



ABINGDON PEACE GROUP

Newsletter

20th April 2021

It Starts Here

In late March CAAT organised a weekend digital conference for its supporters. The focus was on the various ways in which the arms trade is inextricably linked to other intersecting issues.

400 people gave up part or all of a weekend to take part. Very impressive.

The CAAT You Tube channel has several short (c. 20 minute) recordings from the conference:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCMaEd8ObYxorigTL8R9Jsg/videos>

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Next meeting Tuesday, 20th April 2021, at 8pm online

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill: how to create long-term security for our world

Speaker: Priya Shivaram

The private members bill is being put forward by a cross-party campaign powered by *The Big Issue* and led by Big Issue Founder, Lord Bird MBE, with Caroline Lucas. If passed, it will require every government decision, whether local or national, to consider the likely effects on future generations. Just imagine how good that would be! Our speaker, Priya Shivaram, has spent the last 18 months working on the project.

The website [Today For Tomorrow](http://TodayForTomorrow) has more about the new bill.

It was very pleasing to find that Youth CND is promoting the bill and joined in the campaign, because how can living under the threat of annihilation by nuclear war be compatible with the wellbeing of our children and their children?

The legislation is modelled on that which has become law in Wales. The prime mover there was Jane Davidson, whose book “#FutureGen” tells how she helped Wales become the first country in the world to introduce legislation to protect future generations. www.janedavidson.wales

The bill will surely be of interest to anyone who is concerned about the future of the planet, so do invite your friends to join us.



Priya Shivaram

Joining the meeting: Either use the link below or look out for a message with the link on April 20th. If you don't receive it and would like to take part, simply email us using abingdonpeace@gmail.com

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/91315134101?pwd=RmxHLzBQaXlHYjFSRm5nREVzYjdSdz09>
Meeting ID: 913 1513 4101 Passcode: 015836

Our March meeting: Zero Carbon – why NOT Nuclear ?

Last month we broached this topic by playing a recording of a session organised recently by the CND Salisbury group. The first speaker was Andy Stirling, a professor of science and technology policy at the University of Sussex. He posed the question: why is the UK government so committed to civil nuclear power? Its answer is that it is the best way to achieve the climate change mitigation goals. He showed there is little or no reason to believe it can or will be enacted. Power stations are years behind (Christmas dinners, remember, would in 2017 be cooked using electricity generated at Hinkley Point C).

The existing nuclear power provision is manifestly slow in reducing climate change. Hinkley Point C is far behind schedule, already running ten years late and it is the same in France and for Finnish nuclear projects. Many others have not yet been started. The modular reactors and other 'New Generation' nuclear projects proposed have not been piloted or tested. Now there is not even time for a development plan let alone delivery, as the UK government have promised a 68% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 – just 9 years away. It's simply not going to happen and the costs would in any case be prohibitive.

The government has a commitment for Britain to be at net zero by 2050 and has installed ten gigawatts of offshore wind. This does not account for onshore wind or solar. But it does already amount to more power than would be generated by ten of the new modular reactor plants in the proposed programme. Radical acceleration of renewable energy programmes is clearly possible, but spending on nuclear takes money away from spending on renewables, which could achieve the climate change goals faster.

So, Andy returned to his initial question - why is it that the UK is so committed to nuclear power, when it simply won't help Britain meet its carbon emission targets? Andy offered his 'obvious' answer: that the military need a civil nuclear programme, but immediately handed over the narrative to his Sussex colleague, Phil Johnstone, a research fellow in the University's science policy research unit. He compared the US and France with the UK and showed that these two powers, with both military and civil nuclear technologies, required the civil nuclear industry in order to have the necessary infrastructure underpinning the nuclear military programme.

He quoted President Macron saying in December 2020 that to oppose civil nuclear power makes no sense for France, because without it there's no military nuclear and without military nuclear there's no civil nuclear. As for US, the Atlantic Council, a major security think-tank, has calculated that its large educational Research and Development and industrial support system subsidises the civilian nuclear sector to the extent of at least \$42 billion annually - in the pursuit of US national security priorities; while the Centre for Strategic and International Studies reported that if there was a sustained decline in the commercial industry, it would have a negative impact on the US nuclear naval programme.

A former energy secretary said, in 2018, that naval nuclear capability is tied to the fate of the commercial nuclear sector, as long as a strong domestic supply chain is needed to satisfy the Navy's nuclear requirements and this is acknowledged in official defence documents, The Royal Academy of Engineering in 2009 said skills required in the design, build, operation and disposal of naval nuclear reactors are in short supply and the increasingly expensive decline of civil nuclear programmes has forced the nuclear submarine programme to develop and fund its own expertise to remain operational. This shows that some of the costs were previously covered by the civilian programme.

The availability of deep specialist expertise is key and suitably qualified staff appear to be at the bare minimum necessary to deliver the programme. This was revealed by a Ministry of Defence document in 2014, in a redacted reply to a Freedom of Information enquiry. It had been written for the submarine development programme. Thus there is a crisis in research capabilities: the Ministry of Defence's programme had been underwritten by civil nuclear research that has been dismantled and commercialised and important specialist expertise has atrophied. This also emerged from the documents exposed through the FOI.

The government response was to say that the programme should seek imaginative methods to better engage with the emergent civil nuclear programme, to the benefit of defence. A research programme group was established to look at leveraging civil nuclear investment to maximum effect.

The 2013 Oxford Economics Government Consulting report stated that naval and civil reactor industries are often viewed as separate and to some extent unrelated. However, the timeline of the UK's nuclear industry has clear interaction between the two, particularly from a supply chain development point of view. The Nuclear Research Institute says this link needs to be carefully managed, to avoid the perception that civil and military nuclear programmes are one and the same (!).

Andy and Phil made clear that there are strategic factors beyond energy policy that explain not just the enthusiasm but the otherwise inexplicable UK policy on nuclear. The military rationale is the most likely and yet the government does not officially acknowledge this. Alongside the government's silence on these their true motivations there has been an incredible level of lobbying in favour of nuclear in the media. The amount of nuclear advocacy, at a time when the case for nuclear is at its weakest, shows the extent of the problem for democracy. Greens For Nuclear was set up in 2019, with the sole purpose of intensely promoting nuclear. It involved a Twitter campaign by failed Green Party leadership candidate, Rosie Sexton, consistently urging the greens to reconsider their position on nuclear. They refused to listen to any evidence, in regard to costs or the other weaknesses of civil nuclear power as an energy solution. Several UK pro-nuclear power groups were set up in 2020 including Mothers for Nuclear Energy, Liberal Democrats for Nuclear, and Friends of Nuclear Energy. There were demonstrations by activists, such as Nuclear for Net Zero. Similarly, in the US there is the so-called Good Energy Collective enquiry making the progressive case for nuclear, run by former members of the Breakthrough Institute.

In summary, civil nuclear power is slow in reducing climate change, costly and dishonest, because the real drivers are not spoken about. Whilst UK energy policy is silent, defence sources are clear that the major nuclear drivers are military. In the UK, the massive government support for the weapons programme is justified as energy strategy. The result is that many tens of billions of pounds are levied from energy consumers and taxpayers.

The final speaker was Dr Rowland Dye, a physicist who described how he went from being a keen proponent of nuclear power to active campaigner against it. His key moment came in 1983 when, working in a hospital and seeing a news report of Greenpeace launching inflatables to block the dumping of nuclear waste at sea. The report stated that this was 'hospital waste'. He knew that not to be the case and later discovered it was waste from Britain's bomb factories – Aldermaston and Burghfield. Now that waste cannot be dumped at sea, so for the last 40 years it is been stored in barrels; and this is one of the reasons that those establishments are in special measures for reasons of health and safety. He finished by reminding us of the wrongness and madness of Trident. Lest we forget, the key message of Rowland, Phil and Andy was that the civil nuclear programme is not that civil at all – its purpose is to keep British nuclear militarism going strongly not just now but well into the future. (report written by Frances Micklem and Mike Bloom).

PS The speakers we heard had much to say of great interest about the arguments for civil nuclear that does not bear directly on its military aspects. In this report we have concentrated on the military implications. However, we know that many peace group members are committed to the campaign to get to net zero, as well as to the peace movement. If you want to hear more of what the speakers said, go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R035Br2uI8M> .

'NATO chief says defence spending up despite pandemic'

That was the heading over an AFP report dated March 16 citing quoting Jens Stoltenberg, NATO General Secretary thus: "Despite the economic impact of COVID-19 2020 was the sixth consecutive year of increased defense spending across European allies and Canada with an increase in real terms of 3.9 percent," Stoltenberg told a press conference marking the launch of NATO's annual report. "We expect that trend to continue this year, but it is absolutely vital that we maintain the momentum because security challenges have not gone away." Meanwhile, the UK government has announced plans for a major expansion of our nuclear weapons programme, with more Trident missiles and submarines. Are we meant to be comforted that we are not alone in our insanity? (Not to mention our willingness to ignore our legal commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons).

Source: https://www.spacewar.com/reports/NATO_chief_says_defence_spending_up_despite_pandemic_999.html

Join the Global Days of Action on Military Spending (GDAMS) from April 10 to May 17

The Global Campaign on Military Spending has an attractive new website (<https://demilitarize.org.uk/>) with lots of key information about military spending around the world under the slogan:

Defund the Military, Defend People and the Planet

At <https://actionnetwork.org/forms/appeal-reduce-military-spending-defend-people-and-the-planet> you can respond to the GDAMS appeal demanding that governments around the world reduce their military expenditures. Please do, because they have some way to go to meet their target of 2000 signatories.

See also this article by David Cullen of NIS (Nuclear Information Service): *Why is the UK reversing progress on disarmament?*

<https://www.nuclearinfo.org/comment/2021/03/why-is-the-uk-reversing-progress-on-disarmament/>

British arms sales and six years of bombing Yemen

On March 25 we received a message from CAAT (Campain Against the Arms Trade). In it Sarah Waldron wrote:

"Tomorrow marks six years since Saudi-led forces began bombing Yemen. Six years of homes being destroyed. Six years of lives being torn apart. Six years of world leaders turning their backs on the world's worst humanitarian crisis. As you already know, the attacks on Yemen have been made possible by weapons supplied by the UK government and sustained by its ongoing military support.

Since the bombing of Yemen began in March 2015, the value of UK arms sales to the Saudi-led coalition amounts to at least £18 billion. A political solution is desperately needed to bring this horrific conflict to an end.

"After six long years there is finally cause for hope. US President Joe Biden recently announced the US will freeze arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE and end "all American support for offensive operations in the war in Yemen." This is a huge opportunity to pressure the UK to do the same.

It's time to take a stand against the war on Yemen and end UK arms sales that are prolonging this deadly conflict. Sign CAAT's open letter to Boris Johnson if you agree.

Go to: https://caat.org.uk/open-letter-end-uk-arms-sales-for-use-in-the-war-on-yemen/?utm_source=email&utm_medium=launchemail&utm_campaign=yemenopenletter;id=80598&cs=097769394b980737f00036d6278984fe_1616693801_168

CAAT supporters like you and many others have been campaigning for an end to UK arms sales for use in the war on Yemen for years. But there's now momentum to push for change like never before."

Making your money work for good: the UK Nuclear Weapons Financing Research Group (UKNWFRG).

I have just come across this collective of faith groups working together to move money out of nuclear weapons. They believe that money talks. They have a great website [Investing In Change – Moving money out of nuclear weapons](https://investinginchange.uk) <https://investinginchange.uk> where you can check whether your own bank or pension fund invests in any companies directly involved in manufacturing nuclear weapons, or part of the supply chain for them. Many banks have written policies which prevent them investing in "Controversial weapons" such as cluster bombs, but incredibly nuclear weapons have not always been classified as "controversial". This fudge ends with the coming into force of the TPNW. Links on the site allow you to write directly to your bank, check if they have an exclusion policy or publish their corporate ethical standards, and ask them to adhere to them. Sounds like a simple action which might just tip some fund managers into disinvesting your money from nuclear weapons. Wouldn't that be good? (Sally Reynolds)

Genocide, Africa and The French Connection

An excellent update article on Cameroon by Rebecca Tinsley, the tireless campaigner on peace issues in Africa who first alerted us to the events in Cameroon.

<https://panafricanvisions.com/2021/03/genocide-africa-and-the-french-connection/>

British troops assisted Trump's illegal actions

Seven members of Britain's armed forces won an award for their 'vital operational' work supporting the US military after it killed Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in a drone strike last year, Declassified has found. March 18 report in Declassified UK:

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-03-18-trumps-illegal-drone-strike-on-iranian-general-led-to-award-for-british-troops/>

Stitches for Survival: Mass craftivism to put the earth centre stage at COP26

The organisers of this new project hope it will sow seeds of collective hope, that local groups will use their completed sections for campaigning locally and nationally as well as being part of a completed 1.5 mile scarf (to represent the 1.5°C target in the Paris Agreement) displayed during the COP26 talks. Go online for full information:

<https://stitchesforsurvival.earth/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/272262957684289>

Implications for United Kingdom nuclear deterrence should the Union fail

Published by European Leadership Network, this is paper by John Gower, Former Assistant Chief of Defence Staff (Nuclear, Chemical, Biological) in the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence

<https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/policy-brief/implications-for-united-kingdom-nuclear-deterrence-should-the-union-fail/>

(found via: <https://www.cndsalsbury.org.uk/>, where there is a very useful list of recent news etc).

Diary

Mon Apr 12: Resisting Militarism in your Community Everday militarism is all around us. How can we tackle it in our own streets, workplaces, schools, universities or online? Join us to share ideas and make plans for identifying militarism in our communities and building campaigns for alternatives. Online 18:30 – 20:30. Organised by Peace Pledge Union <https://www.ppu.org.uk/events>
Phone: 020 7424 9444; mail@ppu.org.uk

Wed Apr 14: Book Launch: System Crash – An activist guide to making revolution, with authors Neil Faulkner and Simon Hannah. Pandemic, climate crisis, endless war, mega-slums, police repression, creeping fascism, economic stagnation: these shape our world. This book provides hope for an alternative future. Online 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm. Housmans Bookshop event. Find out more <https://housmans.com/event/book-launch-system-crash-an-activist-guide-to-making-revolution-online-event/>

Wed May 5: Palestine: from the Hebrew Bible to the Present Prof Richard Seaford, Exeter University. Faringdon Peace Group monthly meeting online at 7.30pm.

Sat May 15: Peace in the Nuclear Era: threats, treaties and public understanding - OxPeace Annual Conference 9.00am to 1.15pm UK summer time, BST (online). (NB This is as a preliminary announcement – registration details to be given later. Oxpeace email: cis@politics.ox.ac.uk)

Comments, corrections, contributions etc to this newsletter are very welcome.

Abingdon Peace Group meets on the third Tuesday of each month except August. At present our meetings are taking place online. All who are interested in peace and campaigning for it are welcome to take part. The Group has no party political affiliations.

abingdonpeace@gmail.com. Our telephone numbers are (01235) 526265 & 522163