

FABIAN HAMILTON MP, SHADOW MINISTER FOR PEACE AND DISARMAMENT

Faringdon Peace Group was grateful to Fabian Hamilton MP for making time in his busy schedule to speak at their online April meeting about nuclear disarmament and other peace-related issues. He was the first Labour MP to be elected for Leeds North East in 1997 and since 2016 has been the shadow Minister for Peace and Disarmament, a post created by Jeremy Corbyn and continued by Keir Starmer.

Fabian began with a scathing critique of the Government's recent 'Integrated Review' of defence and foreign policy strategy, particularly the decision to increase the number of nuclear warheads. This flies in the face of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NNPT), now in its 50th year, and is against the spirit of the new Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) supported by over 100 states around the world. He believes this diminishes our credibility and tarnishes our reputation, leaving us isolated on the world stage and making it difficult to negotiate with rogue states. The Conservative Government claims it is 'committed to multilateral disarmament and a world without nuclear weapons' but has no strategy to bring it about and is increasing its own stockpile rather than reducing it. The Labour Party in contrast, has laid out steps to achieve nuclear disarmament. It has a clear 'no first use' policy – as opposed to the Government's policy of 'deliberate ambiguity'.

Fabian was honest in admitting that, while he himself is a unilateralist and has been a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) since his teens, as a member of the Labour front bench he must obey the Party's policy in favour of Trident replacement. He had figures showing that the majority of the British public and even some Conservative MPs support nuclear disarmament and believes that if Labour is to win the next election it will need to make a case for multilateral disarmament, conflict resolution and diplomacy in line with the public mood, rather than aggression and sabre-rattling. He thinks that we can no longer go back to business as usual.

He also believes that the UK has a role to play in reducing tension between the US and China in encouraging them to the negotiating table when relevant treaties are reviewed. The biggest driver of insecurity is inequality between nations and the best way to secure the future in his view is through the framework of international law and treaties.

As both a Labour Friend of Israel and a Labour Friend of Palestine and the Middle East, Fabian seeks to understand both sides of the conflict and believes that an independent Palestinian state is essential to the future of both countries. Though he is Jewish by birth - his grandfather was a Rabbi - and he has family in Israel, Fabian is strongly critical of the Israeli government's treatment of Palestinians and its secrecy regarding its nuclear weapons programme.

Fabian voted with the Labour Party in opposing the government's recent Police, Crime and Sentencing Bill, describing it as repressive in clamping down on free speech and public protest, and failing to tackle the issue of violence against women: it proposes harsher sentences for damaging a statue for example than for rape. He concluded by praising the power of collective organisation rather than individualism and the importance of engaging the younger generation in all the issues he had raised with us.

Karen Vogt

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