

Report for Area Meeting of the Meeting for Sufferings Friends House, Saturday, 4th June 2011

The Meeting began promptly at 10.00a.m. with a half-hour period of worship and readings from Quaker Faith and Practice 24.22 and 23.89 and an extract from Martin Luther King, described below.

Non-violent direct action seeks to create a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks to so dramatise the issue that it can no longer be ignored.

There were a number of agenda items before us, but the main ones presented by different speakers were 'Radical Resistance and the State' (Steve Whiting and Sam Walton) and 'Review Group for Meeting for Sufferings & BYM Trustees Report' (Peter Eccles). These will be reported first. Other items on the agenda included a

- Report by the Clerk of BYM trustees;
- Framework for Action Priority F: Crime, community and justice;
- Boycott, divestment and sanctions (of settlement goods in Palestine): the experience of area meetings.

Radical Resistance and the State

Steve Whiting explained certain aspects of social change theory to the current debate and Sam Walton described his personal experiences as a Quaker in direct action. In respect of the theory there are three main aspects: the reforming approach – working with current structures and institutions; the revolutionary/resistance approach; and the building alternatives approach (bringing the realm of God to the World today). At the present time in Steve's view the revolutionary/resistance approach, which involves individual and group risk and sacrifice is the underused component. Sam explained his actions, how his view of the police has changed over time and through personal experience. He described two duties of the police: policing crime and protest. The first requires detection and prevention and the second demands facilitation. However, the police seem to consider their second duty, rather like the first, a matter that demands prevention. He referred to issues such as kettling, the police narrative of events and non-representative reporting by the press (focusing on violence by the few to the exclusion of peaceful protest).

He described how the police narrative could be countered by Lead Observers of Police Action and by amateur video footage and other photographic evidence.

Comments from the floor included 'it is wrong to vilify the police', 'the police are servants/tools of the state' and that there are two kinds of police those that can fully be identified by their badges and the 'riot police including those that appear after dark' whose behaviour is at variance to the 'good cop' and whose identity is often hidden.

The video Turning the Tide viewed by some at lunchtime and watched by many prior to the meeting is a revelation – it can be viewed via the link

<http://www.quaker.org.uk/nonviolence>

Review Group for Meeting for Sufferings & BYM Trustees Report

This report presented to MfS contained elements in the 'Final Report, which was articulated in the 'Southern Marches Area' report in February 2011. These elements or recommendations were (abbreviated)

- Central role of discernment
 - Secondary role – two way channel of communication
 - Framework for Action is the responsibility of MfS
 - Trustees should ask Meeting for Sufferings for regular direction.
- Members were urged to comment, though not on the size, composition or frequency of Meetings. Many did, though on size, composition and frequency!!

Members were reminded that they were not delegates of area meetings, but were accountable to Yearly Meeting. This set off a debate about the 'secondary role' of MfS – some saw this as very important – the close relationship between the membership of MfS and every individual member of the Religious Society of Friends. Others saw this relationship as being further diluted by their being only a single member from each area + an 'alternate' [no such noun]. How, for example, were these to operate to provide continuity and coherence? The Assistant Clerk commented that changes were experimental and that the slimmed down version would operate from 2012. There were pleas for an increase in frequency of meetings and also for weekend meetings to allow time for proper discernment.

'Secondary' was removed from the proposed minute and one member expressed the view that there was no unity in the February meeting about the need for a 'slimmed down' version for MfS. Watch this space for an update at BYM, where there will be a lively debate.

Report by the Clerk of BYM trustees

There were displays of three designs for the Large Meeting House (LMH): the designs were intended to provide greater flexibility of layout (for different uses), improvements in areas surrounding it to improve users' experience of LMH. Paul Parker (new Clerk to BYM) was introduced to MfS, he will be responsible to Clerk of Trustees – accountability criteria to be established. Jonathan Fox introduced the idea of the need for Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in order to ensure effectiveness of centrally managed work. A response from a member suggested that responsibility of Trustees should be to MfS, but responsibility rests with membership as displayed at BYM and not to MfS.

Framework for Action Priority F: Crime, community and justice

Members were offered a paper on activities in which Friends were actively involved from Addressing policy makers to RESET (Prisoner Resettlement Project).

Boycott, divestment and sanctions (of settlement goods in Palestine): the experience of area meetings

Feedback from Area meetings was largely supportive of the action taken by MfS (though some provisos) such as should we boycott at all? Need for some creative ways in supporting dialogue – twinning villages and towns (Northampton Area Meeting). Bristol Area Meeting for example has forged links to towns in Gaza through the Baptist church. Leeds representative spoke about a Jewish member who no longer felt welcomed at Meeting for Worship. Paul Parker expressed ways in which Quakers were developing a dialogue (for example through the British Board of Deputies of British Jews).

Jeff Beatty