

## Paris Climate Change Talks

A group of us from Redcar and Cleveland travelled to Paris in December for a long weekend to take part in the protests at the end of the Climate Change talks. These were the 21st talks; they have taken place on an annual basis since 1995. The talks have had varying degrees of success but it was generally acknowledged that Paris would be very important if there is to be any chance of limiting the global temperature rise to 2°C

The shootings on 13<sup>th</sup> November had made us slightly apprehensive about going to Paris and, more importantly, the state of emergency introduced by the French government meant that the ambitious demonstrations planned by climate change activists that we had intended to take part in could not take place. Anyway, we had bought our tickets so decided to still go. We went by Eurostar, which is a lovely way to travel, 6 hours from Darlington, some of it spent in the buffet car, watching the French countryside speed past the windows. We arrived at Gare du Nord and took the metro three stops to our hotel. There was a lot of pushing and shoving on this train and attempts were made to pickpocket three out of the four of us, but you have to be very good to outwit a Yorkshire resident so thankfully we hung onto our assets!

Our hotel was in Place de la Republic, a place that became familiar to most of us via the television coverage after the shootings. The monument in the centre of the square remained covered with flowers, candles and messages. The square and other public places were full of young armed soldiers, a sight that is rather unnerving to British eyes. On the first night we walked down the road a short distance and were surprised to find ourselves outside one of the restaurants where shootings had taken place. It had been reopened a few days earlier and a large poster declared. 'Je suis en terrasse', implying solidarity with the five people who had been shot at tables outside the restaurant. The place was busy and as an act of solidarity we also ate there, just four weeks after the shootings had taken place.

The following day we travelled out to the suburbs to a large arts centre that had been taken over by activists for the week. It was called Cent Quatre, referring to its address, 104. Inside there were lots of rooms and halls with different events taking place. In the café we bought beer for young Dutch activists and congratulated an older couple proclaiming themselves to be 'Norwegian grandparents against climate change'.

We went to the hall and sat on the floor as there were no chairs. Babies were being nursed, people greeted each other; it was all very reminiscent of an earlier era. We were addressed in a mixture of French and English. We were in time for a legal briefing. It seemed that some actions were going to take place the following day but that the Police had not yet given their permission. As a result there was a chance that people could be arrested. I will freely share the tips we were given, you never know when they might be useful. First of all, as you are being handcuffed you should clench your fists and bend your hands over in order to make your wrists as

thick as possible. This will stop the cuffs being quite so tight and uncomfortable. Secondly, sign nothing, thirdly state 'I have nothing to declare'. Fourthly in France you can have a solicitor but only if ask for one by name, this required us all to learn the names of several friendly local solicitors. The English grasp of foreign names and languages resulted in all of us preferring to remember the name of one Alice Becker, meaning that she would be vastly overworked while the other five solicitors would rarely be requested.

In the event, on the following day the Police announced that they would allow a demonstration to take place at the base of the Eiffel Tower. This proved to be rather disorganised, not surprisingly, as it was not the original planned demo and there had only been a few hours to make arrangements. We turned up at the tower and milled around for a while before discovering a stage and music. We linked hands with an international crowd of people and overall it was an inspiring event.

The Paris talks have been hailed as a success. It was agreed to limit the temperature increase to 2°C but there was no plan about how this will be achieved. The emissions reductions that countries have promised will result in 3°C of warming and those promised reductions are not even legally binding, there will be no penalty for not meeting them. Climate change will be disastrous for all of us but much worse for people in poorer and more vulnerable countries. As a Filipino campaigner said, 'For us people who are really affected by climate change, we need to change the slogan, '1.5° to stay alive' to '1.5° we might survive' because already at 0.8° we're already suffering loss of lives. We will pay in the global south in terms of millions of lives and millions of people displaced.'

You may remember that most of the World leaders attended the first day of the talks. Our own David Cameron spoke movingly about the need to take action and about how he would not know what to say to his grandchildren in the future if he failed to address the issue now. These were fine words but sadly they have not resulted in any actions that might achieve the aims. A month before the talks Cameron dismantled a total of ten green initiatives which were favouring alternative energy. Within a week of the talks ending the Tory government passed a bill agreeing to allow fracking in areas of natural beauty. As one of the placards in Paris said 'Leave the oil in the soil'. Put simply if we are to stand any chance of achieving the 2°C target then we have to stop burning oil now. Experts say that the 2°C target is achievable, but only just. It will require significant changes and we need our politicians to walk the walk and not just talk the talk.

As the climate change activists say, we need system change not climate change and we are running out of time. If you would like to be involved in lobbying for change then please join your local Global Justice movement. We meet at the Marine Hotel and we often take part in actions locally. Our contact email is [globaljusticecleveland@gmail.com](mailto:globaljusticecleveland@gmail.com)