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Bruce Kent and the British campaign for nuclear disarmament

John Dear S.J. | Aug. 8, 2007 On the Road to Peace

?War is not inevitable I don?t think we can believe in God and be pessimistic about the future. The world is in God?s hands. So we have to keep going, keep on working for the abolition of war.? So said Bruce Kent, Britain?s long-time peace advocate and leader of the ?Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.?

I spent two weeks traveling through England and Scotland last month, giving talks in London and elsewhere, starting at the National Peace Conference co-sponsored by Pax Christi, the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Network for Justice and Peace.

In Edinburgh, Scotland, my good friend Jesuit Fr. Chris Boles hosted my talk at the Lauriston Jesuit Centre and introduced me to organizers, church workers, and politicians working for peace and justice. This past year has seen a campaign of daily vigils and civil disobedience at the Faslane Nuclear Submarine Base 30 miles west of Glasgow, where the Trident and its nuclear weapons are docked. A huge mobilization is set for Oct. 1. (See www.faslane365.org.) Activists expect Scotland soon to outlaw the Trident and all nuclear weapons, which would be an enormous step forward for Britain and the world.

In Derbyshire, I sat with Bruce Kent over coffee and talked about his tireless work for peace. From 1980 to 1985, he served as the General Secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (See www.cnduk.org.) and afterwards as chair of the board. Today, he is vice president of Pax Christi England (See www.paxchristi.org.uk.), and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and recently founded the movement for the abolition of war. (See www.abolishwar.org.uk.) At 78, he?s as active as ever, still working full time for peace. He lives in North London with his peacemaking wife Valerie Flessati, and is active in his local parish.

?Generally speaking, people don?t kill each other to obtain what they want,? he says. ?I live, for example, in a fairly multiracial, turbulent area of North East London, but we manage to live together in a reasonable sort of way, and I believe that that image -- of the small London street living together harmoniously -- is the one we should try to transpose to the world community.?

?There is no one road to a war-free world,? he observes. ?We need, for instance, international courts that work. We need an end to the political and economic injustices which drive some to believe that violence is the only answer to their problems. We need scientists and engineers who give work for peace their priority, and businessmen and women who do not think of the arms trade as a legitimate commercial activity. We need education for peace at every age and level. We certainly need a United Nations with the power to free us ?from the scourge of war,? as its own Charter promised.?

?We need to knit the causes together,? Bruce suggests. ?We can?t compartmentalize them. The anti-poverty and environmental movements have to speak out against militarism as well. Wars make poverty. Wars destroy the earth. We?ve never before in history spent so much money on war. So we cannot end poverty or global warming

until we also deal with the military impact of war. War threatens our security and our health; it doesn?t make us safer.?

?But I?m hopeful,? he insists. ?This past Christmas, the pope called the maintenance of nuclear weapons and the threat to use them ?baneful and fallacious,?? Bruce points out. ?The pope?s upcoming beatification of the anti-war Austrian Franz Jägerstätter is a very important signal,? he says. ?Pax Christi is becoming more and more mainstream. In the U.K., the bishops are no longer hostile to the peace movement. We?ve come a long way. Recently, 120 members of Parliament refused a vote to renew the Trident nuclear submarine system. There?s major discontent with the nuclear industry. Many are working on the renewal of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which comes up again for vote in 2010.?

These days, Bruce is busy with a variety of projects. He?s trying to restore Britain?s forgotten history of peacemakers. ?We need to remember those who worked for peace in our history, to inspire and encourage us to carry on their work.? He?s also organizing programs on peace at, of all places, London?s famous ?Imperial War Museum,? in order to reach a wider, mainstream audience. He?s begun a campaign to transform Britain?s ?Remembrance Day? as a day to honor all those killed in war, in order to generate interest in the abolition of war itself. His work to end the arms trade gives him the greatest hope as divestment from weapons? companies continues to spread.

?I?m only here on earth for a short while,? he concluded. ?I have to do what I can in the confidence that it will go somewhere because it?s all in God?s hands.?

His advice? ?Keep going!? he said with a smile. ?Read Saul Alinsky?s book, *Rules for Radicals*. Study the methods of organizing. Know your objectives. Learn how to achieve them. Be civil and polite. Try to bring more and more people into the movement.?

?The peace movement is like an orchestra,? Bruce told me. ?Some of us are violins, others are cellos, others are big drums like me. The main thing is that we all play our instruments and the same music.?

Over those two weeks, I met hundreds of British peacemakers like the great Bruce Kent. They?re playing their instruments well, and hoping that more of us in the United States join the symphony of peace and disarmament.

John Dear is featured in a new DVD, ?The Narrow Path,? available from **www.sandamianofoundation.org [1]**, and his new book, *Transfiguration*, (Doubleday) is available online or from your local bookstore. He expects to stand trial for his antiwar protest Sept. 6th in Albuquerque. For information, see: **www.johndear.org [2]**.

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