



# Around Europe

Quaker Council for European Affairs

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## Titan or Titanic?

**“I say as firmly as I can that building more prisons is not the solution”**

*Rt Hon Lord Woolf, 17 April 2007*

Fleury-Mérogis, a prison just outside Paris which currently holds 3,600 prisoners, was recently given as evidence to the UK House of Commons Justice Select Committee by the Inspector for Prisons, Anne Owers, to substantiate her concerns about the Titans looming on the horizon. ‘The one thing the French have decided is they will never do it again’.

The former HM Inspector for Prisons, Lord Ramsbotham, believes there needs to be a redesign of sentencing structure to account for excessive prison capacity whereas the Finnish merely regard Britain’s ‘obsession’ with prison as barbaric and ineffective.

In light of these statements there seems to be little to support the British government in its decision to create three of what have been dubbed ‘Titan’ prisons. The government intends to spend approximately £2.3 billion on building 10,000 new prison places; initially proposed to cater for the insufficient capacity of England and Wales’ prison institutions and the necessity to relentlessly increase the number they can accommodate. Less than a year after the initial proposal, the Ministry of Justice published its consultation paper which has cultivated the justification for Titans into something which appears to be far more palatable. Titans are now endeavouring to provide ‘comprehensive rehabilitation to individual offenders’, but can

they? A prison of such colossal proportions surely cannot be effective.

Anne Owers identified last month in a report assessing the performance of prisons that a smaller prison population is the most influential factor in providing even the most vulnerable prisoners with safety and ensuring that they are treated with respect for their human dignity. Distance from home was the key variable in preparing prisoners for resettlement into the community and as a consequence helping to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. ‘These are important findings,

which should provide evidence to influence the key policy decisions now being made about the size and shape of the prison population’, said the report, funny then that these two undesirable elements are pivotal to a Titan prison.

The capacity of prisons and tax payers’ money has always been implicitly linked. Instead of squandering billions on always playing catch up on accommodating the excessive number of prisoners, a more constructive situation would  
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# QCEA's New Programme Assistants



I started working at QCEA at the beginning of January and already I feel I have learnt so much. I am working on the European Parliament elections, informing Quakers about the elections and in particular looking at how the European Parliament relates to the areas

QCEA covers; peace, human rights, economic justice and fuel equality. I have also taken over the role of European and Middle Eastern Young Friends (EMEYF) secretary, *Around Europe* editor and I sit on one of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office's (EPLO) working groups on development and peacebuilding.

Before working at QCEA I studied History and Anthropology at the University of Sussex. Since finishing I have worked in a care home for adults with learning and physical disabilities and have also been lucky enough to visit Sierra Leone and Kenya with my Dad, working as a development consultant's assistant. Before university I also taught English in India for five months, which was one of the most amazing experiences I've ever had.

I have been to Quaker meetings all my life and I am enjoying working in a Quaker organisation where I can learn more about how Quakerism interacts with wider issues and institutions. I am excited about the year ahead of me and feel very lucky to be doing such an interesting job.

*Anya Whiteside*

My name is Stephen Hynd and I am one of the new Programme Assistants here at QCEA. I have an MA in Human Rights from the University of Sussex and a BSc from the University of Bath in Social Policy. I have always been passionate about social justice; I have worked a lot with Amnesty International UK and I am committed to working with an evolving understanding of human rights to bring about significant social change. QCEA works hard to bring about this change in a positive systemic way; I look forward immensely to help contribute towards the organization's goals. Although not personally a Quaker, I am dedicated to an understanding of peace, human rights, economic and environmental justice.

energy security project as well as working on issues around the Peace Tax. I will also be involved in organizing the thirtieth birthday celebrations of QCEA later this year. On top of this the web-site will be predominantly my responsibility. I look forward to the year ahead as a year of challenges, excitement and most of all progression. I hope I can give back as much as this opportunity is giving me! If you have any questions, comments or suggestions on any of these areas you can get in touch at [shynd@qcea.org](mailto:shynd@qcea.org)



In the year ahead I will be working on the broad

*Stephen Hynd*

## QCEA Study Tour 18-26 April 2009

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## Peacebuilders in the Western Balkans

Umag, Croatia, saw a meeting of nearly 40 peacebuilders, some from the Western Balkans region, some from Quaker agencies in the UK and Belgium. We spent three days discussing what had been achieved throughout the eighteen years of involvement of Quakers with peacebuilders in the region and what is yet to be done.

On the surface, this was an ordinary bunch of peace activists doing the kinds of things we do when we meet. But below the surface, what was most striking for me was the fact that here were people from the radical end of pacifism and veterans of the Balkans wars sitting together and working together. There was never any discussion about who was a pacifist and who possibly was not. There was never any discussion about what peace or peacebuilding meant or how we might see this differently. The focus was essentially the work each of us does and how we can ensure that we make connections with each other's work.

It has not always been that way. One of the major successes of the programme supported by Quakers in the UK (through Quaker Peace and Social Witness - QPSW)) over the last eighteen years is the fact that the links between these different groups have been made and that veterans have been brought into the work and see themselves as an important part of peacebuilding.

I had the opportunity to talk to a number of those who are either veterans themselves or work with veterans and to discuss the specific issues facing them: the fact that they not only have to live with the knowledge of what they have done and participated in, but also the fact that they need to find meaning in the years they spent fighting. Some of this is about trauma and trauma healing, but some of this is also about the confidence to tell the story of what happened, accept it for what it was and move on. This is not an easy process to observe and participate in for those who see themselves as the victims of the violence. Part of the strength of this programme is in overcoming those dilemmas.

**'Some of this is about trauma and trauma healing, but some of this is also about the confidence to tell the story of what happened, accept it for what it was and move on.'**

QPSW has had a number of representatives in the region. One of them had been a soldier himself; the others had been peace activists for years. It is their willingness and ability to think and work 'outside the box' that has made it possible to bring together a network of so many and such diverse groups of people, all of whom make their unique contribution to peacebuilding in the region.

Inspired by this work and recognising that peacebuilding in the region is moving in parallel with the EU Enlargement process in the region, QCEA has researched and published a study on 'Grassroots Peacebuilding and Enlargement'; we were able to present our findings and our recommendations to our colleagues in the region and start to build the foundations for a developing advocacy strategy which we can share. Beyond the specific recommendations we make in our study, even during the few short days of this meeting, I was able to pick up on a number of additional issues which we can take forward at a European level. The need for veterans to be included in peacebuilding processes and the need to reflect this appropriately in EU strategies is high on that list.

You can find the QCEA study on our website at: [www.quaker.org/qcea](http://www.quaker.org/qcea)

*Martina Weitsch*

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be to focus on non-custodial sentences or, where custody is unavoidable, provide an institution specifically catering for the individual's needs. This would enable it to provide appropriate rehabilitation and therefore deliver something that moves beyond the destructiveness of the crime. The UK Ministry of Justice's rebuttal of the criticism it has encountered is poorly constructed. The argument is that they do not want mass American-style penitentiaries but in fact small prison clusters, which will amalgamate the effectiveness of small prisons with the economic advantages of large prisons. There are no successful examples of this. The politicians in charge of this proposal have vehemently protested against the charge that they are creating giant 'warehouses', however their proposal to incorporate state of the art technology to free up resources, including staff, produces this rather dismal outlook where

future prisoners will be monitored by CCTV. A clear failure to take into account the importance of contact with prison staff and the detrimental effect of high prisoner to staff ratios, have often being linked to undesirable prison culture. These are likely to be amplified in a 'Titan' environment and as a result lead to high rates of recidivism.

In July 2007, shortly after becoming Justice Secretary and Lord Chancellor, Jack Straw himself admitted that 'the government would not be able to build its way out of the prisons' crisis'. Why then are these prisons being built? Why are the predictions of increases in future prison populations being treated as a definite rather than as an opportunity to heed a warning, take action and develop new strategies for dealing with offenders? The current strategy of prison expansion is no strategy at all, rather a gigantic mistake.

*Text and Photo: Faye Morten*

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