

# Northern Friends Peace Board

Penrith Meeting House  
on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2016

## *Place for Hope*

Ruth Harvey from Penrith Meeting introduced the work of Place for Hope, the project for which she is Director. Ruth asked us what 'conflict' as a word made us think of – most of our words were negative. Our involvement continued in a stimulating way as an exercise drew out our diversity, together with our relationship with conflict from avoidance through to embracing conflict. Ruth pointed out that there is a spectrum of approaches which is rich in possibilities.

Place for Hope began in 2008 in Scotland in response to the changes which churches were facing such as lack of people joining ministry and older congregations. Change was leading to disagreement and the project sought to find ways of addressing such conflicts with respect. The aim is to have a network of people who would work to help all congregations reach a place for hope. Increasingly this includes congregations of other faiths. Mediation in a faith context is recognised as different from the more common forms: it can involve large groups and sometimes conflict is not openly acknowledged because of fear and from a failure to recognise that faith groups can experience conflict. This forms an additional layer – 'cotton wool' – which needs to be part of the work of the project. Opening differences can lead to greater understanding if not agreement.

The project is growing and opening up. There are two members who are Quakers and members of another Christian denomination. Referrals are relatively informal and the training is open to all who have some sort of leadership role in faith communities. The subjects of conflict are widely varied: we were given some examples of the conflicts – of which there are three levels – facing the team members. At present the work is directed at domestic conflict but this is seen as part of a wider agenda: national and international peace, and a journey to a culture of grace, hope and transformation.

We reflected on our experiences of conflict in a faith context. This led to Ruth explaining the moves which Place for Hope have made towards shifting the concept of 'a safe place' for dialogue to take place in order to recognise the impossibility of establishing emotional safety. The absence of open recognition of difference and the constraint which politeness can lead to was a common experience.

We hope we will be able to develop our own work supporting Friends and others in nurturing peace in our communities, providing spaces for dialogue and listening.

## **Barrow – Climate Jobs not Bombs**

We received a proposal from our Executive that we might financially support one or more workers from BAE Systems in Barrow to attend the Climate Jobs! Not Bombs conference on 26<sup>th</sup> November in Birmingham, looking at the possibilities of conversion from military production today, 40 years after Lucas Aerospace shop stewards' work on this.

## **QPSW update**

Ellis Brooks from QPSW referred to some upcoming events such as the activists' gathering that QPSW is organising in York on 3<sup>rd</sup> December. He encouraged us to send in local activities and events to the Britain Yearly Meeting website. We can find on the website a toolkit for action. He drew our attention to Turning the Tides sessions on the impact of Brexit. On Trident we are encouraged to continue our advocacy for instance on the UN Nuclear Ban Treaty and the Marshall Islands challenge to failure to comply with the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The war in the Yemen is another conflict where lobbying is relevant, for example on the sale of arms.

On the Prevent Strategy Ellis spoke of the concern relating to the Government's policy. The policy is intended to prevent people becoming involved in violent extremism but in its implementation is very problematic, exacerbating some tensions and putting teachers and other professionals in a position of having to monitor behaviour in a way which is not conducive to peace. Quaker concern is being expressed about the closure of debate and children being branded. There is lack of clarity about the focus on peace but rather an emphasis on control and closure. There is a suggestion that non-violence leads to violence which is particularly opposed to Quaker thinking. Ellis would welcome receiving information about our experiences of Prevent; some were offered by Friends immediately.

## **Peace Tax Bill**

Ursula Sharma talked about the second reading of the Peace Tax Bill [Income Tax non-military expenditure Bill], which will be taking place on 2<sup>nd</sup> December. It allows for diversion of tax destined for the military to another place. Manchester and Warrington Area Meeting's Peace Action Group has prepared briefing materials to support Friends in writing to the MPs on this concern and these have been made available today.

Ursula pointed out that similar bills have been presented in the past. There has been little publicity on the Bill so there is a vital task for all of us, for instance writing to our MPs: there is a model letter available.

## **Media Conference**

A conference on 'Changing the Narrative for Peace – Critical Role of the Media' took place at Darlington Meeting House. Organised by the Sustainable Security project group. The conference was attended by about 40 people, Quakers and non-Quakers, with three speakers (David Gee, Michael Gray and Andrew Smith), diverse participants and a choice of workshops. Attention was drawn to the Ammerdown Group and a document written for them by David Gee and others. There is a blog via the NFPB website and contributions and suggestions for future action will be very welcome.

## **Julie Ward, MEP**

We welcomed Julie Ward, one of the Labour Members of the European Parliament for North West England. Julie talked about her entry into political activity, her work, recent political

developments and some of the current issues of particular concern at the moment relating to peace.

She sees the EU as a forum for peace, and has an assistant, Omri, who works with her in Brussels who is especially involved in peace. He is Israeli so has experienced a society in conflict first hand.

Julie gave us a brief background to the structures of the EU. There are 20 committees in the Euro Parliament; Julie is on three committees, one of which is the Culture and Education Committee. Intergroups are set up as the result of the efforts of the MEPs and result in strong alliances which work on the basis of consensus. Julie co-founded a Children's Rights Group and is a member of others such as Common Goods which promotes debates about the value of common ownership and to defend the open nature of the Internet.

As an example of her peace work, Julie has told us of a Resolution to the Parliament about the Yemen that was put forward recently by MEPs with Labour MEPs in the forefront. She has worked to get a resolution on Non-Proliferation on the agenda of the Parliament: this will require persistent effort. In December 2015, Julie attended the conference in Vienna on nuclear weapons. One thing that became clear at the conference was the impossibility of aid agencies being able to cope with any use of a nuclear weapon. The UK was only reluctantly involved and the US stated their case early on. But the Austrian pledge signed by 130 has made good traction. Since then Julie has been working on building bridges between groups from different nations. She is also involved with the work of the Nuclear Transparency Watch.

Julie is aware of the link between nuclear civil power and nuclear weapons and described her visit to Fukushima: she was shocked by the continuing impact of the disaster. She pointed out that her constituency includes Sellafield and Barrow, but also nuclear free Manchester.

Julie has presented a report to the Parliament on the importance of education which draws attention to the possibilities of intercultural dialogue and understanding (*Report on the role of intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and education in promoting EU fundamental values*). The report emphasises the contribution which young people can make towards better understanding.

Julie's work with the Women's Committee draws attention to the need for women to achieve powerful positions in the EU. The Committee's work includes a commitment to work for peace; she referred to the work of the Parents' Circle from Israel and Palestine and in particular the efforts of Robi Damelin who has spoken all over the world and has also set up a project with the sale of goods made by Palestinian women. She is also involved in post conflict work in countries of the former Yugoslavia. She told us stories which illustrate the possibilities for peaceful change inherent in the EU.

Julie requested that NFPB send a submission on actions for peace to the Labour Party as it develops its policies.

She also told us that each MEP has a budget to send 100 of their citizens to visits to EU institutions and suggested we make use of this before Britain leaves the EU.

### **Information from members**

- *Robert Keeble* told us that “The Light that Pushes Me” exhibition will be on show in Leeds during Quaker week. The city museum there continues to host the exhibition on “Courage, Conscience and Creativity”. (<http://www.leeds.gov.uk/museumsandgalleries/Pages/Peace-Display.aspx>) On 11<sup>th</sup> November Leeds Carlton Hill Meeting will be handing out white poppies to students from the neighbouring University.
- *Robin Bowles* mentioned the forthcoming Huddersfield Quaker Peace Lecture will be given by Jane Clements, Council of Christians and Jews, and the monthly peace vigil continues, initiated by Huddersfield Friends but continuing with wider support. There is also a new Turning the Tide website with good resources and information on nonviolent social change: <http://turningtide.org.uk/>
- *Kurt Strauss* reported that the Castle Museum in York will be showing an updated version of the exhibition on Quakers in WW1, during November, December and January.
- *Ella Booth* from YFGM mentioned the Open Letter on Trident that they had initiated, linking with other youth organisations. A number of Young Friends were arrested at the Blockade at Burghfield in June.

Sue Beardon, October 2016