

## **Prospects for Peace after the General Election**

On the eve of the election, which seems a long time ago now, Symon Hill from the pacifist organisation Peace Pledge Union, spoke to the Faringdon Peace Group about issues of war and peace raised during the election campaign and the effect of different outcomes on prospects for peace at home and abroad.

Unusually, it was the Conservatives who brought up peace issues in a largely unsuccessful attempt to smear Jeremy Corbyn. He was accused of being a pacifist, friend of Hamas and the IRA and weak in his refusal to press the nuclear button. Both major parties support Trident renewal, but the SNP would want to get rid of it if they won an independence referendum.

Symon has campaigned against arms sales, particularly to Saudi Arabia, for the last 25 years and for the first time it was openly discussed during the election. He can see no moral difference between selling arms to Saudi, who deliberately bomb schools, Mosques and hospitals in Yemen killing innocent people, and selling a bomb to a suicide bomber. Jeremy Corbyn talks to terrorists but Theresa May sells them weapons, while proudly declaring that the UK is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest donor of humanitarian aid to Yemen. There is a moral inconsistency here. Labour would suspend arms sales to Saudi if they came to power, though their past record is not good.

The election of Trump makes it easier to question the 'special relationship' with the United States. 'Vote May, get Trump' is a worrying prospect for many voters.

Symon feels that all parties should challenge ideas of security so that the 'defence' budget is spent not just on the military, but on making us safer. Labour, Conservatives and the SNP are all committed to at least 2% defence spending and continued membership of NATO, while the Greens and Plaid Cymru are not. The creeping militarisation of society, particularly in schools, should also be challenged. Note the military parade through Faringdon in June.

While Symon correctly predicted the outcome of the election - a hung parliament with a small Conservative majority – he did not mention a partnership with the DUP and its implications for peace in Northern Ireland. A Labour majority might have made the peace movement complacent, but with a weaker government and a greater chance of our voice being heard, Symon urged us to keep up the pressure on issues of Trident, Trump, arms sales and militarisation.