

Faringdon Peace Group Meeting April 2013
'The March that Shook Blair' with author Ian Sinclair

Ten years after the largest demonstration in British history against war with Iraq, Ian Sinclair spoke to the Faringdon Peace Group (FPG) about his newly published book 'The March that Shook Blair'. The book, which is based on interviews with those connected to the march – organisers, politicians, media, police, public figures and many ordinary people – gives background information and discusses the impact and legacy of the march. Most FPG members in the room had been part of the 30 strong group from Faringdon who went on the march on 15th February 2003 along with an estimated 1 -2 million others, many of whom had never demonstrated before. Although the march failed in its primary objective of stopping British involvement in the Iraq war, Ian argued that the anti-war movement came very close to persuading the government to withdraw from the initial invasion and necessitated authorisation from the UN and a vote in parliament. It has influenced decisions about going to war since then.

In ignoring the voice of the people represented by the march, Tony Blair lost the trust of the British people to the extent that 1 in 4 now regards him as a war criminal. Ten years on, politicians are more honest in admitting they would have been against the war had they not believed the lies about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Faith in politicians was permanently damaged.

The 'Muslim Association of Great Britain' was involved in the organization of the march along with 'Stop the War' and 'Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament'. Some feel that this co-operation and engagement helped community relations but others saw it as tokenistic and temporary. It may even have strengthened the terrorist position as suggested by a failed suicide bomber in 2005 who said, 'I am against war. I marched in peace rallies and no-one listened'.

Many young marchers were politicised and radicalised by their involvement in the march but also disillusioned by the ineffectiveness of demonstrations and have gone on to found direct action campaigns such as 'Plane Stupid' and 'Occupy'.

Despite disappointment that the march did not stop the war, those at the meeting who had been part of it felt it was worthwhile and were proud to have been there. Jennie Chesterton showed her scrapbook of photos of the day which brought back good memories.

Ian's book 'The March that Shook Blair – An oral history of 15th February 2003' (ISBN 978 0 946409 17 4) is published by Peace News Press, price £10.

Faringdon Peace Group meets on the first Wednesday of the month, 8.00pm in the Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Rd. More info from Jennie: 01367-710308 or Karen 01367-241707, karen@vogt.org.uk