

Northern Friends Peace Board
Report to East Cheshire Area Meeting, 8th July 2023

Since our last report, Northern Friends Peace Board (NFPB) has met twice as blended meetings. However, we have not been able to attend either meetings in person. Our February meeting in Lancaster coincided with a train strike, which meant that neither of us could attend in person along with most NFPB members. Neither of your representatives could get to the latest meeting in Darlington, due to the Glastonbury Festival. This meeting also clashed with Armed Forces Day – which NFPB has supported Friends witnessing against this.

We personally have really missed the opportunity to meet with Friends across the north, giving and receiving support, exchanging ideas and contacts.

Peace Studies at 50 – Bradford University is celebrating 50 years of Peace Studies. East Cheshire AM had a founding role to play in supporting our Friend George Murphy to promote this idea to Quakers. Further information:

<https://www.bradford.ac.uk/news/archive/2023/uks-first-peace-studies-turns-50-.php>

We heard from Geoff Tansy a member of the Quaker Peace Studies Trust, from Hebden Bridge, about the role this department has played over the years. Peter Eccles was until recently a Trustee of this charity which supports the work and students of the Department.

NFPB set up a Ukraine group to discern a response to the Russo-Ukrainian war at its meeting in June 2023. Till has been working part of this group since its inception. The group led a helpful open session on zoom in February. The prepared ministry for this session can be accessed on the NFPB website (<https://nfpb.org.uk/ukraine-nfpb1/>) along with many useful links to background information on the war regularly updated by the NFPB co-ordinator Philip Austin: https://nfpb.org.uk/ukraine_2022/. The Ukraine Group brought a draft statement on the Russo-Ukrainian war to the June meeting which has now been adopted and will be circulated to Friends in local meetings with suggestions for further action. (We attach the final version of the statement to our report).

The recent June meeting heard from Charlotte Cooper representing Quaker Peace and Social Witness at an International Peace Bureau conference on Ukraine calling for a ceasefire and negotiations.

Alternative Security Review – NFPB is involved with Rethinking Security see <https://nfpb.org.uk/current-work/sustainable-security/> developing an alternative security review to put wellbeing of people and planet at the heart, rather than defence and militarism as the usual interpretation of security. Individuals and groups are encouraged to participate by sharing their pictures and ideas of what security means to them. We need to build a convincing alternative and reclaim peace as central to our security

see <https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/find-out-more/alternative-security-review/what-is-the-asr/> and

<https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/find-out-more/alternative-security-review/get-involved/>

Friends have until **21st July** to contribute to this

https://coventry.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0cc2mCqI0G6hpxY

NFBP has moved its office to Bolton Meeting House, which is more accessible being only up one flight of stairs. The move inevitably took time and energy, but there's now new impetus for a fresh start in organisation and priorities.

Friends can subscribe to the Peace Round up for useful current information, see <https://nfpb.org.uk/resources/publicity-information-outreach/#peace-round-up>

Thank you for your continued support for the peace work we need more than ever. Annual reports are available from the office, the website will have to change to a new host

NFPB has received donations from Frandley, Disley, Wilmslow, Crewe and Nantwich, Stockport and Marple Meetings. Please pass on our thanks to Friends for their support.

Phoebe Spence
Till Geiger

Appendix: NFPB Statement on Russo-Ukrainian War

For more than nine years, the Russo-Ukrainian war has been raging in Eastern Ukraine, having begun as a low level conflict between irregular paramilitary forces. Largely forgotten outside Ukraine, it has caused widespread suffering, and the deaths of numerous soldiers and civilians on both sides. Since the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, the war has expanded, with massive attacks of regular armed forces, battles of relentless attrition in the East and with endless missile and drone attacks, many targeted at civilian infrastructure and housing. During this period opportunities for meaningful peace negotiations were missed.

The destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam highlights the war's consequences, not just immediately for Ukrainians living along the Dnipro River and for the people of Crimea, but also in its long-term damage to the ecology of the Black Sea region and the global food supply. In this context, an end to the fighting and destruction seems ever more unlikely, and reaching a peace settlement still more elusive. The inevitability of a long war appears to be accepted by many in Ukraine, Russia and the West.

Quakers have long believed war is wrong, and testified to this in the midst of the Second World War:

The savage momentum of war drags us all in its wake. ... War is hardening our hearts. In such an atmosphere no true peace can be framed.

True peace involves freedom from tyranny and a generous tolerance; conditions that are denied over a large part of Europe and are not fulfilled in other parts of the world. But true peace cannot be dictated, it can only be built in co-operation between all peoples. None of us, no nation, no citizen, is free from some responsibility for this situation with its conflicting difficulties.

Now is the time to issue an open invitation to co-operate in creative peacemaking, to declare our willingness to make sacrifices of national prestige, wealth and standards of living for the common good.

As in 1943, we are mindful that war causes untold suffering to everyone caught up in the fighting or indirectly affected by it through higher energy and food prices. While fighting continues, we ask for the rights of all soldiers regardless of their nationality to be respected and that they be treated according to the Geneva Convention. No person should be tortured. The right of all conscientious objectors who refuse to fight should be upheld, and they should be given the opportunity of alternative service.

We call on the Ukrainian, Russian, British and all other governments, as well as international organisations, to build the preconditions for a just peace. This will involve planning the reconstruction of the areas devastated by the war and restitution and rehabilitation of the infrastructure destroyed and the rich farmlands damaged. At the same time, the world community should redouble its efforts towards creating the environment in which a lasting cessation of the fighting can take place to enable negotiations for a just and stable peace. Such a joint effort should lead to a more equitable international order which will allow humanity to work together towards solving the existential threats of the climate emergency, a future pandemic and nuclear weaponry.