

Report from Northern Friends Peace Board 17th June 2017 held in Dumfries

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This was a very full and fascinating meeting, with much that struck me personally. Key amongst these were:

- 1) Opening reflections in small groups following all the seismic happenings in Britain of the last month – the election, terror attacks and the London fire. In my group we wondered whether we are more divided as a nation than ever. The election of a hung parliament, the demonization of Islam and Islamophobia, terrorism and the overwhelming price paid by the poor and ethnic minorities in the fire, are all signs of increased awareness of division. Fear of Islamist terrorism and of the cultural as well as economic changes happening in our country, which are seen by many as a result of uncontrolled immigration, fuels hatred and division. This is a good time for Quakers to be taking initiative and promoting peace and positive change.
- 2) In relation to the above Bradford took an initiative called Programme for a peaceful city, involving many faiths and organisations. Perhaps we could take a leaf out of their book in Sheffield. We have the City of Sanctuary to build on.
- 3) QPSW has produced a toolkit for having difficult conversations, whether about immigration, Brexit, nuclear weapons and Trident etc. This could be very useful in working with disparate organisations and perspectives in our city
- 4) Ellis Brooks from QPSW gave an excellent report of the work and developments, and what struck me most was work on an event for young people at Coventry Cathedral to take place next year, working together with one of the Academy providers, Oasis and the Cathedral – in which they will try to get schools signed up to a Peace charter, to balance with a Peace Voice the increasing military presence in schools. The focus is on balance, and also on Conscience – emphasising the right not to act against one's beliefs in peace, and on Safety – ensuring our young people are not harmed by war and the mental health issues so often following involvement in war.

So, what should Area Meeting be especially concerned with that came out of this meeting. As well as the above, Area Meeting should know that:

- 1) Tim Gee is sending out an email about follow up to meetings he held with Friends around the country to tell them about follow-up. The main focus will be supporting work AMs and LMs are already doing with refugees. They will be organising a series of what they are calling Sanctuary meetings. More information on all this is available on the BYM website
- 2) What has been known hitherto as the Amerdown group on sustainable security is looking at developing workshops on this subject
- 3) Recently a groups of Trades Unions, politicians, peace campaigners and others have met to discuss the issue of arms conversion. Trades Councils organisations have voted unanimously to support the conversion of arms manufacture to socially useful production.
- 4) Castle Douglas Meeting In S W Scotland talked about their concern with regard to militarisation in schools, and they have agreed to monitor where the forces are being invited, whether it is primarily to areas of deprivation, whether parents are informed so that they can withdraw their children if they wish from sessions with armed forces, and ensuring that there is balance with education about peace.

- 5) The fines banks paid following the Libor scandal was earmarked by George Osborn for support for promoting armed forces in schools. Scotland of course has its own education policy and budgets, so have not agreed to spend any of this money this way.
- 6) A toolkit for action on militarisation in schools has been produced by QPSW and Forces Watch and there is a documentary coming out soon called War School, which will have a test screening in November this year.

Things Area Meeting might want to think about and take action on include:

- 1) Could we initiate something like the Bradford Peaceful City project, and maybe use the Difficult Conversations toolkit to reach out to a broad range of communities and organisations?
- 2) Some meetings, notably in North Wales, are looking at putting together a composite on Economic Justice, with emphasis on halting arms sales to Saudi Arabia and divestment by pension funds from arms trade. Could we be part of that initiative?
- 3) NFPB do monthly updates which go to LMs, but it is not always clear that the information is passed on or acted upon. Could we have people who are prepared to look out for these updates and ensure Friends here know about important events and campaigns?