

Chester World Development Forum

Forum Meeting Tuesday 13 September 2022 at
7.00pm at the Unity Centre



Talk by Dr. Mark Bendall, Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at the University of Chester on "Challenges in Global Politics - Mis-use and Mis-Governance".

Mark began by saying that he had specifically kept the title of his talk “vague” so as to keep an openness about the issues up for discussion. He then posed the question – how are we governed? The UK is known as an advanced liberal democracy, but realistically, how much say do we have in governance?

To explore this issue, Mark introduced us to the ISO – the International Standardisation Organisation. Most people are not aware of this organisation, but its influence is present in all walks of life. His first prop was an ordinary light bulb, and he asked us how safe do we feel when using a light bulb? Few people realise how much effort and many “procedures” have gone into making light bulbs safe to use. But, in tacitly accepting these standards, are we in fact being told what we’re allowed and what we’re not allowed to do? His thesis was that those who control the standards effectively exert control over the users. Some would say that the ISO benefits us because it gives a safe and level playing field. However, the public at large has no say in the setting of standards by the ISO, and no idea who is behind the ISO or who the ISO is responsible to, or how transparently it operates.

Mark urged us to think broadly about the exercise of the power that corporate bodies, like large multi-national companies, banks or hedge funds, wield

Why say no to ISO?

Mark explored the example of water, and research carried out by the Pacific Institute. The Pacific Institute is a global think tank that combines science-based “thought leadership” with “active outreach” to influence local, national, and international efforts to develop sustainable water policies. As a result of pressure from transnational water companies, the ISO began developing new policies for water and sewerage supply in the USA. But local water agencies voted against this as such standardisation would make privatisation of public water utilities even easier. This example served to illustrate Mark’s thesis: that standards are not entirely neutral and can have political aspects that are open to manipulation. In other words, the standards are not just serving the public good but can form part of another (commercial) agenda.

Mark then challenged us to a quiz. We had to write down the titles of as many Abba songs as we could, and then the names of private water companies in the UK. The results revealed that most of us knew more Abba songs than the names of the companies! He suggested that this demonstrated how popular culture, promoted by the media, serves as a distraction from important issues. The important issue here is that the private water companies are beholden only to their shareholders and therefore profit will come before people. Why should water be privatised – everyone needs to have water and, like air, it is a natural resource? Should there be more public accountability and less private power in the water industry?

Is the ISO a vehicle to allow wider corporate power?

Mark's view was that it should be of considerable concern to us that the ISO's activities are neither reported nor transparent. Thinking about transnational corporations, many have been exposed for using unethical methods which are potentially harmful. They do this because they have got to make a profit to satisfy their shareholders. Mark recommended that we watch a YouTube video by Mark Achbar, "The Corporation", and read Mark Thomas' book "Belching out the Devil" about the Coca-cola Corporation.

Generally, Mark indicated that we are experiencing increased authoritarianism and that is very worrying. Look at search engine Google, which many of us use. We search the internet using Google, but at the same time Google searches us for its own ends. This corporate power over our lives is concerning, and undermines the principle of democracy.

Mark gave the example of the recent government policy on the right to protest. It seems that more nations are becoming authoritarian – for example, Hungary, Brazil, Egypt – leading to the disempowering of the individual and the empowering of corporations.

Mark encouraged CWDF to think about what we could do to stop increasing authoritarianism and promote the interests of individual citizens. One example is the anti-fracking campaign. Can we think of other actions to take or support?

Finally, Mark considered whether the ISO should be abolished and replaced with citizens' panels which could give more control to the public.

Business Meeting

- 1 Welcome:** Terry Green chaired the meeting
Present: Terry Green, Angela Macquiban, Catherine Green, Kathryn Gornall, Peter Speirs, Vicki Jenner, Jean Cornes, Lindsay Cussons, Tony Walsh, Tom Ormiston, Ann McCarthy, John Tacon, Diane Williams and Dr Mark Bendall
Apologies: Gill Miller, Bernard Payne, Arnold Wilkes, Linda and Stewart Shuttleworth
- 2 Minutes and matters arising:**
 - Forum 19 July 22 – our apologies but these minutes have not yet been finished
 - Committee meetings:
 - 15 August – planning took place for future meetings and CWDF's presence in Grosvenor Park for the start of the Great Big Green Week. Also discussion took place on keeping an archive of all the past events.
 - 05 September – planning activity and organising rota for GBGW and looking to getting involved in Fairtrade Fortnight events next year
- 3 Finance update:**

Bank balance is £193.44. We donated £50 to Jamie's Fund following Linda and Stewart's presentation in July, £20 was paid out for the table at GBGW and our website fee has paid.

Members present agreed to a £100 donation to the DEC Pakistan Floods Appeal
- 4 Website/Social Media update and updating:**

Nothing to report, we still need somebody to take on our social media activity.
- 5 Future CWDF and related events:**

New flyer available with details of all events planned so far up until March 2023
- 6 Reports from members on events in their organisations:**

Catherine Green commented on the proposed “Hydrogen Village” at Whitby, Ellesmere Port and shared her serious concerns about it. A leaflet entitled “Hynot” is being prepared to go to residents.

Tony Walsh told us that the regular CAFOD quizzes begin this Friday at Our Lady’s, Ellesmere Port

Terry Green: mentioned Chester Friends of Palestine’s meeting on 26 September, 7pm at the Wesley Centre, with speaker Mohammad Tamimi, a well-known, Hebron-based, Palestinian activist.

- 7 Date of next meeting: 15 November at 7pm, University of Chester in the Best Building. Our speaker is Paul Tacon, talking on “Global Migration – unpacking superficial narratives”**