

The Peace Board

Peace news and views for, from and about Quakers in the North of Britain
Issue no: 15 November 2003

Striving for security, witnessing for peace – together

At Northern Friends Peace Board's meeting in Middlesbrough in June, Shaun Gregory (head of Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford) urged us to recognise that our (UK) security has to be built upon the security of others, it is 'indivisible'. What we are witnessing in Iraq at the moment is a state of desperate insecurity. This in its turn has threatened and is threatening to undermine the vestiges of international security established by the multilateral processes of the United Nations and other fora over the years. Whatever the immediate consequences, a longer term solution has to have much wider and deeper foundations. It is not going to be straightforward, but the work has to be done.

Anti-war activities that many Friends have been involved in during the past two years have taken them into new coalitions of different shapes and sizes. At our September meeting, Liz Law, Co-ordinator of the Scottish Centre for Nonviolence reflected on this and talked about the importance of working with those with whom we might feel uncomfortable. There is great potential in the diversity of approaches and backgrounds. The challenge for any group is to be able to maintain a clear focus, to hold true to its principles, whilst being able to find common ground for working and acting with others.

At our September NFPB meeting we also heard from David Gee (Quaker Peace & Social Witness' Peace and Disarmament Programme manager), reporting on his recent visit to Friends and other peace workers in the East of the United States. He was greatly impressed by the scale and professionalism of many of the groups he encountered there. He challenged us to move away from a tendency to demonise the US and to seek ways of building supportive links with peace and other groups there, who are fully engaged in asking tough questions, in promoting alternatives and in witnessing for peace.

Working together with others: not simply a practical necessity but an important foundation for building peace and an indivisible security.



Workshops

As well as our workshop on the theme of '**Building a Culture of Peace**', we have developed a workshop on the '**Witnessing for peace in the context of the war against terrorism**'. We hope this will be of interest to Friends, seeking as it does to draw together the experiences and skills that Friends have gained over the past two years and looking at future priorities for action. One of our members, Jenny Wis-treich of York MM, has developed a workshop entitled '**Let Peace Begin with Me**', which she can run a few times a year.

Whilst we are in the habit of running our activities for Friends at weekends, it has become clear that finding a free weekend for a workshop can be hard. We are keen to explore the possibility of arranging events - perhaps mini-workshops or led discussions - with Friends in their Meetings on mid-week days or evenings. Please get in touch if you are interested in hosting an event of either sort.

Learning peace - plenty on offer

CRISP, TTT, CRESST, SCNV, RTC? Beyond these possibly unfamiliar acronyms is a shared commitment to communicate and develop the skills for learning how to engage in conflict and change using peaceful means. We have been pleased in the course of the year to learn about and experience some of the training offered by some of these. Whilst urging our leaders not to use military means to sort out problems, we should remind ourselves of the ever-growing depth and breadth of expertise in non-military peace methods. It can no longer reasonably be argued that peace is a vague and unrealistic ideal, as compared with the 'real' use of force and weapons. The toolbox for peaceful action is being filled, organised and passed on to others. Quakers have been and are associated with the development and practical application of many of these tools. This article highlights just a few of them...

The **Scottish Centre for Non-violence** (SCNV), with its family background in the part-Quaker run Peace House, is now in its fifth year. Liz Law, the centre's Co-ordinator, spoke to NFPB members in September and told us about some of their current work, including: mediation work and training; work to support the development of civilian peace teams, in association with Peaceworkers UK; University level courses in Nonviolence in association with Edinburgh's Centre for Human Ecology... and more. SCNV is still young and is still finding its way financially. But the vision and commitment is taking the work forward and funds are being found.

The **Conflict Response in Schools Programme** (CRISP), set up in its present form in 2000 by Darlington Monthly Meeting has at its overall purpose to provide school pupils with the opportunity to learn and practice skills for handling conflicts without violence or aggres-

sion. With a small team of part-time paid workers and volunteer committee members they work in primary and – occasionally – secondary schools in the MM area. NFPB members had the chance in June to participate in a sample of the training undertaken by CRISP, providing a useful introduction to this type of work.

In Sheffield, Friends are in the process of setting up **CRESST** – Conflict Resolution Education Sheffield Schools Training. Like CRISP, it will aim to take a whole-school approach in its work; addressing the entire culture in which conflicts are addressed in the school.

Moving up the educational scale, as well as the **Department of Peace Studies in Bradford** is the **Richardson Institute** of Peace Studies at the University of Lancaster. They recently collaborated for a second year running in providing a conflict resolution course in association with

Responding to Conflict. And Responding to Conflict (RTC) in its turn, along with the Quaker Peace and Social Witness, have been part of the collaborative work being co-ordinated by Peaceworkers UK, which aims "to contribute to the alleviation of suffering caused by violent conflict through the promotion and encouragement of civilian strategies for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict." An EU pilot training course to this end was run in Gloucestershire in March this year, just as US and UK armed forces were preparing to invade Iraq.



Philip Giles

We were saddened to hear of the death in September of our Friend Philip Giles who was Treasurer of NFPB from 1994 to 1998.

Philip stepped into the role of Treasurer at short notice, resolving something of a crisis for us. He took over the job with enthusiasm, and put a great deal of patient work into getting the Board established as a Charity in Scotland and into the transferring of our accounts to ethical banks.

Philip faithfully attended Board and Executive meetings, to which he brought his deep spirituality as well as his financial skills. He would appear – often after a long and tedious journey - cheerfully smiling and ready for action, with all his papers packed methodically in a haversack. We were as grateful for his spiritual gifts as we were for his work with our financial affairs. Between meetings, he managed with efficiency and good humour the many financial transactions required by a relatively complex organisation such as NFPB.

Philip's work for us was characterised by a quiet energy and focus, and a sense of service which made him give of himself unstintingly. He was a companionable Friend, and a much-loved member of NFPB, remembered with affection by everyone who worked with him.

We send our loving sympathies to Margaret and to all Philip's family and we hold them in our thoughts and prayers.

Caroline Westgate

Impressions of Ramallah:

a Personal Account of a short visit to Ramallah, August 2003

Jenny Foot, Lancaster MM

First impressions: vibrancy, good humour, noise, colour. Men sitting on little stools outside their shops, talking, playing cards, drinking little plastic cups of strong black coffee, calling out: 'Where are you from? Do you know where you are going? Do you need help?... You are welcome'... Yellow taxis everywhere, filling up the road, nose to tail, taxi drivers calling out, trying to catch your eye, hooting, honking, looking for a fare. On the crowded sidewalk, women, heads covered with gracefully draped scarves and wearing the traditional long dark coat, moved quietly through the throng doing the shopping for the family, looking after the little children, balancing bags and holding babies as they went. Women talking to women, men talking to men. In all that crowded and noisy throng, nobody ever bumping against another – a tangible feeling of safety and respect.

I was there, together with Bronwyn Harwood, another Quaker, from Edinburgh, and Elizabeth Raymer from Toronto, Canada. We had all responded to an email from Jo Jaffray, asking if anyone was interested/free to take part in a pilot scheme with some of the young people in Ramallah during the summer. Jo had set up two projects: one to support the Play Centre in the Ama'ari Refugee Camp, (the play centre set up in the 60's by Margaret Gibbons from Edinburgh Meeting) and the other to work with girls aged between 6 and 18, in a girls Home in Ramallah. Bronwyn, Beth and I had offered our individual and differing skills, such as they were, and arrived, not knowing each other, with fairly vague and disparate ideas of what we could do and how we would do it!

In the event, we 'gelled' very quickly, and on learning that the girls in the Home run by the Ina'ash El-Uusra Society (a foundation to

support the empowering of Palestinian women) wanted to learn as much English as possible, we threw all our collective knowledge of action songs, word games, fun and role plays together. We linked that with drawing and juggling and making friendship bracelets and hacky sacks – and we were in business! We went for 8 two to three hour sessions with the girls, staying to share their mid-day meal with them, and worked and played, laughed and sang with 24 lovely open, friendly, intelligent and co-operative students. Towards the end, one of the older girls asked me what I thought of them: I replied that after 28 years of teaching in a secondary school in England, I had never enjoyed working with a group more!

By the time we left, the hugs and tears we shared were very real. The knowledge that these young people, open, full of fun and eager to learn, face a difficult and uncertain future, and had already experienced too much trauma and tragedy in their lives, was for me painful and remains so – and is not to be forgotten.

The other project was with the Ama'ari Camp Play Centre. Since the 80's it has been led by Violet Zaru, a faithful member of Ramallah Meeting (and another graduate of the Friends School!) The Play Centre has had a difficult time over the last years, premises have been destroyed, much of their equipment lost or taken, and it must have taken amazing courage, love and dedication to the young children to keep it going. New premises being built by UNRWA, are promised, but who knows when that will be ready? At present the centre has two very small rooms, which had recently been broken into and toys and equipment taken, but which opens onto a small play area. The two play leaders, both local Palestinian women, care for up to 50 under 6's



a day. How they do it is difficult to imagine – but they certainly need as much support as possible. The centre enables young mothers to look for morning work in Ramallah – the money is desperately needed, as there is 70% unemployment in families in the camp. We spent just three mornings with the children. We had taken *playdough*, which was a great success, and paper and paints – sponge painting was really popular and I have never seen so many pictures produced so fast in my life! But when the children left at the end of the morning nobody took their paintings with them. Perhaps the now is all you can cope with when you don't understand the past and have no idea of the future? And hope is a word with little place in their young lives so far.

I have tried to put some of my experience down in words. We were only in Palestine for less than three weeks – but I find it has a place in my heart of which I am daily aware. It is not only the terrible sadness I feel that two peoples are hurting each other so much and for so long without being able to find a common humanity and respect, it is also a response to the warmth, hospitality, friendship and generosity I experienced there.

We all should hold fast to the UN's vision of a permanent settlement, the realisation of the vision of the two states of Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and recognised borders. Inshallah.

Missile 'defense' and Yorkshire

With the UK government having given permission for the upgrading of Fylingdales for the US missile defense system, and the possible future use of Menwith Hill as another part of the 'architecture' for the system as it develops, Friends and others have continued in their acts of witness at these sites in Yorkshire. As well as the monthly Meetings for worship, Friends have been present at demonstrations and involved in local and national campaigns and discussions. The UK government insists that it is still open to comments on its December 2002 'discussion paper' on the issues. They also say they will not decide about the use of Menwith Hill for missile defense until a request from the US is received.

Meanwhile, research and building-works are continuing apace in the US to develop some sort of Missile Defense system by the end of 2004, forming one of three key components in that country's new military 'triad'. Friends are encouraged to continue to write to (and meet with) their MPs and to the MoD to express their concerns. A lot of resources are available to support this, and a new website for the UK's Missile Defence Working Group (of which we are a member) is a valuable starting point for accessing this at: www.mdwg.org.uk. Copies of NFPB's signpost leaflet on 'Menwith Hill Matters' and of the earlier briefing document from the working group are available from the address below.

Seeking Friends' views....

Racism – a source of un-peacefulness

How might NFPB support Friends and Meetings in witnessing for peace in divided communities? A second questionnaire on this issue was sent to Friends in October, to assess what Friends perspectives and experiences have been over the past two years. There is a particular concern that far-right political parties' activities in the lead-up to elections next year (local and European) might exacerbate latent tensions, and it is clear from recent media coverage that issues of asylum and policing are a continuing cause of concern. If you would like to help us by completing a response to our questionnaire, contact the NFPB office.

Violence as entertainment

Have you seen the latest Quentin Tarantino film, 'Kill Bill'? Do you know a teenager addicted to video games that are full of violent imagery? Have you watched historical military re-enactments? Does any of this matter in the broad scheme of things, or is it just harmless fun? We are seeking Friends' and Attenders' views on this – contact us for a copy of our questionnaire or just send us your views or any interesting resources, to help us get a sense of whether there is something distinctive that Friends can contribute to this issue.

PeaceTest

No, not a multiple-choice or three-hour exam, but the short name we have given to the email discussion group we have set up for Friends to explore aspects of the peace testimony in today's world. Anyone on email is welcome to join. If you are interested, send an email with the simple message 'PeaceTest subscribe' to nfpb@gn.apc.org. This is an opportunity to link up and share ideas with Friends in Britain and beyond.



Resources

Available

The Peace Board is just one of a number of materials and resources we provide, from workshops to our website, via leaflets, booklets, stickers and envelope re-use labels. Contact our office - address below - for a full listing. Our website also includes many pointers to other relevant materials, available from Quaker and non-Quaker bodies.

Needed

And if you would like to help support our work financially, **Gift Aid** and our **Calling for Peace** Phone Co-op scheme - now offering a range of internet connection rates, including anytime and broadband - are just two of the ways in which you can do this.

Many thanks for all those who have contributed so generously these past two years, giving us much needed encouragement and financial stability.

Get in touch if you would like more information.

The Peace Board is a newsletter of Northern Friends Peace Board. It is sent free to Northern Quaker Meetings and others. If you would like additional copies for your group or yourself, please get in touch. A donation to cover extra postage would help, but is not essential.
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