

Northern Friends Peace Board

Saturday 5th March 2016

Nottingham Friends Meeting House

The meeting was the usual mix of useful information and inspiring peace witness and stories. Our friend Robert Keeble from Leeds told of his four great grandfathers and their experience of conscientious objection in the 1st World War – including Hubert Peet who has been written about recently in The Friend. COs were treated very cruelly in an attempt to break their spirit and it was intervention from Quakers in 1916 that prevented 50 Cos being sent to France to be shot by firing squad. Their sentence was commuted to 10 years hard labour.

At this time we are being invited to be conscientious objectors in the sense of refusing to pay tax for weapons and military spending. A private member's bill is planned for Parliament in May. Information about the Bill and the campaign can be found at

www.conscienceonline.co.uk

This year is the best time to be protesting about Trident as the decision about retaining Trident or not will be taken this year. Our government have committed £4 billion to Trident even before any decision on its future has been made. As someone has pointed out, in answer to those who are concerned about the jobs that will be lost – you could pay every affected worker £1 million each and there would still be change out of what is spent on Trident!

A new book is being produced by QPSW, by Tim Wallace, on the issue of Trident. We should be ordering copies for our libraries.

There are many other exciting things planned on this issue in the coming year.

A series of meetings will be planned around the country called Trident dialogues. The first ones are planned in Manchester and Barrow in Furness where Trident is manufactured. Trident Ploughshares are organising trainings on non-violent direct action on Trident. We have missed the nearest one in Leeds, but there are days in Glasgow 26

March, Cardiff 3 April, London 9 April and Bristol 16th April. There will also be a Green Party event in Barrow on 12th April and Quakers in Yorkshire is focussing on militarisation at their 16th April meeting in Huddersfield, with a theatre performance and a speaker from QPSW. The overall plan is to encourage a wide discussion on the issues, including researching alternative uses of the technology for building Trident and the creation of different jobs. It was suggested that if Area of local meetings want to organise such a discussion Steve Schofield is a great speaker. He did the work on alternative employment at Lucas aerospace. Also recommended were Scientists for Global responsibility.

A global day of action o military spending will be held on 18th April. A quiz has been designed for people to reassign the £45 billion spent on the military and its weapons. If we take any actions on that day QPSW would like us to send them photos to go on the website. A great resource on all this is the newsletter QPSW produces “Educate and Disarm”

Another date we were informed of is 21st March – which is the international day of flying kites not drones. A great thig to do with our children and young people.

Another concern discussed was refugees and asylum seekers. This is a peace issue both because war is the cause of so much of the movement of people, but also because conflict in our communities can result from misconceptions and cynical political manipulation. NFPB has been working for many years on peace in our culturally diverse communities. We were told about an excellent report that has just come out about asylum seekers and detention. It is called the Shaw Review and is very critical of the way detention has been used for vulnerable asylum seekers.

We were also concerned that the government is using the law in a draconian way to combat so-called “radicalisation”. University and college lecturers are being asked to report on students in danger of being radicalised, not just through Islamic fundamentalism, but also environmental activism, animal rights and other political campaigning. The government has come up with the notion of the “non-violent

terrorist". Someone suggested we should all call ourselves "non-violent terrorists"!

Finally, we had a report from the trustees and the treasurer. We need to address the fact that contributions from Area Meetings have dropped by one third from last year. This has resulted in a deficit this year of around £8000 which is going to come out of the Board's reserves. A request has gone to Area Meetings to increase their per capita payment from £8 to £8.50, and AMs that are currently not paying will be asked if they might review this. Sheffield and Balby is not in that latter category. But if we can find a bit extra to contribute this will go down very well.

A regular newsletter is produced by NFPB giving details of the work to date and there is a website, so if you want to know more about the Board do check www.nfpb.org.uk

Sue Beardon