

'FORGOTTEN VOICES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR'

Faringdon Peace Group was delighted to welcome back old friend Bruce Kent to talk about 'Forgotten Voices of the First World War'. Bruce has been a leading figure in the peace movement since the 1960s and shows no sign of retiring! The 'forgotten voices' are those of peacemakers and conscientious objectors who were largely ignored in the lead up to and during the war.

Bruce mentioned Henry Richard, a Liberal MP who was secretary of the 'Peace Society' for 40 years till 1884, and arranged a series of major peace conferences in European capitals. Another Liberal MP, Randal Cremer, a pacifist and co-founder of the 'International Arbitration League', was the first winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1903. His work prepared the ground for the Hague peace conferences of 1899 and 1907. Pope Benedict XV, the 'Peace Pope' who we learnt about in a previous FPG meeting, declared the Vatican neutral and attempted to mediate peace, though both sides rejected his initiatives. However, some of the 7 points of his 'Peace Plan' were included in Woodrow Wilson's 'Fourteen Points' call for peace in January 1918. Keir Hardie, a pacifist and founder of the Labour Party was appalled by WW1 and tried to organise a general strike to stop the war. He addressed anti-war meetings across the country and supported conscientious objectors. These numbered around 20,000, some of whom did valuable work in the ambulance corps while others were imprisoned. The Women's International League of Peace and Freedom was formed at a congress against WW1 in the Hague in 1915 and sent peace delegations to most countries engaged in WW1. Even Nicholas 2nd of Russia made great efforts to avoid going to war.

Bruce also spoke about the optimism that greeted the founding of the United Nations, set up to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war', and how it has been misused in recent years. Articles 42 and 51 of the UN Charter allow for war either in self defence or when all non-violent ways to resolve conflict have failed. Bruce believes these conditions did not apply in either the 2nd Iraq war or the war in Afghanistan. He feels the UN Charter is an essential tool for global citizenship and laments our ignorance of international society. To prevent future wars we must alleviate poverty and inequality, stop arms trade and disarm, abolish nuclear weapons and move from a culture of fear to one of understanding. There are many different organisations we can support who are working in different ways to achieve this. Weapons and killing people is never the solution.

Faringdon Peace Group meets on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30 in the Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Road. On 3rd December Kate Hudson, Chair of CND, will talk about Ukraine. All welcome. More details from Karen: 01367-241707, karen@vogt.org.uk or Jennie: 01367-710308.