

'We shall overcome – Words and music to change the world'

In September, in a break from our usual speaker meetings, Faringdon Peace Group gathered around the imaginary camp fire in the Friends Meeting House for an evening of songs and poetry on the themes of war, peace, civil rights and social justice. The protest movement has inspired a wealth of songs over many years. Dave Headey began with the Diggers' Song; a 17th century ballad about land rights.

In the face of the Vietnam War and growing environmental and social concerns, the 60s provided the richest source of songs which we listened to or sang together, from the likes of Bob Dylan, *'Blowing in the Wind'*: Tom Paxton, *'Peace will come'* and *'What did you learn in school today'*: Pete Seeger, *'Where have all the Flowers Gone'*: Phil Ochs: *'There but for fortune go you or I'*: Donovan, *'Universal Soldier'* and Joan Baez, *'We Shall Overcome'*.

In the 80s, singing was very much a part of the women's protest against the siting of cruise missiles at Greenham Common. Both women and men in the Peace Group joined demonstrations there and supported the women with food and firewood etc. Many songs arose from the camp including *'You can't kill the spirit, she is like a mountain, old and strong, she goes on and on and on....'* which frequently did go on and on as we circled or blockaded the base.

We listened to John Lennon's *'Imagine'*, which evoked memories of a demonstration at Fairford airbase against the bombing of Libya. In the late afternoon a B52 bomber took off with an earsplitting roar and a provocative wiggle of its wings to be followed by the strains of *'Imagine'* over the sound system and a skein of swans/geese/doves (we couldn't agree which after so many years!) flying across the setting sun. A moving moment.

Pete Stone read his own poems evoking images of a homeless war veteran on a snowy park bench, a family enjoying a day out as deadly US bombers pass overhead and the body of a refugee washed up on the sand. Sand Cooper's poem *'My Dear Friend'* reflected on the BBC news ignoring UN proposals to ban nuclear weapons in favour of a piece on Trump: *'Instead Trump's quiff/whiffed across the screen'*. The war machine and actions depicting *'crazy guns'* and *'hazy chums'* were the focus of her poem *'Cliché'*, which ends *'She's somebody's daughter/that woman in a burkha/lurking on the bulls-eye spot'*.

After listening to Tom Lehrer's darkly comic song about nuclear war *'We'll all go together when we go'* we finished with a more positive and hopeful song from Greenham; *'Building Bridges'* which ends:

*'With all of our voices
And all of our visions
Friends we could make
Such sweet harmony.'*