

Editorial

Climate of Peace?

During summer 2016, Jeremy Corbyn came to Meadows Library in Nottingham to launch an Energy and Environment policy statement as part of his successful campaign to continue as leader of the growing Labour Party in Britain. Alan Simpson, ‘recovering’ politician (in his own words), presided in this environmentally pioneering corner of the Nottingham South parliamentary constituency which he represented for 18 years. Joan Walley, who chaired the House Environmental Audit Committee for five years until 2015, added a wider perspective. While an audience of local residents plus councillors, architects and activists testified to the achievements of Robin Hood Energy, the City Council’s not-for-profit gas and electricity supplier, and to innovation in environmentally sustainable and social housing.

We reprint Mr Corbyn’s policy statement as part of a wider discussion about the impact of climate change on our warming planet. The challenges are truly global, as Naomi Klein spelt out in May in her challenging Edward Said Memorial Lecture:

‘There is an emergency, a present emergency, not a future one, but we aren’t acting like it. The Paris Agreement commits to keeping warming below 2 degrees centigrade. It’s a target that is beyond reckless. When it was unveiled in Copenhagen in 2009, the African delegates called it a ‘death sentence’. The slogan of several low-lying island nations is “1.5 to stay alive”.’

Some 70 years ago, in March 1947, people died in floods that submerged much of the Trent Valley, including the Meadows and other low-lying areas of Nottingham, following a thaw of extensive snow towards the end of the most severe winter in decades. Now, in an attempt to forestall more widespread calamities, the international institutions hasten to enact the inadequate provisions of the Paris Agreement.

Meanwhile, drought and desertification spread across certain latitudes. The line of aridity, whereby there is insufficient precipitation to sustain pasture or crops, extends south from the Sahara Desert. Eyal Weizman and Fazal Sheikh have recorded and photographed another part of ‘The Conflict Shoreline’ in their important book about ‘colonization as climate change in the Negev Desert’. The link between drought and increasing conflict is mapped with telling consistency. It could also be drawn in Syria and in Yemen.

This link was one of many themes underlying the World Congress of the

International Peace Bureau which met in Berlin in autumn 2016 under the banner 'Disarm! For a Climate of Peace'. In this spirit, the President of the Technical University, Christian Thomsen, welcoming a thousand activists to the Congress, informed us that TU has a clear policy of not engaging in military research, while exercising due caution on potential 'dual-use'. Conversion from military production and the Lucas Alternative Plan were to figure prominently in discussions in Berlin, as Reiner Hoffman and Tom Unterrainer recount, developing our discussion of socially useful production begun in the previous issue of *The Spokesman*.

President Thomsen also explained that the Technical University has reserved 200 places for refugees, mainly from Syria. These students recently completed an intensive course in technical German language, and the President was much encouraged by the accomplishments of the initial cohort.

But Syrians are a minority among the tens of thousands of people currently risking their lives in flimsy boats to cross the Mediterranean Sea from Libya to Europe. Alva White provides eyewitness testimony from one of several vessels which continue to search for and to rescue men, women and children fleeing from countries across Africa. They come from Eritrea in the East to Senegal in the West, and from many places between. Their reasons for fleeing their homes are diverse. To what extent is unsustainable agriculture due to increasing aridity part of the picture?

Jeremy Corbyn spoke of 'climate refugees' when he addressed the people gathered in Meadows Library in September. The Earth is likely to witness many such people seeking safety in the years to come. How will we care for them and for ourselves? These are some among many questions raised at the recent landmark gathering in Berlin.

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The US has 14 submarines with Trident missiles, supplemented by four UK boats. The US plans 12 replacement submarines, with the UK providing four additional new ones. So the UK contribution to the US nuclear-armed submarine fleet will increase proportionately. In such circumstances, it seems unlikely that President Trump will change things. Who can say?

Back in 1987, the year of the landmark Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty between the US and the Soviet Union under Gorbachev, Trump was frustrated with the failure of the Reagan Administration to go further, as he told journalist Ron Rosenbaum at the time. We reprint a couple of revealing paragraphs from the article (see page 38). That was then, of course, and we shall return to current international tensions, including nuclear ones and climate, in future issues.