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The Energy Challenge and the Quaker Response

The converging problems of climate change, fossil fuel depletion and the ongoing relationship between oil, violent conflict and human rights abuses demand a response from Quakers. Deciding what shape that response should take is potentially a source of tension among Friends. Dedicated efforts by some Friends to address the issue remain on the margins of the Quaker world, and some of these responses challenge the basic assumptions upon which we lead our lives.

A number of Quakers are already active on energy and related issues. In the UK, the Living Witness Project is trying to engage Friends in the process of radically reducing energy consumption at a personal and meeting level. In the US, the Moral Economy Project is soon to have its first book Right Relationship published, which challenges the economic growth imperative and its effects on energy resource use and the environment. Washington-based Friends Council for National Legislation (FCNL) has ongoing projects on US climate legislation and oil dependency. Quakers in New Zealand are working on community level solar panel schemes, while a group of Friends from around the world are working on establishing an international Quaker agency to implement the Friends World Committee for Consulation (FWCC) 2007 Triennial minute on Environment and Sustainability. In July, the Sustainable Energy Security project began here at QCEA.

All these efforts recognize that we need to urgently revise the way we think about energy. Exactly what shape a new energy economy should take remains however a moot point, and the approaches of individual Quakers are quite diverse. This was brought home to me on a brief speaking tour of Meetings in the UK, where I introduced the Sustainable Energy Security project and discussed with Friends our energy use and its impacts. I noticed a tension between Friends committed to radical lifestyle change and those who are more inclined to think in terms of infrastructural and cultural change led by government. Radical Friends aspire to abstinence from high-energy living (no flying or car-use, growing their own vegetables, minimal home heating), while non-radical Friends live fairly average middle-class lives in energy terms. Radicals often believe that it is a spiritual or moral duty to live as they do, while non-radicals see the radical approach as a form of Puritanism, and are more inclined towards the belief that meaningful societal and infrastructural change will be driven by government. Can these two approaches be reconciled? Is there anything that each can learn from the other? Might both approaches be unrealistic and self-serving in some way?

In facing up to energy problems we are challenged to think about the kind of society we want to live in, what kind of lifestyles we really want, and what values will underpin them. Lifestyle change is, up to a point, inevitable and, in some ways, desirable. However, renewable energy technologies exist that can enable us to live relatively energy-rich lifestyles in a sustainable fashion, and which can only be effectively brought into existence by government action. The energy challenge is complex. The differences in approach between radical and non-radical are substantial. The challenge of exploring common ground is exciting.

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In this Issue:

Georgia's Refugees Page 2
Serbia's Painful Transition Page 3
Remembering the Future Page 4

Georgia's Refugees and Why They Can't Go Home

The history of Georgia goes back a very long way. But for the purpose of understanding the current crisis in the context of more recent events, a few dates must suffice: from 1918 to 1921 Georgia was an independent country. In 1921, the Republic of Georgia was occupied by Soviet Bolshevik forces, and until 1991 Georgia was part of the Soviet Union. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union Georgia has been independent again. Since then, there have been a civil war and two regional armed conflicts in the districts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As a result there are 247,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) from Abkhazia. Most of them have been living in different collection centres in Georgia and many still do. Georgia regards both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as part of Georgia, but there are local governments in both regions, supported by the Russian Federation, who have claimed independence. Many South Ossetians and Abkhaz have been given Russian passports.

As reported in the last issue of *Around Europe*, this led to the Russian army counter-attacking. This was not restricted to the disputed areas, but included the Russian air forces attacking Georgian cities. They bombed Gori, Batumi, Senaki, Poti, Zugdidi Marneuli, Bolnisi and other cities. A few Georgian airports were also bombed by Russian airplanes. An airplane repair factory in the capital Tbilisi was also bombed, and a few radar stations in different parts of Tbilisi were destroyed. Fortunately there were no casualties in Tbilisi. But Gori, 20 kilometres from South Ossetia, was partly destroyed. According to Russian officials they bombed military targets, but in reality their bombs often exploded in civilian areas, targeting for example multi-storey apartment buildings. Many thousands of Georgians left the bombed areas and cities and moved to the eastern part of Georgia. Officially there are approximately 400 dead on the Georgian side, but that is the number of those people who died on Georgian territory, and we were not told how many died during the conflict in the occupied territory. Unofficially there are several thousand dead on the Georgian side.

We now have a new wave of refugees in Georgia . Many thousands of Georgians left Gori, the Georgian villages around South Ossetia and cities in the western part of Georgia, many of them lost their homes (they were destroyed by bombings). They have all come to Tbilisi and eastern Georgia. The government accommodated them in state buildings such as schools, kindergartens, policlinics, research institutes, etc. - these buildings became shelters (collection centres) for refugees. More than 110,000 Georgians left their homes and became refugees in their own country. Most left with none of their possessions. Many of the homes which they left were burned, destroyed or plundered by Ossetians and Russian soldiers. Since the Russian army has left Gori, about half of these refugees have returned home.

Tent city in Gori

Later, on 10 October, when the Russian army withdrew from the buffer zones, more people had a chance to return to their homes. Many of them did not want to return, because their homes were damaged and the infrastructure in the villages was destroyed, and they were afraid of Ossetians, who even now still cross the border and plunder the Georgian villages around South Ossetia. Unfortunately some refugees were forced by officials to return to the Georgian villages near South Ossetia.

Russia has recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Russian army remains in these regions and thus refugees from there are not able to return home. There are now 35,000 refugees from South Ossetia and Kodoris Kheoba in Georgia.

The Government promised the refugees from South Ossetia (we call them 'new' refugees) that they would build them homes in different regions of Georgia, but nothing was promised for refugees from Abkhazia. They still have to remain in the collection centres in Georgia.

The conditions in many of the collection centres are fairly bad, many of the refugees do not have enough food and other necessities. With the donations from Quakers from different European countries, we provide assistance for refugees living in the collection centres.

Tbilisi Quaker Worship Group

Serbia's Painful Transition

Like all of the former Yugoslav Republics, Serbia is tormented by its recent past. It remains a society in transition, painfully torn between the nationalist myths that have seduced it and the cultural, political and economic realities that surround it. If it is ever to reconcile itself with the world beyond its borders it must first face the violent acts committed in pursuit of its myths. EU Enlargement's Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) offers Serbia the perfect opportunity to face its recent past and undergo its own process of transitional justice. Indeed, the EU is helping Serbia with this process; questions remain, however, over the effectiveness of the EU's method.

The EU's approach to transitional justice in Serbia has been to insist, as part of the SAP, on Serbian cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The basic thinking behind this approach is threefold. Firstly, it ensures that the most influential and infamous perpetrators of crimes against humanity are brought to justice. Secondly, the capture and arrest of these individuals acts as a gauge to measure the character and functioning of state institutions such as the secret service, the judiciary and the police; and to what extent they respond to their political masters. Finally, the trials of these individuals serve as an opportunity to publicly and formally establish the facts surrounding atrocities ordered and carried out in the name of the Serbian nation.

Taming the beast: time for a bottom-up approach?

This method has enjoyed some success. Out of 161 indicted war criminals only two remain at large: Ratko Mladic and Goran Had•ic. In addition, it is understood that the arrest of Radovan Karad•ic in July was down to President Tadic's ability to install a new head of the civilian secret services. This suggests that a form of vetting has taken place at the very top of this powerful institution that may not have happened without EU insistence.

Where it matters, however, this approach to transitional justice is failing. The reaction to Karad•ic's arrest has been fierce and cannot be ignored. Police simply stood by and watched as radical nationalists beat up journalists from pro-European media covering their demonstrations. President Tadic has received death threats, as did the last political leader to send one of Serbian nationalism's champions to The Hague. Sadly, in the case of Prime Minister Djindjic, who oversaw the arrest of Miloševic, the threats were not idle and he was duly assassinated.

The real failure of this approach is its lack of impact upon the popular vision of Serbia's recent past. Many Serbs do not recognise the validity of the ICTY and thus do not accept the evidence used during the trials nor the facts it establishes. This is in part down to a negative representation of the ICTY in much of Serbia's media and in part down to the politicians that dominate Serbian politics. This failure to engage the Serbian people is critical and must be addressed.

The best way to address this is for the EU to support those Serbs working from the grass roots up for transitional justice within Serbia. Currently they are being demonised by sections of the media and attacked, verbally and physically, by radical nationalists. A simple public statement condemning such violent attacks would be a good place for the EU to start. It should then offer financial, technical or political support to the grass roots projects that contest the radically nationalist versions of Serbia's recent past. Failure to engage Serbian society will result in an incomplete transition for Serbia and, according to its *raison d'être*, a subsequent failure of the EU's enlargement process. These are failures no-one can afford.

Text and photo: Calum Shaw

Remembering the Future

'Sacrificed to the fallacy that war can end war'

War always sows the seeds of future wars and World War I was no exception. Between 8.5 and 9.7 million soldiers died in WWI, 1.7 million of them in and around Ypres. There were around 10 million civilian deaths.

The whole QCEA team went on a visit to Ypres recently, during the course of which we visited the Tyne Cot Cemetery. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission allowed grieving families to put an inscription of up to 66 characters at the bottom of 'their' gravestone. This picture shows one example.

Winston Churchill, faced with the horrors of war, wrote in November 1914: "What would happen, I wonder, if the armies suddenly and simultaneously went on strike and said some other method must be found of settling the dispute?" What indeed.

Liz Scurfield
Photo: Sara Erlandsson

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