

## War, Peace and Terrorism and the Public Response

Address by Angie Zelter  
At the Public Meeting  
Diss FMH 4/11/03  
3785 words

In the middle of the Cold War, at the height of the mass protests against nuclear weapons, the peace movement made it clear that the Cold War was a war of lies and was not really about the US and NATO needing to defend itself against the terrible threat from the Soviet Union. It was actually about a fight for the resources of the world, about the control of the global economic system for the benefit of the elites of just a few nations – the USA and its Allies. We predicted then that when the Cold War ended, a new role would be found for NATO, that another ‘enemy’ would be ‘created’ - - the USA/British/NATO system had a world view that needed an ‘enemy’, their military/industrial complex could not survive without one. It was suggested then that ‘Islamic Fundamentalism’ and the ‘Yellow Peril’ would be the new ‘enemies’. What would remain unchanged would be the horrendous waste of over 50% of global resources used in fuelling growing violent conflicts. It is a tragedy that the peace movement has been proved correct in its predictions.

However, on a brighter note, the peace movement has moved from being perceived as a small and marginalized group into a massive global movement against war. It is now obvious to many millions of people around the planet that unequal access to global resources, an unfair trading system, odious debts, a rampant arms industry, narrow self-interested nationalism, are all counter-productive – that human beings are destroying the very fabric of our planetary environment upon which all life depends. At last peaceniks are working alongside environmentalists, human rights activists, indigenous peoples groups, refugee and asylum seekers organisations – all of us coming together in varied and ever-shifting alliances and networks, meeting at social forums, anti-globalisation demonstrations, and gatherings like this, struggling to create the changes needed for a better and more humane world.

In 1998, 1% of the world’s population – over 75 million people – signed a manifesto against war, which eventually led to a UN Decade for Peace<sup>1</sup> – which we are in the middle of right now. If we care to put aside our cynicism, which is not a very good tool for peacemaking, we can take hope in the growing resistance against war and power abuse. The current war in Iraq is the first war where people around the world rose up in their millions to protest against it, even before the war started. And more importantly, the protests continue. I found the march in London just the other week a great boost – I was worried the resistance on the streets might have died away – instead, there were hundreds of thousands of us again, and more protests will take place. We may not have stopped this war but we can get the occupation to end and

---

<sup>1</sup> UN Resolution A/53/243

maybe stop the next war against Iran or Syria or North Korea. We can also work hard to help make the necessary changes in our institutions and societies, to transform our defence and foreign policies, outlaw war and bring to fruition the hope and idealism that is enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

In this country, one of the ways we can create the necessary changes is by continuing a vigorous civil resistance to our own UK international crimes. We must take courage from knowing that so many millions of people around the world are working alongside of us – that we are not alone, but are acting together to create a new and humane global co-operative system, that encourages connections but respects diversity and independence, that we are all global citizens and rely upon each other's health and happiness for our own health and happiness.

This public meeting was arranged for the end of a trial involving 7 local peace activists who opposed the war preparations going on at the nearby US airbase at Lakenheath. They had taken part in two separate actions just before the war began in March this year, they had either walked or biked into the base to disrupt, what they saw as illegal activities. They were part of a growing number of people who are engaging in non-violent, peaceful and accountable resistance to war. They had hoped that with enough such protests the war could be brought to a standstill. They were right of course. Enough people blockading the entrances to airbases and trespassing onto the runways would have brought the airbases to a standstill and could have stopped the war. Shannon airport in Ireland was brought to a close and the US had to stop using it because of local protests. How many people would have been needed to do this in the UK?

We do not know the exact number but we can guess that it would not even take all the people who attended the last march in London. It is possible but it needs all of us to help build this resistance movement. For every march that we go on we need also to take direct action. And for every activist who risks arrest there needs to be at least two supporters on the outside to keep the protests going and to support the people already arrested and these people who do the hidden administrative and support work need to be properly valued and respected for their essential work. It is not so difficult for us here in East Anglia to organise. If people can do all the amazing things that they already do - bringing up families, supporting sick relatives, building houses, creating works of art, growing vegetables..... then we can also stop war crimes being committed in our names. We must not be frightened and cowed by the misuse of power and law but reclaim our portion of this power and use it responsibly. Stopping war crimes and preventing our Government from abusing its power should be part of our daily lives – and I am sure it is for many of you here tonight – and our resistance work can become a cause of celebration and hope.

The Theatre of War is a good example of a civil resistance group with a serious message but who also manage to have fun at the same time and we are lucky having them in our locality. It was their large statue of Bush which was toppled in Trafalgar Square.

Then there is the Lakenheath Action Group, they need more people willing to persuade the US Forces to leave Lakenheath and Mildenhall and to take their nuclear weapons away with them to dismantle safely.

Trident Ploughshares also need more people to pledge to undertake direct and peaceful people's disarmament work – you can form local affinity groups and go up at your own convenience to blockade the entrances and dismantle the fences at Faslane or try to occupy a Trident submarine.

While letter writing and demonstrations are a very necessary part of our overall peace making, nevertheless consistent and large scale **civil resistance** is what is needed to actually create changes on the ground. Please, if you can, join up with your friends and take part in the work of peaceful creative disarmament.

To return to the recent court case at Mildenhall, Court cases like these are being heard all around the country and abroad. What they all do is to challenge the right of powerful nations to go to war. The issue of the legality of the war against Iraq has been raised many times, but it is through cases like these and especially in the case that will be heard in Bristol Crown Court next March that the Judiciary are given the chance to rule against Government war mongering. They may ignore the chance and retreat back to the anachronistic view that it is the Prime Minister alone who decides on war and that no court in the land can question the legality of that decision. However, by continually confronting and challenging the Government and presenting the international law arguments in the courts of the land, eventually we will shame them into some integrity or maybe even find another Judge like Sheriff Gimblett, who is brave and independent enough to make a break with the conventional violent past and apply the rules of law impartially and fairly.

As many of you may have missed the trial at Mildenhall you might be interested to hear some of the arguments put to the Court:-

Having been charged with aggravated trespass the police and prosecutor made an initial error of alleging that we had disrupted 'the refueling and maintenance of aircraft, which persons were engaged in on that land' – and I was charged, for instance, with 'sitting down in front of an aircraft', which activity (I) 'intended to have the effect of disrupting'. Absolutely true, I certainly intended to disrupt planes from loading equipment to aid the invasion of Iraq. I do not believe that violence ever justifies violence, nor do I believe that engaging in state terrorism prevents other forms of terrorism.

However, they soon realised that under that charge I might argue that my trespass was lawful because unlawful preparations for an illegal war against Iraq were going on. Not only might this lead to me getting off the charge (because to prove aggravated trespass the prosecution have to show that **lawful** activities were going on in the open air where I trespassed) but worse of all it might lead to what they consider as ‘irrelevant’ arguments against the war in Iraq being heard in open court, and the airing of these arguments in a public court might encourage others to act similarly. So the charge was later amended so that the disruption alleged was to the ‘security of the base’. This led us into a lengthy debate where we argued that the security of the base was nevertheless obviously linked to the main activities of the base – as Lakenheath is not a security firm but a known military airbase. In other words the security were protecting unlawful acts, they were themselves acting unlawfully in ‘aiding and abetting’ the unlawful activity of going to war with Iraq.

However, the Judge ruled in a ridiculously circular argument. He said that in **order** to find out if the security of the base **is** an offence then he would have to rule whether the war against Iraq was unlawful. This would inevitably involve a legal inquiry into the activities of the Armed Forces, which is not justiciable in the courts as it is protected under the Crown Prerogative.

The Crown Prerogative is an outdated right inherited from the Absolute Monarchs of the past, under which certain activities, including those of the Armed Forces, are prohibited from court scrutiny and in effect are put above and beyond the reach of the law. We argue that the Crown Prerogative, in these days of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, can only be meant to protect ‘lawful’ activities from court and public interference – not to enable the military to engage in Crimes against the Peace and War Crimes. The proper and lawful defence of the realm may well be beyond the court’s remit but the Crown Prerogative does not cover clearly unlawful and criminal acts by the Armed Forces. The military do not have carte blanche in any democracy worth the name.

Judge Gray then went on to say that as he was not **permitted** to make a judgement on whether the activities at the base were or were not lawful he nevertheless had to proceed on the basis of Section 68, which we were charged under. He then proceeded on the basis of an **assumption of legality**. In other words, in order to find us guilty, he had to **assume** the legality of the activities at Lakenheath on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of March. His decision was not backed up by evidence or law, and as I said to the court at the time, I considered this a contempt of the court and an abuse of the legal process.

The cases at Mildenhall illustrate a continuing challenge that the peace movement has been making for several decades now and which maybe will start making headway now that so many more of the public are convincing lawyers to take it further. The

judicial review, brought by CND last year at the High Court in London on the illegality of the war, is a good example and has caused useful ripples. Maybe a local initiative to 'lay an information' at the local court on the actual crimes being committed at Mildenhall and Lakenheath might also be useful.

I will now give you a brief summary of the defences put by myself and others in the trial. I hope it will help persuade you all to take part in the forthcoming civil resistance actions planned for Lakenheath and for you then to have the chance to put your own arguments in defence of your own actions.

We argued that the activities going on at Lakenheath are **always** unlawful in that it is the site for US nuclear weapons which are weapons of mass destruction that could never be used in a discriminating manner so as to only cause damage to the military target it might be aimed at – i.e. they are too powerfully destructive - that is why they are called weapons of **mass** destruction.

Moreover, both the UK and USA promised over 30 years ago in the Non-Proliferation Treaty that they would disarm all their nuclear weapons. The most uncontroversial and unanimous decision of the ICJ Advisory Opinion of 1996 (para.105 (2) (c)) was that 'there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control'. The UK and USA have failed to do this. They are researching the next generation of nuclear weapons at Aldermaston and Los Alamos right now which hardly shows good faith. The presence of these weapons of mass destruction still to this day at USAF Lakenheath is thus an unlawful act that undermines the respect and integrity of international treaties.

Furthermore, the activities going on at Lakenheath on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> March were unlawful in another way - in that, 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' was being supported from Lakenheath where aircraft were providing equipment for the US and UK war against Iraq - this evidence was helpfully provided by a US serviceman during cross-questioning. This war was not authorized by the UN. UN Resolution 1441 did not authorize the use of force and the Government is wrong to state otherwise. Moreover, the issue of the legality of going to war is linked with the illegality of the likely conduct of the war. To go to war within a time frame and specific rules set up by the UN is quite different from planning a war outside of the UN where weapons like cluster bombs and depleted uranium will be used, that will kill and maim civilians over a long period of time. The invasion of Iraq was in fact a war of aggression and a crime against peace and thus unlawful.

The main activities at Lakenheath at the time of the 2 actions had to do with the preparations for conflict in Iraq and were not to do with the general security of a

military base involved in lawful military activities. Moreover, the providing of security for what is manifestly unlawful is in itself illegal.

I therefore argued that I should not be convicted of aggravated trespass, since:

- The activities being carried out at Lakenheath at the relevant time were unlawful and I was acting out of necessity to prevent these activities which threatened the lives and property of others for whom I bear responsibility.

Well, from the rulings so far it looks like we will be found guilty. Interestingly, we have to wait until January to hear the decision formally but we have been promised a written judgement which will be useful for any appeals we may wish to make. However, whatever the legal outcome of such actions are on a particular occasion, by taking part in such actions and defending ourselves or getting a lawyer to defend us, we do manage to put the government in the dock to some extent. Of course, the judges always say it is us on trial not the Government or the military, and they try to stop us saying anything about our real reasons for the action, but nevertheless the truth does come out. And the court officials all have to deal with the challenge and in our case have had to go the lengths of writing a written judgement because they know that the judgement may well be appealed at a higher court.

I call it re-claiming the courts and I think of myself as a global citizen but everyone who takes part in this process does it in their own particular way and within their own philosophical or spiritual tradition. I always find it inspiring hearing the diversity of other defendants stories and motivations for resistance and the process helps to keep alive my own spirit of resistance.

Now, the process I have been discussing covers some aspects of our civil resistance to the UK involvement in war and terrorism, however it does not cover how we can act to prevent crimes being committed by other countries to our fellow 'global citizens' who live and suffer elsewhere. How can we support our brothers and sisters in other countries who suffer under brutal regimes like Saddam Hussein's in Iraq or in Burma or in Indonesia or Turkey or Israel.....without going to war or using military force. Now I have no time to go into any detail here but would like to raise to your attention the growing awareness of the need for trained and dedicated civilian peace forces. This is a concept which is now slowly being realized and it needs more public understanding and support.

Civilians play a crucial role in the prevention, management and resolution of conflict – as international observers, human rights monitors, mediators, conflict resolution trainers, and by providing solidarity and support for people caught up in conflict.

There are now a growing number of organizations that are trying to increase both the quality and the quantity of this civilian resource.

There are now many examples of successful peace monitors and witnesses on a small scale. Most of you will be aware of the International Peace Brigades who have worked in many different countries, including Mexico and Guatemala, some will have heard of the Nonviolent Peaceforce who have just started in Sri Lanka. Some of you are aware of the project I am involved in – the International Women’s Peace Service who presently work in Palestine..... There are many such examples and what is exciting is that there is even growing awareness amongst government and military circles that violence is not getting us very far. Peace-keeping and peace-making requires the engagement of civil society rather than soldiers who are trained in warfare and fighting just exchanging a national cap for a blue beret. Some governments, notably the Swedish and German governments are now actively promoting the training and expansion of civilian peace services by providing useful grants and training possibilities. But it will continue to be up to us, the general public, to keep informed and to support these civilian peace forces and to think about whether they would like to volunteer on one of these projects. And of course we could support the Peace Tax Campaign by withholding that portion of our taxes which the government spends on military defence and ask that it be used to support the nonviolent peace services instead.

I feel that, as a peace movement we have to be involved on many different fronts at the same time. Another related issue, for instance, one which I would again like to raise for your discussion this evening, is the necessity for opening up more of a public debate about much needed changes in UK Foreign Policy. May I recommend a book called ‘Web of Deceit’ by Mark Curtis who explains in a clear and detailed manner the pattern of UK defence and foreign policies that have remained unchanged for many hundreds of years. The UK propensity for war and terror is not new. What was the British Empire other than the subjugation of other peoples by the use of force that included such terror tactics as massacres, concentration camps, torture and scorched earth policies?

Britain has always been at the forefront in developing and deploying weapons of mass destruction (Polaris and then Trident nuclear weapons), has continuously sold arms to repressive regimes (Indonesia and Israel), supported repressive strategic ‘allies’ (Iraq and Saddam Hussein before the invasion of Kuwait, Suharto in Indonesia, South Africa, and now Turkey even though it has massacred thousands of Kurds and is destroying hundreds of Kurdish villages), undermined the UN system by the use of its vetoes in the Security Council (in the last 25 years of the Cold War from 1965-1990, Britain cast twice as many vetoes in the Security Council as the Soviet Union – 27 compared to 13, mainly in support of the racist regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia), and has turned a blind eye to the exploitation and human rights

abuses committed by British multi-nationals abroad (Shell in Nigeria, Rio Tinto Zinc in Papua New Guinea).

If we want peace then we have to recognize not only the obvious terrorism promoted here in Britain, by the Government itself, when it engages in war in Iraq or Afghanistan, for instance, but also the UK role in promoting violence through supporting a system that enables the cruel exploitation of labour and resources of other peoples and lands. Perhaps, what we need is a Truth and Reconciliation Commission of our own, to which we invite people from all our past colonies, plus our past 'enemies', plus people from countries where our multi-national corporations are based or our businesses operate from, those who suffer from the use of the weapons we sell.....? There is a peculiar and rather smug attitude that certain British people have about Britain's past history and about themselves as a nation. It is not only North Americans who need to listen and hear what other nations think of them. We need to do the same.

And when we have pondered maybe we need also to act. Unless we act against the problem then we contribute to it. Even our silence is a kind of consent. So, I hope that we can all discuss how to work together and how to make sure that we do our bit here in East Anglia to create a sustainable non-exploitative economic system and in building a massive nonviolent direct action and civil resistance movement.

Thank you.