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Historical analogies are tempting, giving a sense of security and chiming nicely with that deeply held intuition that there is nothing new under the sun. But it is precisely because they are so attractive that we generally regard them as suspect. This may be a mistake. The human record is short, and our activities largely unchanged, in spite of vast acquisitions of knowledge, technological power, huge populations, and enhanced communication. It would not be entirely surprising if the complicated eddies observable in the historical past were sometimes to recur after an absence.

The last year has often suggested a sickening tendency to resemble certain parts of what one of the period's principal cultural architects called the "low dishonest decade", the 1930s. Every month, I walk from my office to Waterstones to look at books published in the environmental sector; some hundred titles spread over three substantial shelves. A sprinkling of worthy academics (Sir John Houghton's *Climate Change: The Complete Briefing*) aside, most of this is curiously tabloid in character. I find elegantly presented announcements that green is the new black ("how to change the world with style"), which comes with a preface by Lily Cole recommending thrift, and ends by wishing its readers "happy shopping". The book itself passes on "big ideas for your smalls" (reuse old undies as dusters). Another volume, *Gorgeously Green: 8 Simple Steps to an Earth-Friendly Life*, comes with an introduction by Julia Roberts, from which we discover she loves the planet to distraction and has learned nearly all she knows from this book and its author. The text gives recipes

for hoomous, advice about yoga, and suggests, almost insists, we discard carcinogenic talcum and use cornflour instead.

While this seems comic, it is sadly indicative of the deeper character of the current environmental movement, which is superficial, self-advertising, and fragile. A chilling historical analogy presents itself. In October 1934, Canon Dick Sheppard, late Vicar of St. Martins in the Fields, wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* renouncing war. Within a few weeks, he had some 30,000 supportive replies. And in 1936 Sheppard formed the Peace Pledge Union, a movement which grew to astonishing proportions. Similar movements existed around the world. None of this prevented war, and may even have made it more likely since it prevented actions that might have stifled German aggression.

Isn't this where we are in climate politics? Faced with global instability, resource competition, and a creaking energy system, particularly in the UK where the electricity system is entering a period of crisis, we seem trapped in a generalised abnegatory benevolence. We have a faith in international agreement led by panels, NGOs, committees, campaigns, conferences, leagues, unions, a trust that salvation lies in renunciation, then more purely of arms, now more generally of the tools and power delivered by industrial wealth, a faith in the virtue inherent in idealistically pure check-turning passivity rather than inevitably compromised practical self-defence, and running through all a lack of self-confidence evident in rather than concealed by strident popular demands: Stop Climate Chaos, No More War. Will any of this work? Are the utterly infeasible EU renewable-energy targets really expected to have an effect on energy security and climate change, or will they actually make things worse? Does the Prime Minister's recent creation of a Department of Energy and Climate Change show an imaginative determination to tackle the issues, or is it a meaningless gesture, as if Chamberlain in 1938 had created a Department of War and Peace?

Time will tell, perhaps in 2009.

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