23rd October 2024

Secret

"Hagrid never opened the Chamber of Secrets. He was innocent."

Steve Kloves, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (Screenplay)*

Based on the book of the same name by J K Rowling

Visiting *The Secret Bunker* in Fife during a recent holiday was a revelation. The extensive underground bunker was built to house sections of the Government in the event of a Nuclear War. Conceived and constructed at the height of the Cold War, there's an ordinary farmhouse on the surface, while below ground, protected by massive, bomb-proof, reinforced concrete walls, is an extensive layout of map-rooms, broadcasting and radar equipment, dorms, admin areas and weapon stores. Now decommissioned, *The Secret Bunker* is open as a museum, a reminder of a scary period in our history – through much of my childhood – when the threat of nuclear war was regularly in the news. MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction), the prophesied Armageddon, was only a button-push away.

It was gratifying, however, to find that the work of CND was also part of *The Secret Bunker's* displays. Here was balance. Here was evidence of those, then and now, with a passion for nuclear disarmament, nationally and internationally. Greenham Common, Faslane, Coulport were all highlighted, and I was moved to see photographs of several activists I recognised, on marches and protests, from the Iona Community, Peace groups and various Churches. *The Secret Bunker* was a revelation, with a gratitude for protesters highlighted it for balance.

But … when my visit was over and I exited through the inevitable gift shop, I was disturbed to find a whole section of children's toys dedicated to weaponry of all sorts, including plastic hand grenades (complete with firing pins) army pistols and a replica AK47 assault rifle. Here, worryingly, was an invitation to imitate violence, destruction and killing. And this has left me with a deep and lasting sadness.

Hagrid can do what he chooses. But today I will open *my* chamber of secrets. I will not be innocent if I ignore my distress. With all that's going on in Europe and the Middle East at the present time, conflicts that are MAD in a different way, I will resolve to be in touch with *The Secret Bunker* people and ask, "Can't we do better than this?"

A prayer for today

Lord, in my prayers for peace, direct me also to work for peace where I can. Amen

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