

# Leamington *Spark*<sup>#4</sup>

In this issue (16<sup>th</sup> Feb 2004), the *Spark* burns brightly about – **Depleted Uranium weapons** near Leamington?, the regressive nature of **council tax**, community **renewable energy**, a new **left-of-Labour political party**, and the full magnitude of **climate change**.

**(SORRY...Event listings will be back in Spark 5)**

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Article by Rhisiart Gwilym

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**Leaking sources in this Midlands region are telling a terrifying tale.**

The whisper is that somewhere hereabouts depleted uranium munitions are made or completed in a secure secret factory facility. Eventually they are flown out of Britain to one of the USuk empire's ongoing colonial wars, by secret night-flights from Coventry airport.

Chances are that one of Britain's major arms dumps, at Kineton in South Warwickshire, is in the loop too, storing the criminal munitions until needed. DM Kineton has its own dedicated military rail-link directly to Coventry.

So say the whispers. Spark asks: what if they're true?

## **What price an accident?**

What if accident, terrorist attack, or just bog-standard human carelessness lets a cloud of uranium dust loose, here in the English Midlands? What if it already has? You'll have to dig about a bit on the Net to find the answers. The deafening silence from the British mainstream, hand-in-glove-with-power media is carefully not giving

them to us. (Answers? They're not even admitting the existence of the questions!)

What would happen is a slightly smaller version of the huge crime against humanity which the USuk aggressor war-criminals occupying Iraq have let loose against the entire Iraqi civilian population - and, incidentally, against their own

Whitehall are ever brought before the International Criminal Court at Den Haag, the charges they would face would be under the Geneva Conventions and the Nuremberg Principles: international law treaties to which both Britain and the US are - nominally - signatories.

The USuk invaders of Iraq made reckless use of many tons of



**17 Jan:- Local protestors expose possible storage of illegal Depleted Uranium weaponry at Kineton military base, highlighting lethal contaminative effect of these weapons on the people of Iraq, and the risk of experiencing radioactive fallout in our own back yard.**

## **A local Chernobyl?**

expendable, cannon-fodder rank-and-file military personnel, too.

The imperial occupiers refuse steadfastly to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency into Iraq, to monitor, advise, and help the Iraqis to deal with the horrifying upsurge of radiation sicknesses now afflicting them. Why?

Why this obdurate refusal of a *genuine* humanitarian intervention? Scared of what the IAEA might tell the world? Scared it can't be gagged-and-spun?

If - dream it! - the imperialist gangsters in Washington and

depleted uranium munitions. Since then, they have refused to admit the seriousness of what they have done, and to begin the clear up.

### **DU use is a major war-crime**

There is a strong prima facie case that this deliberate, countrywide contamination of Iraq, and - inevitably - its neighbours, is a major war-crime. It may even be in the most serious category of all, which is deemed to contain all the lesser ones: crimes against humanity.

At the end of WWII, at the tribunals at Nuremberg and Tokyo, people were hung for such crimes. (Victors'

'justice', of course: none of the people responsible for fire-bombing hundreds of thousands of helpless civilians in Dresden, Tokyo and elsewhere, or for nuking Hiroshima and Nagasaki whilst the Japanese were actually offering surrender, were even tried.)

For these reasons, the antiwar campaigners Warwickshire Weapons Inspectors continue to act against the illegal munitions believed to be passing through DM Kineton. The picture is of a recent blockade of its main gate, during the Britain-wide day of action called by the 'Reclaim The Bases' movement.

WWI state in their Media Release that an escape of DU from Kineton, into the countryside of this grossly-overcrowded island, could render large areas of the Midlands subject to compulsory mass evacuation, and create a no-go area like the Chernobyl region, which would have to remain in force for decades or even centuries.

See:- Campaign Against Depleted Uranium:- <http://www.cadu.org.uk/>

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## Council Tax: too regressive!

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**Warwick District Council** is to raise council tax levels by 24% in a move it claims is necessary to combat overspending and to pay for new areas of responsibility.

The increase of services provided by local government over the past few years – including CCTV cameras, recycling and internet services – led last February to the district council announcing a £350,000 overspend. They claim that the choice is a simple one – cut services or raise council tax. Meanwhile Whitehall (responding to popular pressure against the rises) has moved to cap rises in the tax at 5%.

The introduction of council taxes in 1993 was a response to the widespread rioting and popular revolt against the poll tax. However its increasing importance in the finances of local government has led many to contemplate just how fair the council tax system really is.

Council tax is levied on the value of the property in which you live. It has 8 different bands and within Warwick district council, bills range from £700 for the lowest bracket of homes (those worth less than £40,000) to as much as £1600 for homes worth up to £120, 000 and reaching a ceiling at £2200 for anyone living in homes worth £320,000 or more.

### Income not considered

There are basic fundamental problems with the way this tax is calculated. First off, income is entirely irrelevant to how much people pay. If your next door neighbour earns twice as much as you, they pay exactly the same as you do, which makes it a much lower proportion of their income. Whilst a bill of £1500 is a great deal to someone earning £15,000 a year (around 10% of their income), it's much less important to someone earning twice that. Whilst some poorer families will receive council tax benefit (means tested, obviously), a massive amount of working people will struggle to meet the council tax demand. Meanwhile, their richer neighbours wonder what all the fuss is about.

This is not just theory; in practice the poorest 10% of people pay four times the proportion of their income into council tax than the richest 10%. Remembering, of course, that even if they were paying the same proportion of their income, it would still be harder for families in and around the poverty line than those more comfortably off.

Furthermore, the system takes no account of just who is living in a property. Your home is worth so much and therefore you pay so much. This completely ignores the

differing financial situations of all sorts of people. It makes no distinction between those renting and those who own their homes.

Among working people, those renting will almost certainly live in a home that they could not afford to buy (which is why they're renting in the first place) and yet the council tax expects them to pay as much as someone who can buy their home. Neither does it take into account those that have worked all their lives to buy their homes only to retire and see their income subside to a level that is well below that which they earned during their working life. Whilst council tax might once have been relevant to their earnings it ceases to be affordable when they retire.

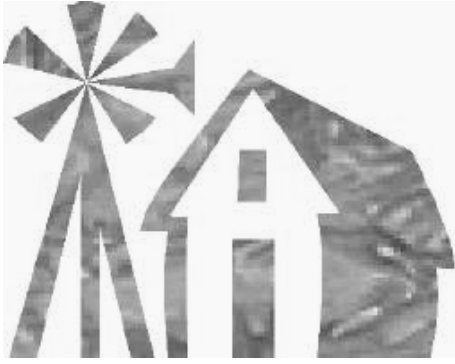
### Pensioners hit hard

Some pensioners are eligible for council tax benefit, although around 1/3 of those eligible do not claim that assistance because of the convoluted and demeaning means testing system. The poorest 20% of pensioners are paying 6 times the proportion of their income that the richest 20% of the working population are paying.

The tide though, is turning against council tax. A group of around 2000 protestors, mainly pensioners and people from other vulnerable sections of our society, descended on Downing Street in January to present a 35,000 strong petition to the government, clutching 'axe the tax' banners and calling on the government to 'scrap it, not cap it'.

The fight against council tax is crucial in fighting off this government's Tory agenda. Taxes should be met fairly by everyone in our society based on their ability to pay, not on a flat rate which punishes the poor and limits what the rich contribute.

**The campaign against council tax is led by a non-party organisation 'Is it fair', which organised the protest at Downing Street. To get involved visit [www.isitfair.co.uk](http://www.isitfair.co.uk)**



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# Local action on renewable energy

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## Event review

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*"Bright Ideas: A community event on renewable energy for Warwick District"* January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Sikh Community Centre, 1 Mill Street

**This event** was organised by Action21, an organisation which (with support from the local council) aims to promote ecologically sustainable development in the Warwick District area. Taking the grave threat of human-induced climate change as its motivation, the intention was to promote the development of renewable energy schemes (and energy conservation schemes) in Warwick District itself.

### 'Localisation' crucial

For me, the implicit acknowledgement that energy systems should be localised (i.e. production brought closer to consumption) was absolutely critical. The problem of rural resistance to large-scale wind-farm development, for example, can be at least partially addressed by urban consumers taking more responsibility for the energy they consume.

Following an introduction by Action 21 Sustainability Officer Jenny Sansom, the crowd of approximately 30 people was addressed by four speakers, each taking a slightly different angle. Stephan Harrison, a scientist from Oxford University, quickly explained the origins of the scientific consensus behind human-induced climate change.

### 10% renewables by 2010?

Richard Davies (of Marches Energy Agency) gave a gloomy account of the UK's disappointing progress towards having 10% of energy generation from renewable technologies by 2010; the figure currently stands at a feeble 3%.

Next, David Julien (of WEEAC) explained that domestic energy consumption accounts for 30% of total UK consumption and that the average home could (and should!) cut its annual energy bill from approximately £600 to £200 by taking appropriate energy-saving measures.

Finally, Ian Preston of Community Action for Energy (CAfE) explained how his organisation was helping to co-ordinate co-operative networking between communities embarking on grassroots energy initiatives. He demonstrated the wide range of community-level technologies that are now available and increasingly in use, such as small-scale wind power, micro-hydro, solar (heating and electricity generation), biomass and combined-heat-&-power (CHP).

Following the speakers there was a period of informal discussion and at the end of the event questionnaires were collected which had asked attendees for ideas on possible local renewable energy projects. Usefully, these gave examples of projects elsewhere in the UK that might be of a scale suitable for Warwick District.

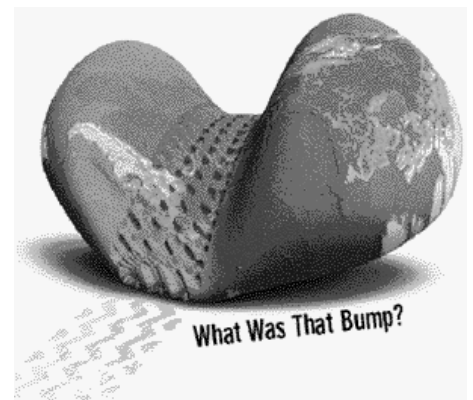
I asked Jenny Sansom what she thought about the view, held by some radicals, that such community-led projects are an inadequate response to a systemic problem and/or rather too close to

the concept of private enterprise. She made the point (with which I agree) that we all use energy, and we urgently need it to be produced sustainably, so would we rather have our energy expenditure go to private behemoths such as Powergen, or have it re-circulate in the local economy...?

### No spoon-feeding – get active!

Personally, I was quite surprised to find that no concrete proposals for the area were proposed at the event. However, it has since dawned on me that the initiative, which is at an embryonic stage, needs community input and support to ensure its feasibility, and that the meeting was a first step in harvesting ideas and enthusiasm. In other words – GET INVOLVED!!

**More info:-** <http://www.action21.co.uk>  
<http://www.est.co.uk/cafe>



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## Crash, burn, extinguish

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### Comment by concerned reader

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**Spark 3's article on the lunacy of air-travel expansion** is dead right as far as it goes. But that's not far enough. What we're facing here is not just a vague ecological nuisance: a bit more drought or stormy weather, a few more thousand people killed far away in poor countries.

Briefly and bluntly: We probably, our young people and children certainly,

are heading into one of the worst global catastrophes in the whole span of life on Earth. Not in the sweet by and by. Not soon. Already underway now, and accelerating remorselessly every year.

The oil industry barons are already quietly discussing amongst themselves the fact that Peak Oil is already here: Some time in about the next five years, and maybe already, world demand and world supply of cheap, easily accessible oil and gas will begin to separate, one still going mindlessly up, the other relentlessly down.

And there's nothing anyone can do about it, because there's almost no more cheap, quick and easy oil or gas left, and what is left is shrinking ever faster, with no big new fields left to find. So say the oil industry experts themselves.

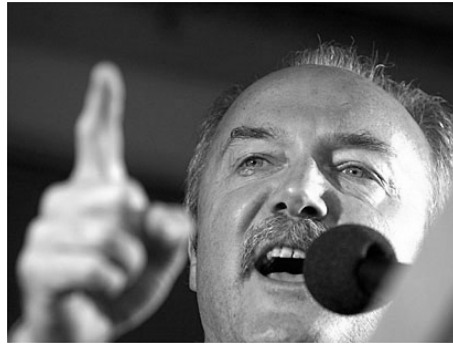
Meanwhile, we've already burnt into the atmosphere a huge flood of fossil carbon. This, and the last pools still left - which, with utter, idiot fecklessness we propose now to burn also in one last suicidal splurge - has begun a horrifying process of climate catastrophe. This will kill off about a fifth to a quarter of all the Earth's life-web, even if we slam on all the brakes at once right now, and even more if, as seems likely, we can't bring ourselves to stop till the tank runs dry.

The end of the oil, for a global economy which has made itself utterly dependent on this one energy source, means a high risk of the collapse of human civilisation.

But climate meltdown could unleash the methane hydrates now sequestered under the polar seas, as happened in the near-fatal mass extinction which ended the Permian Era, quarter of a billion years ago. If that happens, and if it's just a bit worse than last time, Earth could be sterilised, like Mars and Venus.

Puts our piffing little local grouses into perspective, doesn't it?

**More info: Monbiot, July 2003 article: 'Shadow of Extinction', [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com) & Peak Oil articles on 'From The Wilderness' site [www.fromthewilderness.com](http://www.fromthewilderness.com)**



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## RESPECT - The Unity Coalition

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**By Rhisiart Gwilym – again ☺**

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**A new political river is trying to break out from underground and flow broadly in Britain.**

It has begun open public meetings, and Britain-wide conventions to haul itself into existence. One meeting has already happened in Coventry, on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2004. A West Mids. regional convention is scheduled for 1pm on Saturday 6 March, at Carr Lane Community Centre in central Birmingham.

Before the end of March, there will be around twenty such public gatherings across England, with the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) - already holding seats in the Scottish Parliament - carrying the RESPECT flag north of that border.

Already, there is a smell of something biggish going on. The meeting at Coventry University Sports Hall was a bit ragged, but drew an unusually large, and unusually mixed, crowd. The 'National' Convention the following Sunday drew an equally mixed crowd of 1400.

RESPECT is an acronym of the key strands of the Coalition's purpose: Respect, Equality, Socialism, Peace, Environment, Community, and Trade Unionism.

The founders – amongst them George Galloway, Ken Loach, the radical film-maker, George Monbiot, environmental and political writer, Salma Yaqoob, chair of Birmingham Stop The War Coalition, John Rees and Lindsey German, co-founders of the Britain-wide Stop The War Coalition, socialist barrister Nick Wrack, union leaders Bob Crow and Mark Serwotka - proclaim that: -

"There is a crisis of representation, a democratic deficit, at the heart of politics in Britain. We aim to offer a solution to that crisis."

They cite two key facts to support this insight: - Britain recently saw its biggest ever political demonstration, opposing the USuk aggression against Iraq. Yet recent Britain-wide elections have produced the lowest turnouts since records began: - voters not apathetic, but disillusioned about any honest will amongst parliamentarians to serve them.

Despite the predictable barrage of criticisms from other left/radical parties, RESPECT seems to have made a promising start. Already the venerable rail union RMT has been ejected by New Labour. The Scottish RMT has already re-affiliated to the SSP, and the southern half is now being wooed by RESPECT.

If/when the marriage happens, it will put an almighty gale up New Labour. Unions give substantial dues to their affiliated political parties. RESPECT's aim of raising a million pounds to contest all seats in the June 10<sup>th</sup> Euro and London Regional elections will begin to look realistic, and – as they say it will be - a vote of no confidence in Blairism.

**More Info:-**  
<http://www.respectcoalition.org/>