

Annual Meeting Saturday 13th October 2018

at Selly Oak Quaker Meeting House, Birmingham B29 6NB

10.45 – 12.15 "Postwar Sri Lanka: challenges to reconciliation" (Open Meeting)

Speaker: Elizabeth Harris, Honorary Research Fellow at the Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion at Birmingham University.

Elizabeth Harris reminded us that the civil war in Sri Lanka was long, bitter and brutal. It came about because the Tamils were a minority who were discriminated against and did not feel heard while many Sinhalese held the view that the Buddha had blessed the whole island for their use. Militant Tamil youth groups rose to complain about their treatment *and* fight for a separate state of Tamil Eelam, and as the Government militarised the conflict the group that became dominant, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), became more ruthless. The war ended in military defeat for the *LTTE*. Immediately after the war, rather than looking for a conciliatory process, the government celebrated the victory, putting up victory monuments and allowing Buddhist symbolism to increase in Tamil majority areas.

Elizabeth quoted the four beliefs required for reconciliation, according to Louis Kreisberg:

1. Honest acknowledgement of the terrible aspects of what happened
2. Compassionate acceptance of those who committed injurious conduct and acknowledgement of each other's suffering
3. Belief that injustices are being addressed
4. Anticipation of mutual security and wellbeing

Elizabeth went on to explain how these conditions have not been met. Following international and UN pressure the government set up a 'Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission' which produced a comprehensive report. From 2015 the new President set up structures, including District Reconciliation Committees, in order for action to be taken. However, research has shown that the implementation did not live up to the theory: for instance only the committees in the north and east have met and some people did not know they were members of a committee. Many former combatants and widows are still living in poverty. There are issues about land which has not been returned. Reparations have not materialised. The two sides see the continuing problems differently: most Sinhalese will only accept the Tamils as a subordinate Group to the Buddhist majority who have a right to the country and the Tamils see the first step of reconciliation as political, with the release of internees, the return of land that is still in the hands of the military and a political solution to the underlying causes of the conflict. This has still to happen.

12.15 – 13.00 QSAIG members and interested friends: "Conversations on the lack of ethnic diversity within the Quaker community in Britain"

Diana Jeater, in her Salter Lecture at Britain Yearly Meeting, challenged the nature of the relationship between British Quakers and the people of the Global South, in particular Africa. Informed by this, what can QSAIG learn from, and contribute to, the discussion within the Religious Society of Friends? Friends had been encouraged to listen to the lecture at

<https://bathquakers.org/2018/05/16/diana-jeaters-salter-lecture-on-britain-quakers-and-africa/>. Another source of information on the lecture is found in an article in "The Friend" after Britain Yearly Meeting in May, 2018.

Anne Smith introduced some of the main themes of the lecture. Other contributions given in a worship sharing approach included:

A profoundly shaking lecture to Quakers in Britain – a wake-up call! It emphasised a situation of unconscious power held by many Quakers. Reference was made to the toolkit in the Quakers in Britain material website related to Sanctuary Meetings which seeks to raise awareness of power and privilege. Some sentences from Harvey Gillman's article in "The Friend- being a Friend" made ready for Quaker Week October 2018 was quoted.

One black African spoke of experiences of racist behaviours that she had experienced through her 33 year close association with Quakers. She sustained her attendance at Meeting in order not to be separated from her husband, who is closely involved in the life of the local Quaker Meeting.

Regarding our lack of ethnic diversity, one person spoke of living in a more rural place where few citizens were from an ethnic minority; despite efforts made in writing to welcome people of other faiths that did live in the area, nobody came. <http://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/social-justice/migration>

Reference to term "Overseer" that has historically damaging connotations within the slave trade - might a more suitable term for our "oversight" be "Supporting Friend"? If one feels offended by the remark of another a response: "that makes me feel" can be a truthful and helpful way forward.

Another person recognised that our racism is deeply entrenched – and had some personal examples of where this had been a factor in communication re global issues such as overconsumption of the West and the rise in global population.

Another contribution gave an example of where her understanding of what was "fair" was challenged by a person in a different culture – helping her to realise, and reflect on, her own assumptions that may be valid but emerging from her own cultural perspectives.

Discomfort in one Quaker Meeting for Worship led to very powerful ministry – a black woman had been accepted into membership of Friends , but that woman on going to another Q Meeting found that people "fell over her" because of her visible ethnic difference to the large majority "white" people in the Meeting.

13.45 – 15. 00 Update from those present on concerns and issues.

Report from working group on the global initiative of Ekta Parishad (Unity Forum) to conduct JaiJagat2020 marches and awareness raising; Gerald Conyngham explained the Jai Jagat campaign in 2020 which Ekta Parishad are preparing for. (Ekta Parishad is a community based organisation in India which Quakers have had links with since 2002. Ekta campaigns for the rights of landless people.) They now want to broaden out into an international campaign which will focus on similar issues across the world. There will be a walk from Delhi to Geneva which will end in a people's parliament in Geneva in October 2020. Gerald, Stuart Morton and Ginnie Wollaston are part of a working group looking at how Quakers in the UK might be involved. This could include sending young people to India to take part in training and asking the Journeyman Theatre group to do a play around these issues in 2019 or

2020. He asked if the group could be affiliated to QSAIG along the lines suggested in the guidelines for this type of affiliation.

Restorative Justice for Bhopal: For background: <https://bhopal.org/> and <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/world/three-decades-after-the-bhopal-disaster-a-new-approach-offers-hope>

Alick Munro (Kingston Friends' Meeting alick@munro.com) introduced this:

In 1984, there was a massive leak of methylisocyanate toxin into the air and water around the Union Carbide plant producing carbaryl insecticide in Bhopal India. The immediate effect of the leak killed several thousand local people. The plant was closed but contaminated water continues to leak into the soil and is probably responsible for high rates of cancer in early and mid-life and fetal abnormalities in the area. Union Carbide agreed a compensation plan in 1989 that did not provide for decontamination. They then sold the plant and it now belongs to the government of Madhya Pradesh. Union Carbide was bought out by Dow, which then merged with Dupont. Legal efforts to obtain payment to clean the water supply and soil and decontaminate the plant are mired in delay and obfuscation. Over the past 12 months, Martin Wright from Streatham Meeting, with Annie Murray and Martin Lloyd from Reading Meeting and myself and Annie's daughter Katy Cheney and others have been developing this organisation to put moral pressure on Dow-Dupont, and possibly the Indian government to put this matter right. We have applied to register the campaign group as a charitable incorporated organisation, and have begun corresponding with people who are in a position to influence Dow-Dupont. Support and funds from other Friends will be appreciated. We can provide a film show about the disaster and lead a discussion on the task of finding a remedy.

Norman Smith was invited to introduce to his research on Marjorie Sykes, a Quaker who lived for over 60 years in 20th century India. She worked in education, had close associations with Gandhi, worked for peace in Nagaland and was an author. Norman has interviewed many people in India and the UK. The large manuscript, which includes a table of contents, has a very limited number of copies, some of which will be placed in libraries at Friends House, Woodbrooke, Huddersfield Quaker Meeting, Jordans Quaker Meeting, the British Library, and several other UK and Indian libraries.

Judith Baker, Quaker Peace & Social Witness Conciliation Support Coordinator (part time) continues to work with a committee that maintains communication in various ways with work focussing on a part of North East India where violent conflict continues, but has been much reduced in the decade.