Scottish CND AGM 2021

Chair’s Report

Another year of trying to do our best, with changes in coronavirus regulations, Scottish CND and local groups have started to return to in-person activities. For example, Glasgow CND are back to vigils at the Buchanan Street steps. Recent events including our ‘die-in’ at Faslane in September (on video - https://youtu.be/sBiwY8v_2HQ), North East Scotland CND’s rally for COP26 in Aberdeen, many of us participating in the mass COP26 rally in Glasgow on 6th November, Peace Education Scotland and Scottish CND hosting in-person events during COP26 to make the connections between nuclear weapons, war and global warming, complementing and in collaboration with peace groups from all over the world.

We supported the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom exhibition on Climate justice and pushed the messages – end the loophole which excludes military emissions from countries’ official carbon footprint + nuclear power is neither carbon neutral nor peaceful but linked to nuclear weapons.

We hosted or supported three film events, Peace Education Scotland’s personal tribute to Kenneth McNeil and screening of their own film on ‘The Environmental Hazards of Nuclear Weapons’, a showing of Collisions and the preview of a ‘A guided tour of the unacceptable’, Scottish CND’s new film about Faslane and Coulport which will be launched in the coming year.

In August I was honoured to speak at the launch of the Peace and Justice Peace Cranes exhibition in Edinburgh, and in September I was pleased to take part in action against killer drones outside RAF Lossiemouth. In October, a small group of activists took our protest to the doors of the UK Government outpost in Edinburgh, seeking recognition and accountability for the impact of the UK’s nuclear tests around the world.

Across the year, Scottish CND has continued to support and promote Nukewatch in monitoring nuclear convoys in Scotland and their press and lobbying work challenging the Scottish Government to face the safety issues that are further heightened by the pandemic. We thank Faslane Peace Camp for their participation in the ‘die in’ and their ongoing witness and presence at the base.

The return has been slow and cautious, and, as with our AGM, Scottish CND continue to hold online events, which can draw together members from around the country. We held a thoughtful and reflective online event in remembrance of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, and an uplifting celebration of the fourth anniversary of the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in July, following its entry into force for the 56 UN states that are signatories in January. Speakers joined us virtually from around the world.

Early in the year, Glasgow CND organised a beautiful online commemoration for Marshall Islands Day of Remembrance, to honour the communities devastated by nuclear detonations in the name of ‘testing’. More recent online events included an MSP Ross Greer sponsored Scottish Parliament event in collaboration with Peace Education Scotland with speakers directly affected by nuclear tests and uranium mining, from the Pacific to North America. They shared their experiences and their hopes for change. We were pleased that Richard Dixon of Friends of the Earth agreed to chair and that we could re-show the recorded talks during a COP26, following the film Collisions.

All nuclear campaigners across the UK have been disappointed by the actions of the nuclear-obsessed, increasingly aggressive UK government – from lifting the cap on the nuclear stockpile, to
the recent Aukus pact and endorsements of nuclear fusion and ‘small modular nuclear reactors’. We are grateful that the May 2021 election returned a Scottish Parliament with a substantial and increased majority in support of nuclear disarmament. This has already led to the re-establishment of the Cross Party Group on Nuclear Disarmament with a new additional purpose to support the TPNW; and to the SNP adopting a three-year deadline for getting rid of Trident after Scottish independence, thanks to the hard work of the SNP CND group.

Scottish CND has had to cope with organisational transitions including continued adjustment to the loss of our office, further staff changes (remember campaign worker Emma Cockburn left June 2020, now works for the Campaign Against the Arms Trade and Emilie McSwiggan who joined us is doing excellent campaigning work, alongside the continued administrative hard work of Crisitna Tofan doing the essential processing membership, orders and the like) - we are now seeking to replace Flavia Tudoreanu, our coordinator, who has returned to Romania for family reasons. I am sure that each one of our roughly 2000 members will join me in thanking her for her efforts over the last 10 years, 7 of them as our coordinator, including the recent focus groups she conducted to gather members’ views.

The executive committee of Scottish CND is a fantastic group of people who have given excellent service. I will verbally thank outgoing members at the AGM. Part way through the year Mike Blackshaw, our secretary, had to step back for health reasons but, health permitting, and whether or not he is elected, he is committed to carry on helping to boost our membership. Particular thanks to David MacKenzie the assistant secretary for becoming the acting secretary thereafter.

One major disagreement divided the committee. As thorough newsletter readers will know, a difficult division over whether to take the legal, financial and campaigning risks of a time-limited opportunity to seek a judicial review on the UK governments’ decision to increase nuclear weapons in Scotland was resolved by choosing to put energies elsewhere. Around then I indicated that I believed Scottish CND should become a Ltd liability company but this raised concerns about consequences for our democracy and the executive agreed to seek legal advice. This has not, however, been achieved in time for this AGM. I hope that the new executive will look afresh at this and its own ways of working including the relationship between officers and other executive members.

As with every year, there are gains and losses including, sadly, the death of some of our members. I am among the many who will personally miss Kenneth McNeil, a former secretary of Scottish CND and founder champion of Peace Education Scotland and Eileen Cook long time secretary of Edinburgh CND and a former secretary of Dundee CND. Apologies for not naming others but please send appropriate obituary text if you would like us to commemorate a former member on our website.

We know the year ahead presents challenges and opportunities. We will work with others lobbying around the 10th review of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in January, and to ensure that Scotland’s support is heard at the First Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW in March, at which we hope to have Scottish representation. We will also mark the 70th anniversary of the first British nuclear test in Australia highlighting the harms of nuclear weapons, then and now. We will continue to expose connections between civil nuclear power and nuclear weapons, to work to ensure that nuclear disarmament remains a public and political priority within Scotland; and to make the most of the unique opportunities presented by Scotland’s opposition to nuclear weapons, to unravel the whole of the UK’s nuclear programme.