

A PEOPLE AND ISSUES

Work with a partner. One of you reads “News from the future 1”. The other reads “News from the future 2”. Underline the key words and then make notes. Now close your books. Tell your partner about your future world. Your partner should take notes. He/She may ask questions. Now change roles — your partner tells you about his/her text. When you have finished, find another partner and repeat the task. With this partner make a poster illustrating the two versions of the world in the future.



20

News from the Future

News from the future 1

Yesterday, January 10th, 2060, the world heard the news it so desperately did not want to hear. The United Nations Environment Programme as well as countless national environment committees throughout the world announced that we have now passed the “critical figure” of 560 parts of CO₂ per million parts of air in the earth’s atmosphere. This is over twice as much as it was at the beginning of the industrial age in Britain 300 years ago.

But what does this figure really mean? Nearly all the world’s scientists — over 99%, in fact — agree that this figure is the “point of no return” for

climate change. It means that the process of the earth getting gradually warmer, leading to climate change, cannot now be stopped, whatever we do. We have just passed the last red danger light at high speed.

What will happen now? The answer is: a lot. Here in Europe, summers will get ever hotter and winters ever wetter. Countries like Spain and Greece in southern Europe will become deserts without trees or water. Countries like Germany and France in northern Europe will be increasingly in danger from floods. The Netherlands could return to the sea. Sudden violent storms will become ever



more common. And we Europeans are the lucky ones.

In other parts of the world, life has already become very difficult or impossible because of climate change. Hurricanes are forcing people away from Central America and the USA's south-eastern coasts. In Asia, cyclones are doing the same from China to India. Africa's deserts are expanding fast. Thousands are dying. Millions more are refugees. These regions are falling into uncontrollable chaos.

News from the future 2

Yesterday, January 10th, 2060, the world heard the news it was hoping and praying for. Champagne has become rare these days, but people happily paid \$1,000 for a bottle to celebrate. The United Nations Environment Programme announced that the world has again held its CO₂ at 450 parts per million parts of air for the tenth year in a row. What's more, the level of CO₂ will decrease slightly this year, even though the world economy will continue growing by 4% per year.

There are many reasons for this success, and here are just a few. First, we have reduced our use of fossil fuels such as oil, gas and coal by nearly 80%

Moreover, the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets are melting and sea levels are rising a centimetre a year. Many low-lying islands like the Maldives in the Indian Ocean have disappeared, and soon great cities on coasts, from Shanghai to New York, will drown as well.

Scientists were warning the world about this 60 years ago. If people had acted quickly back then, they would have stopped today's disasters. But they did nothing. Why?

over the last 50 years, and it is these that produce most of the CO₂ emissions. We have replaced them with a number of alternative forms of energy, such as solar, wind, tidal and hydroelectric power. There is also new fuel technology. Today this runs the world's three billion vehicles, and it produces no CO₂ at all — nor any other kind of pollution. And then there is the new nuclear power, the safe, cheap nuclear technology that EU members first began developing 80 years ago.

These and other changes have happened thanks to the strength and vision of our grandparents' generation. Their governments understood the need to fight global warming. If they had not started — and continued — the fight to control CO₂ emissions then, severe climate change would have begun by now. Our world would have fallen into chaos if those wise leaders had not been there. Today, we owe them a big thank you as we come out of human history's greatest crisis.

