



Quaker Peace
& Social Witness

Journal letter from London

Wayne Sharrocks, November 2017, No. 1

PEACE PLEDGE UNION

Dear Friends

I was lucky to arrive into my role at the Peace Pledge Union (PPU) at a busy and active time.

Within the first few days I was involved in the protests against the DSEI (Defence and Security Equipment International) arms fair. A member of PPU staff was in attendance every day in some form to help disrupt or stop the arms fair happening in London. This gave me a great opportunity to get to know my new team at the PPU as well as to meet other peace groups at the same time. I was amazed and inspired by the energy of the events put on over the week. Many people showed great courage and conviction in their beliefs and made a big impact on the event and me personally. I was asked to give a short speech on one of the mornings of actions. I chose to talk briefly about some of my experiences in Afghanistan and the horrific things I have seen weapons do to our own soldiers there through the use of improvised explosive devices, and I highlighted that components used in those very devices likely passed

through an event just like the DSEI arms fair.

I also took part in the Veterans For Peace UK (VFPUK) action of setting up a vehicle check point to inspect for banned weapons (landmines, booby traps, incendiary weapons, blinding laser weapons) entering the arms fair. My role was to film the interactions and make a short film which shows the police stopping concerned military veterans who were stopping and searching for banned weapons. They asked the police to take over which they refused. A few days later a type of laser weapon was found there for sale in the arms fair which only adds to the validity of the action. The video can now be found on the VFPUK Facebook page. I have been told this action helped out with the court cases of many who were arrested.

After the excitement of the arms fair protests it was time to get more engaged in my actual day to day role within the PPU which is combatting militarism in universities. I have to say probably the toughest challenge for me so far is adapting to working in an office. I have spent my whole life either in the Army or in manual

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labour jobs so sitting at a computer was and still is a challenge that I am finding ways of dealing with.

My first thoughts about this role were a bit overwhelming. Thoughts of endless hours contacting every university in the UK were rushing into my mind. This fear was soon set to bed after a series of meetings with organisations such as Forces Watch, QPSW and Child Soldiers International amongst others. Speaking to people who have done this kind of work before made me much less anxious and allowed me to set realistic expectations which have proved to be very valuable.

Once over my initial anxiety about the new role a thought came to mind 'How can I get students to come to us?' I came up with an idea for a website with resources and information about militarism, options to book me for talks/workshops and to bring groups from around the country together. I managed to use my previous experience with online web building to create a website fairly quickly which I launched a few weeks ago and this has aided me a lot when contacting groups and showing them what the PPU can offer. Please take a look at www.ppustudents.org.

Another area I have been grateful to help with is utilising my filmmaking and photography experience. I was given the task of making a short film to explain "Why wear a white poppy". I spent 2 weeks locating people from all ages, races and backgrounds, to interview them and I edited it all into a short video on why they wear a white poppy. I think I managed to capture some powerful statements for the final video including Michael Pike, an ex-soldier and Bill Hetherington, who lived through the blitz.

The tough part was making it short enough which meant chopping a lot out but this also made for a more powerful short video that will hold peoples' short attention span.

You can see the film on the Peace Pledge Union Facebook or YouTube accounts. I also created a series of shareable pictures of contributors from the film wearing their poppy with a quote from them to highlight a few perspectives.

The video has been shared across the PPU's Facebook and Twitter accounts as well as the brand new YouTube account. The video sparked a huge debate. It has been seen over 220,000 times on Facebook alone which is amazing when you think Wembley stadium has a capacity of 90,000. I have had a few people tell me they wore a white poppy for the first time after seeing that video which I am quite proud of.

Shortly after the video and photo campaign I was contacted by Camden School for Girls to talk for their year 11 and 6th form assembly. The tutors were interested for their students to hear another perspective on the military. I talked in front of 300+ students for 40 minutes brutally honestly on why I joined, what training was like, what war was like, the aftermath of a life in the military and my journey to becoming a peacemaker. That was followed by some great questions and discussions. I think it's safe to say I shattered the illusion of the military being a great and noble career path for most.

Remembrance weekend seemed to sneak up very fast. After working on the initial video and picture campaign it was all hands on deck at the PPU. I spent many hours counting leaflets, packing white poppies and

posting them out. It has been very busy. The remembrance period concluded with the Alternative Remembrance Ceremony held at the conscientious objectors stone in Tavistock Square, London. It was a very powerful event hosting two speakers with experiences such as living through the horrors that happen in Palestine and attempting to disarm war planes.

The true sentiment of 'never again' is honoured at this event. I filmed the speakers and event which are now available to view on the PPU YouTube channel.

Wayne Sharrocks