as the rich of the world, for every short-term comfort that profligate energy expenditure may buy. And who can blame the developing countries for increasing their own harmful gas emissions to seek those comforts they have watched us enjoy? We are responsible for tempting them towards their own appalling destruction, which will make Boxing Day 2004 seem mild in comparison.

Such considerations are profoundly ethical. So long as we are our brother's keeper, we have a duty to do everything we can to avoid inflicting those calamities upon him. And the fact that the victims may indeed be as closely related as brothers, and not some descendant distant in time and place, as we used to imagine, concentrates the mind upon finding ethical solutions.

The huge scale of the problem suggests that we need to employ every sensible option, from drastically reducing our energy consumption and wastage, to developing fuel cells, carbon sequestration and a hydrogen economy without delay, and every benign form of renewable energy. The panacea of nuclear energy is illusory, since the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) advises us that nuclear stations cannot possibly come on stream quickly enough, even if they were acceptably safe. And they are not. Their radioactive waste would litter the world for 240,000 years, to add further to our intergenerational shame. The World Bank will not invest in current nuclear technologies - even to fight global warming.

Other positive contributions come from more efficient and less used vehicles, energy efficient buildings (including new-build homes), moving from coal to gas generation, biomass, afforestation and conservation tillage. No one knows yet what the problems of each may be, so we must proceed with each, cautiously but at once.

Panting healthily on the crest of a windswept moor or gazing out between the chintz curtains of the best bedroom, of course one is aesthetically disconsolate at the awesome march of the wind turbines. Yet every little helps, including them. In comparison with the future disconsolation of the Bangladeshis, such heartache of ours is trivial. Just as in wartime we melted down fabulous wrought-iron work to make guns, covered the fells in conifers for pit-props and tore up well-loved gardens to dig for victory, so we must swallow our aesthetic pride and bite on the ecological bullet, to avoid this far worse enemy - one we have created ourselves.

No one is quite sure what Cervantes meant by parodying courtly honour in the ridiculous figure of his quixotic hero but, as I remember the story, the knight was always true to himself after his own fashion. Perhaps we can be truer to ourselves in the current critical situation, if we forego the aesthetics to hold on to the ethics.

Norwich citizens can march in London on Saturday, 12 February, - to persuade world governments fully to back the Climate Treaty to restrict greenhouse gas emissions now. For travel details / tickets ring the Greenhouse on 01603 631007.

I am grateful to the Editor of Resurgence Magazine for ideas from letters therein from Rob Collister and Peter Harper.



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A living memorial to Auschwitz

Jan 29 2005
Jacqui McCarney

Thursday saw the first ever commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz 60 years ago. The calculated evil of the Nazi's, responsible for the deaths of 6 million Jews, along with Poles, homosexuals, Soviets and Gypsies, is a harrowing reminder of man's inhumanity to man.

This commemoration acknowledges respectfully those who suffered and died, and provides the living with an opportunity to express their grief, sadness and perhaps shame. Shame at what we are capable of doing to one another.

Is the human race destined to express itself, in violent acts of terror and war while praying for peace? History shows that this is indeed the case, and our time on this planet is punctuated by barbaric acts of war and violence.

While we pride ourselves on our superior intelligence, inventiveness and ability to solve problems, we are caveman age in human relations. We have used our superior intelligence to make very sophisticated clubs with which to batter one another - from machine guns to atomic weapons. As yet, we have not figured out how not to batter one another.

Indeed every discussion about conflict sees today's expensively educated leaders revert to a caveman speak of simplistic polarities - Good, Evil, Friend, Enemy, Civilized World, Axis of Evil. Then George Bush's memorable, "You're either with us, or against us" and Tony Blair's most recent, "A few bad apples".

Honestly! Most parents expect more emotional intelligence from their 5 year olds. "It's all his fault", gets little sympathy from parents who know that it's usually six of one and half a dozen of the other. So why do we accept such nonsense from politicians.

Seeing the world in black and white allows us to abdicate all responsibility. Whilst placing ourselves comfortably on a seat of righteousness, we can commit all kinds of barbarism to those we have demonised. Hitler's delusion was that he saw himself as the liberator of the German people. Those who commit acts of evil often fervently believe themselves to be acting out of honourable intentions against some outer evil.

What does human evolution amount to, when we fail miserably to live peacefully with our fellow man?

Our failure amounts to our childish refusal to engage fully with the other.

Instead, we dishonour the sacredness of other's humanity and render them subhuman. The evil is out there, it is 100% their fault, whilst the halo of God's goodness is owned by us alone. Projecting the darker side of our human nature, our shadow, onto the world and others leaves us with a dark and frightening universe. No wonder, we now live in a "culture of fear".

To step beyond this primal level of relating, we must begin to take responsibility for some of the mess and be prepared to talk, but more important, listen. Listening carefully to others allows us to understand them.

The aim is not to get rid of conflict, this would probably be impossible, but to develop the techniques, skills, and wisdom for resolving it. Condoleeza Rice's promise of more US diplomacy are words in the right direction, but is she serious she can deliver it?

We really need leadership that favours diplomacy over war - a new approach that could permeate the whole of society. Studies such as that of Mel and Carl Ember conclude that continuous wars is a major cause of escalating violence in countries like the US, whose homicide rate of 7 or 8 % per 100,000 is the highest in the world compared to non-combatant countries like Denmark, 0.2 per 100,000, the lowest.

The bullying in our institutions, wife beating, rape, mugging and assault that happen in our local community can not be divorced from each other or from our engagement in war. According to research carried out by Dane Archer and Rosemary Gartner, (Violence and Crime in Cross-National Perspective) all forms of aggression are strongly inter-related - the more aggression in one sphere, the more there will be in others.

This is true whether the aggression is verbal, symbolic or physical. Far from being a release valve, it becomes a template or formula for how to behave in other spheres in the world. Germaine Greer's refusal to play ball with the bullying in Big Brother is also a refusal to play the bigger game of our society, pretending it is all harmless fun.

A living memorial to the holocaust would be a genuine commitment to conflict resolution being practised at all levels from ordinary people to governments.



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The mission for a democratic Iraq

Jan 22 2005
Ian Sinclair

In his book, *Web of Deceit*, Mark Curtis argues the public's understanding of Britain's real role in the world is being obscured by the mainstream media, which "promotes one key concept that underpins everything else - the idea of Britain's basic benevolence." Criticism of foreign policy does take place, but always within narrow limits which show 'exceptions' to, or 'mistakes' in, promoting the basic rule of benevolence. Thus, a regular EDP columnist has written that "the mission for a democratic Iraq" is "still not successfully concluded."

The historical record clearly shows, rather than promoting democracy and human rights in the Arab world, Anglo-American foreign policy has been systematically opposed to these ideas. For example, in 1953 the US and UK instigated a coup against the popular, nationalist government of Iran, installing the brutal Shah. Amnesty International observed the Shah's regime slaughtered 10,000 Iranians and held over 25,000 political prisoners. This week the investigative journalist Seymour Hersh exposed renewed US interest in Iranian affairs, reporting that the neo-conservatives are contemplating whether to extend the 'war on terror' to Iran, with Special Forces already operating in the country.

Or what about the continuing US/UK support for Saudi Arabia? In Saudi Arabia there is no freedom of association or expression, peaceful demonstrations are banned and women are pervasively discriminated against. There are no political parties, non-governmental organisations, trade unions or independent local media. In November 2003, Tony Blair said he counted Saudi Arabia as "a good friend" and hoped in the future our two countries relationship "will become even stronger."

More than anything else the US and UK don't like independent, popular governments, who want to do things their own way. This attitude towards democracy was well demonstrated by the distinction made between "old" and "new" Europe in the build up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The former took the same position as the majority of their population (they opposed military action in March 2003) and were condemned by the US and UK. The latter ignored huge domestic opposition (e.g. Italy and Spain) and supported the invasion, and were praised by Washington and London.

In Iraq today the US and UK forces face a fundamental problem: The majority of Iraqis want to kick them out (many opinion polls show this).

Therefore, an elected government that reflected Iraqi popular opinion is unlikely to be sufficiently submissive to US and UK interests, and is unlikely to take an 'acceptable' position on the wider Middle East security and the Israel-Palestine conflict.

To this end, the US has consistently stalled on one-person-one-vote elections since the invasion. The popular Shi'ite cleric, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani called for elections by June 2004. This was blocked by the US, despite British officials claiming early elections in Iraq were viable and that an electoral roll drawn up from a mixture of ration, health and identity cards would be adequate. Salim Lone, the former UN Director of Communications in Iraq, notes the US "put democracy on hold until it can be safely managed."

How this might occur was highlighted by a recent Time magazine story, which reported the existence of a "secret finding... proposing a covert CIA operation to aid candidates favoured by Washington." Furthermore, in July the US-puppet Ayad Allawi made moves to control the media, establishing a committee to impose restrictions on print and broadcast media. The head of the committee told the Financial Times these restrictions would include "unwarranted criticism of the prime minister." There are, of course, less subtle means of rigging the vote. For example, the 100,000 people estimated to have died in Iraq since the invasion certainly won't be voting on January 30.

If the US and UK are serious about establishing an independent, democratic Iraq they would deescalate the violence, not escalate it, and hand over control of the electoral process to the UN. Indeed, the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, wrote to the US and UK governments before the recent assault on Falluja, arguing military action "could be very disruptive for Iraq's political transition." Unsurprisingly the day after the US assault began attacks on US forces rose from 80 to 130 a day. Can an election be legitimate when it is conducted under foreign military occupation?

The organisation Global Policy Forum believes Western oil companies could reap profits anywhere between \$600 billion and \$9 trillion over the next 50 years - as long as Iraq enters into production sharing agreements that offers the companies favourable terms. With such high stakes being played for, it seems highly unlikely the US and UK are going to voluntarily hand real control to the Iraqi population.



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Conflict resolution - a growing trend

Jan 15 2005
Andrew Boswell

The world appears very bleak from images on our TVs, and pictures in newspapers. People rightly say we need more positive news. Well, it does exist, and we should find and celebrate it as a Norwich Quaker friend of mine, Elizabeth Stutz, did.

Inspired to discover the world in which hatred and recriminations have been laid aside, Elizabeth searched the Internet, finding thousands of Palestinians and Israelis who devote their lives to different ways of creating peace in their war-torn region:

- The Parents' Circle, a growing, hundreds strong, group of Palestinian and Israeli families, who have lost close family members in the conflict.
- BRIDGES, a new health journal being launched by Israeli and Palestinian health professionals with portions in Hebrew, Arabic, and English.
- young people from both communities growing up in friendship and understanding through art, drama, sport and travel.
- nine different women's groups, working in harmony on different aspects of peace
- Christians, Jews and Muslims, worshipping and studying together in increasing numbers, celebrating reconciliation and the fact that they share the same Prophets, basic religious beliefs, and cultural background.

Now Norwich Quakers and the Norwich and District Peace Council have produced a web site - www.practisingpeace.org - which links to some of the many websites describing this work.

The international community urgently needs to know that Muslims and Jews are able to live and work together in harmony and we invite you to visit the site, and to support and encourage these brave people who are laying the foundations for justice, peace and human dignity. These people demonstrate that peace is possible where politicians have so far failed, through their courageous work.

The world hears daily of Middle East incidents in which extreme violence, cruelty and injustice are the norm. Constant negative news inflames negative feelings of hatred and animosity, and produces an atmosphere in which retaliation, vengeance and reprisals are seen as unavoidable. In this climate, the thought of a real peace appears impossible.

For this reason, it is of utmost importance that the harmony that exists among many grass roots citizens as well as professional workers and their work for peace should be recognised and understood by the international community,

and used as a foundation for a peace settlement that both sides feel they can embrace. Contact has been established between the Norwich website and those in Israel/Palestine and some heartening exchanges are taking place.

Aaron Barnea from the Parent's Circle wrote "We are glad ... that, together with others, we may change a bit the generally pessimistic mood regarding the future of our region. Our families, victims of the ongoing conflict, are working together in order to show to both communities that cooperation and friendship is possible". Heskell Nathaniel, Founder, Breaking the Ice writes of the 2005 "extreme peace mission", which, in September, "will take a group of Jews and Arabs in a breath taking expedition across the Sahara", following last year's, joint Palestinian and Israeli Peace Expedition to Antarctica.

Our site links to over 30 sites, including audio and video content, and bears witness to the success of conflict resolution, noted by Scilla Elsworthy as the fastest growing method of dealing with conflict in the 21st century. A few decades ago, there were few such stories worldwide, now there are many - in Britain alone there are over 50 institutes who research non-violent conflict resolution.

This growing trend is reflected in several books - in 2001 Scilla Elsworthy and the Oxford Research Group (ORG) published "War Prevention Works". This tells 50 inspiring stories from around the world of successful peaceful resolutions initiated and sustained by diverse civil society groups such as women, youth and faith-based organisations.

In 1999, the European Center for Conflict Prevention published a similar book "People Building Peace - 35 inspiring stories from Around the World". Now, 2005, they are publishing a follow up book with a further 65 stories from countries as diverse as Liberia, Macedonia, Argentina, Nigeria and Cambodia.

Mikhail Gorbachev's Green Cross International has launched a magazine "Optimist" - issue 2, just out, has an article on the Good Water Makes Good Neighbours project where Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians build peace through sustaining shared water resources. The UK's "Positive News" paper has been reporting such good news since 1993 the banner "Another world is possible, spread the word, let's make it happen". To find out more about Norwich's small contribution, please check out our website!

Thanks to Elizabeth Stutz for her inspiration and help for this column. Proceeds from the January and February One World columns have been donated to the Sarvodaya Movement, www.sarvodaya.org, a Sri Lankan Buddhist charity working with the victims of the tsunami.



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Am I My Brother's Account Keeper ?

Jan 8 2005
Marguerite Finn

"Loving our neighbours includes loving those in distant lands requiring our practical help" (Rt. Rev. Graham James, Bishop of Norwich)

What was it about the Tsunami disaster that prompted us to respond so quickly and generously? The time of the year, perhaps - or the fact that many of us are deeply troubled by the appalling situation in Iraq - an avoidable disaster which we failed to prevent? Maybe it was the dawning realisation that we all live a precarious existence on the surface of a volatile planet and we do not control the forces of Nature? If we accept that, then we have no need to live in fear of phantom 'enemies' and the money in the global war chests could be diverted to rebuilding devastated homes and cities.

Each New Year we are presented with an opportunity to clean up the mess from previous years and start again with a clean slate. This is both a strength and a weakness. If the latest disaster pushes earlier 'on-going' disasters to the back of our consciousness, that is a grave weakness. We live in an age of unprecedented global communication. At the press of a button we can have instant access to news from around the world. We are horrified and saddened at the plight of victims of death and destruction.

We are moved to help. But we don't follow it up. New events occur, the media focus moves on and we forget to wonder what is happening today in Bam, or Bangladesh, Falluja or Haiti. I often find myself wondering what ever happened to the hundreds of people last seen clinging to trees and roof-tops to escape the floods in Bangladesh (2004), the 14 million Chinese made homeless when the Yangtze River flooded its banks (1998), the Iranians digging frantically in the dusty debris of the ancient city of Bam (2003) or the Palestinian families in Gaza whose homes had just been bulldozed (2004/5).

It is not compassion that is missing - it is accountability.

What would happen if the media reported on the progress of cleaning-up and rebuilding disaster areas after, say, two years and again after ten years? Would this not ensure that all agencies involved from Governments down were accountable for their actions? With the eyes of the world focussed on them it would be difficult for donor countries to renege on their pledges and for the recipient countries to waste or mismanage the resources given to them. Surely there is scope here for positive 'good news' stories - and if not, why not?

One particular disaster, which the world seems to have forgotten is Bhopal. Here is a twenty-year old mess crying out to be cleaned up - for which nobody wants to be accountable. In December 1984, forty tons of lethal gases leaked from Union Carbide Corporation's pesticide factory in Bhopal, India. It was the worst chemical disaster in history. Over 8,000 people died in three days from direct exposure to the gases. The Company refused to provide full information regarding the nature of the poisoning, which meant that doctors were unable properly to treat the victims.

To this day survivors have been unable to obtain information on the composition of the leaked gases and their effect on the body. Union Carbide abandoned the factory, leaving behind large quantities of dangerous poisons, which continue to contaminate the water supply and affect the local population. A third generation of victims is now emerging. These are children born to parents born after the gas leak. They are suffering from TB, lung fibrosis, cancers and chromosomal aberrations. Dow Chemical Corporation bought Union Carbide in 1999, but refuses to accept any responsibility for the Bhopal disaster - even when Greenpeace found severe contamination of land and water supplies due to the continued release of chemicals from the toxic wastes that remain on site.

Bhopal cannot start 2005 with a clean slate - but neither can the Dow Chemical Corporation, which still owes the people of Bhopal a clean environment and the removal of the festering remains of the chemical factory. Here in Norfolk we agonise about dogs fouling pavements and public places. How can we do that while allowing the people of Bhopal to be born, live and die on contaminated land, in total breach of their human rights ? Further information can be found on www.greenpeaceusa.org/toxics or www.Bhopal.org.

My thanks to Greenpeace International for their excellent report on Corporate Crimes (June 2002)



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Things can only get better?

Jan 1 2005
Rupert Read

Some say that 'progress' is inevitable. As the wrapping paper gets recycled, as the January sales barrel on - and as the 'New Year' begins -- it's worth thinking about what "progress" really means.

Take computers. Apparently computers double their capability every 18 months. So they become more efficient and cheaper. Transistor radios are now lower in price than they were 40 years ago. So, when inflation is taken into consideration, are cars. A Mini in 1959 cost £600. Small cars can now be bought for around £6000 - - much cheaper than the 1959 model, in real terms.

You can carry the analogy too far: if cars were 'progressing' at the same rate as computers we would be able to buy a Rolls-Royce for £1.35, it would do three million miles to the gallon and it would deliver enough power to drive the QE2. It would also have been miniaturised enough to get half a dozen onto a pinhead! (But then it would be pretty useless as a car...)

The above examples only prove that there are areas of our lives where the application of the latest scientific expertise can have dramatic payoffs. What if we move our consideration of 'progress' away from commodities and focus our attention onto attitudes or human relations? Do people regard other humans and the environment around them with greater respect than in the past? Two simple examples suggest not. It seems more of today's families leave litter behind after a family picnic. And fly-tipping is on the increase in the greater Norwich area.

Perhaps I am being picky. Life is in many respects better for most of us in the Western world. However, the wealth of the poorest countries in the world has declined in absolute terms over the last two decades. Not to mention those, such as the homeless, and those perplexed by the over-complicated claims forms produced by the Government for means-tested benefits, who are hardly living in paradise, even right here in Norfolk...

And think about the world we are leaving for our grandchildren. We have been overstretching the global system for longer than anyone can remember: a lot of the system's parts are starting to creak rather badly.

Fish -- at least the kind people buy at the fish-shop -- are running out. One reason why is that many of the smaller fish that big fish eat are being scooped out of the sea and used as fertiliser. Or take water supply: As the industry and agriculture swallow up ever more water we find that the water-table is sinking. 'Fossil water' that has been below ground for centuries is now being used to create the 'miracle' of golf- courses in places like Phoenix, Arizona - a city in the middle of a desert! Talk about unsustainable...

Some will say that technological progress will come along to solve these man-made problems. But this depends how that technology is used. It could be used to ensure that non-animal methods of testing new medical cures are used and that barbaric and scientifically- inaccurate animal-testing comes to an end. And to make more goods from recycled materials so that we do not continue to use up the Earth's resources at an unsustainable rate.

But some of society's problems do not require technological solutions at all, but political and economic solutions. Buying local produce, such as from farmer's markets, helps cut down on pollution from unnecessary transport. And more could be done by governments to promote Fair Trade -- to ensure that the 'third world' workers producing those goods that we need to import (goods such as tea and bananas) are paid a living wage. In the field of health, the promotion of preventative medicine must be a higher priority. This includes eating more fresh fruit and vegetables and making more journeys on foot or by bike to get more exercise.

Preventative action is also necessary when it comes to transport. People drive so much partly because it was decided that supermarkets would be able to make larger profits if they were located at highway intersections, where people would be forced to drive to -- because many small shops would close after building the supermarkets ! And if you build hypermarkets you can close down an entire town centre, not just the grocers'.

Does anyone care if we lose the character of our town centres? Yes - I certainly do!

Things will get better - if we keep things local ... and make them sustainable. May I wish all readers of this column a sustainably happy New Year....

[Many thanks -- for huge help with this column -- to [Bob Gledhill](#)]



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Give Them The Earth This Christmas

Dec 18 2004
Jacqui McCarney

Mulling over another EDP report on Climate Change, whilst I walked towards the city, beside grid-locked Christmas shopping traffic, I couldn't help notice an isolated and bored, unhappy looking young child strapped in the back of a 4by4 as it pumped out fumes.

By contrast, my return journey, by bus, was greatly cheered by meeting 3 year old Tom and his mother. Tom chatted endlessly about all he saw and on leaving bus called politely "Thank you Mr Bus driver" and all the women including me, especially me, coo-ed and ahh-ed.

"Christmas is a time for children" - these contrasting pictures of childhood reflect the opposite scenarios for the future security of the young generation. Tom's life was rich and full of adventure with opportunities to develop social skills and a sense of community. In deliberately using public transport, his mother is enriching Tom's outings now, and making a strong statement about her hopes for his future and the future of Tom's generation.

Giving our children a stable and secure future can no longer be regarded as a purely private matter as road transport produces a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions leading to climate change - our life-style choices now will have an impact on a whole generation, as Sir David King the government's chief scientist has said "global warming is greater challenge than global terrorism".

The UK has witnessed the catastrophic effects of climate change - unprecedented rainfall; widespread flooding memorably in Boscastle; overflow of sewers pouring out raw effluent; monsoon conditions in Scotland causing mudslides and trapping dozens of vehicles; severe storms and rising sea levels claiming low lying land experienced dramatically here in Norfolk.

We can expect more extreme droughts and heat waves, like in 2003, that lead to thousands dying in France; increases in skin cancer; and of course, wars over increasingly scarce energy resources, such as with Iraq. Despite, his mother's best intentions, the future for Tom and his generation looks grim.

The third world's picture is much worse - climate change will cause disease, flooding and loss of land on a huge scale.

Ordinary people are right to be concerned for the future of their children. According to a BBC poll most of us

accept that human activity is responsible for changing the world's climate and 85% are willing to make changes to help the environment. Margaret Beckett writing in *Renewal* said "There is a growing public appetite for leadership on the environment". Where is it? With 3 million members of environmental groups in Britain, and the Green party holding five seats and the balance of power in Norwich, Mrs Beckett's instincts are well founded, despite her Government's lack of decisive policy and action.

Tony Blair's speeches endorse the need to reduce carbon emissions; yet, he has, given the go ahead for a huge expansion of airports, and has a £30billion budget for road building.

Air travel is the fastest growing source of CO2 - we have a choice of over 400 package holidays from our local airport whilst little thought is given to the real cost to the future generations.

This lack of consistent leadership permeates down to institutions. UEA has an international reputation on climate change studies, and CRed brings some of their expertise into the community, aiming to reduce local carbon emissions by 60% by 2025. However, living near the university one might doubt the renowned environmental department's existence as one witnesses a small city on the move every day at 5 'o clock with subsequent congestion and pollution.

Getting the 58% of car using students onto bikes and buses with generously subsidised bus passes would improve car travel for members of staff who travel in long distances ... encouraging staff to use electric cars now only £5,000 with no petrol or tax costs ... providing an efficient, reliable and comprehensive bus service - would all help the whole city and clear the route for emergency services to the hospital. Working with the council and bus company, the university would still have a huge amount of change from the £12million, planned for a new multi-storey car park.

Whilst wishing all the children of Norfolk a happy and joy filled Christmas, we need more to wish them a happy future, and to build it. Leadership from politicians may come too late. A recent paper in *Science* identified reducing car use by 50%, and increasing car efficiency by 100%, as key strategies to stabilize climate change by 2050. Let's allow our children the pleasure of walking, cycling and bus rides, and ensure their rightful inheritance; the earth.



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Norwich: A segregated city?

Dec 11 2004
Ian Sinclair

Recently I attempted to catch the direct bus from the Norfolk and Norwich hospital to the train station. Frustrated by the lack of a no. 25, I boarded another bus bound at least for the city centre. As the bus (no. 22) travelled through Bowthorpe into West Earlham, looking out the window, it became increasingly clear to me there was defacto segregation right here in Norwich. That it was possible for two communities (say Eaton and Mile Cross) to live within a few miles of each other, but to live completely separate lives - working, shopping, playing and holidaying in two different worlds.

Of course I am talking about social class - which has become a dirty word under New Labour. However, social class is still a central concept in understanding society today, with numerous studies showing how the class a person is born into influences many aspects of their lives, and directly affects a person's life chances. But what does it mean to be on the wrong side of this class divide?

Poverty is seriously damaging to your health. Studies overwhelmingly show that for most health conditions, those with lower incomes have it much worse than those who are rich. Respiratory diseases, coronary heart disease, lung cancer, strokes, tooth decay and suicide are all more prevalent among the poor. Fat is also a class issue. Recent figures from the Department of Health show that the rate of obesity for girls in the most well-off quintile was 4.5 per cent, doubling to 8.8 per cent in the most deprived quintile. One of the reasons for this disparity might be nutritional. The Child Poverty Action Group note "the poorer you are the worse your diet", with surveys consistently showing poorer families tend to consume less fruit and vegetables, and more fats and sugars.

With all these odds stacked against them it shouldn't be a surprise to find out a man in social class V is likely to live seven years less than a man in social class I, while a child born into social class V is twice as likely to die before the age of 15 as a child born into social class I.

Children from poorer families tend to do less well at school than those who are richer, with less staying on

after GCSEs. Those that do make it to university can expect more debt than other students, and by taking part-time jobs to ward off this debt, tend to depress their final degree mark.

To all this, the privileged reply: "Yes life is unfair, but if you work hard, you can make it". This meritocratic myth is a convenient justification for gross social inequality. However, as well as being an insult to the millions of people who work tremendously hard, just to survive, this argument is becoming increasingly dated. Over the past twenty years, social mobility has ground to a halt, with the gap between rich and poor actually widening. Today, a middle-class child is 15 times more likely to stay middle-class than a working-class child is likely to move up into the middle-class.

The system works by exploiting the many to create wealth for the few, not by rewarding hard work in and for itself. Interestingly, it is the countries with the least amount of social mobility (the US and UK) that have the strongest myths about working your way to the top (the 'American Dream' and Michael Howard's 'British Dream'). A coincidence? I think not. However, there are nations that do have a far greater amount of movement between the classes (and importantly, far less poverty) than Britain - Sweden for example.

So how do we get from here to there? In theory it's simple. As the majority, the working class simply need to vote for a party that will redistribute wealth in society (New Labour certainly isn't the answer, as it has become the acceptable wing of the Conservative Party). However, as the rich largely own and control the mass media, the corporate message of unfettered individualism rules all. This has led to two strange political phenomena. Firstly, since 1945 the Conservatives have been in power for 34 years. This means some working people are actually voting against their own interest. Voting, in essence, to keep themselves poor. Secondly, those living in poverty, who would benefit the most from a radical change in policy, are actually the least likely to exercise their right to vote.

So, ironically, I agree here with the Conservatives: The solution to this damaging class divide lies within each individual - who need to take collective action for radical change.



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The creation of new desires

Dec 11 2004
Ian Sinclair

The late American comedian Bill Hicks often used to pause during his stand-up routines, to urge those who worked in advertising or marketing to kill themselves, arguing "there's no rationalisation for what you do... you are Satan's little helpers... filling the world with bile and garbage." Now, of course, I am not advocating that those people who work in advertising and marketing kill themselves (this is, after all, a column that tries to promote peace!), but I do think it is important to look critically at the position of advertising in society.

Modern advertising emerged in tandem with the violent birth of capitalism. For working people, the movement from pre-industrial, agricultural life to an urban-based, factory system was a huge social and psychological shock, met with resistance and protest. It was quickly understood by the political and industrial masters of the time that they could only make people work long, regular hours if they were trapped into wanting commodities.

Advertising is the engine of capitalist, consumer society, envisaging a world in which happiness is equated with the accumulation of products. The author V.L. Leymore argues this is done "first by posing essential dilemmas of the human condition and second, by offering a solution to them." Leymore notes "advertising simultaneously provokes anxiety and resolves it." In a consumer society individuals need to be constantly dissatisfied with what they have. Advertising then, doesn't help to fulfill desires, but attempts to create a permanent state of unhappiness.

However, the effects of advertising are far larger than simply encouraging a consumer orientated society. Advertising is generally an overwhelming conservative social force, powerful in preserving the status quo.

Take the relationship between advertising and the media. The national and regional press in this country are almost totally dependent on advertising for their survival - with approximately 70% of their revenue coming from this source. This reliance tends to create a politically conservative media who are afraid to offend the very corporations that fund them. However, it also results in a preference for entertainment over controversy, documentaries and political debate. What advertiser in their right mind would want to advertise their product during a John Pilger documentary that exposes UK involvement in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children? Hardly the ideal environment to promote a "buying mood".

The problem lies in the way adverts are beamed into every home irrespective of the occupant's ability to access what is on offer. This excess of expectations over opportunities, is often the underlying cause of many crimes. Contrary to the media's sensational portrayal of the issue, the majority of crime is non-violent property crime.

Take the following recent news stories: The obesity epidemic sweeping the western world. The calls for a complete ban on smoking in pubs and restaurants. The recent revelation that 90% of Bliss readers are unsatisfied with their bodies. In each case, the interests of advertisers and the corporations they front, are in direct conflict with the public good.

Of course the advertising industry doesn't take this kind of criticism lying down. They would argue they do no more than provide necessary information for rational individuals. However, this defence (directed at the general public) is irreconcilable with the boasts advertisers make to their clients about their ability to secure a greater market share than competitors through the creation of new desires and by manipulating consumers. For example, a detailed submission by the advertising agency Leo Burnett to the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising for an "effectiveness award" in 2002, explains how its campaign for Kellogg's Real Fruit Winders "entered the world of kids in a way never done before" and managed to "not let Mum in on the act."

So what is to be done? As with many areas of social policy, Sweden seems to be pointed in the right direction. Since 1991 Stockholm has prohibited all TV advertising aimed at children under the age of 12. So far, the British Government has bowed to pressure from industry and simply asked for voluntary compliance to regulations. Self regulation is obviously favoured by the advertising industry - and for that reason alone we should be suspicious of it. Also, we should move towards a ban on advertising in all public spaces.

However, ultimately the solution lies within each of us. The economist Clive Hamilton believes the greatest danger to consumer capitalism - and therefore advertising - "is the possibility that people in wealthy countries will decide that they have everything they need. For each individual this is a small realisation but it has momentous social implications."



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Our Troops deserve Our Support

Dec 4 2004
Andrew Boswell

All war is terrible, but urban insurgency fighting, as in Fallujah, defies description. Whether in Iraq, Palestine, Vietnam, or Algeria, it produces war crimes, as soldiers' basic humanity is tested.

Veteran war correspondent, Chris Hedges, has said "You have an elusive enemy ... in an environment where you are almost universally despised. Everyone becomes the enemy. And after your unit suffers-after, for instance, somebody in your unit is killed by a sniper ... it becomes easy to carry out acts of revenge against people who are essentially innocent, but who you view as culpable in some way for the death of your comrades."

Shocking TV footage recently showed two separate incidents in which American soldiers apparently executed wounded captured Iraqis in Fallujah in what were surely war crimes. This raises the terrifying question: how many civilians and fighters have been killed in war crimes not caught by camera?

Such killings are atrocious, whether done in revenge, or in fear, or even as "standard operating procedure" as ex Falkland's soldier, Quentin Wright, has chillingly suggested. However, soldiers are dehumanised by their military life and training, reduced to "killing machines" and it will be quite wrong if this soldier is singled out to be punished as a "bad apple", in the Abu Ghraib fashion, whilst the military command chain is not held accountable.

We must become aware of the long-term spiritual and psychological damage that, being in this sort of warfare, does to those who find themselves caught up in it.

Stories of many Vietnam veterans reveal the suffering. Claude Thomas, was a 'star' gunner on assault helicopters at 17 : the gunners bet each day on who would make the most kills, and Claude knows that he was directly responsible for the deaths of several hundred Vietnamese men, women and children. Upon return to 'normal' life, he hit rock bottom - "unable to function". Like many "vets", he struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), drug and alcohol addiction, and homelessness (see references at www.oneworldcolumn.org).

Not just devastated psychologically by the trauma, he carried deep moral scarring - "at night the memories came - being shot down, the cries of the wounded, screams of people I'd killed". How can such a young person contain the guilt of killing entire villages?

These intense flashbacks led him to regularly think of suicide. Yet Vietnam veterans were helped little by their own society. For Claude, the turning point came when he attended a meditation retreat for veterans offered by, his previous 'enemy', Vietnamese Buddhists. In this immensely supportive community, he experienced forgiveness, and for the first time, he could see Vietnamese people as 'not enemy' - "the only experience I had with the Vietnamese was, they were my enemy. Every one of them: shopkeepers, farmers, women, children, babies." Now he is Zen Buddhist monk himself and travels widely to end violence (read his book "At Hell's Gate").

Claude, and others who recovered, took decades to do so - their stories offer the hope of a deep transformation of the scars - but they are unusual: many simply do not recover and continue to live in suffering, or hold the pain in forever, or until it is unbearable. 58,000 Americans were killed in Vietnam, but, according to a former director of the Veterans Administration, over 100,000 Vietnam veterans have committed suicide in the years since.

In the UK, 264 Falklands veterans have now killed themselves, more than those killed in combat. 20,000 British ex-servicemen are estimated to be sleeping rough, in hostels or squats.

This is a conveniently 'hidden' problem in our society, and the government prefers it that way. Honour the dead, yes, but if the people knew the extent of the living suffering of our servicemen, then they would oppose any future wars in even greater numbers. No surprise that the MoD do little to help veterans, except provide some support to charities such as Combat Stress and Crisis.

The Iraq war will leave many shattered service men - we can expect over the coming years to see hundreds of suicides, thousands suffering with PTSD, thousands homeless from our Iraq veterans. The media and politicians often say things like "Our Troops deserve Our Support" - they actually mean "Our Government deserves Our Support". What government deserves anything but contempt when it sends soldiers to the Gates of Hell, having misled Parliament and the people to do so, and provides little, if any, help afterwards?

Charities shouldn't have to pick up the pieces- we should demand the Government act now to properly fund care for UK veterans.



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Women Who Walk Into Doors

Nov 27 2004
Marguerite Finn

"None of the doctors looked at me. I didn't exist. They stared at the bruises for a split second, then away ... there was nothing there. I could go to the shops ... and no one saw me. I could smile and say Hello ... they could see the mouth that spoke the words. But they couldn't see me. The woman who wasn't there; The woman who had nothing wrong with her. The woman who walked into doors."

In 'The Woman Who Walked Into Doors', Roddy Doyle perceptively charts his heroine's gradual loss of identity, self-esteem and slide into alcoholism, trapped in a violent marriage. Women will understand - men may have to read it twice.

In the time it took to read the quotation, two more incidents of domestic violence will have been reported to the UK police. In Britain, on average 2 women per week are killed by a male partner or former partner and 1 in 4 women will be a victim of domestic violence in their lifetime.

Amnesty International is currently running 16 days of activism to highlight its "Stop Violence Against Women" Campaign. Amnesty aims to raise awareness of a global human rights scandal that has yet to be fully acknowledged - and to challenge the attitudes, laws and practices that sustain it. Amongst the issues highlighted will be:

- "Violence to women in the family (e.g. battering by partners, sexual abuse of female children, genital mutilation and marital rape);
- "Violence to women in the community (e.g. sexual harassment, rape, forcible psychiatric treatment to 're-orientate' lesbian women, violence by officials against refugee women).
- "Violence to women perpetuated or condoned by the state (e.g. rape by government forces during armed conflict, torture in custody, trafficking, forced labour and prostitution);

Violence against women is not confined to any particular political or economic system.

It cuts across boundaries of wealth, race and culture. For 25 years, women's rights activists worked tirelessly to raise public awareness of the issue. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1979 was their first major success. A further breakthrough came in 1993 when violence against women - in public and private - was declared a human rights violation.

The subsequent UN 'Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women' obliged states to take responsibility for ending violence against women. The major challenge has been - and still is - to ensure that the commitments made by governments are translated into action. It hasn't happened yet.

Despite comprising more than 50% of the world's population, women remain under-represented as problem-solvers, decision-makers, elected officials or leaders. The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) promotes women's efforts around the world to participate in the political and economic life of their countries (www.unifem.org), but the task is enormous and their resources are finite. Amnesty International's worldwide campaign is a contribution to these efforts - It aims to mobilise both men and women to counter violence against women. The main underlying cause of such violence is gender discrimination - the denial of women's equality with men in all areas of life. The structures within society that perpetuate gender-based violence are patriarchal, deep-rooted and intransigent. What divine right have men to under-privilege half the human population ?

Violence against women is neither 'natural' nor 'inevitable'. It persists only because society allows it to.

Violence against women during armed conflicts has reached epidemic proportions. It is used as a weapon of war to dehumanise the women themselves and to persecute their community. Wars are no longer fought on remote battlefields but in our homes, schools, communities. Post-conflict situations have accelerated the growth in trafficking of women and children. Trafficking is modern day slave trading. There is irrefutable evidence that the number of women trafficked in post-conflict zones is increased by the introduction of peacekeeping forces. This screaming paradox led to UN Deputy Secretary General Louise Frechette's insistence that women are vital to resolving armed conflicts and rebuilding the peace and they must be involved at every stage. The perpetrators of violent crimes must not be able to commit them with impunity. Peacekeeping forces are immune from prosecution - and it has been suggested that this makes them 'more part of the problem than the solution'.

The main thrust of Amnesty's campaign in the UK is to make people aware of the problem and to work with other relevant agencies to overcome it. You can help by joining the Norwich branch of Amnesty International and becoming involved in this campaign and/or offering your support through donations. Telephone David on 01508-538353; www.amnesty.org.uk ; or www.problemwhatproblem.com .

Thanks to Catherine Rowe, Norwich Amnesty, for help and inspiration.



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Remember the 80s

Nov 20 2004
Rupert Read

Remember the 1980s? Remember 'Neighbours', and the 'Pet Shop Boys'? Remember Kenny Dalglish, Ian Botham?

Remember the Miners' Strike, and the Poll Tax? Remember Reagan and Gorby? Remember nuclear disarmament?

People used to talk quite a lot about nuclear disarmament. CND were big in the 1980s, and Labour believed in 'unilateral nuclear disarmament'. (That phrase meant what it said: getting rid of our nukes, our WMDs, unilaterally, without waiting for other major powers to do the same, but hoping they then would, so that the world could become nuclear-free.) Labour - good old Labour, not sickening shiny 'New' Labour -- were condemned by the entire mainstream media for this, condemned as 'loony lefties' and 'appeasers'.

They believed in unilateral nuclear disarmament; everyone else believed in multilateral nuclear disarmament. What did 'multilateral nuclear disarmament' mean? It was supposed to mean that we would negotiate our nukes away. Nuclear disarmament would occur through multilateral negotiations between nuclear states.

The U.S. and Russian governments did carry out some such negotiations, back in the 80s. Their armouries of nukes were reduced slightly. Now they can only destroy the world about 8 times over, not 18 times over... Cold comfort, really; it isn't much better to be obliterated 8 times over than 18 times over, if you are the person/city/country obliterated...

Nuclear weapons are perhaps the only true weapons of mass destruction. Of total destruction. And while Russia and America have reduced their huge nuclear arsenals somewhat, Britain has held on tight to its 200 nuclear warheads, these last twenty years. That's the equivalent of about 2000 Hiroshimas. That's about 300 million people that we can kill, at the push of a button.

That's abhorrent.

Now, Britain is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which requires that its signatories disarm, multilaterally or unilaterally. But what has Britain actually done, since the 1980s, to rid itself of nukes? In fact: can you remember the last time that you heard any 'mainstream' politician talking about British nuclear disarmament?

Funny, isn't it; it seems like all those advocates of 'multilateral disarmament' stopped talking about it, as soon as the 'threat' of the unilateralists' popularity receded. As soon as the 'loony leftie' unilateralists were buried by Thatcherism and the right-wing press, and Labour gave up the ambition of unilateral nuclear disarmament so it could be 'electable', then all talk of Britain playing a part in multilateral nuclear disarmament ... just evaporated away.

So: what did the words, 'multilateral nuclear disarmament' mean, in practice? That we would achieve nuclear disarmament - ridding the world of these worst-of-all weapons - multilaterally? Or: that we in Britain would have a label for our nuclear weapons policy that made it sound as if we were in favour of real peace (not endless war or threat of war), while in fact we intended no such thing? Is the meaning, in practice, of 'multilateralism' simply this: deterring any efforts to make Britain or Europe or the Earth nuclear-free, and then, once your efforts to deter unilateral nuclear disarmament have succeeded, no longer talking about nuclear disarmament at all?! Is that what Kinnock, Steel, Owen and Thatcher (remember the 80s!) meant by 'multilateral nuclear disarmament': i.e. no disarmament, except disarming the unilateralists of their arguments and their popularity, and saying disarmingly to the British people, "We too are in favour of disarmament", for as long as it took until campaigners had despaired of getting the government to relinquish its nukes?

Luckily, we haven't despaired. I served last month as spokesperson for 'Theatre of War' and 'Trident Ploughshares' - anti-war activists dramatizing the need for Britain to beat its Trident nuclear missiles into ploughshares - in their successful 5-hour blockade of Downing Street. And a fortnight ago I was in court supporting fellow members of the 'Peace Police' (who back in June cut into Burghfield nuclear base) as they presented arguments from international law to explain why they had acted to try to prevent a greater crime - the crime of nuclear blackmail (most recently applied by Geoff Hoon to Iraq).

The inheritors of the Greenham generation are still here.

So: Remember the 1980s. Remember and weep. Many were fooled by the government and media then. Fooled into thinking that 'multilateral disarmament' was anything more than an excuse for doing nothing, an excuse for holding on to our illegal WMDs. We've been fooled again, recently, by our government, which invaded Iraq pretending that it (Iraq) had WMDs.

Let's NEVER be fooled again. As our international treaty obligations require, as any basic human decency or morality requires, let us get rid of our WMDs, our nukes, now. Unilaterally. Without excuses. Without lies.



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I Believe, Therefore I'm Right

Nov 13 2004
Jacqui McCarney

At UEA, on the day of the US elections, I spoke with a young American student who had voted for George Bush. Why? First, he made her feel "safe", and, second, "moral issues". Familiar enough, as they had become the mantra of the Republican Party.

It was, nevertheless, shocking to hear someone admit that their "feeling" of safety is worth 100,000 lives, and the failure to see that this huge loss of lives is in itself, a major moral issue. Protecting American sensibilities is clearly very expensive for the rest of the world, and understanding their narrow view of morality very confusing.

Few outsiders have missed the irony of George Bush being re-elected on a "moral ticket", not just the vote of ill-educated floating voters, but the beliefs of many educated Americans, as illustrated by my friend above.

George Bush -born-again Christian, devout church-goer does not just believe in God, but is convinced that God believes in him. Indeed, a great part of America share this view - it is after all "God's Own Country".

President Woodrow Wilson, wrote "I cannot be deprived of the hope that we are chosen, and prominently chosen, to show the nations of the world how they shall walk in the path of liberty".

Now, strident ideas of chosen nationhood, and religious based self certainty, unite with "full spectrum military dominance" of the Project for the New American Century.

The Judeo Roman version of Christianity, used by the Roman Emperors to build Empire, is a dangerous excuse for oppression and despotism, then and now. Introduced to the western world by Emperor Constantine, this promoted the notion of self-righteous conquest in the name of the Christ

In holding "belief" as the defining truth, Christian Neo-conservatism has little concern about empirical evidence, human rights and compassion. It is increasingly common here too, witness our Prime Minister clinging to his convictions, despite a growing mountain of evidence to the contrary, with words like "I believe I am right".

When 'belief' excuses cruel barbaric acts, it has gone beyond religion to ideology. Fundamentalism, Fascism and Communism have been condemned when they have

abused human rights. Neither can the criminality of 100,000 killed in Iraq, families torn apart by grief, young men shockingly abused, hundreds incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay be waved aside under a Christian, "liberating" agenda.

Some Americans choose moral issues that allow them dollops of self-righteousness - abortion, homosexuality and family values. While they abhor the loss of life of the unborn at home, they accept the loss of life of thousands of Iraqi babies and children as collateral damage. While they condemn homosexuality at home, they practice sexual torture of all varieties on Iraqi men and boys abroad. While they vow to protect the family at home, they wreck the family life of Iraqis abroad. These gross injustices, committed in the name of America should be profoundly humbling to those who claim the most basic of moral positions.

To their advantage, the conservative right spun the election as between God fearing Christians and non-believers, between passionate religious views and woolly political correctness. This is to deny the legitimate moral views of non-Christians and those Christians whose views are more closely aligned to the teachings of Jesus. Nascent Christianity has at its core a commitment to human rights evidenced in Jesus' rejection of vengeance, legal and penal moralities and of market place values. A philosophy which is staggeringly radical to western, consumerist view, and one most honestly adhered to by religious groups such as the Quakers.

The dilemma for Christians could not be more challenging. They must choose old testament tyranny, or new testament love and compassion. Embracing all the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus is clearly nonsensical and contradictory. Jesus came to challenge the brutal, vindictiveness expressed in parts of the Old Testament, and offer a more humane and forgiving way of life.

Ironically, it is the teachings of Jesus and not the Old Testament which Jefferson wished to embody in The Declaration of Independence. "The kingdom of God is within" is expressed when he declared, God is in the "head and heart" of every person. He was indeed determined to reject Judeo Roman Christianity, which he had seen the British use as a validation for its oppression of the American people. Human rights were the basis for all civil rights and were "self evident". When Republicans claim that George Bush expresses the Christian values embodied in their constitution, they are gravely mistaken.



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The enigma of remembrance

Nov 6 2004
Andrew Boswell

We are now in the season of "remembrance" of War past - a red poppy adorns the cover of this paper, and many of us wear them.

Thankfully, most of us do not have an authentic experience of war and its consequence. One person who does is Rose Gentle - her son Gordon was killed in Iraq, just a few months ago. Rose is a dynamic reminder of the cost of War - refusing for her loss to be in vain, she now campaigns for the withdrawal of our troops, despite the Government trying to prevent her.

The rest of us, not touched personally by War, cannot fathom the anguish. Gordon Gentle and 100 million others who died in the last hundred years cannot tell us.

However, most of us will have known survivors, who have been touched and damaged the fires of war. In my own family, a cousin was "shell-shocked", now called post-traumatic stress disorder, in the Normandy landings. A young man, then, with life ahead, he never really healed, and suffered psychologically for the rest of his life, never being well enough to work. My grandfather was a doctor in the First World War, in Ypres and Gallipoli - he could never talk about his experiences of fixing those blown limb from limb.

And so, the enigma - within the enormous seasonal outpouring of pomp, glory and bravery, there is an immense silence of another reality - the reality that my grandfather couldn't share, and that my cousin was too traumatised to even bear. This silence - of the things which can't be talked about - is shared by many veterans, including many who will parade on Thursday.

The White Peace Poppy addresses the silence; it asks us to look beyond, touch the horror, and, like Rose Gentle, do something about it. Almost as old as the red poppy, it was launched in 1933 by the Women's Co-operative Guild - mothers, daughters and wives, who knew the loss of loved ones and the trauma of those who survived injured. Living under the cloud of an even greater European war, in the 1930s, they challenged people of the need for peace, and political leaders to find a better way to resolve conflict.

WWI was the "War to end all Wars", yet it didn't. Neither did WWII, and since 1945, the world has continued to become an ever more violent and bloody place. Where previously warfare had essentially been conducted by armies, now civilians are increasingly becoming legitimate military targets - simply dismissed as 'necessary collateral damage'. Where clearly delineated 'wars' are being replaced by an ongoing culture of violence, revenge and retribution, and where the difference between 'war', 'civil war', 'terrorism' is being ever more blurred. In Iraq, the distinction between combatants and non-combatants is breaking down with so-called 'civilian contractors' (mercenaries) actually often providing battlefield support services.

Whereas WWI soldiers knew the gruesome reality of blood and gore, now combatants and planners can play out actions with the unreality of video games. A particularly chilling item on Channel 4 news recently showed an airman "taking out" a group of about 30 people in Fallujah, now believed to have been civilians - no harder than pressing the button on a video game. Given his response, the airman did not appear to really know psychologically, or with any humanity, that he had just killed tens of people.

The White Poppies and their message for a Culture of Peace (see www.whitepoppy.org.uk) is so vital today. The familiar red poppies remind us all of the ongoing suffering of war veterans, who are often soon forgotten by Governments, and raise money for the Royal British Legion's welfare services. The white poppies remind us of war victims worldwide, not to forget their shrouded silence, and the vital need to find non-violent methods to resolve conflict in the future. Proceeds fund the Peace Pledge Union's educational work, and any additional funds raised locally in Norwich will this year go towards Medical Aid for Iraqi Children (Reg. Charity No. 1044222).

This year, I hope you will join me in wearing your poppies to remember the sacrifices made in previous conflicts and commit yourself to working for a future free from the scourge of war. During the twentieth century, more people died in wars than we can imagine. We can't change the past, but let's work together for a different kind of future that the white poppy symbolises.

[I am grateful to Richard Bickle from Norwich and District Peace Council, who distribute white poppies locally, for providing research.]



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Two racehorses - one owner

Oct 30 2004
Ian Sinclair

George. W. Bush vs John. F. Kerry. Republican vs Democrat. Alleged draft dodger vs war hero. On Tuesday the American people will go to the polls to elect a new President. But what kind of choice do they really have?

Bush and Kerry were both born into wealth and privilege, attended the same elite university (Yale) and joined the same secret society (Skull & Bones). Forbes magazine estimate the Kerry family fortune to be an extraordinary \$525 million, while Bush's assets are worth as much as \$19 million. Both candidates rely heavily on corporate funding. Currently, Bush has raised \$260,500,000 of private money for his campaign, while Kerry has received \$248,000,000. More importantly, both are funded by largely the same corporate powers - with the two candidates sharing four of the same ten largest corporate donors to their campaigns.

Concerning foreign policy, differences between the two candidates are so small, that they are almost invisible. In August, Kerry said he still would have voted to authorise the war on Iraq even if he had known that weapons of mass destruction would not be found. Kerry does criticise the Bush Administration's foreign policy, but always within very narrow limits - referring to "bad predictions" and "errors of judgement". America's right to intervene around the world is taken for granted then, and will be preserved for another four years. History isn't on Kerry's side either. In the modern era, most of America's wars have been initiated by Democratic presidents - Truman in Korea, Kennedy and Johnson in Vietnam and Carter in Afghanistan.

All this is not lost on the American people. On the eve of the 2000 Presidential election, surveys showed over 80% of respondents felt the government was "run for the benefit of the few and the special interests, not the people", while 53% of respondents answered "only a little " or "none" to the question: "How much influence do you think people like you have on what government does?"

It shouldn't be a surprise then to find voter turnout in 2000 was just 51% of the population.

The situation is not much better here in the UK. All three of the main political parties offer no real alternative to the dominant corporate agenda, and voter turnout in 2001 was a post-war low of 59%.

Is this how democracy works? If the (self-professed) centre of the free world is like this, what hope is there for the rest of us? To answer, it is worth focusing briefly on the other big election story of the year in the Americas. In contrast to the US, the August 2004 Presidential recall vote in Venezuela was the largest poll in the country's history, with a voter turnout of 70%. Selma James, an international observer at the recall vote noted "participation in politics, especially at the grassroots has skyrocketed", mobilising the working-class into action, traditionally the least active voters.

The existing President Hugo Chavez managed to gain 59% of the vote, in spite of hostility from the US Government, international capital and the powerful Venezuelan elite, who control the mass media. Commentators put this down to Chavez implementing home grown development and using the nation's oil revenues for social programmes for the poor, such as adult literacy drives, land distribution and free healthcare.

An important victory for democracy in Venezuela then - but we shouldn't underestimate what is at stake on November 2. There are small differences between the US Presidential candidates, and in a governmental system as powerful as the United States, this can translate into important differences for the average person. On domestic issues, Kerry has a more moderate programme than the Republicans, who seem intent on destroying every progressive social advance of the twentieth century - cutting back on the already limited medical care system, social security, education and progressive income tax. For the 45 million Americans with no healthcare, women, ethnic minorities, gays, lesbians and transsexuals, there are real consequences from the outcome of this election.

Progressives in the United States and around the world will undoubtedly be hoping for a Kerry victory on Tuesday, but let's not be under any illusions about what that really means. Movement building - for peace, for fair trade, on environmental issues, against corporate-led globalisation - needs to continue whoever wins.

Rather than focusing solely on the personal qualities of two very similar candidates, perhaps it is time to critically examine the system that only lets rich, conservative, white males who are overwhelmingly funded by big business, run for President in the first place?



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The Struggle of Memory against Forgetting

Oct 23 2004
Marguerite Finn

I started this column knowing little about black history. At the launch of Black History Month I embarked on a voyage of discovery and learnt about organisations and projects I never knew existed here in Norwich.

It was not just that I was ignorant of the contribution black people make to society in Britain and around the world, I also realised that the history I had learned had been distorted to prevent me from appreciating that contribution.

Empowered by my newfound knowledge, I asked 20 people, randomly chosen, what they knew about Philip Emeagwali. None had heard of him, which is astonishing because Dr. Philip Emeagwali invented the 'super-computer' and is the father of the internet. Born in Nigeria, he survived as a boy soldier in Biafra and now works in America. President Clinton described him as "one of the great minds of the Information Age". He is the most researched scientist on the internet today - yet most of us have never heard of him. Why?

Ignorance of black history is not confined to white people. Young black people are often unaware of the achievements of black and ethnic minorities. This deprives them of meaningful role models. It is disabling to live in ignorance of one's history.

One day Theo asked his mother, "What if there were no black people in the world"? Mum thought for a moment and said, "Follow me around today and let's just see what life would be like if there had never been any black people in the world". Theo got dressed but his shoes weren't there because Jan Matzeling, a black man, had invented the shoe last. His clothes were wrinkled but Mum couldn't iron them because Sarah Boone, a black woman, invented the ironing board. "Oh, well," said Mum, "comb your hair, at least". But the comb wasn't there because Walter Sammons, a black man, invented the comb. Mum couldn't brush her hair either because Lydia O'Newman, a black woman, invented the brush! To help his Mum with the chores before going out, Theo swept the floor. When he looked for the dustpan it wasn't there because Lloyd P. Ray, a black man, invented the dustpan.

Mum wanted to put the washing in the dryer but it wasn't there. George T. Samon, a black man, invented the clothes dryer. Mum decided to go shopping; she reached for her fountain pen to write out her list but William Purvis, a black man, invented that. In the garden, Theo noticed that the uncut grass - John Burr, a black man, invented the lawn mower! The car wouldn't work without the automatic gearshift invented by Richard Spikes, a black man, and traffic clogged up the roads because there were no traffic signals. Garret Morgan, a black man, invented the traffic light. When they returned home with the groceries, Theo went to put the milk in the fridge but it wasn't there - John Stannard, a black man, invented the refrigerator. The evening grew chilly. Theo went to switch on the heating. Nothing happened - Alice Parker, a black woman, invented the heating furnace.

Theo's Dad was late home from work. There was no bus - the electric trolley was invented by a black man, Elbert R. Robinson. He'd had to walk down from his office on the 20th floor because Alexander Miles, a black man, invented the elevator. When he got home Theo and Mum were sitting in the dark - Lewis Latimer, a black man, invented the filament in the light bulb. Dad then told Theo about Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, a black doctor who performed the first open-heart surgery and Dr. Charles Drew, the black scientist who found a way to preserve and store blood, leading to the first blood bank.

Inventions are one way of contributing to society; developing solidarity within local communities and gaining respect throughout a region, is another. Everjoice Makuve and Dr. Eshetu Wondimagegne are two such black people, the first in her work with Norfolk Minority Ethnic Support Forum and African Worship ASOW, and the second with his work with the Norfolk African Community Association (NACA). It is through the work of these imaginative individuals that such groups become woven into the fabric of our society and enrich it - like the glorious quilt in black author Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*.

In Western society, white arrogance often struts when it should pause for thought. As cultures from different sources pour into evolving societies, there are inevitably struggles, which Milan Kundera called "the struggle of memory against forgetting".

Remembering our common history is the best antidote to exclusivity.



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What if Britain were Iraq?

Oct 16 2004
Rupert Read

What would Britain look like if it were in Iraq's current situation? Well, the population of Britain is two and a half times that of Iraq. Violence killed about 1000 Iraqis over the last month, the equivalent of 2,500 Britons. What if 2,500 Britons had died in aerial bombardments, machine-gun spray, and rocket attacks, over the last month? That's nearly as many as died in the 30 years of Northern Ireland's 'Troubles'.

What if 'the Westminster village' were constantly taking mortar fire? And what if almost everyone in Westminster or Whitehall considered it suicidally dangerous to go over to the South Bank or to Camden?

What if reporters for all the major non-English-speaking media were in effect trapped inside 5-star hotels in London and Birmingham, wholly dependent on native 'stringers' to know what was happening in the West Country or in Norfolk? What if the only time they ventured into the Home Counties was if they could be 'embedded' in army patrols?

There are about 30,000 guerrillas in Iraq engaged in concerted acts of violence. What if there were private armies totalling 75,000 men, armed with machine guns and mortar launchers, hiding out in urban areas all over Britain? What if they completely controlled Hartlepool, Winchester, Leicester, Manchester, Sheffield, and Peterborough, such that troops and local police could not enter those cities?

What if, during the past year, the Attorney General, the Foreign Secretary, and the Queen herself had all been assassinated?

What if all the cities of Britain were wracked by a crime wave, with hundreds or thousands of murders and kidnappings in each major city every year?

What if the U.S. Air Force routinely (I mean daily or weekly) bombed Camden, Soho, Moss Side, and Mile Cross, purporting to target 'safe houses' of 'criminal gangs', but inevitably killing a lot of children and little old ladies? What if from time to time the US Army besieged Camden and Mile Cross and the precincts of Canterbury Cathedral, killing hundreds of armed members of the 'Christian Soldiers'?

What if entire platoons of the Christian militia were holed up in Highgate Cemetery, and were bombarded by US Air Force warplanes daily, this bombing destroying hundreds of famous graves?

What if the Archbishop of Canterbury had to call for a popular march of tens of thousands of Christian believers to converge at Canterbury Cathedral to stop the US from damaging it further, through its bombing raids?

What if there were virtually no non-military air or rail travel within Britain? What if many roads were highly dangerous, especially the M1 from the North Circular to Watford Gap, and the M6 from Birmingham to Manchester? If you used those motorways, you were gambling with your life, at risk of carjacking, or 'collateral damage' from American troops' guns.

What if no-one outside Westminster had electricity for more than 12 hours a day? What if electricity went off at unpredictable times, causing factories to grind to a halt, and air conditioning to fail in the middle of intense summer heatwaves? What if the North Sea oil rigs were bombed and disabled at least monthly? What if unemployment hovered around 40%, and in inner city areas was nearer to 80%?

What if veterans of the Ulster Freedom Fighters and ex-police officers who had been sacked for their 'shoot to kill' policy against Irish Catholics were brought in by the Americans to run the government and the army, on the theory that we need tough men in charge at times of crisis?

What if only 2% of the electorate supported the (American-appointed) Prime Minister? What if the British people consistently said in opinion polls that they wanted elections now, that they were more scared of the Americans than of the guerrillas, and that they simply wanted the occupying 'coalition' forces to leave now - and yet the 'coalition' leaders kept insisting that the people welcomed them, and that anyway they were only staying at the invitation of the new 'sovereign' British government?

What if the PM was promising elections, next year, but was saying openly that maybe voting would 'regrettably' just not be able to take place in most of the 'middle England triangle', stretching from Camden to Oxford to Peterborough, because it was just too dangerous there?

What if the American and Italian leaders maintained that nevertheless freedom, democracy and peace, U.S.-style, are just around the corner?

[With thanks for inspiration to Juan Cole, Michigan University, USA. Join him, me and tens of thousands more, at the mass demonstration against the occupation of Iraq at the close of the European Social Forum, tomorrow, in Trafalgar Square.]



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Fox Hunting- A Colourful Distraction

Oct 9 2004
Jacqui McCarney

The passion and blood-letting that accompanied the pro-hunt demonstrators left the majority feeling bemused. Especially, if like me, you attended some of the regular peaceful demonstrations against the Iraq war where such incidents just didn't occur even when numbers touched 2 million as on February 15th 2003. It perhaps did not occur to those whose aims are peace to incite war, just as it may not occur to those who perpetuate violence to act peacefully.

Hunting conventions - tail coats, red waist coats, high leather boots, tally-hoing and horn blowing is a might too celebratory for the cruelty that lays ahead. A local farmer told me that a group of young people he knew had found it "Fun" as if that was justification enough.

Fox hunting is a "tradition", which people do not want to lose and of course war is another tradition that we are extremely reluctant to let go of. We continue to argue with what seems equal passion for both.

While fox hunting may be an anachronistic and cruel "sport", the current furore distracts from the real countryside violence of which we are all part. While we cling to our image as a Nation of animal lovers, this can have little real substance when we also accept horrific levels of cruelty in the production of much of our food.

Eating out, TV dinners and supermarket shopping has accelerated in recent years, but few inquire about the origin of their food - most likely factory farmed and the end product of shocking levels of cruelty. Juliet Gallantly's and Tony Wardle's classic account, "The Silent Ark" chillingly describes dingy windowless sheds, crammed with tier upon tier of tiny cages housing 5 very distressed chickens. Suffering from brittle, often broken bones, or osteoporosis from unnatural levels of laying - they are covered in excrement from the droppings of the birds above resulting in ulcers, burns and disease.

Most would find this level of cruelty abhorrent, but stand by the egg shelves in any supermarket and watch as customers still go for the cheapest factory eggs. Is this a moment of forgetting or meanness or just plain ignorance.

Those increasing numbers who wish to shop without cruelty need constant diligence in our modern supermarkets where cheapness is of the essence and poor quality is disguised.

A friend of mine, a practising Buddhist with a wish to live ethically, would often turn up with a supermarket quiche and seemed unable to see the cruelty she was endorsing.

And this is before you let a piece of meat pass your lips. Witness the meat marketer's imagination - chicken tikka masala, satay, nugget, and kiev's - an endless list. Follow the smell of cooking meat and you will find chickens roasting on spits, chicken in barbecue sauce - an infinite supply, and they are dirt cheap. No mention of the appalling conditions in which they were reared - crowded, filthy, diseased, and fooled into eating non-stop because of constant artificial daylight, and soon unable to stand.

If we want to live without violence we must challenge it at all levels of our society. That is challenging not just fox hunting, but also the whole way in which the countryside and our food production are managed.

The people and taxpayers of this country keep highly subsidised farmers in profit. People are prepared to pay for sustainable, caring stewardship, but are fed up with excessive exploitation for purely monetary gain.

Intensive agribusiness costs £1.5bn a year in damage to soil, air and water pollution in the UK alone, and factory farming methods contributed to the BSE and Foot and Mouth epidemics. Landowners would gain greater respect if they made less noise about outmoded "sports" and came up with humane and respectful ways of managing the wild and farmed animals in their care.

Whilst not everybody would choose a meat-free diet, most health advice is for a drastic reduction in meat consumption. When we do eat meat we have a right to expect meat that is humanely produced from healthy animals that are not full of anti-biotics.

Country people have the stewardship of the land, animals and plants of our beautiful and fertile earth. Simon Hart, chief executive of the "Countryside Alliance" (CA), describing the demonstration with hounds outside the Labour Party Conference in Brighton, said "the idea was to demonstrate the relationship between man and beast in the country". Sadly, the carcasses of a horse staked through the heart with a CA banner and the two young calves are tragic reminders of that relationship today.



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Don't worry, it may never happen

Oct 2 2004
Andrew Boswell

Tara Greaves' brilliant EDP article on the day of Tony Blair's Climate Change speech called for "action to achieve a more sustainable way of life". Indeed, to encourage Green innovation, isn't it time that a Nobel Prize was created for sustainability?

Ironically, another article that day praised the business opportunities as "Demand soars for flights to Dublin" from Norwich - there should also a dummy's prize for reckless business.

These extremes reflect the predicament of our fragile world. It's seriously endangered, yet we continue to use cheap flights and buzz everywhere in cars - our mantra "Don't worry, it may never happen".

We hope a wonderful, new technology will be discovered to keep us all driving and flying for another century.

Some American corporations have grasped biofuels as an extremely lucrative market, especially in the expanding, Asian countries, where the Indians and Chinese, 2.5-billion people, are set to dwarf economic growth within the United States itself. Just last month, the Pure Energy Corporation (PEC) and American Biofuels (ABF) announced exports of biodiesel to these countries.

Given the huge energy demand of the US - a major reason for the disastrous Iraq War - wouldn't you think the Americans would want to keep their biofuels to help make their own country more sustainable?

Greenwash, now a dictionary word, describes misleading disinformation used to project an environmentally responsible corporate image. Are biofuels being spun in greenwash by interests more interested in making money than sustainable transport?

Norfolk biofuels industry lobbyists, such as Georgina Roberts in this paper recently, bandy about figures of 70%, or even greater, for carbon emission savings. However, even if correct, these large, convincing sounding, figures are based on the pure, unblended fuel before many times dilution with conventional diesel at the pump.

The actual government figures, from research, for unblended biodiesel savings are 40% - 56%. If a market were to be developed on a quick-growth, highly intensive, agribusiness model, the UK whole-market savings could be 0.8 - 3.2% by 2010. It's worth noting, that taking an average of 2.0%, then the same result would be achieved by the typical 10,000 miles a year driver reducing their driving by 200 miles a year.

True sustainability requires introducing a technology with care, so as not to introduce more environmental problems along the way. With biofuels, this means protecting local sources of food production, ensuring land use is not expanded at the expense of biodiversity, restricting practices that lead to soil depletion, eliminating chemical fertilizer regimes to prevent emissions of the dangerous greenhouse gas (GHG) nitrous oxide, and passing legislation to prevent the use of any GM technology in the biofuels cycle.

The Large Scale Biofuels Concern Group is advocating that the public are presented with the real facts - ungreenwashed, and that the socially and environmentally sound applications of this technology are then promoted and funded. Sustainable development requires an accreditation system to ensure all suppliers meet high carbon saving targets, and producers can demonstrate sustainability of their supply-chains. It also means much greater emphasis on small-scale production units, eg on farm, which minimize GHGs from transport costs, and really benefit the local communities. EEDA should be funding more research into such smaller projects.

Localised, small scale, biofuels, are being developed elsewhere in the UK. For example, Pembrokeshire Bio Energy, a farmers' co-operative which supplies biomass for automated heating of buildings such as hotels, swimming pools and homes. Let's see similar, exemplar, small scale schemes in Norfolk, instead of the exploitation of our heritage by big business.

The "Green Fuels" greenwash is distracting motorists from addressing the real issue that we need to be cutting world wide emissions by tens rather than units of percentages. We should demand that the Government urgently introduce a radical sustainability policy, including truly sustainable biofuels. A slower and more sustainable introduction of biofuels would inevitably yield less, short-term - perhaps less than 1% UK GHG savings by 2010.

But a wider sustainability policy would also reduce use of private cars, short haul air flights, make huge investments in public transport, develop electric and hydrogen transport, and introduce incentives for energy efficiency including domestic solar panels and small-scale wind systems.

Alas, no politician is yet prepared to say it - we need to cut private car mileage not by hundreds of miles, but by thousands of mile each year. One of those Sustainability Nobel prizes should go to the Transport ministers in the country, which first implements an integrated sustainability policy; otherwise, it may take an environmental "September 11th" to compel Governments to take real action.



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