

GRANDPARENTS FOR A SAFE EARTH. NEWSLETTER no.4: SPRING 2017



“We are a network of grandparents and elders who care deeply about the world our descendants will inherit. We have learned that the current plans of energy companies and governments will, if not radically changed, put our grandchildren’s future at risk. We seek to cooperate and enter into dialogue with others. Where other actions fail, we are prepared to take direct action, in a spirit of non-violence and respect.” (from our website).



Here is our news since our last newsletter in December 2016:



Some of our members lodged an objection – and attended a meeting - with their local planning authority about the proposed expansion by a further 50%, of Cribbs Causeway (left), the largest out-of-town shopping centre in the West of England, on the grounds that such an expansion would involve an increase in car use, and therefore in emissions of climate-damaging Carbon Dioxide and Nitrogen Oxides gases. Recently the proposal has been put on hold until a Government inquiry has been held, and we are following further developments closely.

Shopping centres are a major symbol of a seemingly endless increase in consumption, and our group has spent time in the past few months getting to grips with the idea of the “degrowth economy”, which challenges the assumptions of the dominant neo-liberal discourse. At our



recent study day (right) we looked specifically at the ideas of Professor Clive Spash and his critique of the Paris



Climate Change Summit (COP21) in December 2015. (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2016.1161119>). He takes issue with the Summit for acting as if “There are no elites consuming the vast majority of the world’s resources, no multi-

But is this non-binding agreement trustworthy? national corporations or fossil fuel industry needing to be controlled, no capital accumulating competitive systems promoting trade and fighting over resources and emitting vast amounts of GHGs through military expenditure and wars, and no governments expanding fossil fuel use and dependency”, and concludes, “The unreality of this document is only matched by the unreality of the praise given to it by the media and others.” In support of this claim he puzzles over why the Paris Agreement has had no effect on the stability of the financial markets, and did not lead to fossil-fuel investments becoming “stranded assets”. For more details see bit.ly/Profspash

So, we are writing to public figures such as Members of Parliament, Members of the European Parliament and local politicians stressing that our current economic system, with its insistence on continuous economic growth, is inevitably linked with issues of climate change as well as permanent damage to the planet. At the end of our analysis we simply pose the question: “can you see a flaw in his analysis?” Similarly, we have contacted the umbrella group Climate Coalition (www.theclimatecoalition.org), of which

we are members, expressing concern that the problem of endless economic growth has not so far featured adequately in their campaigning around climate change.

In a new venture, two of our members have just started running a University of the Third Age (U3A) study group in Taunton on climate change. They are planning to discuss the concerns they and other grandparents (and other elders) share for future generations. They have also made links with local Quakers and Transition Town groups in the local screening of climate-change films such as *Before the Flood* and *Demain (Tomorrow)*.



Many of us draw public-sector pensions, and are concerned that our pension providers are still investing heavily (8-10% of the total is common) in corporations that are involved in fossil fuel extraction. Although an increasing number of authorities are beginning to divest from the worst of these investments, many still adhere narrowly to the basic principle (or fiduciary obligation, as it is called) to provide the best possible financial returns on investments for their pensioners. Some of our group are regular attenders at their former employers' pensions committees and raise public questions about the moral (and economic) sustainability of these investments. The Government requires all local authorities pensions schemes to combine into new regional pensions pools, and we are already in contact with the secretary of our own new West Country "pool", not least to make sure that we can follow and challenge its proceedings (see <https://www.brunelpensionpartnership.org/en/news/2016/12/newsletter-issue-7>). We also take comfort from the action of Swiss grandparent colleagues, who one of our members met at a conference last year, in their campaign (see their video on <http://www.retraites-sans-risques.ch/>).



Above: Wall mural in Falls Road, Belfast



We have all been distressed to hear about the current famines in Africa. The media, politicians and the aid agencies have focused on political conflict and on the need to provide relief aid. Good. But it took the United Nations Secretary-General to add: "climate change works as a key enhancer of other factors - desertification, food insecurity, water scarcity. And so, not only do we have the repetition of crisis, but we risk to have more and more, and with more devastating consequences". So, as grandparents and elders we also try to think about the effects of climate change that are happening here and now, and not only in the distant future.

And finally, some good news: Member Phil was one of the runners-up for this year's Sheila McKechnie Foundation Award. SMK is a charity that supports campaigners to make an impact. Our congratulations.

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Follow our actions on www.youtube.com by typing Grandparents For A Safe Earth into the search box.