

# QUAKER CONCERN OVER POPULATION

## NEWSLETTER 9 AUTUMN 2021

**QCOP at Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering in July – Group Fair (two sessions) and Jonathon Porritt’s talk on Population Growth and the Climate Emergency, ensuring a Just Transition.**

The two zoom sessions at the Group Fair consisted of a short PowerPoint presentation with questions and discussions. About 6 attended each session covering subjects such as assisted dying, the change in China’s one-child policy and white supremacy. The weak-

ness was that only one person could speak at a time. The strength was that people from everywhere could attend.

### **Jonathon Porritt’s (JP) talk**

125 Friends attended this talk, which was chaired by Martin Schweiger, QCOP member.

**Jonathon** talked first about “a shocking year” with the mayhem caused by the one degree rise in temperature and the possibility of 3 degrees by the end of the century. Referring to the hope of COP26 at Glasgow in November, he said, “On NO account must we allow more than a 2 degree rise if we are to avoid very, serious unstable, unstoppable chaos. The turning point will be the melting of the ice in the Arctic and Antarctic. If this happens it will be very grim.” He reminded us that we already have all the solutions.

Turning to population, JP commented on the UN forecasts of population growth as “baked in predictions” based on the number of young

people today producing the next generation. Overconsumption and overpopulation go hand in hand.

What is a just transition? “For most people it means **the interests and rights of poorer people not being just a postscript, but central.** The cost of this has been mooted to be \$100 billion to help poorer nations adapt. It is shameful that richer nations have failed to provide the money. Some poorer nations are so incensed at this injustice that they have refused to attend COP26. *[Consumption by richer nations has produced the problem poorer nations are facing – CF.]* There is great anger at Boris Johnson cutting development aid. The issue of human rights is mixed in with the discussion. We should put the emphasis on Rights, not just contraception and the wider health care of women and young girls. This is still a controversial area.”

JP touched on Project Drawdown where several organisations looked at 80 solutions to the climate crisis to see which mattered the most and at what cost. Everyone was amazed that the second greatest solution should be the education of women and contraception to ease greenhouse emissions. This must be better acknowledged. For a just transition we need to re-prioritise, think differently. The level of controversy has often made it difficult to engage in the issues. We need to see it through the eyes of millions of women in developing countries. Our commitment must be to a just and inclusive future. This needs to be there at every stage of the transition.”

Our special guest, Radhika from Kerala (who has decided not to have children because of climate change) commented: “It is very important to talk about education and family planning. Most poor people do not know about the

impact of large families on climate change. On racism: I have never thought about this as a racial issue.”

### **Questions:**

**Helen Johns**, who works on climate change and poverty, commented on patriarchy as a root cause, and the need to educate men and boys also.

**Daphne Wasserman** asked what was the most cost-effective solution identified by Project Drawdown? JP said, “Refrigeration and food waste, which is an astonishing source of greenhouse emissions.”

**Jack Moor** asked about the education of men and their power. JP’s replied “the world is more vulnerable now to populist autocracies led by one. We are not seeing a world led by democracies. I am very concerned at this autocratic populism - India, Putin, Trump, Bolsanaro. It is a characteristic of this age and male driven. Interestingly, many have sought to promote pro-natalist policies. It goes to the heart of how they see their nations. A

scary nexus – where effective family planning takes place, the education of women goes alongside men. This has been led by women over many decades, as in Bangladesh.”

**Mark Laskin:** There are concerns that rich countries with the greatest consumption should reduce their population. JP: “Research at Lund University, in 2017 looked at all the methods of reducing individual carbon footprints. The decision to have one fewer child came out as a massively bigger choice. This is as big a part of our advocacy as work in the developing world. This IS an issue. We need well-informed people having fewer children.”

**A Friend from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting:** What can we do apart from funding? **JP:** “I am nervous about advising people what to do. We have to go on encouraging our politicians to continue to fund Family Planning. *[It is very good that...]* Biden and Kamilla Harris are reversing the Mexico City rule. Remind politicians of

the significance of reducing aid. Please write in to politicians.”

**Leslie Bacon:** The pro-gestogen-only oral contraceptive pill is now available, *[known as POP, it is available at pharmacy counters]*. **JP:** “To make a broader reflection, there should be an as early as possible sex education system. However well-educated children are, the family planning programme is not always available. There is a need to ensure affordability and range.”

Closing comment from Radhika: “In Kerala the birth rate is 1.8% and there is 100% literacy. But there are some dark features: it is a biodiversity hotspot but has seen heavy de-forestation. Since 1973, 85% of species have gone extinct. Flooding in 2018 caused many deaths and recurs every year. Nobody talks about this.”

**Martin Schweiger concluded** “**What can we share with Friends? What should we be advocating? QCOP will try to**

**respond. We must keep planning for a better future.”**

*Taken from notes by Cherry Foster (CF)*

### **Zoom meeting with Newbury Friends, August 2021**

Are you concerned about the overpopulation of the planet? The fact that global population grows by 1bn people every 12 years makes this quote from David Attenborough really worth pondering.

Seventeen Quakers from our Area met on Zoom, to view a new PowerPoint production created by QCOP, followed by Q&A. We were shown graphs of exponential population growth over the last 200 years, and the impact this has on consumption and re-sources. Although the rate is decreasing, we are heading for 11 billion people by 2100, which is unsustainable for the planet. What can be done? QCOP made it clear they are against any form of coercion. It must be choice based. According to the UN, 270

million women have an unmet need and wish for contraception. We discussed the importance of education, alleviating poverty, the impact of family size and the Chinese one child policy experiment. Longevity was highlighted by an older Friend who did not want to fall off his perch...yet!

We all felt our eyes were opened. I recommend you see this presentation. To book, contact Nick Chetwood [nickghyll@aol.com](mailto:nickghyll@aol.com). On QCOPs website a new book 'Difficult Questions about Population' can be down-loaded.

*Maria Grace, Newbury Meeting*

### **The boat is sinking!**



**We must bail out (reduce consumption). BUT ALSO repair (reduce population growth)**

### **Support a charity**

We are often asked what individual Friends can do. One way is to support bodies

working in family planning. We had planned to nominate two charities a year that help to reduce population growth but have decided to continue

supporting MSI Reproductive Choices until the end of 2021 as our response was, to say the least, very disappointing, with only £30 from one Friend being recorded. We hope you will donate to it and mention QCOP when you do so. We know our nominated charity will be enormously grateful and it will help them carry on their brilliant work. Thank you.

**MSI Reproductive Choices** provides contraception and safe abortion to women in 37 countries. By enabling girls to stay in school, supporting women's careers and enabling communities to be resilient in the face of global challenges, sexual and reproductive healthcare is central to a better, more equal and more sustainable world for all. The world is failing the 218 million women and girls who cannot get the contraception they need. This may rise to 300 million in 2030. Sexual and reproductive health and rights support education, gender

equality and building sustainable economies. This is central to climate resilience. To support its work go to <https://www.justgiving.com/mariestopesinternational>

**A Hexham Debate  
The Future of Humanity  
Depends on the Size of our  
Population, 20 March 2021,  
by Simon Beard, PHD**

Simon has a background in moral philosophy, in particular population ethics. He is currently Senior Research Associate at the Centre for Existential Risk at the University of Cambridge. Existential risk is risk to the survival and flourishing of humanity; it therefore includes climate crisis, artificial intelligence, nuclear power, bioengineering – and overpopulation. He finds that faced with some of these risks people divide into optimists who think that ingenuity, technology and positive thinking will provide solutions and fatalists who feel that doom is inevitable. Simon thinks that

both are possible outcomes, but that the sensible approach is to examine what is happening, explore ways of dealing with the problem and persuade people into action.

Looking for a Quaker view, he found a 1976 quote from Gregor McClelland in Quaker Faith & Practice 23.47: “Compassion, to be effective, requires detailed knowledge and understanding of how society works. Any social system, in return, requires men and women in it of imagination and goodwill... What is important is that institutions and their administration be constantly tested against human values and that those who are concerned about those values be prepared to grapple with the complex realities of modern society as it is.”

### **Human values**

Let us look at human values and be creative and curious. The values and philosophers of ethics that inspired Simon

are:

1. Eusemonia – the welfare of all sentient beings;
2. Meaning – active engagement with projects of worth;
3. Ubuntu (humanity in Zulu) – promoting shared identity grounded in good will;
4. Katuna (Buddhist) – compassion, sensitivity to suffering in self and others with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it. This is important to those engaged in provision of contraception.
5. Harmony – as a Chinese concept, diverse entities co-existing and flourishing in mutual interdependence.

### **Not a simple idea**

Simon revealed how complex is the idea of overpopulation. It is not just too many physical bodies. The present world population could stand on the Isle of Wight. They would not survive long. It is the impact of our lives and what we do that matters.

In the past 100 years the number of humans has quad-

rupted. This increase may not happen again but already we face an uncertain future because of it. One aspect that is ignored is the example of the post-war “baby boom”. Such an event – “the generation that opened universities and closed pension schemes” – may have profound social changes. A decrease in child and maternal mortality and an increase in average life expectancy are also important. Now, even though the rate of birth is lower, the population grows.

There are different stories about our relationship with the environment. Simon showed a graph from the Royal Society showing loss of biomass. Surprisingly, this appears to be not all bad news. Since 1950 temperate forest has increased; there are very low levels of destruction of tundra and coniferous forest; tropical forest is being destroyed but less than before 1950. Overall, there is now less destruction per person than before 1950

(but there are more people). However, the story of global warming is not reassuring; there has been a 50% increase in greenhouse gases since 1980 and the Kyoto agreement.

Our global footprint is said to be 1.7 earths; that is, we are consuming more than 70% of what the earth can sustain. Our footprint should be 1 earth or lower. The Global Footprint Network is an interdisciplinary group looking at data relating to this. They have come up with a graph that shocked Simon. It shows that the global economy has increased far more than either population or human environmental impact, which appear to follow a similar trajectory. In other words, it appears that population is the driver and not the global economy. So those who say, “It’s not population, it’s consumption” are wrong.

There has been relatively little change overall in grazing land, fishing, crops and urbanisation



but what has massively increased is carbon emission.

Sustainability?

If we could both decarbonise the economy and limit population growth to the UN median projection, we could achieve a global footprint of one earth.

At present most children are born in countries with a low fertility rate; so provision of contraception and education of women in countries with a high fertility rate, while beneficial to individuals and those societies, will not go far to solve the problem.

Simon feels that a major driver of population growth over the next 100 years will be increased numbers of elderly people and that this must be talked about more. This is not saying that we should regard longevity as a bad thing and it makes no sense to go on producing young carers who will in turn grow old. However, there is a delicate balance to be struck and the issue of

assisted dying by choice needs to be introduced.

Statistical trends tend to be expressed as a linear projection, but where human behaviour is concerned they should be looked at more as probabilities. Humans are unpredictable. The evidence seems to suggest that educated women tend to have smaller families. But where good childcare is available and a skilled woman can earn a high salary, she might have more children, not fewer.

What we can do is to support young people who state their intention not to have children. This is brave and it shows up all the cultural bias towards procreation, because they are often condemned and told they are being selfish and unnatural. His message is to challenge journalists who criticise the “no child” decision and do all you can to overcome this prejudice in society.

*Jeanette Cayley*

## **China and the One Child Policy**

In a broad sense I agree, but I deprecate western countries attacking the Chinese for their one-child policy in the 1960s. It was very rough, but

(a) I believe China would have been starving if they had not been so drastic. I admire the people stomaching the policy. As a refugee in 1939 I know about living in a totalitarian state, but I admire that they took the policy on board to overturn what was an ancient cultural trait; eg my Chinese New Zealand school friend was one of 8 children, which I understood was a cultural norm – a matter for “pride”!!

(b) Since the mid-1960s it has taken decades for western countries to admit that population is an issue to be discussed. It was a shock arriving in England in 1954 (to do my PhD in Cambridge) to see how overcrowded England is. No wonder Brits emigrated not just to New Zealand from the mid-1800s to take over the country from the indigenous

Maoris, but also elsewhere. When I tried to discuss the world population issue among British Quakers in the 1960s (after Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring') I got told that I was being racist!!

I react negatively to westerners criticising the Chinese. I have never seen any article or speaker saying anything positive about the Chinese or admiration for what they achieved as a result of the one-child policy or sympathy for their sacrifices. Even with the population as it is, the Chinese are now buying land in New Zealand and (one reads) in Africa and South America in order to ensure an adequate food supply and raw materials in the future under continuing growth of prosperity in China, let alone climate change. At the same time they are building coal-fired power stations to meet the growing demand, in spite of realising how bad this is for climate change, because they cannot build nuclear power stations at

that rate. Think how the world would be without their one-child policy. As regards “racism”, it was the smaller racial communities that had some exemption from the one-child policy, not (as I understand it) the mainline 'Han' race.

If one is critical of anyone, it should include India which has not taken the issue seriously. Growing prosperity has helped the middle classes, but India has never taken the issue seriously and seems “proud” to overtake China in total population. Sorry for this rant! But there is a lack of perspective in almost everything one reads in Britain about population and China.

*Volker Heine*

### *Ideas for Christmas!!*

**Difficult Questions Over Population.** This booklet priced just £3.50 (£5 incl UK postage) makes an ideal Christmas present. Available from [jmrr57@outlook.com](mailto:jmrr57@outlook.com).

## **Future Zoom Events**

**Wed 17 Nov 19:30-20:30.** Talk by Population Matters Director Robin Maynard, followed by a discussion.

**2022** - We are planning several online sessions but would welcome suggestions from our members

## **Our Newsletter**

The opinions in this newsletter are the views of the contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or QCOP. Editor: [jmrr57@outlook.com](mailto:jmrr57@outlook.com).

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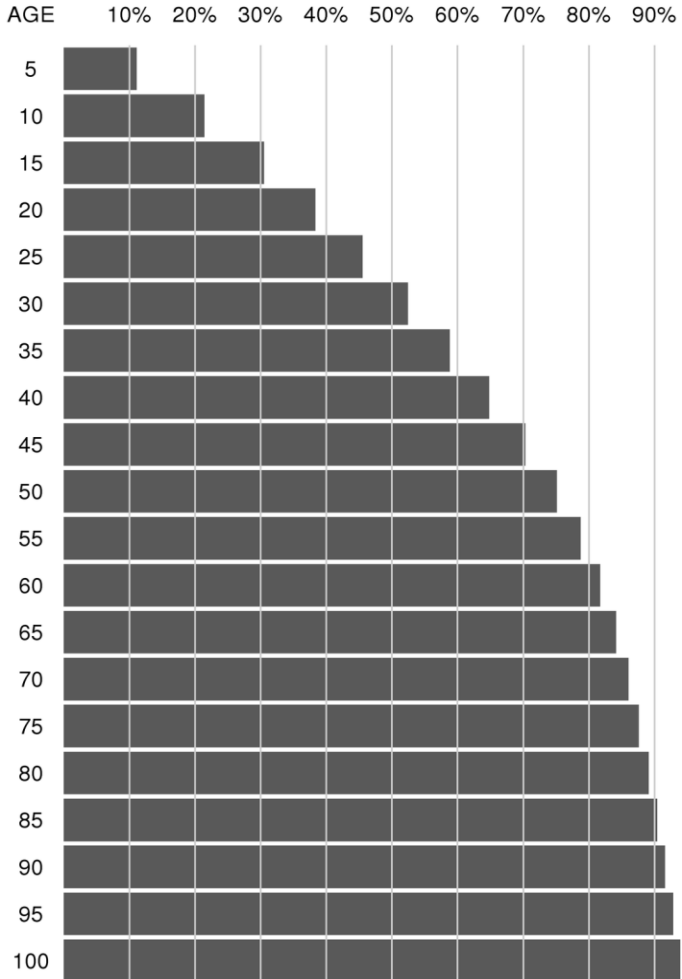
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## What percentage of Global fossil fuel emissions (since 1751) have occurred in my lifetime



Data source: CDIAC and [globalcarbonproject.org](http://globalcarbonproject.org)  
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