



Earth and Economy



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

May 2013

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'Day of shame' as welfare cuts kick in

Symon Hill



Disabled People Against Cuts and UK Uncut deliver an "eviction notice" at the country home of Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith. Photo: Eleanor Lisney

Quakers are seeking to stand alongside millions of people hit hard by the latest swathe of benefit cuts. Church Action on Poverty (CAP) and several faith groups spoke out on the 'Day of Shame' in April, when a large chunk of the UK population saw their incomes fall.

Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) is backing CAP's Close the Gap campaign, which challenges the growing gap between rich and poor. A number of Quaker meetings have minuted their concern about welfare cuts.

"Our meeting has been very supportive in many ways," said Richeldis Messam, who belongs to Brigflatts Meeting in Cumbria. Her family had already lost out before April due to changes in benefits for single parents. The stress she is under as a result has made it harder to find work.

She said, "As a society we are valuing paid employment and paid childcare over raising our children, over parenting".

Other meetings have faced difficult decisions over how to respond. Friends in Luton were asked to become involved in their local food bank, but some felt this would only address the symptoms of poverty and not its causes.

After a meeting for clearness, they decided to work with the food bank to serve people "suffering from the effects of poverty, hunger and the destructive effects of inequality".

They expressed concerns about food banks as a "sticking plaster solution". But they hope that "the food bank movement might provide a vehicle for sharpened protest against injustice".

Many faith groups are now speaking out against cuts, pointing out how many people are affected. CAP has done the maths:

- Six and a half million households will lose out as a result of the one per cent rise in most benefits. As the increase is below the rate of inflation, critics say it is a cut in all but name.
- Over three million families will be hit by the end of the Council Tax Benefit system, with many handing over as much as £300 a year for the first time.
- Up to 660,000 families and single people will lose at least £14 per week through the “bedroom tax”. This results from a cut to housing benefit for people with a “spare” room – even if there are no one-bedroom flats available. BBC research found that only 400 one-bedroom properties are available in Wales, where 28,000 households will be affected by the bedroom tax.
- Around 67,000 households will be hit by the overall “benefit cap” of £500 per week. Many of those affected are receiving high housing benefit due to recent increases in private sector rents. Quaker Social Action is among the groups calling for a cap on rents as a better way of cutting the welfare bill.
- Disability Living Allowance (DLA) will be replaced by Personal Independence Payment. All people receiving DLA will be reassessed, with as many as 400,000 expected to lose their entitlement.
- At the same time, people with incomes of more than £150,000 will gain from a cut in the top rate of income tax from 50% to 45%. The government has been accused of redistributing wealth from the poor to the rich.

Ceri Owen, a Quaker mental health activist who belongs to Friargate Meeting in York, says the cuts were already hitting hard before April.

“When I was looking for a house a few months ago, it was pretty terrifying,” she explained. She was unable to find anywhere that could be covered by the housing benefit she received, partly because many landlords will not rent to people on benefits. Fortunately, she is now sharing a house with Quaker friends.

Ceri urged Quaker meetings to combine practical support with political action.

“We should be supporting people in practical ways because they’re going to be incredibly badly hit by this,” she said. “But also we should never lose sight that people in the UK are going to be homeless and hungry because the government has chosen to put them there. This is a choice about how we run our economy. This isn’t a natural disaster. It’s a man-made one.”

Find out more

Church Action on Poverty

www.church-poverty.org.uk or 0161 236 9321

Christianity Uncut

www.christianityuncut.wordpress.com

Disabled People Against Cuts

www.dpac.uk.net

UK Uncut

www.ukuncut.org.uk

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The river's turned brown

Oil giants are lobbying for access to tar sands. Chris Walker reports on the resistance.

“The river used to be blue. Now it's brown. Nobody can fish or drink from it. The air is bad. This has all happened so fast,” says Elsie Fabian, an elder of a First Nation community in Alberta, Canada. Her community is one of many living along the Athabasca River to be affected by local oil industry activities.

This is no ordinary oil drilling. Where forest once stood, water and chemicals are being forced through the earth to bring bitumen, a form of crude oil, above ground. Waste chemicals have contaminated rivers. Bitumen is also strip-mined from open pits.

As well as local environmental damage, the industry poses a grave threat to a stable global climate. The production and use of tar sands oil produces three to five times more CO₂ than conventional oil. The operations in Alberta now cover an area the size of England, and have been described as one of the most destructive industrial projects in history. As conventional oil sources deplete, similar projects are being developed in Madagascar, Kazakhstan, Venezuela and Russia. The Canadian government and oil giants including Shell and BP are now intensively lobbying the EU and USA to open markets to tar sands transport fuel.

However, grassroots resistance to tar sands is growing. In Canada, First Nation communities and other activists are resisting the industry with lobbying and direct action. Canadian Quakers have joined other church groups in voicing deep concern about tar sands. In the USA, 40,000 people, including Quakers, marched through Washington DC in February to resist a proposal to import tar sands fuel via the Keystone XL pipeline. Forty-eight people, including Quaker Eileen Flanagan, were arrested for handcuffing themselves to the White House gates.



First Nation activists and their supporters march against BP

This year, the struggle is coming to the UK. Canadian diplomats and oil lobbyists are attempting to undermine a proposed EU Fuel Quality Directive that would classify tar sands fuel as highly carbon-intensive. With fuel suppliers legally required to reduce their climate impact, the directive would effectively block tar sands oil from Europe. Responding to grassroots pressure, the UK government last year changed its position from supporting efforts to weaken the legislation to abstaining in a key EU vote. This has led to further opportunities for grassroots activists to call on decision-makers to keep tar sands oil out of Europe. This year, Quaker Peace & Social Witness will be supporting Friends across the country to take action on tar sands oil and challenge dependency on fossil fuels.

Take action

You can help to resist the use of fuels such as tar sands oil. For example, why not call on your MP and MEP to support the EU's Fuel Quality Directive and block tar sands fuel from Europe? For more information on this and other opportunities for action, visit www.quaker.org.uk/speak-out or call Chris Walker on 020 7663 1009.

Reducing our carbon footprints – together

Sunniva Taylor explores resources for people wanting to help each other to have a more positive impact on the Earth.

Most Friends want to reduce their carbon footprint and strive to develop more sustainable and life-enhancing ways of living. And Friends around the UK are working hard to do so. But this is not easy!

How do we know what to do? How do we address feelings of fear and guilt? Behaviour change is much easier when we work together in supportive groups. We also know that the factors that stop people engaging tend to be psychological and social rather than practical.

Below are some examples of group-based 'programmes', which could be run with groups of F/friends, to explore these feelings and take the next steps in a supportive and affirming way.

Carbon Conversations is a series of six meetings to help you halve your carbon footprint. The creation of a non-judgemental atmosphere is central, as is the permission to share hopes and doubts. Six to eight people meet with two trained volunteer facilitators using materials provided by the scheme. There may be trained facilitators in your area; if not then facilitation training is provided. The price is set by the organising group, with a typical cost of £20–£30 per person. Training for facilitators starts at about £200 but bursaries are available: please see the box below.

For more information see www.carbonconversations.org or contact Pamela McLean on 07970 327 975.

Footpaths was developed (with some help from Leicester Friends) by the Leicester Transition Town initiative. It involves six to ten people coming together for seven meetings of two hours each. They work through a structured course guide (£10). People are encouraged to help each other and confront anxieties that are provoked by striving for personal change. Facilitation is provided by two members of the group who have attended training.

Footpaths is used at Wooldale Meeting. Contact Martin Smith if you'd like to talk to a



*Creative discussion at a Carbon Conversations event.
Photo: Carbon Conversations*

Friend who's been involved: msmithholmfirmth@phoncoop.coop or 01484 687 139; or see www.transitionleicester.org.uk/projects/footpaths.

Ecocell is a scheme developed by Christian Ecology Link to enable members to measure their footprints and take action to minimise them. Each module contains a section on biblical and theological reflection. *For more information see www.greenchristian.org.uk/ecocell.*

Ecoteams enables participants to make changes that fit their lifestyle and measure progress. The focus appears to be on the practical rather than social and psychological. *For more information see www.ecoteams.org.uk.*

Some of these programmes have a cost attached. If you do not have the funds to cover them in your local or area meeting, consider applying for a QPSW Sustainability Grant. See www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability-grants.

Have you or Friends in your meeting been involved in any of these programmes before? If so please contact Sunniva Taylor: sunnivat@quaker.org.uk or 020 7663 1047.

Money and morality at Yearly Meeting

If you're going to Britain Yearly Meeting this year, watch out for some exciting and informative workshops about issues of money, justice and the Earth.

Yearly Meeting is the annual gathering of British Quakers. This year, it will be held at Friends House in London from Friday 24 to Monday 27 May.

In addition to the formal plenary sessions, there will be Special Interest Groups meeting to explore all sorts of subjects. Several of those led by Quaker Peace & Social Witness cover issues of economic justice and sustainability.

Watch out for *Your Faith, Your Finances*. This will be led by Suzanne Ismail and Symon Hill. It is a chance to explore the ethical and spiritual dimensions to decisions about how you use your own money.

QPSW staff will also take part in a Special Interest Meeting run by the Canterbury Commitment Group on how Quakers are engaging politically on sustainability, linking 'the local' to 'the global' (see Chris' article on this subject on page 3).

Quaker activist Colin Hall will lead a discussion entitled *Conversations we have not yet had: challenging ourselves further in living sustainable and just lives*. Another option will be Steve Mandel's talk (followed by discussion) on *How our theory of economics and our practice of finance have unsustainability built into them*.

Timings for these Special Interest Groups were not available at the time of going to press. Please check your Yearly Meeting programme when you receive it, or when you arrive on 24 May.

Momentum building on Israeli settlement trade

Suzanne Ismail

The UK-Dutch multinational Unilever has become the latest company to distance itself from illegal Israeli settlements. After years of civil society pressure, the company announced that it had moved production in its Beigal and Beigal subsidiary from the Barkan Industrial Zone settlement to within Israel proper.

This is the latest development showing that the campaign to end trade with the settlements is gaining momentum. Settlements are towns built illegally on Palestinian land outside Israel's own borders. They often displace and divide the Palestinian population and use their resources, such as water and farmland.

Settlement trade is creeping up the political agenda across Europe following the publication of the report *Trading Away Peace: How Europe helps sustain illegal Israeli settlements*. It was published last year by 22 organisations including Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) and the Quaker Council for European Affairs.

The report's recommendations – including better labelling rules, government advice discouraging European companies from doing business in the settlements and a ban on the import of settlement goods – have been discussed in a number of parliaments across Europe. The European Union (EU) Foreign Affairs Council communiqués have mentioned settlement trade twice in the last year.

It is too early to say what concrete action will emerge either at a national or EU level. Nevertheless, it is important to celebrate that, in just a few years, a movement in which Quakers have played an important role has succeeded in bringing this issue to the fore. Tragically, Israel's settlement-building project shows no signs of abating. It is vital that we keep up the momentum. In this vein, QPSW representatives are engaging with UK civil servants, MPs and ministers on this issue. To find out what you can do to take action, see www.quaker.org.uk/settlement-trade or contact Suzanne Ismail: suzannei@quaker.org.uk or 020 7663 1055.

Creating a just and sustainable food system

Sunniva Taylor explores ideas for food systems based on the needs of producers, consumers and the Earth – not on the profits of corporations.

What did you eat for breakfast? How was it made, and where? Who grew the grain or the fruit? Do you know the grower? Who was in control of that farm and the seeds that were planted, and where did the profits go? These are all questions about the food system your breakfast was a part of – a system that is currently largely globally-connected, corporate-controlled and unsustainable, and where hunger and famine coexist with overconsumption and associated health problems. So what would a just and sustainable food system look like, and how do we get there?

Nearly 900 million people in the world are still going hungry every day. That's more people than live in Europe, the US, Canada and Australia combined. But eradicating hunger and malnutrition is not just about getting nutrients to these people – food is far more than the nutrients it contains. Both the growing and consumption of food are deeply intertwined with our culture and society, our physiological and psychological well-being, and with politics and economics. We eat particular types of food because they mean something to us. We access our food in the ways which our economics and local communities make possible for us. Thinking about food systems must therefore involve consideration of power and distribution, equity and control, as well as an exploration of how food can be produced in ways that are ecologically sustainable and resilient.

Food sovereignty

QPSW has begun to consider the concept of food sovereignty as an approach to these issues, and the food sovereignty movement as an exciting possibility for change. Food sovereignty puts the people who produce, distribute and consume food at the centre of decisions on food systems and policies, and does so in opposition to the demands of markets and corporations that its advocates believe have come to dominate the global food



Urban spaces and growing food can go together

system. Much of the momentum for it comes from the global south, such as through La Via Campesina movement, a network of small-scale farmers, landless people, fisher folk and others. However, its advocates are here too – small-scale farmers who use ecological growing methods, community gardeners, co-op workers, campaigners and activists, groups you might already be a part of. La Via Campesina also demands a change in the way international negotiations involving food are conducted so that food producers themselves are at the heart of this.

Governance

The 'Food and Sustainability' strand of our sister organisation, the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva (QUNO Geneva), is working to address related questions about the governance of food at an international level. It is particularly interested in those who determine the rules around natural resources relating to food, including access to and ownership of seeds, water and land. It is also looking at the links between natural resource management and prevention of conflict in light

of climate change, drawing on the experience of indigenous peoples, small-scale farmers, fishing communities and the rural poor. It works with delegates and policy-makers in Geneva and participates in various international processes and negotiations. In the September–December 2012 issue of *Geneva Reporter* it explores one international mechanism (the Committee on World Food Security) that may be a cause for optimism in the development of a system of agricultural governance that recognises smallholder farmers as critical. QUNO is also currently exploring what a better international framework for governance of agricultural trade and investment might look like.

IF

In the UK there is a large-scale campaign taking place throughout this year called Enough Food For Everyone IF. It is calling on the leaders of the G8 nations (eight of the world's wealthiest countries – the US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Japan and Canada), who will be meeting in Northern Ireland in June, to make decisions and change policies to 'fix the food system'.

IF calls on leaders to provide more aid; prevent 'land grabs' and stop poor farmers being pushed off their land; stop companies dodging taxes in developing countries; and increase transparency. These are all good aims, and we would encourage Friends to join in with events and initiatives in their local communities to explore and share them, or even to participate as a local meeting if they feel led.

QPSW has decided not to join the campaign, because we think the changes that are needed to achieve this are bigger and deeper than those it advocates. We feel that at the heart of the problem is the issue of power and politics, as described above. With its focus on the G8 as the solution, we question whether the IF campaign can tackle this, and so, considering also our limited resources, we have chosen not to become a member.

QPSW is committed to working on food sovereignty and to challenging an international food regime whose rules are not fair and equitable. We will continue to explore what other work we can do, researching

opportunities and working out where we are best-placed to influence. We hope in particular to support the global movement for a sustainable and just food system.

Find out more

Geoff Tansey – a Joseph Rowntree visionary and member of Hebden Bridge Meeting, is exploring food systems
www.tansey.org.uk:

The IF campaign:
www.enoughfoodif.org

QUNO Geneva:
www.quno.org
(Search for the Sept–Dec 2012 issue of *Geneva Reporter* under 'Publications & Statements')

UK Food Group:
www.ukfg.org.uk

UK Food Sovereignty movement:
www.foodsovereignty.org.uk

More information about food sovereignty from the World Development Movement:
www.wdm.org.uk/what-food-sovereignty

London's top sustainable restaurant

Friends House Restaurant has been awarded the title of 'London Sustainable Restaurant of the Year' by the Sustainable Restaurant Association. It was awarded the prize in February for offering food that reflects its Quaker values, using fairly traded, local, organic, free-range and sustainable products.

Friends House restaurant has two meat-free days each week – Monday and Friday – and makes a point of serving free-range meat and fish from sustainable stocks. All the milk and cheese on sale at Friends House is organic and farmed in nearby Kent.

The Sustainable Restaurant Association awards are given to those who have achieved the highest ratings in sustainability during the year.

Quirky Quaker actions for a better world

Quakers around Britain are finding creative ways of speaking out for economic justice and sustainability. Symon Hill gives some examples.

Manchester Friend Alan Pinch is one of several Quakers to have found original ways of getting his message across. He cycled to George Osborne's constituency office at Christmas to give him a copy of the Charles Dickens classic *A Christmas Carol*.

He was joined on the ride by Graham Martin, an Anglican, and Stephen Pennells, a Roman Catholic. They said that the Chancellor risked "turning into a modern-day Scrooge" and returning Britain to levels of poverty and inequality not seen since Dickens' day.

The trio cycled twenty miles from Manchester's Albert Square to George Osborne's constituency office in Knutsford. They made stops along the route so that members of the public could sign a statement challenging the Chancellor's cuts to the welfare state.

Alan, who came up with the idea, said, "It's a bit of festive fun with a very serious message at a time when many families are being forced to choose between heating and eating". He explained that the trio wanted "to add our voices to the many calls for him to change track".

More recently, a number of Friends got stuck into challenging something that fuels both war and economic injustice: military spending.

The Global Day of Action on Military Spending saw actions around the world on 15 April. At least six Quakers were among those who joined a street action in Westminster called 'Play the budget right'. A game show host introduced contestants seeking medical treatment and a university education who instead won military equipment, while an engineer wanting to use her skills to develop renewable energy was forced into working in arms production.

Friends were also present in other actions on the Day. Veteran Quaker campaigner Sylvia Boyes was one of forty-seven people arrested at a nonviolent blockade of the Faslane base in Scotland, home to the Trident nuclear weapons.



Alan Pinch and Stephen Pennells prepare to deliver the Dickens classic to the Chancellor. Photo: Graham Martin

The blockaders pointed out that the £100bn expected to be spent on Trident could be better spent on health, education, supporting people in poverty and tackling climate change.

A few days later, Quakers teamed up with Greenpeace to help their Save the Arctic campaign. Greenpeace projected a short 3D film on the eastern side of Friends House in central London. The film celebrated the Arctic as a precious habitat and called for a global effort to protect it from climate change and deep sea oil-drilling. Greenpeace supporters interacted with the film in a flash mob-style event.

Have you found creative ways of speaking out in your area? Other Friends could learn from your experience. Drop us a line: symonh@quaker.org.uk or 020 7663 1035. You can also share your thoughts on the Quakernomics site: www.quaker.org.uk/quakernomics.

Being poor is expensive

The poorest people in Britain are being forced to pay over the odds for food and fuel. Symon Hill reports on calls for change from Church Action on Poverty.

A 'poverty premium' means that food, fuel, furniture and funerals cost the most for people who can afford the least. Examples include increased fuel charges through pre-payment meters, extra spending on food for those who cannot buy in bulk and additional charges for paying for furniture in instalments.

Church Action on Poverty (CAP) has called for fair prices as part of its campaign to close the gap between rich and poor. The campaign is backed by Quaker Peace & Social Witness.

Save the Children estimates that the poverty premium per household in the UK is as much as £1,300 every year.

CAP's director, Niall Cooper, said "People on the lowest incomes end up paying the most for many goods and services, including food, fuel, financial services, funerals, furnishings and white goods."

CAP is exploring potential approaches to delivering affordable goods and services to people on low incomes.

It has encouraged supporters to raise their concerns with companies that charge a poverty premium. Some campaigners have urged faith groups not to invest in such companies.

'Fair prices' is one strand of CAP's Close the Gap campaign. The others are 'fair wages', 'fair taxes' and 'a fair say'.

In a new development in the "fair taxes" strand, CAP has teamed up with the Student Christian Movement to launch a joint campaign over universities' deals with tax-dodging companies. They are urging vice-chancellors not to give contracts – for example, for building work or food services – to businesses that are not paying their full share of taxes.

"I feel it's really important to speak out and act for a better and more equitable society," explained Tim Rouse, a Quaker student at

Reading University. "One way of doing that is by calling for fair taxation."

Tim is campaigning against a sponsorship arrangement between Reading Students' Union and the accountancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). The firm is accused of facilitating tax avoidance as well as promoting fossil fuels and the arms trade.

Tim added, "To me, it seems that opposing them is standing up not just for equality, but for peace and sustainability too."



*Poverty and inequality in Britain are continuing to grow.
Photo: Church Action on Poverty*

Find out more

Church Action on Poverty:
www.church-poverty.org.uk or 0161 236 9321

Student Christian Movement:
www.movement.org.uk or 0121 200 3355

Fair Taxes on Campus (including a message to email to your vice-chancellor):
www.church-poverty.org.uk/movement

QPSW Sustainability Grants

Are you engaged in a sustainability project that needs support? QPSW has small grants to give away to Quaker (or Quaker-supported) projects focused on sustainability – whether that be cutting carbon, connecting people to the Earth, engaging in politics, speaking out or challenging unsustainable and unjust economics.

A maximum of £2,000 and minimum of £100 may be requested. A maximum of £5,000 in grants will be distributed in total. Application forms are available now. The deadline for applications is 19 August. Grants will be distributed by the end of November 2013.

For further information and application forms see www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability-grants or contact Sunniva Taylor at sunnivat@quaker.org.uk or on 020 7663 1047.

Walking for justice

Quakers are among participants in the Pilgrimage for Peace and Economic Justice – a walk from the Scottish island of Iona to the Houses of Parliament in London.

Organisers are expecting the journey to take 61 days, walking from 19 May to 21 July. Some participants will join in for particular weeks or days rather than the whole walk.

The pilgrims will hold an act of witness at the Faslane nuclear base, stage events in cities such as Glasgow, York and Cambridge and visit traditional religious sites including Holy Island.

Those behind the Pilgrimage are particularly concerned about plans to slash education, health and welfare budgets while renewing the Trident nuclear weapons system.

To find out more, visit www.justpeacepilgrimage.com.

Europe-wide campaign for fairer trade

Human rights, decent work for all and a low-carbon economy are among the aims of a new Europe-wide alliance working for fairer trade. The Alternative Trade Mandate (ATM) includes over fifty organisations from across the continent.

Among the founders is the Trade Justice Movement, to which Quaker Peace & Social Witness is affiliated. Other members include trade unions, aid agencies, migrant workers, women's rights groups, Fair Trade activists and environmental campaigners.

Founded in the run-up to European elections in 2014, the alliance aims to shift the debate about the rules of international trade in a way that “puts people and planet before big business”.

The alliance's principles include fighting poverty, democratising decision-making and challenging power relations between countries, regions, genders, classes, castes and ethnic groups.

However, they are seeking to go beyond these

general principles to build a “well thought-out, concrete and detailed proposal on what EU trade policy should look like”. The precise wording of this mandate is being worked out through civil society consultations in several European countries.

The first full draft was revealed in April. It includes the need to “guarantee that European governments and parliaments hold European corporations accountable for the social and environmental consequences and impacts of their operations”. They also call on the EU to back food sovereignty (see pages 6–7), allowing communities to prioritise local and regional food systems over global agricultural trade. This is part of a commitment to making the connection between producers and consumers as direct as possible.

Individual supporters can request a regular email from ATM. Organisations, including faith groups such as Quaker meetings, can affiliate to the alliance. To find out more, visit www.alternativetrademandate.org.

◆ Friends in action

In the USA, the Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT) is challenging financial support for destructive coal mining. We asked Eileen Flanagan of EQAT to tell us more.

What is the Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT)? How did it come about?

EQAT (pronounced “equate”) is an organisation of Friends and friends of Friends who use nonviolent direct action to work for a just and sustainable economy. Although we are not under the care of any Quaker body, we grew out of the 2009 sessions of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting where there was a profound sense that the Spirit was calling us to some bolder action around climate justice. Today our participants range in age from high school students to octogenarians. Although our base is in Philadelphia, we are expanding geographically. Our last Day of Action in December included actions at fifteen PNC Bank branches in five states and the District of Columbia.

You’ve been pressuring US bank PNC to stop the financing of mountain top removal coal mining in the Appalachia region. Why is that your focus?

Taking the profit out of financing climate change is one way to affect change, and we saw a strategic opportunity to do this with PNC, which because of its Quaker roots has held the accounts of many Friends and Friends’ institutions. PNC advertises itself as a “green bank” while being one of the leading financiers of mountain top removal coal mining. This devastating practice has destroyed more than 500 mountains and polluted over 2,000 miles of stream in Appalachia. There are unusually high rates of cancer and birth defects as a result.

Why is nonviolent direct action important to EQAT and how are you using this in your Bank Like Appalachia Matters (BLAM!) campaign?

We use nonviolent direct action because history shows that it works. It gives ordinary people an opportunity to demonstrate their



Quakers in the US stage a nonviolent protest against PNC Bank. Photo: EQAT

moral commitment in a way that challenges business as usual. In our BLAM! campaign, we have used a variety of nonviolent tactics. We have held numerous actions at PNC banks and bank events, including some where people committed civil disobedience and many where Friends withdrew their money. Last spring we organised a 200-mile walk to PNC’s national headquarters, visiting Quaker meetings and others along the way. We have attended PNC shareholder meetings and plan to do so again this April. In fact, to prepare for what will be an escalation of our shareholder presence, we are currently engaged in a forty-day fast.

Take action

For more information about EQAT, visit www.eqat.org. For ideas on taking action to end fossil fuel dependency and other sustainability issues, visit www.quaker.org.uk/speak-out or contact Chris Walker at Quaker Peace & Social Witness: chrisw@quaker.org.uk or 020 7663 1009.

Conversation starter: ethical clothing...

Conversation starter is a space for Friends to voice a hope or concern relating to sustainability or economics and challenge us to think about how we can act on it.

In this edition, Kate Pearson looks at some of the issues and actions being explored by North London Area Meeting in response to social and environmental exploitation in the clothing industry.

Hope

The global clothing industry needs reform to create a system that is ethical and sustainable. Consumers are central to bringing about change. Profits and appearances should not be maintained at the expense of other people and the environment. Workers and cotton growers need a fair price. Living wages need to be implemented across the industry. The introduction of pre-screening of factories before retailers place orders could reduce the likelihood of unrealistically large orders, which contribute to excessive overtime, sub-contracting to unregulated factories, and low wages.

Values

Our testimony to simplicity can be traced back to seventeenth-century Quaker plainness. The examples of early Friends, such as John Woolman, challenge us to seek an end to the exploitation of people and our environment for the sake of dress. Forced labour, low pay and poor conditions make this industry inconsistent with Quakers' commitment to justice. The widespread use of pesticides, water misuse and pollution, poor quality clothing, 'fast' fashion and increasing numbers of garments going to landfill challenge our commitment to sustainability.

Action

- Question shop assistants, managers and head office staff on when living wages will be introduced for all staff, including sub-contracted workers, in the UK and overseas. Ask what the company is doing to improve working conditions and labour rights for garment workers abroad.
- Consider using your purchasing power to support ethical and greener alternatives such as social enterprise, charity shops, 100% Fairtrade and certified organic cotton.
- Support organisations that strive to improve the effects of the garment industry on people and the planet, such as Anti-Slavery International and War on Want.
- Keep informed by checking retailers' policies and practices. Labour Behind the Label and *Ethical Consumer* magazine rate retailers against ethical and green criteria.

Questions for Friends

1. Would you be prepared to follow in the footsteps of John Woolman to change your style or buying habits to avoid the products of exploitation?
2. We live in an interconnected world. Everything we buy has an impact. In 2011, Quakers made a commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community. What could you do to make your wardrobe greener?

You can continue the conversation with Friends in your meeting. You can also respond – either 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, please get in touch (contact details on page 2).

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