

**SOUTH BEDS FRIENDS OF THE EARTH AND LOW CARBON LEIGHTON LINSLADE
TALK BY PAUL BROWN ON CLIMATE CHANGE AT THE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE ON
10 JANUARY 2019.**

Paul started by outlining some of the history of climate change. Surprisingly the first world leader to recognise the problem was Mrs Thatcher. She addressed the UN in November 1989 saying that we had a duty to save the planet for future generations. Come forward to 2018 and Mrs Thatcher's worse fears have been realised. Too little has been done too late to tackle the problem. Over the years there have been lots of good intentions – Earth Summit 1992, Rio 1997, and Kyoto 2015. After each agreement there has been plenty of euphoria but no momentum. A powerful lobby led by US and Saudi Arabia have succeeded in slowing down any action. Paul has read all the reports and is understandably horrified. The reports have been sent to governments and when published have been changed so much from the original as to be unrecognisable. Scientists who have dared to speak out, or have been too alarming, have had their grants to study climate change withdrawn. However scientists are now more ready to speak out and now refuse to allow their reports to be watered down. This is because of the realisation that the problem is a lot worse. Latest information has shown that sea level rises are now estimated to be considerable greater than originally anticipated. Earlier reports measured only the warming of the oceans, but were unable to accurately calculate the melting of sea ice on land such as Greenland and Antarctica. The threat has therefore been underestimated in the past and we now have more alarming warnings. We may only have 12 years to act.

The US and Saudi Arabia still refuse to accept the reports but it is now more difficult to attempt to bury the message of bad news. There has been a huge change in outlook in a number of countries, noticeably China and India who are now embracing action to address climate change after realising the economic implications of killing off their future populations. China is now investing more in renewables than any other country. Coal is disappearing all over the world – no longer seen as having any future and of being economically viable. There are however still problems – a neo-Nazi madman has been elected in Brazil but it seems highly likely that his reign of terror will not last for long. The US, in spite of Trump, is still going ahead with large scale development of renewables. Texas is now full of wind turbines.

Our own government however still seems to be fixated by the white elephant of nuclear power which in some quarters is still being falsely thought of as being carbon neutral. In spite of the politicians' actions, the cost of developing renewables continues to fall and with the addition of new battery technology electricity from renewable sources can now be stored effectively. Hydrogen is also now an option and hydrogen trains have been built to replace diesel in some parts of the world. Battery technology has taken large strides – even battery hotels have been constructed.

The media ignoring the problem has also been one of the major difficulties to overcome. The latest scientific projection is that by the end of the century global temperatures are predicted to rise by 3 degrees and millions of people are predicted to perish as a result. Paul pointed out that this news item made page 32 of the Observer!

However Paul also pointed out that all over the world ordinary people are taking notice and are rising up with actions of their own. In particular Paul referred to Extinction Rebellion, who successfully blockaded the bridges in London at the end of last year, and have organised school strikes and action against the BBC.

With the lack of action from government and the media the push will have to come from below. It was pointed out that there have been successful campaigns in the past – the campaign to reduce lead in petrol (I can remember taking part in that) and the campaign against smoking in public places.

It was pointed out this is an election year. We could contact councillors to persuade them to take action on climate change. Victoria has a list of councillors.

There are of course powerful economic arguments for dealing with climate change. People who care little about the environment or the future still care about money. Technology, particularly in the energy field, is moving fast with the development of batteries and more effective use of renewables. There is potential that some people will be convinced to change their lifestyles for economic reasons.

A lively discussion followed on from Paul's talk, and there were a number of interesting questions. It was pointed out that there are harmful materials in batteries, but Paul believes that this problem will be addressed as the technology continues to develop. Who is behind the misinformation campaign on renewables particularly onshore wind? Paul believes that the nuclear industry has spread misinformation and propaganda from the start. They have recognised that if too many people realise that renewable energy is more efficient and cheaper to produce, it could spell the end of the nuclear industry. Nuclear power is the most expensive way of producing energy and would be difficult to justify at all if it was not for its links with the production of nuclear weapons. Paul pointed out that all the countries that have or are developing nuclear energy also have nuclear weapons. (Japan?)

Aviation consistently gets left out of any action and is a particularly worrying problem with the proposed development of Heathrow and Luton airports. Paul agreed but pointed out that aircraft technology is being developed to become less polluting and Heathrow expansion will not go ahead unless it meets the criteria on pollution levels.

Following on from the talk I think we should consider using different terms for the problem – replace the term Climate Change with Climate Breakdown or Climate Chaos, and replace Global Warming with Global Heating. In both cases more descriptive.

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