

Bristol Dissent! Briefing

INFORMATION FOR ACTION

Climate Change

While it seems to be in the news a lot, Climate change is perhaps the issue that has received least attention compared to the scale of destruction that life on earth is facing - yet hardly a day goes by without another scientific report being issued warning of the massive scale of the problem, supported by almost every independent climatologist in the world.

Ticking time-bomb

Over 2,000 scientists are directly working for the United Nations to study climate change and its impacts. This is one of the largest mobilisations of scientific research ever undertaken. All the scientists agree that we have a huge problem, suspected ever since 19th century researchers identified the ability of Carbon Dioxide to store large amounts of heat. In 1997 3,000 scientists signed a Statement on Climatic Disruption. That year 1,500 scientists including 110 Nobel Prize winners signed a letter to US President Clinton calling for immediate action. In 1999 the 35,000 scientists in the US Geophysical Union adopted a position calling for action. In May 2001, the national scientific academies of 17 nations including the UK Royal Society signed a statement calling for action. Ex-transport minister Stephen Byers recently called it an ecological time bomb, with the world less than ten years from runaway global warming and rising sea levels. In 2004, the UK Government's chief scientific advisor Sir David King said climate change is the most serious problem facing the world, more serious than international terrorism.

Destructive addictions

All this while the government goes to war on the basis of being 45 minutes from non-existent weapons of mass destruction, in order to continue satisfying our fossil fuel addicted lurch towards slow extinction. As yet serious action on this issue has not materialized, and there is not going to be much point campaigning after the waves start washing over our shores and the oil reserves are too expensive to drill. While environmentalists see climate change as a threat to our weather, the US government sees it as a threat to American freedoms. While Blair has been delighting NGOs with promises of a low-carbon economy, he has been busy pleasuring Bush by

lobbying to remove stringent emissions targets from Europe's climate policy.

Houston, we have a problem.

Perhaps the greatest triumph of the G8 governments (with the exception of the US) has been to shift the focus of concern over global warming onto the Kyoto agreement: which requires puny cuts of 5% in emissions (excluding aircraft emissions), somewhat at odds with the immediate 60-80% cut in CO2 output scientists are demanding to avert disaster.

Yet big business, far from worrying about the collapse of capitalism, are increasingly realising that it offers major potential for increasing profits. While buzzwords like low carbon economy enter the greenwashed corporate environmental statements, carbon trading is embraced as a new and profitable branch of the futures and commodities markets. Smokestack corporations can simply relocate to countries like Vietnam or South Africa, soaking up those free carbon credits while exporting their



pollution to the world's poor. The nuclear industry has also received an unexpected breath of life from its deathbed, arguing that the only way to cut emissions while continuing with business as usual is for a massive expansion of nuclear energy. Note the assumption there.

State of denial

So what can be done at the grassroots? We have to be honest about the mess we are in regarding climate campaigning. The green movement has comprehensively failed to drive this as an issue. By focusing on energy alternatives, such as carpeting the country with windmills, it has provided the nuclear industry with the agenda it needs to cast itself as the great white hope (try asking pro-nuclear campaigners how much fossil fuel the nuclear industry consumes



annually). Yes, wind and solar are going to be important for a low-energy future, but the agenda of massive over-consumption of energy, despoiling of the seas, forests and air, inequality and military-industrial oppression of much of humanity needs to be confronted.

So it is a desperate situation, almost as if a magic bullet were required to penetrate our state of denial. We cannot leave it just to the scientists to dismantle the carbon machine. Fortunately the ideas are already being translated into action: Rising Tide, an international network of direct activists, are active in relation to the G8 summit and held a tour of the UK in 2001, resulting in many innovative ideas. Perhaps by identifying the most oppressive and unwelcome forms of over-consumption in your own neighbourhood, be it the SUVs driving past your house or the floodlit billboard round the corner, an effective target can be found for that magic bullet.

Resources

g8climateaction@lists.riseup.net

Dissent! organising list for action related to the G8 and climate change.

www.risingtide.org.uk

UK grassroots network of direct action climate change campaigners.

Website contains briefings on climate change, tips for giving talks, countering pseudo-scientific global warming myths, etc.

www.campaigncc.org

Campaign Against Climate Change, arranges weekly vigil at the US embassy and other protests; gives talks on climate change.

High Tide: News from a Warming World

Tales from a global journey on the chilling and far-reaching devastation already being wrought by climate change by a former member of Corporate Watch UK. See www.marklynas.org

www.carbonweb.org

Platform - understanding the psychology of oil corporations and how they operate.

www.NoNewOil.org

An online 34 Page booklet on the oil industry, oil and climate change and ideas for actions that can be taken to change things!

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