

FARINGDON PEACE GROUP MEETING, SEPTEMBER 2013-09-10

‘SCRAP TRIDENT?’

Faringdon Peace Group hosted a debate on 4th September between Kate Hudson, General Secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and Colonel Graeme Olley (Ret'd) on the value of Trident, the British nuclear weapons system.

Kate Hudson has been active in the anti-war movement since the early 80s and has been General Secretary of CND for 3 years. Graeme Olley is a retired army officer who has served in East Timor, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Pakistan and Afghanistan. He was at the Defence Academy in Shrivenham for 10 years before starting his own company as a security analyst and advisor.

Kate Hudson began by giving the case for scrapping Trident and its replacement on grounds of cost, changing threats to national security, its uselessness in a military context and its contravention of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT). Trident costs £3 billion a year at present, replacement submarines will cost £30 billion and the new system will cost £3 billion a year for the next 30 years. In these times of cutbacks to services and welfare, this money could be much better spent elsewhere. The threat of country on country nuclear war has diminished and nuclear weapons are useless in the face of present threats to national security such as terrorism, climate change, pandemics, cyber warfare and organised crime. We have an obligation under the NPT to reduce our nuclear weapons. If powerful nations refuse to give them up, other nations will be eager to acquire them. Kate challenged the idea that status comes from military might, asserting that peace-building and humanitarian aid are much more highly valued. She believes the decision to replace Trident is not a done deal but will be dependent on a parliamentary debate in 2016.

Graeme Olley, who has experience of working in over 50 countries, is acutely aware of instability around the world. The post Cold War world, which we hoped would be a safer one, has seen a proliferation in risks to national security. Against this background he believes now is not the time to make such a drastic change as giving up our nuclear weapons. There is cross party consensus that Trident is still vital to our security. He claims that our partnerships with America, Europe and NATO are strengthened by our nuclear capability and that we would lose power and influence around the world without it. With a reduction in conventional forces, with no harriers or aircraft carriers, Trident is even more important to deter potential attackers and prevent wars. Nuclear weapons research helps in the development of nuclear power which will be essential for an independent energy supply. Both Graeme and Kate concluded that an ideal world would be free of all weapons, nuclear, chemical and conventional, but while Graeme felt that global insecurity means we should hang on to Trident, Kate argued that this instability is the very reason why we should scrap it and set an example, leading the way to global disarmament.

All are welcome to Faringdon Peace Group meetings, whatever their views. First Wednesday of the month, 8.00pm, Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Rd. Faringdon. Wheelchair access and toilet.