



Earth and Economy



Quaker Peace & Social Witness Sustainability & Peace and Economic Issues Programmes

Issue 1

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Speaking out on tar sands

Energy companies are relying on extreme methods to reach the world’s remaining fossil fuel supplies. The Sustainability & Peace Programme is helping Friends speak out.



Tar Sands operations, Alberta, Canada

One of the biggest barriers to achieving a low-carbon economy is our reliance on fossil fuels. That’s why the Sustainability & Peace Programme is helping Friends speak out against new and extreme forms of fossil fuel extraction.

As global fossil fuel sources diminish, projects like open-caste coal mining, fracking and tar sands rely on carbon-intensive and destructive methods to reach remaining fuel sources.

Perhaps the most extreme of these methods is the Canadian tar sands project, where energy companies are extracting heavy crude oil from vast expanses of land. The oil is strip-mined, and pumped or extracted by forcing water, steam or solvents through the ground. The

process creates water pollution, deforestation and adverse health effects on local communities. It has been described as the most carbon-intensive industrial project in history.

The UK government has recently shown support to the Canadian government in opening European markets to tar sands fuel. However, this October, the EU Parliament has the opportunity to legislate to keep tar sands out of Europe. Why not write to your MEP and ask them to support legislation against tar sands?

Find out more

For a briefing on tar sands and opportunities for action, visit:

www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability

Rio +20: Time to act for a sustainable future

Will governments commit to sustainable development at the UN summit in June?

In June, world leaders will gather in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for the Rio +20 UN summit on sustainable development. Twenty years ago at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, governments adopted a blueprint that aimed to promote growth, social equity and environmental protection. Now, Rio +20 will again bring together governments, international institutions and civil society groups to re-commit to sustainable development and review progress.

The UN says the summit is a chance to “move away from business as usual” and promote decent jobs, clean energy and a more sustainable and fair use of resources.

But as global environmental and economic injustices deepen, what does moving away from ‘business as usual’ mean? Campaign groups across the world are calling on world leaders to build a sustainable and just alternative to our current path of development, and put people before profit.

Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) partners Stop Climate Chaos, a coalition of UK groups calling for urgent climate action, are calling on UK MPs to support a sustainable future by signing their Rio Connection Declaration. The declaration says that “the UK should lead the world in the transition to a fair and green economy, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and creating jobs and opportunities to reduce poverty and inequality here and overseas.”

Other campaign groups are calling on the UK government to play a positive role in assisting developing countries build sustainable and resilient economies. The Jubilee Debt Campaign, of which QPSW is a member, and the World Development Movement are calling on the UK government to change the way it funds developing countries to adapt to the effects of climate change. Rather than giving loans through the World Bank that tie developing countries into debt, the groups say that the UK should give grants through more democratic bodies like the UN Adaptation Fund. This

campaign forms just a part of a wide array of demands from groups calling on world leaders to protect the poorest at Rio this summer.

Find out more:

Find out how you can call on your MP to support the Rio Connection Declaration at:

www.stopclimatechaos.org/rio-connection

Find out more about Jubilee Debt Campaign’s Climate Debt Campaign at:

www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk

Editorial

Welcome to *Earth and Economy*, the first joint newsletter of Quaker Peace & Social Witness’s Economic Issues and Sustainability & Peace Programmes. The amalgamation of our programme newsletters reflects a shift in the way QPSW, and Friends across the country, are thinking about and acting on issues of economics and sustainability. There has been a growing awareness that our economic and environmental crises are finely enmeshed, and as witness to our testimonies, we must tackle both crises together. Friends have been joining with others to change the impact of their own lives on people and planet, and challenge the unsustainable and unjust economic and political structures in which we live.

You will see from the *Friends in action* and *Conversation starter* pages, that this newsletter isn’t just for telling Friends what QPSW is doing. It’s also for Friends to share news about how they’ve been taking action. You can read and share more on the Quakernomics blog at www.quaker.org.uk/quakernomics.

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Occupy – what next?

The Occupy movement gathered support from Quakers and other faiths across the UK. But after the tents have gone, where do we go next?

When the Occupy movement started to emerge in September 2011, few would have envisaged the depth or breadth of the support it would receive across the world. However, coming only months after Quakers in Britain discerned the need to ask whether the economic system “is so broken that we must urgently work with others of faith and good will to put in its place a different system in which our testimonies can flourish” (Yearly Meeting 2011 Minute 23), it is no surprise that Friends and Meetings across the UK embraced it.



Meeting for worship at St Paul's Cathedral.
Photo: Martin Kunz

Occupy has inspired Quaker witness in a myriad of forms. Countless individual Friends spent time living at, visiting or providing practical support to their local Occupation. The Recording Clerk, the Quakers & Business Group and several Meetings including Nottingham, Sheffield & Bristol issued statements supporting the movement. A regular meeting for Worship took place on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral and an Epistle written by the Meeting was recently published in full in the *Occupied Times* – the newspaper of Occupy London. Other Meetings such as Lancaster (see p.11) held events to explore issues raised by the Occupiers.

Whilst most of the Occupy camps have now gone the movement continues – not least in public consciousness – and the role it has played in democratising public debates on issues such as tax avoidance, executive pay, and the banking system. A 'second wave' of actions are being planned to take place in May. Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) has been giving some practical support to this process, including making Friends House available to host planning and training sessions.

Pilgrimage for Justice, 7–19 June

QPSW is also supporting Occupy Faith UK, an autonomous group which has emerged in

solidarity with the Occupy movement and which seeks to raise awareness of social, economic and environmental injustices as they affect communities across the UK. This summer the group will be recreating an ancient pilgrimage route, inviting people to join a two-week-long walk from London to Canterbury. Events held along the route will explore how local communities can work together as a force for social change. The pilgrimage will culminate in a three day conference at the University of Canterbury which will focus on the policy changes needed to create a more just society. There will be many ways to participate, in person and online.

Get involved

Find out more about the pilgrimage for justice at www.occupyfaith.org.uk/. If your meeting is on the route and you'd like to offer support contact: occupyfaithuk@gmail.com

Come to the Occupy Special Interest Group at Yearly Meeting 2012. This will be a chance for Friends from all over the UK to share their Occupy experience and find out about QPSW work to support the movement.

Growing our low-carbon, sustainable community

Sunniva Taylor, QPSW Sustainability & Peace Programme Manager, takes a look at what Friends have been doing as part of our commitment to sustainability.

Since August last year Friends across Britain have been taking action to make real our commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community (the 'Canterbury Commitment' or 'minute 36'). Many of these activities have been about growing – whether that is the growing of food specifically, or the more general growth in the number of sustainability groups and activities taking place.

Friends in Sheffield Central Meeting held an event to find out what they were led to do in response to minute 36. Their visions inspired the meeting's Living Witness Support Group to carry out a survey of the meeting – Grow Quakers! - to find out what skills and interests Friends have, or might like to cultivate, in growing and cooking food. Out of this emerged the idea for an edible roof garden. Herbs, fruit trees and maybe a vegetable or two have already been planted.

Meanwhile Brighton Friends have agreed to re-design their garden using permaculture methods. This will involve introducing fruit and nut trees, soft fruit bushes and perennial edible plants into what is already a well-used city green space. And Warrington Local Meeting has just broken ground on a new meeting house vegetable garden, as part of their 'Step Down' campaign started in response to our low-carbon commitment.

News of these and many other activities have made their way to QPSW as part of Meeting for Suffering's request in December last year for all meetings to fill in the 'Climate impact calculator for meeting' and 'check-up', as well as to send in their 'sustainability stories'. An impressive 200 local meetings (out of 476) have sent in the results of the calculator; and almost 150 meetings have responded to the meeting 'check-up'. The invitation to take part in this process was also extended to all listed informal Quaker groups and independent Quaker bodies.

Meeting for Sufferings has set up a 'Minute 36 Commitment Group' which is responsible,



Friends at Sheffield Meeting. Photo: Steve Loader

on their behalf, for coordinating the response to our Canterbury Commitment across Britain Yearly Meeting and for developing the aims and objectives involved in becoming a low-carbon, sustainable community. This group will be reporting to Yearly Meeting in May on the progress of our concern. Their report will include reflections on the information provided by meetings in the calculators and check-ups.

Find out more

Read 'sustainability stories' by Friends and meetings at www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability-stories. Could you write one too?

Attend the Minute 36 Commitment Group report at Yearly Meeting 2012 in Friends House (Session 2 – Saturday 25 May 9.30–12.00).

On the road for climate jobs

Friends call for government investment in jobs for a low-carbon economy.



Campaign against Climate Change marching for climate jobs in 2010. Photo: Jim Jepps

In May, Friends across the UK joined up with local campaign groups to call for government investment in 'climate jobs'. Over two weeks, the Campaign against Climate Change's Climate Jobs Caravan held events in over 20 cities across the UK, bringing together local climate groups, trade unionists and other supporters including Quakers. As part of Campaign against Climate Change's One million climate jobs campaign, the Climate Jobs Caravan gathered support to call for large-scale government investment in services and infrastructure that would transform Britain in to a low-carbon economy, and provide jobs.

Recently, many activist groups have been calling on the government to tackle the economic and environmental crises by investing in jobs that build towards a low-carbon economy. Climate jobs, argue campaigners, would be an opportunity to tackle high unemployment, produce government revenue through taxes, stimulate the economy, and provide the labour force required for a large-scale national transition to a low-carbon economy. Such jobs would include those in renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable transport, industry and education.

The One Million Climate Jobs campaign is supported by four trade unions including Public and Commercial Services Union and the Transport Salaried Staff Association, as well as MPs including Green Party leader Caroline Lucas.

Along with many activists, those that took part in the Caravan criticise the government's lack of action on climate change, inequality and unemployment. Both politicians and grassroots activists have also argued that current austerity policies present a threat rather than a means to economic recovery. Groups calling for climate jobs form part of a wider activist movement calling for an alternative. Activists argue that instead of cuts, the right forms of government investment could lead to not just an economic recovery, but one based on greater equality and sustainability.

Climate Jobs Caravan events were hosted by Friends in Manchester, Liverpool, Westminster and Sheffield, and were attended and supported by Quakers across the country. Enid Pinch from Manchester and Warrington Area Meeting was involved in organising the Manchester event. "I support the Climate jobs caravan because it is a positive response to two serious problems, namely climate change and unemployment," says Enid. "It is also drawing different groups together. It was really good to meet trade unionists at the planning meetings."

Find out more

To find out more about the Climate Jobs Caravan and read the *One million climate jobs now* pamphlet go to :

www.climate-change-jobs.org

Measuring what matters

Suzanne Ismail, QPSW Economic Issues Programme Manager, explores how new measures of wellbeing could help government make better decisions.

In July the UK's Office of National Statistics (ONS) publishes its first set of 'experimental' wellbeing indicators. The new indicators will include measures to capture information on the UK's health, personal relationships, work, education, personal finance, political participation and environmental conditions. They should eventually sit alongside Gross Domestic Product (GDP) statistics as a tool for policy makers.

Why do we need new measures?

Currently GDP is a cornerstone for macroeconomic policy making. GDP measures national income and is calculated by adding up the value of all monetary transactions that happen within an economy over a particular period of time. As a general indicator of the size of an economy GDP can be effective. However, it is often incorrectly used as a general proxy for all sorts of economic and social progress. The assumption is that if GDP is growing, society is materially richer, healthier, happier and more secure. In the majority of countries, increasing economic growth has become the main aim of economic policy.

Unfortunately, GDP is a narrow measure and it is unrealistic to expect it to give a picture of the complex factors that contribute to individual and social wellbeing. Some commentators claim that overreliance on GDP as an indicator of progress has made it extremely difficult for politicians to support socially or environmentally beneficial initiatives that may have a negative impact on economic growth.

What difference will the new measures make?

It is often said that "what gets measured gets done". As such, if the ONS can develop reliable data on the broader range of things that affect our wellbeing, this has the potential to bring about more balanced policy making. The ultimate aim is for economic and social policies that better address the factors that matter to us most in our everyday lives.

The UK isn't the only government considering wellbeing indicators. The ONS project builds on several international initiatives, including those of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the European Union and the influential French Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress led by Nobel Prize winning economists Josef Stiglitz and Amartya Sen.

Such high-level attention to new ways of measuring social progress is, without doubt, a positive development. However, work remains at an early stage and is not developed enough to have a significant impact on policy making. The forthcoming indicators will need to be tested and improved over time. Just as importantly, politicians and civil servants will need to be persuaded to and equipped to use the information that emerges.

There have been some small steps forward in this respect. Last year the 'green book', the document civil servants use to appraise and evaluate prospective policies and initiatives, was updated to include information about the wellbeing approach. And an All Party Parliamentary Group on Wellbeing Economics now exists to promote wellbeing measures in the UK Parliament. Nevertheless, it is likely to be some time before wellbeing measures are routinely considered in decision making.



GDP cannot measure inequality or unsustainable practices. Photo: Jason Mrachina/CC

Gross Domestic Product's limitations

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) statistics include the costs of cleaning up pollution and war.

But they don't include the costs of unpaid childcare/ caring or volunteering.

And they can't take account of inequality, unsustainable consumption or environmental degradation.

Other alternatives to GDP

Office of National Statistics' wellbeing approach is just one alternative to GDP. Others include:

Happy Planet Index

Developed by the New Economics Foundation, the Happy Planet Index (HPI) combines a country's environmental footprint with data on life satisfaction and life expectancy. Countries with the Highest HPI (such as Costa Rica, Guatemala and Cuba) are not necessarily the world's 'happiest' countries but they are relatively efficient at 'converting' the planet's natural resources into long and happy lives. The New Economics Foundation claims that this shows it is possible for well-being to exist without excessive consumption of the Earth's resources.

See: www.happyplanetindex.org

Gross National Happiness (GNH)

The government of Bhutan has a policy of pursuing GNH and assess proposed policies and projects on their ability to contribute to its growth. GNH is a sustainable development index composed of 33 separate governance, cultural and environmental and economic indicators. National GNH surveys were carried out in 2007 and 2010.

See: www.grossnationalhappiness.com

Human Development Index

The Human Development Index (HDI) was developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a means of evaluating how well countries meet human needs. The index combines data on life expectancy, education and the material standard of living into a single statistic. It was designed to put people rather than financial indicators at the centre of policy making but does not consider environmental factors. Each year UNDP ranks over 180 countries according to HDI. In 2011 Norway, Australia and the Netherlands topped the list, whilst Burundi, Niger and the Democratic Republic of Congo received the lowest scores.



HPI measures how natural resource usage is converted in to happy living. Photo: Cifor/CC

Find out more

ONS wellbeing project: www.ons.gov.uk/well-being

Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress: <http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/en/index.htm>

All Party Parliamentary Group on Wellbeing Economics: <http://parliamentarywellbeinggroup.org.uk>

A green budget?

What does the government's 2012 budget mean for sustainability?

On 21 March the government published its 2012 budget. Does it support or undermine David Cameron's pledge to lead "the greenest government ever"?

A budget for growth

In his budget speech the Chancellor George Osborne stated that the budget "unashamedly backs businesses" and is a "budget for growth". Quakers have said that "the pursuit of growth [...] is often unjust, violent and destructive". Many of the measures in the budget in favour of growth are detrimental to the environment, and to equality.

A budget for oil and gas?

George Osborne committed to renewable energy playing a crucial part in Britain's energy mix, though suggested that care should be taken to ensure that this is not costly for families and business. In fact the Committee on Climate Change and energy regulator Ofcom have said that it is increasing gas prices that have pushed up home energy bills, not renewable energy. Despite this, Osborne claimed that "gas is cheap", and the budget prioritises the expansion of the oil and gas industries. A new £3 billion field allowance was announced for particularly deep fields with sizeable reserves, targeted at the West of Shetland. A new gas generation strategy will be set out in the autumn.

A budget for motorists and aviation?

Air Passenger Duty (APD) (a tax payable by aircraft passengers that increases with the length of the flight) will rise from April. However, George Osborne re-opened the possibility of expanding airports in the South East of England.

The budget commits £130 million to trains in the north of England and £15 million to Transport for London for investments in cycle safety. It maintains a rise in fuel duty (a tax paid levied on fuels used by most road vehicles). However, there was also confirmation of £56 million for a controversial Bexhill to Hastings link road.



Chancellor George Osborne

Also announced...

- 'Growth-friendly planning laws' with the overhaul of the planning system, including a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The reaction has been mixed and it has yet to be seen whether the new regulations really will protect ecosystems.
- Consultation on the simplification of the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC). The CRC is a mandatory carbon emissions reporting and pricing scheme to cover all organisations using more than 6,000MWh per year of electricity. If the government finds that simplification is not possible they may scrap the tax and replace it with "an alternative environmental tax".

Find out more

To read Friends of the Earth's reaction to Budget 2012, go to: http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/budget_2012_reaction.pdf

Meeting for Sufferings agrees 'Statement on Equality'

Quakers speak out against effects of governments cuts on the most vulnerable.

In March, Meeting for Sufferings adopted a 'Statement on Equality' which affirms the Quaker commitment to equality and expresses dismay at the disproportionate effect government cuts will continue to have on the poorest and most vulnerable in our society. "We are called by our experience of equality to voice deep concern over the widening gulf between rich and poor". The statement arose from a discussion on Quakers, equality and the government cuts at the October 2011 meeting of Meeting for Sufferings. "We are distressed that the United Kingdom has now a greater disparity in incomes than at any time since the 1930s. We know the government intends to make cuts, but we object to it being at the expense of those who are unable to work."

The statement is a response to the growing, widespread concern within the yearly meeting about the damaging effects of the government

cuts. Mid-Thames, Lancaster and Manchester and Warrington are amongst a number of area meetings particularly active on this issue.

"Quakers strive to uphold the values of justice and equality in the face of spending cuts that increase poverty and have a disproportionate impact on the poorest among us."

Friends are encouraged to use the statement to engage with their MP or local authority. There will be a workshop on equality at Yearly Meeting: please come along and bring evidence of the local effects of the cuts for sharing. More ideas available from www.quaker.org.uk/public-issues.

The 2012 Salter Lecture at Yearly Meeting will be given by Danny Dorling, a professor of human geography who has published extensively on equality issues. www.dannydorling.org/

Close the Gap campaign and tax justice bus tour

An opportunity to take action on UK inequality

Individual Friends, meetings or area meetings can act on growing inequality in the UK by getting involved in the 'Close the Gap' campaign. 'Close the Gap' is a three year coalition campaign supported by Church Action on Poverty. Quaker Peace & Social Witness joined this campaign on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting in 2011. The core of the campaign is to call for:

- Fair Pay – aiming to shift the public mood so that excessive pay gaps are eliminated and promoting the payment of a living wage;
- A Fair Say – challenging the unfair power that big business and lobbyists have over public decisions;
- Fair Prices – demanding businesses stop charging higher prices for their poorest customers, calling for a cap on charges made by lending companies and promoting fairer alternatives such as credit unions;

- Fair Taxes – pushing for a tax system in which wealthy individuals and businesses pay their fair share and promoting the end of tax avoidance as an alternative to public spending cuts.

Currently, the campaign is focussing on tax justice. The campaign's letter to George Osborne in October 2011, signed by QPSW, provoked a substantial government response and was featured in the Daily Telegraph: "Christians seek tough action on tax evasion". This summer we are launching a major partnership with Christian Aid. The Tax Justice Bus will be unveiled in August at Greenbelt and will spend the next two months touring all three nations and the Republic of Ireland. The exact route has not yet been finalised, although it will be available by the end of May.

We are looking for local groups who would be interested in hosting the bus and running associated events. Please contact Alison Prout with your ideas! alisonp@quaker.org.uk

Settlement trade criticised at EU

Two recent developments have kept the issue of European Union trade with Israeli settlements on the political agenda. On February 17 2012, the European Parliament (EP) adopted a resolution urging action to stop settlement exporters breaking EU trade rules. Goods from Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) should not benefit from the EU–Israel trade agreement which allows many Israeli goods to be imported into the EU at reduced tariff rates. However, some exporters circumvent the agreement by claiming that settlement goods are the product of Israel. The resolution calls for the European Commission to address the problem by drawing up a blacklist of companies that undermine the rules in this way and obliging Israel to clearly distinguish between settlement and Israeli goods.

The resolution was adopted three months after an internal EU report recommended the consideration of EU laws to prevent financial transactions that support settlements. The report, written by the EU Heads of Mission (HoM) in Jerusalem, outlined how the

systemic increase in settlement growth is undermining a two state solution. It made other recommendations including compiling guidelines for tour operators in an attempt to prevent them supporting settlement businesses in occupied East Jerusalem, and informing EU citizens about the risks of buying property in occupied East Jerusalem.

Neither the EP nor HoM recommendations will automatically be adopted by the Commission. However, they have helped to strengthen calls for the EU and its member states to move beyond political rhetoric and take practical non-violent action designed to halt the growth in settlements. Ending trade with settlements is an obvious next step to take. QPSW continues to work alongside the Quaker Council for European Affairs and others to persuade our decision makers to take that step.

Find out more

To find out more and sign up for email updates and action alerts on this issue see:

www.quaker.org.uk/settlement-produce

Working for an exploitation-free Olympics

Quaker Peace & Social Witness has joined an international coalition to raise awareness of the risk of human trafficking during London 2012. The coalition includes The Institute for Human Rights and Business, the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility and over 25 religious investment bodies. In March it wrote to over 30 Olympic sponsors and hotel chains with operations near Olympic venues to find out what action they were taking to prevent human trafficking.

It is particularly important that the hotel industry takes action in this respect. Hotels are increasingly reliant on migrant workers – often supplied by employment agencies – to do jobs such as room cleaning and kitchen work. Limited language skills and a lack of awareness of employment rights can mean they are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. There is also a risk that hotels could inadvertently find

their facilities being used by the sex-trafficking ‘industry’. In recent years there have been several reported incidents where victims of sex trafficking have been hidden in or forced to meet ‘clients’ at hotels.

There are fears that the extra visitors to London and other Olympic cities during the games could exacerbate both of these problems. As such, the coalition is seeking assurance that hotels are taking steps to respond to the risks. Some hotel chains like the Accor group have already developed anti-trafficking policies augmented by training programmes designed to enable staff to identify and respond to any instances of trafficking that they might come across. If the London Olympics are to be exploitation free it is vital that others follow in their wake.

For more information see: www.eccr.org.uk

◆ Friends in action

Mo Kelly reports on an Economic Justice Forum held at Lancaster Meeting.

In late summer last year, the increasing numbers of tented occupations and the particular dynamic between protesters and church that unfolded at the St Paul's Occupy Camp in London, has, I suspect, led many of us to a position where we can no longer sit on the sidelines, ignore economic injustice and say "it's nothing to do with me."

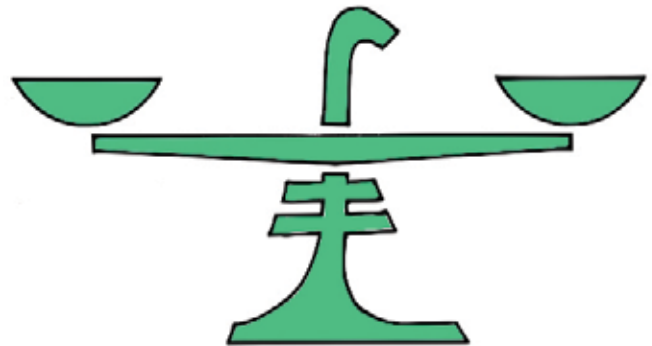
I had felt hugely challenged by the Occupy movement and its growing momentum. Particularly interesting was the assumption of many people who visited and interviewed those occupying the streets that they should have the answers to economic injustice – and if they didn't... then what was the point of the Occupy movement? It appears to me that any quick and easy answer to a complex issue would surely be unwise, folly even. Occupy has named the urgency of addressing – what we increasingly know to be – an immoral, unjust and unequal situation in our society that affects us all. Occupy challenges us to get informed and get involved in bringing about change, however small that change might be.

So – where to begin?

On 17 March, Lancaster Friends invited three speakers to their Forum for Economic Justice – Deborah Hargreaves, chair of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust funded High Pay Commission; Brian Davey, economist, coordinator of Cap and Share UK and a member of the FEASTA Energy and Climate working group; and Anna Thomas, former head of economic and social development at ActionAid UK. Our calm and tranquil Meeting room was transformed for the day into a colour-filled, vibrant space reflecting the energy and ongoing commitment of the many small and not-so-small community groups already working within Lancaster and District.

As Friends, we wished the business of the day to be 'in the manner of Friends' and invited the eighty-five or so people who joined us – from diverse groups and none – to be willing to listen and to be open to hearing the views of others.

We used two radio microphones (as at Meeting for Sufferings and Yearly Meeting) to assist us in the calm process of listening to each other. Our day ended with a plenary where seven groups (each a colour of the rainbow) each brought back one question to the speakers, together with a positive statement of something that they perceived as hopeful and positive.



Lancaster Meeting's logo for the Economic Justice Forum.

It was felt by many of us attending the Forum

- that the 12 months work of the High Pay Commission resulting in November 2011's highly accessible and easy to comprehend report: Cheques with balances: why tackling high pay is in the national interest.
- to be of huge significance in addressing the continuing immoral economic inequality in our society here in Britain. The commission has since been renamed the High Pay Centre. As Friends, we believe that its non-confrontational current work, "engaging with" and talking to the business community, is a truly Quaker way of engaging with an issue which, in its magnitude, could possibly be regarded as the 'slavery' of our particular time in history.

Find out more

For more information on Lancaster Meeting's Economic Justice Forum and to hear recordings of speaker presentations, and to access the High Pay Commission's report see: www.economicjusticeforum.org.uk

Conversation starter...

This column aims to get Friends talking and acting on issues of sustainability and economics. *Conversation starter* is a space for Friends to voice a hope or concern relating to sustainability or economics and challenge others to think about how they can act on it.

In this edition, Colin Hall from Luton Local Meeting, shares his hope for a law against ecocide. As world leaders gather in June at the Rio +20 Summit, they have the opportunity to create international legislation against large-scale environmental destruction.

Eradicating Ecocide

by Colin Hall

Hope

The earth is in the greatest danger from exploitation for profit. We need an international law against ecocide. Eradicating Ecocide is a campaign to make mass damage of the environment a further Crime against Peace – alongside Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, and War Crimes. Those who might be found guilty include CEOs of big corporations and heads of state. Such crimes could include tar sands extraction in Canada (see p.1), or oil pollution in the Niger Delta.

Values

We are called to save the planet from environmental and economic catastrophe: the two are fundamentally enmeshed. Our actions must flow “from nowhere but love”. That love for the world must extend to stopping the terrible wrongs on the largest of scales perpetrated by organisations and forces that operate within the current economic system but are seemingly beyond control. A proposal for a law of Ecocide has been put to the UN by lawyer Polly Higgins. It is only by action on the international scene that control can be regained, and justice brought to the earth.

Action

The Ecocide campaign needs involvement from Friends, their creativity and vision, hope and faith, because it challenges the entrenched system and will be hugely resisted. You could:

- ask your local and area meetings to support the campaign;
- inform your MP and MEP about ecocide, and ask them to support the campaign;
- find out more about opportunities for action at www.eradicatingecocide.com.

Questions for Friends

1. Quakers made profound contributions to ending slavery and the development of human rights. Do you agree that ecocide is a comparable issue? and that rights should be extended to future generations, other living creatures and the earth as a whole?
2. Could those found guilty of the crime of ecocide themselves be victims of the system that they support? Accordingly, should they be offered Restorative Justice in order to understand and acknowledge the terrible harm that they have caused, end their wrongdoing and undertake acts of reparation so that they can be re-integrated into the world we all share?

You could continue the conversation with Friends in your meeting, and respond collectively or individually on the *Conversation starter* page of the Quakernomics blog at: www.quaker.org.uk/quakernomics.

Do you have a Conversation starter to offer? If you'd like to write for a future edition, contact Sunniva Taylor at sunnivat@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1047.