

earthQuaker

living
witness 
Quakers for Sustainability

newsletter
issue 86
Autumn 2014



The Peoples Climate March, 21st Sept

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Editorial

As earthQuaker goes to press the long summer seems to have finally come to an end. For Quakers concerned about climate change and sustainable living, it's been a full season with Yearly Meeting Gathering in August and the day of climate action in September. Both of these felt very positive for the slowly emerging response to climate change. In particular the climate marches in cities around the world were co-ordinated by Avaaz as opportunities for people to show they cared rather than protests.

In this issue Laurie Michaelis (Quaker Tools for Transformation, p.3) suggests the Quakers can offer an alternative to activism based on anger and blame. On the other hand Alan Richardson (p.6) asks whether we're willing to take sides against injustice.

Whether or not we are taking sides, Quakers have been speaking out. We've included in this issue the statement on Facing the Challenge of Climate Change produced by the Quaker UN Office for the New York Summit, which Living Witness signed up to (p.4).

From time to time we receive articles calling on Friends to pay more attention to population growth, and we'd like to make this a focus in the next earthQuaker. What do you think the issues are? What can and should be done? And where do Quakers come in? Send articles and letters to dee@livingwitness.org.uk

The leaves are just about to turn despite the warm autumn weather, looking out of my window to a clear blue sky and sunshine.

Fruitful autumnal blessings,



Climate Change at Yearly Meeting Gathering

Laurie Michaelis

Sustainability wasn't a major theme on the agenda at the Yearly Meeting Gathering in Bath, but it did seem to me that our sustainability Concern had taken another step forward. Lis Burch as clerk of the Canterbury Commitment Group gave an inspirational report to Yearly Meeting about our progress and challenges in becoming a low carbon sustainable community. She gave a strong message that this is something we are called to do and that Quakers are doing it: "Some of us will feel called to make changes in our own lives... Others will feel called to outward action... One is not better than the other, and we need both. Each of us has a part to play".

The text and sound recording of her report are at www.quaker.org.uk/ymgbooking

My own week in Bath was more crowded than a typical yearly meeting with options and special interest meetings on climate change. There were lunch time sessions offered by the Canterbury Commitment Group, the Quaker UN Office and Living Witness. There was a session organised by an international group of Quaker organisations, including Living Witness, on connecting up our work on peace and the environment. And the Canterbury Commitment Group ran two parallel 'journeys' (four option sessions through the week): Sunniva from QPSW led one on 'Transforming the System' and I led one on 'Transforming Ourselves'.

For me a particular focus through the week was on engaging with social, psychological and spiritual aspects of climate change. Living Witness is establishing a new network on this theme and there will be day and possibly weekend gatherings in the next few months.

Please contact me if you'd like to join the e-mail list at - laurie@livingwitness.org.uk

Quakers in Climate Action

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon convened a climate summit for world leaders in New York last month, hoping to build some momentum in the negotiations leading up to next year's Paris conference. It became the focus for marches and other events in New York and in cities around the world.

At the summit itself, heads of state mostly reiterated existing national policies and emission reduction targets; countries still have a few months to firm up new commitments for Paris. More significant announcements were made by the business community: a coalition of financial institutions promised to take US\$100 billion out of carbon intensive sectors by December 2015 and to report on the carbon footprint of a further US\$500 billion of investments.



The Peoples Climate March, 21st Sept

Meanwhile the demonstrations around the world seem to have injected new energy into public feeling about climate change. The media spoke of climate 'protests' but actually the day of climate action was very positive; people simply showing they care. More than 50 Friends joined with the London Peoples Climate march, Friends in Scotland joined the Edinburgh march, 70 people joined Friends for their meeting for worship in the centre of Birmingham and Friends from Ashburton and Norwich meetings also held vigils.

Quaker Tools for Transformation

Laurie Michaelis

I've been reading Adam Curle's late writing. He was a Quaker who worked at the sharp edge of conflict transformation in many situations and countries from the 1940s to the 1990s, and was the first professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University. In his book *Taming the Hydra* he describes the root causes of violent conflict as lying in the psychology and culture of our civilisation, and in the system of power and profit. That Hydra – the many-headed monster – is all-pervasive. It is what Walter Wink in his books about *The Powers* calls 'the domination system'. It exists in and through many of the institutions of modern society, and also in and through us as individuals. Adam Curle was strongly influenced by Tibetan Buddhism and its teaching about the three kleshas – the poisons of ignorance, attachment and aversion. For him ignorance – that is, ignorance of our true nature as beings connected to all other beings – is the ultimate cause of violence.

Climate change is a form of violence. It is different from many of the issues that Quakers engage with, because it is so obvious that we are all perpetrators. But it has many of the same root causes as with war, poverty and social exclusion. These causes lie within our personal psychology and in the cultures and structures of our social institutions. They are present to some degree in all of us, and in all of our organisations including the Society of Friends. Recognising their systemic nature and their presence in ourselves is a first step towards change. It may also help us to move away from blame and guilt.

Two Quaker challenges are becoming increasingly central for me. One is working with our own darkness: 'Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the

leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life'. The other is answering that of God everyone, including the perpetrators of harm.

Often in our personal relationships and in our political engagement, the urge is to justify ourselves, to see ourselves as good and right, and to see the 'problem' as lying in others. It is particularly convenient if we can blame an individual person. Friends sometimes talk about 'righteous anger' as a healthy part of working for justice. I'm not so sure. It may give us the impetus to act, but unless we can 'tender anger into love' it may distance and alienate the people we most need to engage.

Shame can be part of that tendering process. It is usually seen as a bad thing. Certainly people can get trapped in it, and Friends may reject it as part of a traditional Christian emphasis on sin. But isn't the darkness God's too? Shame can be enlightening. It really can be the passage to new life by motivating self-change and helping us recognise our common humanity with others.

A few of the interviewees for A Call to Conscience (see p.5) told me they felt Friends were over-focused on lifestyle and that this reflected the individualism of wider society. Some talked about the unhelpfulness of personal guilt, given the importance of powerful interests and institutions in shaping society and its climate impact. There may be a problem if we are consumed with guilt, or if we believe ourselves to be pure and free of responsibility for climate change because we live ultra-low-carbon lives. But for me some focus on lifestyle is essential as part of action for nonviolent change, especially if we use it as a way of connecting ourselves to others. In changing ourselves we recognise our part in the problem, take responsibility, and communicate to others that 'we are the change'. This is part of working for change in our communities and wider society; and working for wider change is part of changing ourselves.

Facing the Challenge of Climate Change

**A shared statement by Quaker groups
September 2014**

"It would go a long way to caution and direct people in their use of the world, that they were better studied and knowing in the Creation of it. For how could [they] find the confidence to abuse it, while they should see the great Creator stare them in the face, in all and every part of it?"

William Penn, 1693

As Quakers, we are called to work for the peaceable Kingdom of God on the whole Earth, in right sharing with all peoples.¹ We recognize a moral duty to cherish creation for future generations.

As we gather at events surrounding the UN Climate Summit, we call on our leaders to make the radical decisions needed to create a fair, sufficient and effective international climate change agreement.

As Quakers, we understand anthropogenic (due to human activities) climate change to be a symptom of a greater challenge: how to live sustainably and justly on this Earth.

We recognize that current and unprecedented rates of greenhouse gas emissions, if left unchecked, will likely lead to global mean temperature rises of extreme detriment to human beings.

We recognize that catastrophic anthropogenic climate change is not inevitable if we choose to act.

We recognize a personal and collective responsibility to ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable peoples now, and all our future generations, do not suffer as a consequence of our actions. We see this as a call to conscience.

We recognize the connections between climate change and global economic injustice as well as unprecedented levels of consumption, and question assumptions of unlimited economic growth on a planet with limited natural resources.

We recognize that most greenhouse gas emissions are created by fossil fuel combustion. We recognize that our increasing population continues to pursue fossil fuel-dependent economic growth. We recognize that the Earth holds more fossil fuel reserves than are safe to burn, and that the vast majority of proven fossil fuel reserves must remain in the ground if we are to prevent the catastrophic consequences of climate change. We therefore question profoundly the continued investment in, and subsidizing of, fossil fuel extraction.

We seek to nurture a global human society that prioritizes the well-being of people over profit, and lives in right relationship with our Earth; a peaceful world with fulfilling employment, clean air and water, renewable energy, and healthy thriving communities and ecosystems.

This week, we join the People's Climate March as members of this beautiful human family, seeking meaningful commitments from our leaders and ourselves, to address climate change for our shared future, the Earth, and the generations to come.

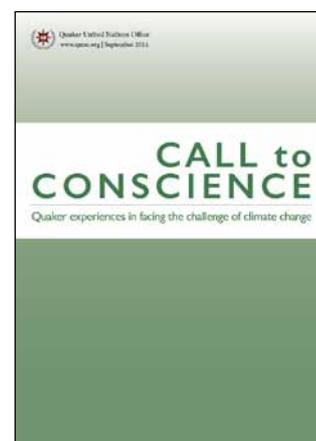
We see this Earth as a stunning gift that supports life. It is our only home. Let us care for it together.

¹ Kabarak Call to Peace and Eco-Justice, 2012, p. 1

A Call to Conscience

Living Witness, along with several other Quaker organisations in Britain and around the world, has signed up to a statement drafted by the Quaker UN Office (QUNO) on 'Facing the Challenge of Climate Change' addressed to the UN climate negotiations (see below).

QUNO has also just published a booklet of eighteen interviews with Friends around the world. Laurie Michaelis had conversations with each of them by Skype, asking what inspires, motivates and sustains them in their engagement with climate change. Some of the interviewees are focused on low carbon living, others on 'engaging the powers' through nonviolent direct action. Several work to empower people in their communities in a variety of ways. Two are singers and songwriters. Laurie says it was inspiring, motivating and sustaining to hear people's passion, the depth of insight and commitment, and the breadth and diversity of their witness.



You can download the booklet, A Call to Conscience, from www.quno.org

Do We Stand Against Oppression and Injustice?

Alan Richardson

I recently visited the Dutch Resistance Museum in Amsterdam. The excellent introductory film detailed the three choices faced by the Dutch population following the successful German invasion of neutral Holland in May 1940.

1. Work with the Nazis by joining the Dutch Nazi Party.
This assured you of preferential treatment and good job prospects working for the Germans.
2. Continue with life as before; it really wasn't much different under German rule. Keep your head down and try not to get yourself noticed.
3. Become part of the Dutch Resistance.

Most people found that option 2 suited them, at least initially. However, life under German rule became steadily worse, and by the time the Jews started to be removed to extermination camps many more Dutch were actively resisting the Germans. The Transport Union called a strike, and all tram and railway services stopped. They did not resume until the Allied forces arrived. In the face of this the Germans removed stores and farm produce and left the Dutch people to starve. Thousands died.



www.amsterdamartstation.com

That same evening I was reading from "The No Nonsense Guide To Religion".

In a chapter headed "Resistance and Liberation" was a section on "Taking Sides". This gives three theological options which were put forward for South African Christians during the years of apartheid.

1. State Theology. This was the official view that apartheid was sanctioned by God.
2. Church Theology. Most church leaders subscribed to this view. This involved criticism of apartheid and talk of the need for reconciliation and justice.
3. Prophetic Theology was the name given for the third option which was put forward by a group of Christian activists. They said that in some conflicts one side is a fully armed and violent oppressor while the other side is defenceless and oppressed. This type of conflict can only be described as the struggle between justice and injustice, good and evil, God and the devil. To speak of reconciling these two is not only a mistaken application of the Christian idea of reconciliation, it is a total betrayal of all that Christian faith has ever meant. We are supposed to do away with evil, injustice, oppression and sin – not come to terms with it. We must recognize that God is not neutral, but sides with the oppressed and that Christians are called to do the same.

A similar point had been made a year earlier by the founders of the Call of Islam, a left-wing South African movement that urged Muslims to work alongside others in the struggle against apartheid. What similar dilemmas exist today? Where do WE stand? Religious groups will not challenge a political system to any significant extent if they do not make a deliberate choice to stand against it.

Where are WE choosing acceptance or tolerance instead of opposition?

Social, Psychological and Spiritual Aspects of Climate Change

At the Swanwick conference in March this year, a group of Friends agreed to start a Quaker network on the social, psychological and spiritual aspects of climate change. It will primarily work as an e-mail list but there will also be day workshops and residential gatherings.

Some of the themes might include

- working constructively with denial, blame, shame and guilt;
- embracing difference and reconciling the value systems, worldviews and priorities of different people and groups; and
- developing moral community and a collective will to change.

If you'd like to sign up to the e-mail list please contact laurie@livingwitness.org.uk

Letters

Pesticide warning

It was reported in the national press & by the BBC on 24th June 2014 that the world's most widely used insecticides (such as neonicotinoids & fipronil), have contaminated the environment across the planet so pervasively that global food production is at risk. This is reported in the peer-reviewed journal "Environmental Science & Pollution Research."

Researchers have compared their impact with that of the landmark book "Silent Spring" in 1962, by Rachel Carson, which revealed the harm from the blanket use of the notorious DDT. Pesticides linked to declines in bee numbers pose a serious threat to other insects & wildlife such as birds which feed on insects. Experts who assessed over 800 scientific studies are calling for tightening of regulations governing insecticides which disrupt the central nervous systems of pests & are applied to 100s of crops in forestry, horticulture & for household insect pest control. These could be having an impact on species higher up the food chain & on food for humans. Billions of dollars' worth of potent & long-lasting neurotoxins are used every year.

They are a systemic insecticide, meaning that they are absorbed into every cell in a plant, making all parts poisonous to pests.

The RSPB said "Farming has to find a way to produce food without putting the environment & its future under unsustainable stress." The National Centre for Scientific Research said "Far from protecting food production, the use of neonicotinoid insecticides is threatening the very infrastructure which enables it (food production)." Dragonflies which eat mosquitoes are suffering & some ditch-water has become so contaminated 'it could be used directly as lice control'. These pesticides are reducing aquatic invertebrates which are a main food for wading birds, trout & salmon. A compelling body of evidence clearly demonstrates that the wide-scale use of these persistent water-soluble chemicals is having widespread, chronic impacts on global diversity.

A Wills

Just how does change happen?

Just how does change happen? Surely if we're engaged in change making around climate change, sustainability, fracking or indeed any issue then understanding where to put our energy and where to focus our interventions is important. Most activists and campaigners don't have the luxury of endless resources, time, staffing, or cash, or if you do please let me know how you managed it!

I spent 10 years working on change making within the Quaker community, and spring boarding from there to change making in the wider world, over the same period and since. During what feels like long service in the third sector I've read and thought a lot about different aspects of campaigning, change making and social transformation so coming across new material or whole new paradigms of action is very exciting. I've recently been to workshops run by two very different organisations which have been incredibly helpful for shifting some of my thinking.

The first was a campaign training event run by the Sheila McKechnie Foundation, have a look at their website for training events near you, and for further resources, there is some great material there. The second workshop was run by 'Common Cause' and their work to promote what's known as Values and Frames is enlightening. Have a look at their website <http://valuesandframes.org/> where you can download the Common Cause Handbook for free. It might utterly transform how you think about change making. If you're not an activist or campaigner have a look anyway, because there's useful material in here for outreach, communications, as well as strategic planning and development, which might be useful in your Meeting or Listed Informal Group.

Lizz Roe

Useful internet links sent in by earthQuaker readers;

Campaign for Climate Change - 2015 is a pivotal year. With the UK general elections and COP21 climate talks in Paris on the near horizon, CCC, along with its UK allies, are organising a mass creative climate action on March 7th 2015.

www.campaigncc.org

The Marine Conservation Society champions the need for marine wildlife protection, sustainable fisheries and clean seas and beaches.

<http://www.mcsuk.org/>

Carbon map – which countries are responsible for climate change?

www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-change

Quaker Earthcare Witness - American website seeking emerging insights into right relationship with Earth and unity with nature.

www.quakerearthcare.org

Transition Network - a charitable organisation whose role is to inspire, encourage, connect, support and train communities as they self-organise around the Transition model, creating initiatives that rebuild resilience and reduce CO2 emissions.

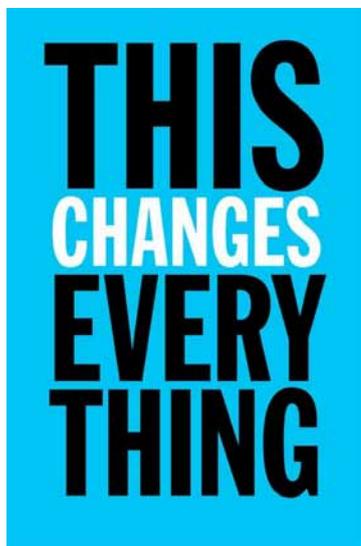
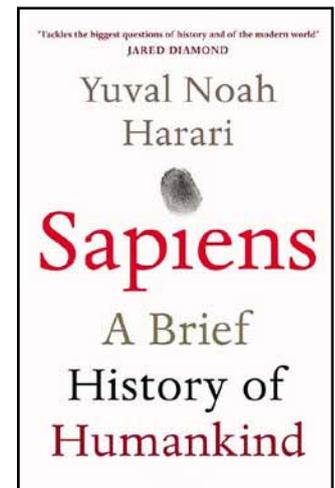
www.transitionnetwork.org

Book Recommendations

Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind

by Yuval Noah Harari

In Sapiens, Dr Yuval Noah Harari spans the whole of human history, from the very first humans to walk the earth to the radical - and sometimes devastating - breakthroughs of the Cognitive, Agricultural and Scientific Revolutions. Drawing on insights from biology, anthropology, palaeontology and economics, he explores how the currents of history have shaped our human societies, the animals and plants around us, and even our personalities. Have we become happier as history has unfolded? Can we ever free our behaviour from the heritage of our ancestors? And what, if anything, can we do to influence the course of the centuries to come?



This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate

by Naomi Klein

This is a comprehensive and compelling work dealing with the ramifications of unchecked global warming due to ever increasing carbon emissions and greenhouse gases.

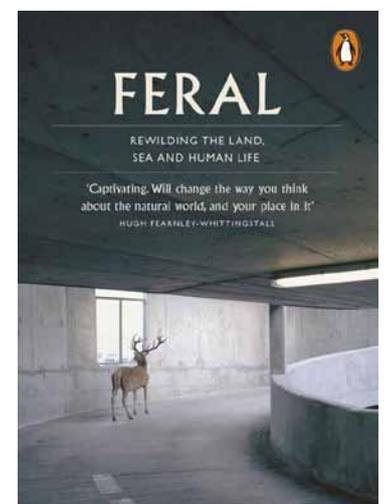
The paramount point she makes is that capitalism is unable to effect climate change due to its dependence on fossil fuels and need for continuous growth. And the time for marginal fixes has expired, thus forcing us to now make radical changes in how we live. Ms. Klein suggests that only national and international consensus, regulation, and planning (on a par with the U.S. and Britain's concerted WWII planning efforts) have any chance at making unified reductions in emissions to bring climate change under control.

Feral: searching for enchantment on the frontiers of rewilding

by George Monbiot

'George Monbiot is always original - both in the intelligence of his opinions and the depth and rigour of his research. In this unusual book he presents a persuasive argument for a new future for the planet, one in which we consciously progress from just conserving nature to actively rebuilding it'

Brian Eno



Night's velvet black and deepest blue

Night's velvet black and deepest blue
Gently translate to pearly hue,
Stars fade in each dawn's gathering light,
Maintain their dance beyond our sight.

The sun emerges, limpid red,
To chart its passage overhead;
Its arc describes each unique day
And Time's our measure of its sway.

Time's never still; across the world
The present moment is unfurled.
That's what we have, the chance to make
Each moment matter, for Truth's sake.

When night returns and we rehearse
The wonders of the Universe,
Our gift of life in context see,
A pearl of Grace in Eternity.

Celia James

To the tune of 'New every morning is the love, our waking and uprising prove'

Quaker Community Courses

25-30 Nov - Woodland Working Retreat

Working in the Community woodlands, learning about and using traditional methods. Enjoy a guided nature walk in the beautiful Peaks and a seasonal bonfire. £180-130.

5-7 Dec - Decluttering

Explore your relationship with the things you own and the way you spend your time in the context of the Quaker testimony to simplicity. £140-90.

More details www.quakercommunity.org.uk



Quaker Community

Living Witness Trustees

Would you be interested in being part of the discernment process for the work of Living Witness? We are looking for Friends willing to be trustees in 2015 and future years. Trustees need to be committed to Quaker values and familiar with our processes, in particular Quaker business method. We are currently seeking Friends with a particular interest in our work on the social, psychological and spiritual aspects of responding to climate change. Trustees meet four times a year, on a Monday, in Oxford.

Please write to laurie@livingwitness.org.uk if you might be willing to serve.

Deadline for the next issue of earthQuaker - 1st Dec 2014

Please post or email contributions to the editor
Dee Sayce, 7, Bowden Crescent, New Mills, High Peak, SK22 4LN
or **01663 308656 - 07837 578382** or email: dee@livingwitness.org.uk

All contributions welcome articles, reports, poems, ideas, letters, photos

Include your postal address and telephone number or email address but we will not include contributors' contact details in earthQuaker unless specifically asked to. Members wishing to contact a contributor can get in touch through the editor—contact details above.

We reserve the right to edit but will always try to check substantial edits with the author.

*Climate change does not respect border; it does not respect who you are - rich and poor, small and big.
Therefore, this is what we call 'global challenges,' which require global solidarity.*

Ban Ki-moon

Membership

I wish to join Living Witness as an individual member.

Suggested donation £10.00
(£3.00 for age 18-25)
Free to under 18's

Name:

Address:

Please make cheque payable to
"Living Witness Project"

Email/phone:

and send to:

Delete as appropriate - I prefer earthQuaker:

by post (b&w)

by email as a pdf (colour)

I am happy to access it from www.livingwitness.org.uk (colour)

Living Witness
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I enclose £

Gift Aid declaration (please tick box if appropriate):

I would like you to reclaim tax on my donations (you must pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax equal to the tax we reclaim on your donations).

Date:

Living Witness (LW) is a Quaker charity supporting Friends' witness to sustainable living and taking it to the wider community in Britain and elsewhere.

LW has worked since 2002 with a growing network of Quaker meetings, connected through regular link group gatherings, newsletters and shared resources.

At the beginning of 2008 LWP merged with Quaker Green Action, which since 1986 has been the main forum for Friends sharing a Concern for sustainability.

We welcome both individual Friends and meetings as members of our network and participants in our gatherings. Please get in touch with the LW co-ordinator if you would like a workshop or speaker session in your meeting.

The co-ordinator is Laurie Michaelis.

The office address is Living Witness, Quaker Community, Water Lane, Bamford, Hope Valley S33 0DA
To contact Laurie by email use as before: laurie@livingwitness.org.uk

Website is www.livingwitness.org.uk, where publications including earthQuaker (colour version!) can be downloaded.



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