

Notes from the third Rethinking Security session

Our third session on Rethinking Security was, as advertised, focussed on action that can take the conversation out to others with the aim of opening up thinking and shifting opinion in relation to UK policy. Participants were asked to come with ideas to share on what we could do, first as individuals, then in the various groups, circles and movements we belonged to and finally as participants in this conversation, to date. Twenty-one of us participated.

As it was in the first two sessions, energy was high and ideas flowed. And, as before, the time was far too short. The first task we were given was to think about what we could do personally, write our intentions of post-its and then discuss them with one other person before sticking them on the big board for us all to browse through.

Personal plans for action majored on use of the internet, particularly Twitter and Facebook, and on conversations with anybody we could have them with. They also included trying to put our beliefs into action in the way we live.

Some other ideas for action that emerged in the plenary discussion that followed came up again later, for instance on public meetings and work in schools.

Many of the ideas for personal action were focussed on things to be done in relation to, or with, specific groups. These were listed on flipchart and in some cases grouped, as follows:

1. Bath Anti-cuts Campaign
2. Cultural and academic groups such as BRLSI, New Oriel Hall Film Club, Bath Festival and Bath University (I-SEE and other groups and departments), Scientists for Global Responsibility plus 38 Degrees
3. Addressing climate change: Travel Watch, Transition Bath and Fossil-free Banes?
4. Young people in education, particularly in schools (learning from practice in Bath Woodcraft Folk)
5. Political parties as represented in the meeting: Green Party, Labour Party and LibDems
6. Peace groups including Bath Stop War, which includes CND, CAAT and MAW (Movement for the Abolition of War), plus UNA
7. Quakers

Quakers and those involved in the Bath Anti-cuts Campaign chose not to use time in this meeting to talk among themselves. The others became the focus of discussion in groups, as chosen by participants. There was a constant hum of animated and concentrated conversation from all of them and it was hard to cut them short for lack of time. They could clearly have taken their ideas further. Their reports were as follows:

Group I: Cultural and academic circles and others

The discussion in this group was focussed on the issues that needed to be raised in public venues. What came through strongly was that climate change was a security issue. It was noted that the U.S. military had identified it as such. The group proposed that a forum should be created to educate the public on this and suggested a public meeting (see later) and petitions. Other points from this group were fed into the last part of the session, on our collective options.

Group II: Political Party members

This group presented its proposals for action on flipchart:

- Speak out
- Work for democracy
- Use Facebook more for the anti-war message and Britain.org to promote true security
- Challenge NATO assumptions and reduce spending on Defence/War
- Enter into discussions with those of other views
- Seek to influence the media
- Be more active
- Change transport priorities
- Have a presence in the 2018 Bath Festival

Group III: Schools (a discussion based on the ideas voiced earlier)

1. Provide relevant material for assemblies/PSHE (curriculum on ‘Personal, social, health and economic education’) on security matters
2. On bullying, volunteering policy help and materials linked to security and democracy
3. On gender issues – ‘sexting’, power, self-esteem, peer pressure – offer mentoring?
4. Democratise the process, as in Woodcraft Folk

Group IV: Peace (Bath Stop War Coalition)

- On our weekly peace vigil in front of the Abbey (Sat. 11.30 – 12.30), Have themed discussion topics such as Syria, What is Security? Did you know ...? (about different things), What does Trident mean for your security?
- Cultivate local media, especially commercial radio, and develop our use of Twitter for outreach
- Send speakers to other groups

- Get the message out via local events, e.g. a fete
- Undertake a ‘listening project’ (use questionnaires, with open questions, to get people talking about what security means for them and how it could be achieved)
- Street theatre, e.g. with the ‘Trident monster’
- Share Rethinking Security results and develop a list of challenging questions and answers to them

Since none of these ideas could be fully elaborated in the given time, some may fall by the wayside – for the time being, at least. But the thinking shared and ideas generated will stimulate and inform the future involvement of those who took part and ideas will be taken forward in the different groups represented, with opportunities being created or grasped when they arise.

Our final, brief focus was on some potential follow-on action by our circle of Rethinking Security participants. Ideas listed were:

- ❖ Use the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration as a platform for our thinking
- ❖ Celebrate peacemaking and wars that didn’t happen; learning more about UN achievements
- ❖ Focus on Syria, e.g. through an exhibition of children’s pictures of life in a camp
- ❖ Events on Conscientious Objectors (already planned)
- ❖ Create opportunities to speak to people outside our own circles, e.g. by getting BANES to organise an event or through a campaign for divestment [from noxious companies]
- ❖ Hold a public meeting on Climate Change, Conflict and Security, with expert speakers
- ❖ Organising/supporting themed displays, e.g. at Bath Stop War’s Saturday Vigil
- ❖ Holding a public meeting or ‘hearing’ at which participants in this process present their thinking to Bath MP Ben Howlett and ask for his response, then the responses and questions to him or us by others

Again, there was insufficient time to discuss these ideas other than in a very cursory way. However, we were agreed that reaching out beyond our own circles was important and the proposal for a *themed presence on Saturdays in front of the Abbey* (at the usual vigil time of 11.30 – 12.30) was agreed on, as one way of awakening public awareness, which would also be good preparation for a *public hearing with Ben Howlett MP* (which should bring in Conservative Party members too).

A public meeting on climate and conflict as related issues would also have the potential to bring in a wider audience and would, like other suggestions, be something to take forward if we can.

There are many other ideas that could be pursued because we came up with so many! How can we harness the energy and ideas we generated during these three sessions of Rethinking Security, keep up the momentum? How much can we realistically hope and work for?

We had plenty of ideas of what to do individually and in our own particular groups. Some of the thinking about combined action and synergy can begin at the next Bath Stop War Coalition planning meeting, on Wednesday July 6th at Bath Friends Meeting House, starting at 7.30. Please join us then, if you can and would like to, or come and talk to others and swell the numbers at our weekly Saturday vigil, even for a short time. We will notify you of themed events.

Meanwhile, unless I hear to the contrary, I will keep you on the list for occasional mailings, as all those present last night requested. (Do let me know if you would rather not be included.) It would also be good to know how many of you would be happy to have your names made visible to others, so that you can be in touch with each other directly. The list could be split between those who would be like that and those who wouldn't.

For now, thank you once again for your participation. It's been great for us all, I think, to have had a chance to think together in such an interesting and engaged group of people and to share so much concern and determination. Many thanks from Bath Stop War and UNA members.

I will be proud to report back about our sessions at the July meeting of the Ammerdown Group. Remember that its website, with its new Rethinking Security document, is there to provide resources for taking this Rethinking into new circles: www.rethinkingsecurity.org.uk

Diana Francis, June 2016