



Earth and Economy



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

April 2015

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Quaker Equality Week

Quakers across the country united in publicly challenging economic inequality. Maya Williams, Economics, Sustainability & Peace Network Coordinator, shares how.



Lancaster Quakers holding their second vigil as part of Quaker Equality Week. Photo: Philip Deegan.

This March more than 80 Quaker meetings across Britain took part in Quaker Equality Week, powerfully bearing witness to our testimony to equality in the face of huge and increasing differences in levels of income and wealth in the UK.

The high level of economic inequality in Britain goes against Quaker testimonies in a number of ways – destroying people’s hopes, isolating communities from each other and making it extremely difficult to tackle climate change.

The week was coordinated by Manchester & Warrington Area Meeting. They invited meetings across the country to join them in a nine-day 'week' of activity responding to their faith-based commitment to equality and in recognition of widening inequality in the world.

Posters and leaflets were designed and printed to form a support pack for meetings getting involved; these were sent out alongside ideas for action, advice on publicity and social media, Britain Yearly Meeting statements on economic inequality and Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) briefings. All of these resources helped meetings across the country to plan an array of different activities throughout Quaker Equality Week.



At least 35 silent vigils were held during the week. Lancaster was the first meeting to do so, holding a 12-hour vigil two weeks before Quaker Equality Week officially started. They were joined by a number of others, including members of other church groups who wanted to uphold and recognise people who are being disproportionately affected by economic inequality in the local area.



Salisbury Meeting's Equality Week vigil.
Photo: Salisbury Quakers



Coventry Quakers decorated the meeting house garden with flowers for equality. Photo Jo Hallett

Many Quaker meetings also held vigils, often being joined and supported by other faith groups, social justice groups, trade unions and local politicians. Some vigils were held within or outside meeting houses. Others were held in busy public places, drawing attention to particular aspects of economic inequality, including benefit sanctions, the living wage and vacant retail units.

Several meetings organised talks or events during the week. South Belfast Meeting joined with the local Methodist church to hold a structured conversation on Equality, inequality and the basic income which was well attended.

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Welcome to *Earth and Economy*, where you can explore issues of faith, money, justice and sustainability.

Every issue is free, so please visit www.quaker.org.uk/earth-economy-signup or call 020 7663 1056 to sign up for a paper copy or email version. The newsletter is published by Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW), but it's not just about what QPSW is doing centrally. It's also a chance for you to share news about how you've been taking action, helping Friends to learn from each other.

You can also add your own thoughts to the Quakernomics blog at www.quaker.org.uk/quakernomics, or follow us on Twitter @EandEquaker.

Contact Maya Williams (Economics, Sustainability & Peace Network Coordinator): mayaw@quaker.org.uk or 020 7663 1056.

Wanstead Meeting invited a member of the Economics Sustainability & Peace sub-committee to speak at their lively discussion on 'Quakers and Economic Equality', at which other local faith and church groups joined them, as well as others who live in their local community.



Purley Quakers' Equality Week display. Photo: Purley Quakers

Disley Meeting used the resources to frame their 'give or take day', where the local community could bring along crockery, household linen, electrical goods, books, toys, or kitchenware to give away or take away. The day was organised in a way that promoted equality, respect and care for people and the earth. The Quaker Equality Week resources were also used by Stoke Meeting as the theme for their participation in a local International Women's Day event.

Sidmouth and Bury St Edmunds meetings were amongst those which organised displays in local community spaces. Others, such as Central Manchester Meeting had a display within their meeting house, so that others who used the building during the week could see it.



Sidmouth Quakers were joined by two local Councillors for their vigil during Quaker Equality Week. Photo: Sidmouth Quakers

There were also a number of letter write-ins where Friends and others wrote to their MPs and parliamentary candidates to raise

particular issues of economic equality, ranging from tax and the living wage to pay ratios. Ealing Quakers also held a pre-election panel discussion evening on inequality issues with representatives from the main political parties.

Other activities included film nights, large flowers with messages of equality decorating gardens and a banner making evening.



Devon Friends during Quaker Equality Week. Photo: Nicholas Cox

After Quaker Equality Week, meetings are following up their initial activity by asking questions at hustings on the issue and engaging with their parliamentary candidates.

Quaker Equality Week showed how committed Friends across the yearly meeting are to take action on economic justice issues. As we move forward the Economic, Sustainability & Peace team will be able to support the development of more local and area initiatives, taking action around economic justice and sustainability.

If you would like to find out more about taking action, or if your meeting has an initiative or a project that you would like other meetings to find out about and join in with, please get in touch with Maya at Mayaw@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1056.

What's happening next?

On 20 June there will be a follow-up day in Manchester for Friends involved in Quaker Equality Week to come together, share the strengths of the week and talk about what to do next.

On 24 October Central England Area Meeting will also be holding a conference at Bull Street Meeting House on economic inequality as a follow on from the successful *Food banks are not enough* conference they ran in 2014.

Global Divestment Day

Alison Prout, QPSW programme manager, writes about how Quakers got involved in Global Divestment Day and some of the divestment campaigns QPSW is supporting.

An enormous dinosaur, Boris Johnson, singing, impersonators, street theatre and a giant heart. Just a few of the features of Quaker participation in Global Divestment Day. Divestment, or disinvestment, simply means getting rid of investments in a particular company or industry that you consider to be unethical or contrary to your values. On this day the focus was on divesting from the fossil fuel industry.

On Global Divestment Day there were over 500 events in 60 countries across the UK and around the world. Large numbers of Quakers were involved, particularly in events in Huddersfield, Oxford and London. The events were fun, family-friendly, and thought-provoking.

Global Divestment Day highlights the need to transfer financial support from the fossil fuel economy into safer, sustainable renewable options. Over 80 per cent of current fossil fuel reserves need to stay in the ground if we are to prevent catastrophic climate change.

The Divestment movement is growing rapidly. So far 180 institutions representing £30 billion have committed to divest. Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) and a number of local and area meetings are amongst them.

In autumn 2013 BYM took the decision to divest from companies engaged in fossil fuel extraction. This meant selling two investments in Statoil and BG group which represented about 2 per cent of the portfolio. BYM's divestment is part of the commitment made by the Yearly Meeting in 2011 to become a low-carbon, sustainable community and was a first for a large faith community.

Since BYM divested QPSW has been working to support and encourage other churches and the Christian community to divest from fossil fuels by working with Operation Noah on their Bright Now campaign.

Huddersfield Quakers chose Global Divestment Day to announce their commitment to divest as well as organising an impressive Valentine's themed tour of local banks and Kirklees Council's offices in Huddersfield town



*Global Divestment Day in Oxford.
Photo: Alan Allport*

centre. The event encouraged banks and local institutions to 'break up with fossil fuels' and featured bubbles, power ballads, sequin dresses and a giant red heart.

Street theatre dominated the Oxford event, with two dramas performed in four locations over the city accompanied by the local 'Sea Green Singers'. This was mainly organised by Fossil Free Oxfordshire. Local Quakers are very active in both groups.

Quakers in London were part of a diverse group of almost 500 people gathered at City Hall to call on the London Assembly and Boris Johnson to publicly commit to avoiding all investments in fossil fuels, to use their power to pressure the London Pension Fund Authority to divest, and provide fossil-free investment options. 'Divest London' was spelt out in large letters by different groups. Quakers were joined by people of other faiths to create 'V', the 'faith letter'.

Find more information, including a briefing, at www.quaker.org.uk/disinvest-fossil-fuels. Divestment doesn't just apply to your investments, for example you might consider switching your bank. Find more information at www.moveyourmoney.org.uk/divest. It's likely that your pension fund is invested in fossil fuels too. QPSW is a member of the Greenlight campaign to support Friends who want to engage with their pension provider – get involved at www.greenlightcampaign.org.uk.

Taking action on fracking

Sunniva Taylor, QPSW programme manager, explains how Friends were involved in campaigning for the inclusion of a moratorium on fracking in the Infrastructure Act.

Quakers in Britain are calling for a ban on fracking in the UK. QPSW and Friends across the country took action on the Infrastructure Bill (now Act) early this year. We called for a moratorium on fracking to be inserted.

Up to 80 per cent of known fossil fuel reserves globally need to stay in the ground if we are to have a chance of avoiding a 2°C temperature rise. Yet exploration for and extraction of new fossil fuel resources continues, facilitated by policies such as the Infrastructure Act.

A report by the Environmental Audit Committee concluded that a moratorium on fracking is needed “to avoid the UK’s carbon budget [the agreed amount of carbon that can be burnt] being breached in the 2020s and beyond, and the international credibility of the UK in tackling climate change being critically weakened.”¹

MPs and campaigners, including Quakers, called for the Infrastructure Act – which achieved Royal Assent on 7 February – to be amended to include a moratorium. We know that Friends wrote letters to at least 23 MPs, and that QPSW submitted written evidence to the Infrastructure Bill committee.² We called for a moratorium, but also, failing that, the removal of clauses in the Bill related to ‘trespass law’, which enables fracking to be carried out under property without the owner’s consent.

An amendment proposing a moratorium on fracking was supported by a cross-party group of MPs. Quakers joined hundreds of others outside the Houses of Parliament to call for ‘No fracking, anywhere’, when the Bill was debated in the House of Commons on 26 January.

The House of Commons rejected a moratorium, and did not discuss amendments related to the trespass law, meaning those clauses remain in the Act. MPs did agree to conditions from Labour banning fracking in national parks, other protected areas, and some groundwater protection zones. Analysis by the *Guardian*

suggests this would effectively have banned fracking from 40 per cent of the land in England being offered for shale gas exploration by the government.³

However, many of these amendments were unpicked as the Bill went through the final stages between the Commons and Lords. Fracking rigs will not be allowed in national parks, but it looks like horizontal drilling under them will be. The meaning of the term ‘protected areas’ has not been defined and left to government discretion.

Despite not getting the changes to the Act that we were campaigning for, resisting fracking is still possible. There is no moratorium on fracking in England, but in Scotland and Wales ministers have voted to freeze fracking until more is known about its impact on the climate and health. Moreover, though fracking might be being pushed forward nationally, the decision-making about individual sites to be fracked happens at a local level. As communities across the country are already demonstrating there is much to be done to prevent fracking from taking place.

What can you do?

Read QPSW’s ‘Energy Justice’ briefing and suggestions for action, available at www.quaker.org.uk/energy-justice.

Is there fracking planned locally to you or an active local anti-fracking group? Look at Friends of the Earth’s latest map of UK fracking: <http://bit.ly/1DEMwzz>.

Explore the Frack Off directory: <http://bit.ly/1li5K3r>.

See if your local Friends of the Earth group is active on this issue: <http://bit.ly/18OdCa5>.

Let us know Quakers are taking action on fracking locally. We’d could put you in touch with other Friends doing the same. Contact sunnivat@quaker.org.uk or 020 7663 1047.

1. ‘Environmental Risks of Fracking’, Environmental Audit Committee, January 2015. Access report at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmenvaud/856/856.pdf.

2. Access evidence at: <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2014-15/infrastructure/documents.html>.

3. www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/feb/02/fracking-set-to-be-banned-from-40-of-englands-shale-areas.

Housing, economy and environment

Secretary to Quaker Housing Trust, Paula Harvey, shares the connection between housing, the economy and the environment.

“Housing and the making of homes has considerable social and environmental consequences: it is, quite literally, the society and economy set in concrete. All that is associated with it – land, manufacturing, finance, energy consumption – represents a large part of our economy and we should seek to influence it.”

Housing is an essential part of making a community, not a means to separate and isolate ourselves. The sustainability of healthy communities needs a choice of housing available to meet the physical, cultural, familial and social needs of the people living there. This also contributes to ensuring there is a sufficient number and range of households to support services such as public transport, local shops, green spaces and schools. And, because housing is a resource for the wider community, an element of accountability is required for those in a position of influence to exercise control over this resource, whether this comes in the form of policy decisions or financial influence.

A key message for Quakers is the importance of housing as a home, providing a secure place in which to thrive, not merely an individual financial investment. Housing is vital to an inclusive and healthy society. It is well understood that inadequate housing is inextricably related to poverty, unemployment or low-paid employment, poor health and education, prejudice and other causes of social marginalisation. The improvement of housing conditions – homes – for everyone plays an important part in the regeneration of our cities, towns and villages. It is vital to preventing people being excluded from full participation in society.

Today, more and more people in Britain find it hard to get and keep an appropriate and affordable home. The lower your income the harder it is, regardless of whether you are in paid employment. Changes to the benefits system, not only in how benefits are calculated but also in when and how they are paid, are

adversely affecting large numbers of people who receive them. And many people now receiving benefits were previously assumed not to need that form of state help because, for example, they are households in work. At a time when inequality in housing is widening and housing options for people are narrowing, social housing is an important option for a secure home to everyone, regardless of income.

Quaker Housing Trust (QHT) arose from the Yearly Meeting concern about the damage caused to people by inadequate, inappropriate and insufficient housing in Britain. It was created as a way of turning Friends' concern and money into help for social housing projects that transform people's lives by giving them a safe place to live.

Along with the core work of helping the provision of good quality of homes for a wide range of people in housing need, QHT uses its role in funding property and building works to make practical witness to the connected Quaker concerns about the environment and ethical use of money and property. Applicants are encouraged to achieve the highest standards for energy efficiency, carbon emission reduction



Photo from Quaker Housing Trust's Spirit of Place exhibition. Photo: Quaker Housing Trust

and other environmentally sustainable options that are possible for their property – and ideally contribute to a reduction in costs for the occupants. A special Environmental Assessment Grant pays for the fees of an appropriate professional to help social housing projects identify and use such options.

There is a noticeable and welcome increase in approaches to QHT from projects buying, renovating and refurbishing empty properties. More projects are returning derelict and run-down houses to their proper function, others turning disused buildings into places that give people of all ages and conditions the home they need. Often these projects are in areas of considerable degeneration and deprivation, and are able to give training and employment to local people through the renovation work. QHT is aware of, and nurtures, the growing concern within Britain Yearly Meeting about making best use of Quaker properties, particularly meeting houses.

One way or another we are all part of the same housing market, whatever our housing situation and however good or poor the decisions that led us there. External factors outside our control will have made their contribution: economic cycles, political decisions on housing and welfare policies and local government priorities. The housing market has worked in some people's favour, but the same market prevents others from finding a home that they can afford.

So, wherever and however we live, we are all involved in the issue of housing, all affected by the way society regulates our access to a safe, secure, adequate home. This means we can all be part of challenging and changing 'the system'.

As Quakers and as citizens we have a collective responsibility for housing our population, our neighbours. Making a difference is an active process and one that Friends have long engaged with as part of our historic witness to social justice. The Housing session at Yearly Meeting 2015 may provide time to continue the exploration of the interconnectedness of the Quaker concerns for the environment, social justice, economic justice, and housing. It will also give us food for thought when considering how to exercise our rights as citizens in the general election.

“What is my fair share of the world's wealth and resources, including housing resources? Do I consider that if I take more than my fair share others will have to manage on less?”

Case studies

- QHT gave an Environmental Assessment Grant to help a project get the best advice on heating options for four of their houses providing supported communal housing for single homeless people in Tonbridge, Kent.
- QHT funding helped with a 3 year project to buy and renovate 25 empty properties to provide energy efficient and affordable homes for homeless families and single people in Leeds.
- QHT supported the conversion of existing office space into a self-contained flat to increase the accommodation for adults with learning difficulties in Whitby, Yorkshire.

What you can do

Do you have housing wealth that you can recycle through Quaker Housing Trust? For example, this might come from a source such as reduced mortgage rate, interest on a building society account, an inherited property or its contents, or rebates earned by a more energy-efficient home.

Does your area meeting have land or property that could be re-used to provide affordable housing?

Have you seen our recently reissued 'Principles for a Just Housing Policy', a checklist for Friends to use to evaluate housing policy against our basic Quaker principles? We have also republished 'Housing: Our Spiritual Concern', which is a kind of 'advices & queries'. Both are now available on the Yearly Meeting 2015 website www.quaker.org.uk/ym and the Quaker Vote website <http://election.quaker.org.uk/resources-a-z/>.

More information is available from Paula Harvey, Quaker Housing Trust, on 020 7663 1036 or involveme@qht.org.uk.

www.qht.org.uk

Quaker Peace & Social Witness Sustainability and New Economy Grants

Each year £5000 is distributed through the Sustainability and New Economy Grants process. Maya Williams, Economics Sustainability & Peace Network Coordinator, shares information about some of the projects which recently received grants

Each year the Economics, Sustainability & Peace subcommittee has £5000 to allocate to projects that are organised or supported by a local or area meeting. The grants, of up to £2000 per project, are to help build a more just and sustainable world.

At the end of 2013 we gave out grants to five different projects that were working on sustainability.

Exeter Community Energy project

Members of Exeter Meeting supported a grant application for Exeter Transition. They were awarded £1,500 to help with the setup of Exeter Community Energy, which aims to reduce local reliance on fossil fuels for energy, and build a local economy that's sustainable. The grant enabled the energy co-op to identify and develop a working group with professional, technical and legal expertise and to organise publicity and open meetings to gather support, as well as put time towards fundraising to continue the project. They are now working with community organisations and sustainable businesses to install solar panels on their roofs as part of the community energy project.

Liverpool Burial Ground and community engagement project

Liverpool Quaker Meeting received a £730 grant to fund the development of their Burial Ground into a community orchard and wildlife garden. At weekly volunteer sessions, paths were cleared, a pond was dug and new trees were planted. The newly planted trees are being watered by a water collection system and a beehive has been installed.

The commitment of the volunteers has transformed the Burial Ground into a wildlife space that is valued by the local community, who came out to support the project at an open day in the summer.



Liverpool Meeting's community orchard and wildlife garden. Photo: Jan Jackson

Bakewell Green Festival

Following a grant of £1,500, a number of other successful funding applications and a dedicated team from Bakewell Quaker Meeting, the Bakewell Green Festival took place in the summer of 2014. Participants contributed talks, poetry, music, goods for sale, and activities, all celebrating sustainable living in the Peak District. The day was a massive success with 4-5000 visitors through the day. Since the festival, members of Bakewell Meeting have also organised a series of evening and weekend activities.

Pales Meeting and Capel Meeting also received grants: Pales Meeting to develop their Meeting House Garden, and Capel Meeting to create a community orchard in their garden. Both of these meetings through the course of the year were able to find ways to run their projects without spending their grant money. The money has since been returned and will be put towards future grants.

In 2014 we invited local and area meeting to apply for grants on the theme of sustainability and new economy. We were able to fund five projects. This is what some of them plan to do over the next 12 months:

Stocksfield Footpaths Programme

Stocksfield Quakers received £1,530 to organise a training weekend for Quakers on how to run the Footpaths Programme. Footpaths was developed by Transition Leicester and is a seven session programme to help a group consider and reduce carbon footprints in a supportive way. Stocksfield Quakers hope that each person who gets trained during the weekend will run the seven week course with a group of eight to ten Friends afterwards.

Northfield Ecocentre Urban Harvest

Northfield Ecocentre, a project of Central England Area Meeting, has been running Urban Harvest, a project that collects unwanted fruit from gardens and community spaces. Through the lifetime of the project, over three tonnes of fruit has been picked and distributed to charities, schools and food banks or turned into juices and preserves which are sold to help support the project in the coming year. With the £1,220 grant they will be able to buy the equipment needed for this project rather than hiring it each year, making the project more sustainable for the coming years.



Urban Harvest is run by Northfield Ecocentre, a project of Central England Quakers. Photo: Northfield Ecocentre

Exeter Pound Project

Transition Exeter received £1,700 funding for publicity and community engagement for the Exeter Pound Project, an initiative that members of Exeter Meeting are involved in. The Exeter pound can be spent in local businesses and will launch in autumn 2015.

Apply in 2015

If your local or area meeting has a project or is supporting a project that is working to build sustainability or a new economy then why not apply for a grant this year?

As well as providing grants, we can offer support throughout the year, and can give you some help in developing your project into a form that makes applying for a grant possible. If you don't need support, we would still love to hear about what you are doing, so that we can inspire and inform other Quakers about what is happening in their area and around Britain through our stories page at www.quaker.org.uk/stories-of-witness.

The deadline for applications will be 14 September 2015. We will then work with applicants to develop their project applications before a final decision is made at the end of November.

More information about the New Economy and Sustainability grants, including an application form, can be found at www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability-grants.

Contact Maya on Mayaw@quaker.org.uk or 0207 663 1056 for any questions about grants or for support to develop a project connected to your local or area meeting.

The grant is to support the creation of a film about the Exeter Pound Project and use it in community engagement with local traders, community groups and other members of the public. Their hope is that by having a local currency there will be more custom to local independent businesses and a more integrated and sustainable local economy will be created.

Dorchester Living Lawn

Dorchester Meeting received £250 for seed trays to help transform the meeting house garden into a grass-free lawn. They are one of a number of groups and organisations creating grass-free lawns across the town. They will be planting 22 varieties of wild flower seeds which will create the lawn. Grass-free lawns retain moisture, attract insects and produce a hardy display of wildflowers for much of the year and withstand being walked on.

Principles for a new economy

A new document proposes some of the principles that could underpin an economic system in which Quaker testimony could flourish. Suzanne Ismail, Economics Programme Manager, explains.

The new 'principles for a new economy' document is an initiative of QPSW's Economics, Sustainability & Peace sub-committee (ESP). It is an attempt to create a positive, holistic Quaker vision of what a more just and environmentally sustainable economic system would look like. ESP hopes that the document will be widely shared and debated by Friends and that perhaps, in time, it might become a reference point for Friends and others working to bring about a more just and environmentally-sustainable economic system.

Rather than offering a critique of the current economic system, the new document is deliberately aspirational, describing the world as ESP considers it should (and could) be. As such, the principles emphasise that the common good and the need to safeguard the natural world would be of the highest priority. This would, for example, result in greater concern about the overconsumption of natural resources than about national government deficits. The document also emphasises the need for greater democratic control over the economic system and for economic structures, institutions and public policy which foster community, in particular working to ensure that this is not undermined by inappropriately large gaps in income and wealth.

The decision to create the document has its roots in the decisions made by Britain Yearly Meeting in session in 2011 and 2012. As well as committing the Yearly Meeting to become a low carbon, sustainable community, those Yearly Meetings resulted in a series of minutes that recognised how the economic system and the current environmental crises are inextricably linked. We committed first to educate ourselves about the economic system, then to work with others to build a better economic system - an economic system in which Quaker testimony could flourish.

Since then, ESP staff and committee members have felt a growing sense of unity within the

Yearly Meeting about what's wrong with the current economic system. However, having taken part in events, actions and conversations with Friends from across the Yearly Meeting, we also sensed that as a corporate body, the Yearly Meeting is far less clear about the type of economic system we want to see instead.

The principles document is ESP's attempt to help create some clarity and vision towards these ends. The principles document will be a product of ESP's own discernment. However in writing it the committee has drawn on contributions, ideas and suggestions from many others, including Friends who took part in a series of ESP workshops at Yearly Meeting Gathering 2014, in lively discussions on our Quakernomics blog and from Earth and Economy readers who responded to our invitation to comment on an earlier draft of the text. ESP staff and committee members are extremely thankful for these and the many other contributions we received. They often complemented, but sometimes challenged, our own thinking and almost certainly helped us to improve on earlier drafts.

Nevertheless, as a yearly meeting we still have much exploration to do in this area. As such the principles document is offered as a potential focus for further threshing, discernment and action rather than an official yearly meeting statement. Later this year QPSW hopes to launch a new project based loosely round the principles document. We'll keep you updated on the plans for this in future editions of *Earth and Economy* and let you know when the final version of the principles document is available. We expect this to be in the summer. In the meantime you can look at the initial version and the debate around it on our quakernomics blog at www.quaker.org.uk/quakernomics.

News in brief

Best to divest

An online seminar 'Best to Divest?' exploring the case for divestment from fossil fuels launched by Brighthelm Church in Brighton is online at www.besttodivest.org. The seminar explores key questions such as: what's the ethical and financial case for divestment? What is the experience of organizations that have taken this route? Is divestment an effective tool for change, or is engagement with fossil fuel companies a better option? What are the options for investors wishing to withdraw from fossil fuels? How secure and profitable are the alternatives?

Climate lobby, 17 June

What: A day of action on climate change, including climate lobby of MPs.

17 June 2015, 12.00pm–5.30pm at Palace of Westminster, London, SW1A 2PW

Join QPSW and 1000s of others to talk to our newly-elected MPs after May's general election and before crucial international climate negotiations in December 2015.

You'll be joining the whole Climate Coalition for a really important day. We'll be going to Parliament to meet with our MPs and calling on them to take action on climate change and challenge vested interests.

Register at www.quaker.org.uk/day-climate-action.



Quaker campaign win!

After five years of pressure from Quaker environmental campaigners, especially the American Quaker Earthcare Action Team, PNC bank (a historically Quaker bank) has announced it will stop investing in mountaintop removal. This process of getting coal from a mountain involves blowing up the top of the mountain and dumping the remains into rivers and valleys.

EQAT's campaign has involved nonviolent direct action at the bank, singing, arrests, a 200-mile walk, fasting, public meeting for worship, account closures and more. When a PNC board member visited Britain they were greeted by British Quaker activists with the same message.

Congratulations and solidarity with EQAT! For more information visit: <http://eqat.org/>.

Has your funeral director signed the Fair Funeral Pledge?

Buying a funeral can be expensive and confusing. When we're bereaved, we don't make savvy consumers. Not only have funerals got more expensive, but funeral directors are often not open and upfront about what things actually cost. This lack of clear, comparable information can make a stressful, disorientating time worse.

Quaker Social Action (QSA) has launched the Fair Funeral Pledge, to bring some much needed transparency and scrutiny to the experience of buying a funeral. The Pledge calls on funeral directors to provide clear, comparable prices and to offer a simple option if you're worried about money.

Ask your funeral director to sign the Pledge: www.quakersocialaction.org.uk/fair-funerals-pledge.

Make Tax Fair

As a member of the Tax Dodging Bill campaign, QPSW is calling on all political parties to pledge to introduce a Tax Dodging Bill in the first 100 days after the election. The Bill would help to reduce economic inequality by raising billions of pounds to help tackle poverty in developing countries and the UK.

Globally, billions of pounds are lost to 'legal' corporate tax dodging each year. A Tax Dodging Bill would change this by making it harder for big companies to avoid paying tax in the UK and by ensuring that UK tax rules don't encourage big companies to avoid tax in developing countries.

Find out more at <http://taxdodgingbill.org.uk/>.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) – the death of democracy

David Malone, a Friend from Scarborough Local Meeting, explains more about TTIP and why he believes Quakers could take this on as a core concern.

For the last two years, up and down the country, I have been giving a talk called 'The Death of Democracy' about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, a free trade agreement currently being negotiated (mostly in secret) between the United States and the European Union.

The talks always go the same way. People start out embarrassed because the title seems so exaggerated. Gradually embarrassment gives way to a creeping sense of horror and finally people become flushed, angry and determined to do something. What people become incensed by is that the TTIP gives to corporations a new 'right' to sue entire nations using what is known as the Investor State Dispute Settlement clause (ISDS). The ISDS gives corporations the right to sue if they feel any government action – any regulation, any standard, any change in any law which affects them – has reduced or 'expropriated' their future profits. The ISDS allows corporations to do this not through the nation's courts and legal system, like the rest of society, but through an exclusive, corporations-only system of privately-run arbitration. Unlike our courts, in this arbitration there is no judge, there is no jury, and civil society has no rights whatsoever.

Arbitration is presided over by three private individuals drawn from a small group of highly-paid lawyers, nearly all of whom work for the same top 20 global law firms. Worse, it turns out the top 15 arbitrators have, to the present date, decided 55 per cent of all known cases and 75 per cent of all known cases in which the corporation claimed compensation of more than \$4 billion. Fifteen private individuals, over which you and I have no democratic control or even oversight, and no right to appeal their decisions. These fifteen people have a greater power than any judge or minister to review and make binding decisions and can and do award vast sums that the tax payer is forced to pay.

What is advocated as a necessary 'protection' for corporations is, in my opinion, a direct assault on our democratic and sovereign right to govern as we see fit, and a direct assault on the fundamental notion that there is one body of law and one set of courts before which we are all equal. The culture of secrecy is something that Quakers have been led to question for many years.

We have been led to the conviction that, despite a culture of state secrecy, we must strive to bring about openness in our country. Secrecy bolsters power and leads to deceit and the abuse of power. At times a sensitive reticence is required but, in working in the spirit of love and trust rather than fear, we seek to discern the boundary between that reticence and secrecy.

Quaker faith & practice 23.91

The Quakers were born during the first great struggle to establish democracy and the rule of parliament and law in this country. I think it is imperative that Quakers be there to defend what we once helped win.

To that end, I and a fellow Friend, Neil McDougal from the Isle of Wight, have submitted written evidence to the Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, which is currently looking into the TTIP. I have taken my concern to my local meeting which has decided to support my concern and will bring it to my area meeting in a few weeks.

If there are other Friends who feel as Neil and I do perhaps they will take a concern to their meeting and together we can make this a national Quaker concern. There is a desperate need for a group of citizens to emerge as an organised focus of dissent.

I hope the Quakers will become that focus. We have done it before. I believe now is the time for us to do so again. I can be contacted at malone@i330.demon.co.uk.

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