

British Pugwash Group

Annual Report for the Year 2003/4 and Future Plans

The Past Year

Our main public meeting this year, which focused on the implications for Britain of the current wave of “unconventional terrorism”, heard talks from Prof Harry Smith, Dr Julian Perry-Robinson and Dr Chris Watson, dealing with the implications of, and threats from, biological, chemical and nuclear weapons. The meeting, which had been organized by Prof Jack Harris, was well attended and stimulated lively and constructive discussion.

Earlier in the year some ten UK participants, several of whom submitted papers, were able to attend the Pugwash Annual Conference in Nova Scotia, around the theme of *Advancing Human Security: The Role of Technology and Politics*. This was based mainly in Halifax but, with a full day of meetings and sociability as the guests of the people of the town of Pugwash, it was a particularly memorable event

Iraq and related defence issues have been very much in our minds this year and we were disappointed that Mr Robin Cook, although expressly sympathetic, was unable to accept our invitation to take part in a public discussion meeting on the subject. Through the Chairman, however, we have been in detailed correspondence with the Ministry of Defence, both over issues of concern in the 2003 Defence White Paper and also, more specifically, on what we see as inconsistencies in the Government’s position on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Extracts from this correspondence are posted on our website. We are also in periodic contact with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Chairman is currently pressing them to help in stimulating dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian scientists.

Breaking somewhat from our usual inhibitions over such joint enterprises, we are collaborating with a number of like-minded groups in an effort to raise public awareness of nuclear weapons issues. Initially the aims of this project are to carry out public opinion research and to promote public awareness of issues through public meetings, involvement in school and college projects, and website publicity. Some initial funding has been raised, including from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, and British Pugwash is currently acting as the host organization, in particular by providing accommodation for the research assistant, Samia Liaquat Ali Khan, who has been coordinating the project. Prof John Finney, who has been our representative, will report more fully on this project at the AGM.

We remain concerned that our membership should more fully reflect the British academic community, and particularly those actively “in the saddle”. One move that we have made in this direction has been to suggest to a selection of Royal Society Fellows that they might consider joining the Group. Partly as a result of this we have had a gratifying increase in membership during the year, and this will no doubt be referred to in more detail by our Treasurer in his report to the AGM. Also, in response to some suggestions from members, and in an attempt better to accommodate the needs of “working” members, we are experimenting this year with timing public meetings for an evening, rather than afternoon. We shall be on the look out for members’ reactions to this change.

We are sending a copy of Pugwash Newsletter to all members, on a trial basis. We shall be asking whether you find it valuable to have hard copies, or whether you

would be happy to access the Newsletter on the web. The latter arrangement would give more prompt access, and would obviously save funds, but we appreciate that some members may still prefer a hard copy. You may have spotted that our website is now under new, and much improved, management (the expression “sexed-up” somehow springs to mind!). We hope that it is useful and, as always, we shall be glad to hear any ideas on how it could be better still.

See www.pugwash.org/nationalgroups.

Finally, on a particularly happy note, a number of us recently had the pleasure of joining Jo Rotblat and some of his friends to celebrate his 95th birthday.

Future Plans

We have for long felt that pressure should be maintained to question government policy on nuclear weapons, particularly in the light of any eventual plans to replace Trident. Our two earlier, published studies laid the groundwork for this and we are now planning a more concise, reader friendly publication, provisionally as an “Economist-style” article. We shall enlarge on this plan at the AGM. We are also considering how to move further to apply pressure to government on the Trident replacement issue, especially as a decision to develop a replacement could be seen as conflicting with our legal commitment under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Accompanying this report is an announcement of a British Pugwash session on Eliminating Weapons of Mass Destruction, as part of the 2004 British Association “Festival of Science”, at Exeter. This will be on the morning of Wednesday 8th September and will be followed first by a short session, organised by Scientists for Global Responsibility, on *The Ethics of Military Science and Technology*, and then by a lunchtime “Meet the Professor” occasion, aimed at sixth-form and college students. This should make a good morning and we have been offered a number of free registrations for that day, so please contact the office if you are interested.

Another topic of obvious concern at the moment is the way in which intelligence, good or bad, influences international peace and security. We have however had difficulty finding a suitable and willing speaker, and any suggestions from members would be welcome.

For our December public meeting this year we are starting to plan around questions to do with possible future weaponisation of space, and hope to have more details on this shortly.

2005 has been designated by UNESCO as an “International Year of Physics”, and will also be the 60th anniversary of Hiroshima, and the 50th of the Russell-Einstein manifesto. To contribute to these events, we have plans afoot for a one or 2-day meeting on Science and Society, for which, again, we shall have more details available soon.

The 2004 Pugwash Annual Conference is due to be held in October, in Seoul, on the theme of *Bridging a Divided World through International Co-operation and Disarmament*. We expect there to be four British Pugwash participants, who may be joined by one or more Student/Young members.