

# QUAKER CONCERN OVER POPULATION

## NEWSLETTER 6

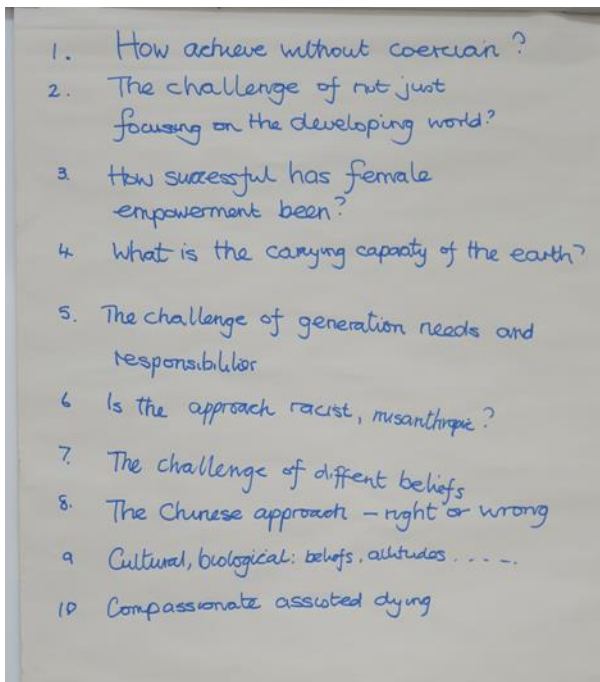
SPRING 2020

*"Family planning could bring more benefits to more people at less cost than any other single technology now available to the human race".*

**UNICEF Report, 1992**

### QCOP at Kingston - a personal view

On the 22 February QCOP held a workshop on Population at Kingston Meeting House. Part of the Kingston Learning Programme, there with 19 Friends present and 5 QCOP committee members.



It began with Cherry Foster asking Friends what issues they wished to discuss during the day. This was followed by a short film of David Attenborough on population in which he addressed many of the issues. Reference was also made to the Canterbury

commitment and why Quakers need to get involved. Then after a short discussion, David Tinsley gave a presentation putting the issues in a stark but humorous way. After coffee he led a workshop on the varied options on managing global population, with several possible courses of action. To help with this, several scenarios with their pros and cons were shown. (These were for discussion: not necessarily the viewpoint of QCOP.)

After lunch Cherry Foster looked at how countries are addressing the issues themselves. This was followed by further discussion and led on to considering three of the "difficult questions". Before finishing with a brief period of worship Friends were asked to consider what they would take away from the session and share this with the person sitting next to them.



Was the day a success? Did it make Friends more aware of QCOP's views? From the feedback forms I believe the answer was yes. We had quality discussions with many Friends and gained three new members. An existing QCOP member crossed London to attend and found it worthwhile. We became aware of local Facebook accusations of a racist attitude, which startled us, and we hope the

event redressed this successfully. From comments afterwards it is clear that local sceptics have now reached a more balanced view of how population relates to environmental and sustainability issues. As our treasurer said, "You don't get donations of £120 from a meeting which has not been positive."

*Jonathan Riddell*

## Facebook

Please visit our Facebook site: 'Quaker Concern over Population'. This allows us to spread our message to a wider and different audience. Please respond to posts or add posts of your own.

## Am I really a racist, sexist and white supremacist with misplaced concerns?

I am a member of QCOP so naturally am concerned about the consequences of population growth. In this I agree with David Attenborough when he says: 'All environmental problems become harder, and ultimately impossible, to solve with ever more people.'

A recent conversation with a fellow Friend, though, has left me sad, dis-spirited and asking myself the above questions.

It was clear my Friend was a 'weighty Friend' who thought my focussed concern about population growth was wrong and misplaced. She agreed that the three major challenges of our time: global warming, consumption and inequality were all contributing to a major risk to the future of human life on the planet and it was right, therefore, to recognise the challenge these posed to our testimonies and therefore to merit our concerns.

However, despite her agreeing that if nothing were done about population growth, Nature would deal with the problem on our behalf through war, pestilence, disease, starvation etc. every attempt to justify my concern was met with a stonewall disagreement: the concern was misplaced and inappropriate. The logical outcome of her responses was that nothing would be done.

Therefore, bearing in mind Advices and Queries, I was led to consider could I be wrong? Could I, as she suggested be a racist, a sexist and a white supremacist?

Am I a racist? – I hope not. Am I wrong to recognise that the earth's resources are finite and being used at a current rate far faster than they are replenishable and conclude, therefore, as the impact on the environment is the product of average per capita consumption and population size, there are too many people on the planet? Am I wrong to suggest lives would be more fulfilled and human life on the planet more sustainable if every country, developed or developing, had (and also implemented) a non-coercive policy to reduce its population? Obviously, many countries need such policies but one less child in a developed country brings a far greater benefit to the environment than one less child in a developing country. If I decide, on reflection, that I am wrong and indeed racist then I must now abandon my concern and abrogate the challenge to Nature.

Am I a white supremacist by worrying about the suffering caused by the protectionist policies of European countries with fences erected in Hungary and the Italian Government banning rescue boats in the Mediterranean, both aimed at stopping refugees and asylum seekers from reaching Europe? I hope not. Her arguments that population isn't the issue and that if Hungary and Italy changed these policies then deaths wouldn't happen is a bit like saying if we didn't take our cars to town, we wouldn't need car parking attendants. With current right-wing governments in place in these countries it is unlikely these policies will be abandoned or that other countries facing mass migration as the effects of climate change develop, will not start erecting their own 'fences'. Again, though, if her argument is valid, I would be able to abandon my concern and leave it to nature and right-wing populists to deal with the problem.

The question of whether I am sexist? Again, I hope not. Am I wrong to worry about the 215 million women around the world identified by the UN who long to control their own fertility but have neither the power nor the resources to do so? If she is right and I am sexist I can abandon these concerns and forget about the situation of these women with families they can't feed or provide for.

Similarly, if I concur with her and agree that consumption is the problem, then I feel I am on safer ground as I am vegan, minimise my car use by

walking and using public transport, have solar panels on my roof etc. However, it is difficult to escape the feeling that every effort I make to reduce my global footprint is negated by 80 million more feet on the planet every year but according to my Friend if the developed world sufficiently reduces their consumption the problem would disappear.

Finally, I ask myself if I am over reacting to the issue when the UN predicts population numbers will level out at 11 billion in 2050 and then slowly start to fall. Perhaps my worry is misplaced but I still can't help feeling concern for the millions who will die of war, or hunger or lack of water during the next 30 years, collaterals in the process of approaching this population plateau and subsequent fall.

My considered response to her allegations bring me to conclude that there appears to be no 'right or politically correct' answer to this world problem, so if by raising my concerns I am open to her criticism, then perhaps it is a price I just have to pay for doing what I consider to be right!

An analogy springs to mind! If when Noah's Ark was being built he had been faced with similar 'politically correct' criticisms: e.g. the animals would be living in inhumane conditions, the native woodlands were being destroyed in its construction, the work force was not unionised and earning agreed rates of pay, the nepotism of only family members on board; what about others? The vessel would not have been built but Friends somewhere would, no doubt, have been collecting for the purchase of inflatable arm bands and life rafts!

I feel it is far too easy to look for every reason why population is not an issue and thereby do nothing. David Attenborough speaks my mind: "It seems to me that every one of the ills of the past 200 years - hunger, famine, loss of identity, forests disappearing, loss of dignity, over-crowding, loss of countryside - it's all to do with increased population. Anywhere that women have control of their bodies and education and are literate and politically independent, the birth rate falls". This issue, alongside consumption, inequality and climate change, is far too important to ignore.

I had looked forward to hearing Jonathan Porritt speak at the Yearly Meeting Gathering in Bath on the 4<sup>th</sup> August - his speech entitled: 'The Climate Emergency and Population Matters' would have considered links between population growth and worsening environmental degradation.

QCOP by arranging this talk were meeting David Attenborough's challenge of ensuring that whenever climate emergency, loss of habitat, environmental damage, consumption etc. are discussed, population is mentioned. He argues that until the strange taboo of not doing this is lifted, there is no hope of a solution.

*David Tinsley - Lewes Meeting.*

### [Creating the QCOP booklet, "Difficult Questions"](#)

This booklet is intended to be a user-friendly, layman's guide on how to answer frequently asked questions and misconceptions about global population. These include practical ones, such as, "How can we possibly reduce the current population to 2 billion?" and "Who is going to look after the oldies?" and controversial ones such as, "Isn't this white men telling black women what to do?" (The answers are surprising.) Some topics deal with the role of Quakers; others with the relationship between population, consumption and living sustainably. Some are more personal about family size and the quality of life in a one child family. One says, "I am beyond childbearing age. What can I do?" (Answer, plenty!)

The main author is our most experienced member, Roger Plenty, supported by other QCOP members, June New, Beth Allen, Cherry Foster and the late Tim Baynes. Each point is supported by graphics, cartoons, information, case studies and quotes, all referenced, along with a reading list, and some useful quotes. The graphs are from reputable sources. We have faced dilemmas such as the inclusion of an important graph where the detail is still undergoing peer review and deciding which cartoons are useful and will not lead to negative comment. We have had many long debates to keep the booklet sensitive and reputable.

One constraint has been fitting each question and answer onto two A5 sides, which has the effect of

keeping it short and snappy. A joy has been finding a graphic designer for covers.

Editing has been by the combined wisdom and experience of the QCOP Writers Group and the Steering Group. Our thanks to all who have seen it and provided enthusiastic constructive criticism. We hope the booklet is both thought provoking, and even challenging in a positive way and a useful reference tool. We look forward to sending a draft version to our members to discuss at this year's AGM.

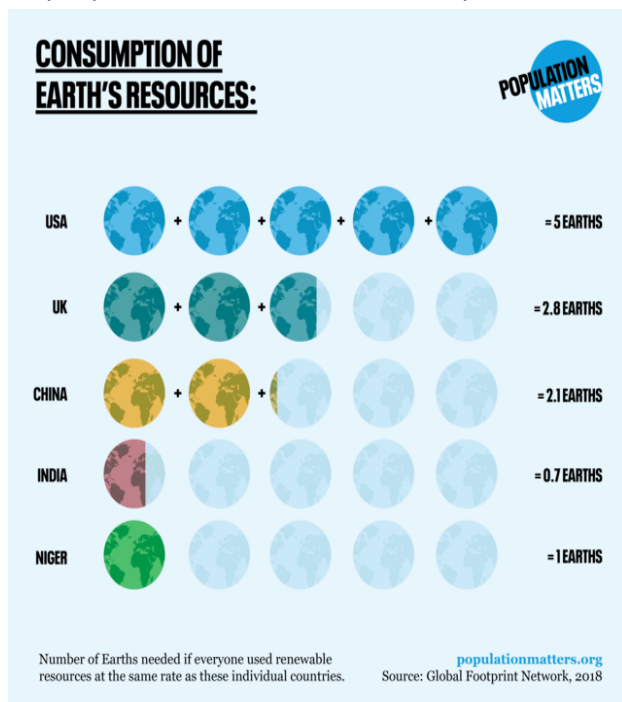
*Cherry Foster - Nailsworth Meeting*

### Difficult Questions booklet taster

Below is one of the questions from the booklet.

#### **4. "Isn't it a question of consumption rather than population?"**

It is more a matter of consumption and population. The idea that it is 'either/or' is a way to avoid discussion of population, and is an artificial division. To reduce it to an absurdity, if there were no people, there would be no consumption.



*Number of earths needed if everyone used renewable resources at the same rate as these individual countries*

### New ideas and energy needed!

Members of QCOP's Steering Group are in their second term of service and although we are feeling

encouraged we are also a little frayed at the edges! We need help with fresh ideas, minute writing, grant applications, organising events, speaking (training available), poster design etc. If you have any of these skills, please contact Jonathan Riddell on [JMRR57@outlook.com](mailto:JMRR57@outlook.com). The Steering Group meets mainly via Skype, but you could help without that.

### Upcoming Events

Due to the restrictions imposed by Coronavirus changes have been made to all the events planned for 2020. The Sheffield event has been postponed, as the talk by Jonathon Porritt at YMG to YMG in 2021. Our AGM preceded by a discussion on one of our "difficult Questions" will go ahead on 13 May but using Zoom. If you wish to attend the AGM or would like an event in your area please contact Cherry Foster.

### Want to hold an event?

We are very keen to help you and can offer planning ideas, materials, PowerPoint presentations and even a speaker. Please contact Cherry Foster on the [\\_fosters@btinternet.com](mailto:_fosters@btinternet.com)

### Newsletters – date of publication

We hope to produce a spring and autumn newsletters. Contributions to Jonathan Riddell at [jmrr57@outlook.com](mailto:jmrr57@outlook.com). The opinions in this letter are the views of the contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or QCOP.

### Committee and contact details

Jonathan Riddell - Convenor (Alton Meeting)  
Email: [jmrr57@outlook.com](mailto:jmrr57@outlook.com) Tel: 01252 712628  
[www.qcop.org.uk](http://www.qcop.org.uk)

Cherry Foster - Membership (Nailsworth Meeting)  
Email: [the\\_fosters@btinternet.com](mailto:the_fosters@btinternet.com)  
Roger Plenty - Treasurer (Nailsworth Meeting)  
Nick Chetwood - (Brigflatts Meeting - Cumbria)  
June New - (Jesus Lane Meeting - Cambridge)  
David Tinsley - (Lewes Meeting)



QUAKER CONCERN  
OVER POPULATION