I AWAITED this year’s Doomsday Clock announcement with real interest and not a little anxiety. Where the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists place the hands is a powerful indicator of the state of the world. Their decision last year to set the hands at 100 seconds to midnight – the closest ever – was a real reflection of the dangers we face, many of them long-running but exacerbated by the Trump years. So I wondered if they would pull the hands back a little, with Biden in the White House.

But no. The hands remain firmly fixed at 100 seconds to midnight. This year the scientists opened their statement talking about Covid-19. They say that while deadly, the virus is not an existential threat. Its consequences will be grave but will not obliterate civilization. But what the pandemic has revealed is just how unprepared and unwilling countries are to handle global emergencies properly; that governments have abdicated responsibility or ignored scientific advice. This is a real wake-up call; governments are also unprepared to handle today’s existential threats: nuclear weapons and climate change, or emerging future threats, like more virulent pandemics and next-generation warfare.

On nuclear weapons, they point to accelerating nuclear programmes in multiple countries and raise concerns about delivery
systems that can flexibly use conventional or nuclear warheads, which ‘may raise the probability of miscalculation in times of tension’. They highlighted the concern recently over national leaders who have sole control over nuclear use – notably Trump in his last days. In fact the scientists assert that the potential for the world to stumble into a nuclear war increased in 2020, even as we have seen the rapidly worsening consequences of the climate crisis. They also referred again to the ‘threat multiplier’ which has intensified the existential threats in recent years: ‘the continuing corruption of the information ecosphere on which democracy and public decision-making depend.’ Or as they put it more bluntly: ‘In 2020, online lying literally killed.’

But in spite of these negative events they decided not to move the clock closer to midnight, because ‘amid the gloom’ they do see some positive developments. Chiefly, ‘the election of a US president who acknowledges climate change as a profound threat and supports international cooperation and science-based policy puts the world on a better footing to address global problems.’ Absolutely – and they go on to cite Biden’s rejoining of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the extension of the New START arms control agreement with Russia.

So there are negatives and positives, some glimmers of hope. But we still remain the closest ever to midnight: there is work for us all to do to move that hand back to a place of safety.

CND groups across the country marked the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) last month, despite Covid-19 restrictions. Wimbledon Disarmament Coalition/CND published a fantastic advert sharing the news in their local paper, which will hopefully encourage more local supporters to get involved with the campaign.

If you live in Wimbledon, why not get in touch with them? The campaign is only just starting!

To contact the group email info@wdc-cnd.org.uk.
An Academy for Peace

Jill Evans, Chair of CND Cymru, and former Member of the European Parliament, writes about the success of Welsh campaigners in establishing a peace academy.

ON International Peace Day in September 2020, Wales’ own academy for peace, Academi Heddwch Cymru, was officially established. Its purpose is to extend Wales’ strong tradition of peace-making and peace promotion. It will work to place peace firmly on the national political and social agenda and guide us in building a sustainable and peaceful society in its broadest sense.

I first proposed a peace institute for Wales as far back as 2009 when the UK government proposed merging all military training in a huge defence academy in St. Athan in the Vale of Glamorgan. Huge investment and thousands of new jobs were promised and most politicians enthusiastically welcomed the idea. For myself, and many others in the peace movement, it was anathema to make Wales synonymous with war preparations. Training there would have been offered to any countries that could afford it. This was not the sustainable future the Welsh Government had promised.

The proposal never came to fruition for financial reasons but a colleague of mine in the European Parliament, Nelly Maes MEP from Flanders, suggested that Wales could benefit from a peace institute, as they had in Flanders. It could advise and inform government decisions and provide an independent and objective factual analysis of the impact of such projects on all aspects of our national life. This marked the first step on the long road to launching our Academi Heddwch.

Many hundreds of people have worked tirelessly to reach this stage. A petition to the National Assembly (now Senedd) in 2014 attracted 1,500 signatures and achieved parliamentary support in principle but there was no funding available.

We decided to persevere and our small but dedicated steering group explored all options to achieve our aim. It is quite an achievement that by 2020 every university in Wales, together with the Learned Society, the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and the Welsh Centre for International Affairs had signed a memorandum of understanding to establish the Academi. Its home is the Temple of Peace and Health in Cardiff but it is much more than a building. At its heart is a programme of work to coordinate and develop an independent community of researchers in related fields. We are coordinating the work to commemorate the remarkable petition from the women of Wales to the women of the USA in 1924. Our Academi will also take its place in the global network of peace institutes, sharing expertise and giving Wales a voice.

At this time of unprecedented national and global challenges, I believe our Academi Heddwch can make a real difference in building a different and better future for Wales.
Faringdon Peace Group meeting 3 February, 7:30pm
To register contact:
01367 710308 or steve.jenny@hotmail.com

Where next for the peace movement after ban treaty day? Yorkshire CND roundtable
12 February, 6pm.
To register contact:
info@yorkshirecnd.org.uk or 01274 730795.

CND webinar with Hiroshima survivor, 20 February 12 noon.
To register contact:
information@cnduk.org

Yorkshire CND AGM
20 February, 5pm
To register contact:
01274 730795 or info@yorkshirecnd.org.uk

To register contact:
c.lanyon@btinternet.com

Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy: An evening with Ray Acheson and Scottish CND, 22 March, 7pm.
To register contact:
scnd@banthebomb.org

Meet the staff
This month: Sara Medi-Jones, Campaigns Director

“Working for CND - pre-pandemic! – meant that no two days were the same. My role is to coordinate CND’s day to day campaigning and make sure we get CND’s message out there in various different ways. As well as looking ahead and planning, this entails tasks such as arranging demonstrations and public events, writing reports, supporting CND groups and editing Campaign magazine. I’m also lucky enough to have opportunities to represent CND at international events, such as United Nations conferences. And arranging CND’s presence at the Glastonbury music festival is a highlight!

“The last year has meant we’ve had to adapt our campaigning, so no in-person events but plenty of webinars for example. As a team, we’re working together to make the most of this new situation – but definitely looking forward to being out in the streets protesting again!”

Temporary office closure
Please note that due to the national lockdown, the CND national office in London is temporarily closed while the new restrictions apply. All staff are still working remotely, and all should be able to get back to you on email. To contact the office staff, please email enquiries@cnduk.org or phone 07891 870732 and you will be re-directed to the right person.

The office closure means that we will be unable to send materials or shop orders. We will also not be receiving post, so please be patient if you are awaiting acknowledgement of a donation made by post.