

# QUAKER CONCERN OVER POPULATION

## NEWSLETTER 4

SPRING 2019

### The Depopulation Dividend

Who will care for the elderly and what will happen to the economy as a result of a falling birth rate?

At last, such questions are being seriously addressed and more optimistic views are emerging.

An article 'Aging Populations, Good for Us, Good for the Earth' was published in the international scientific journal 'Trends in Ecology and Evolution' Nov 2018, (vol 33 pp851-862 Gotmark, Cafaro & O'Sullivan). The authors surveyed various studies which suggest that the problems associated with aging are overstated and are manageable. Economic analyses show that the economic, social and environmental benefits of smaller populations are substantial. These authors say 'the reluctance of ecologists and social scientists to discuss the negative effects of population growth has given a free hand to advocates of economic growth to focus on the problems of aging'. In fact, smaller human populations 'open possibilities to create even better societies which are sustainable over the long term'.

Reinforcing these views, The Guardian published an article by Nicola Davis (26 Dec 2018) citing Professor Sarah Harper who says 'Declining fertility round the world should be a cause for celebration not alarm'. 'AI and robotics mean that work is moving away from industrial jobs, meaning efforts need to go into education of the young, not boosting procreation'.

It is easier to enable older adults to stay upskilled, healthy and in the labour market than it is to cope with the environmental problems of overpopulation.

*June New – Jesus Lane Meeting, Cambridge*



*Daphne, Cherry, David and Mary in Glasgow Meeting House with one of our leaflets. QCOP are keen to reach out to Scottish Friends and hope to organise a session in Glasgow or Edinburgh. If you would be interested in attending please let QCOP know.*

### Did you see today's news about the Sahel? About the changes being wrought on it by climate change.

The Sahel is a broad strip across Africa bordering the Sahara Desert, and forming a part of several countries. It is semi-arid, and farmed with great difficulty. It suffers from near perpetual drought, and is already feeling the influence of climate change, which is threatening to turn it into desert,

when it will merge with the Sahara. In spite of this, very rare rainstorms of great intensity strike occasionally. It is also the home of a rapidly rising population.

A farmer who was interviewed in the news spoke of the fact that there was not enough water to supply the livestock, which died: and that one deluge had stripped the top surface of his meagre farm taking all his crop with it. He did not know how he was going to support his ten children.

And there's the rub.

The International Panel for Climate Change predict that if nothing changes temperatures in the Sahel will rise by 4.5 to 6.5 degrees this century, making it virtually uninhabitable, whilst UN demographers state that its population will increase from 125 million to 650 million in the same period. Two express trains approaching each other on a single line: what will the consequences be?

Peter Wadhams, in his book "A Farewell to Ice", writes, "One can foresee a shortage of compassion and a shortage of aid: the result will inevitably be famine on a massive scale. How will the world react to this evidence of its own selfishness? I quail at the thought of how nasty humanity may become, and of what excuses it will offer for inaction".

*Roger Plenty - Nailsworth Meeting*

## Difficult Questions?

Whenever we address groups there are always certain questions that we get asked. So we have decided to look at some of these in the next few newsletters as space allows. Here is the first.

*Hans Rosling says that there isn't a population problem. Do you think you know more than he does?*

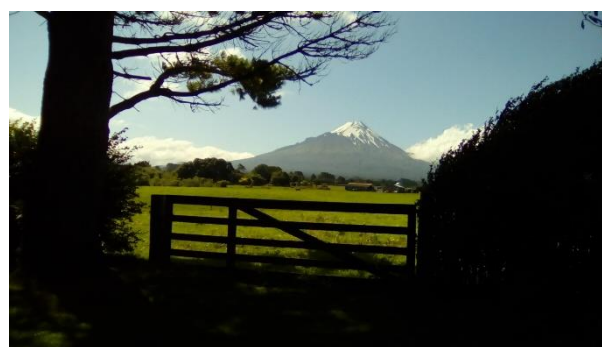
Yes. It isn't a matter of me versus Rosling: it's a matter of a large number of demographers versus Rosling. The current thinking is that the planet could only support about two billion if we all lived at the present rate of the developed world: conversely, if we cut consumption by three quarters the world could support the present population. But since population is growing by a

billion every twelve years, we would soon have to cut consumption even further.

*Roger Plenty - Nailsworth Meeting*

## New Zealand Yearly Meeting: "Treading Lightly on the World"

Louise and I are members of Gainsborough Meeting in the UK but are in Wellington for a year as Resident Friends at the Quaker Centre. We have just returned from Summer Gathering (yes, in January!) at a remote campsite near Mt Taranaki – a majestic volcanic peak.



The theme of the Meeting was "Tread Lightly in the World" and covered changing behaviours re consumption, energy use, managing pollution, fighting inequality etc. and even included a video link with QUNO to hear of recent developments in the management of global warming.

It was surprising, though, that in this programme there was no mention of population growth! I therefore offered a workshop: "Why bother with reducing our global footprint ..... when we are still increasing the number of feet?"

There were over 130 at the gathering but only 12 attended my workshop: those attending already largely recognised the problems ie. inequality, climate change and population growth being the major challenges facing the 21st Century to avoid breakdowns in society.

The meeting was asked to consider how the greatest change could be achieved – choosing the 'high hanging fruit' which is difficult to pick or the 'low hanging fruit' which is more easily reached. It was suggested the higher fruit eg. changes to car use (there were 40 cars in the car park), air travel

(some had flown to the gathering; not surprising considering New Zealand distances and lack of railways) and other reductions in people's uses of energy, resources, water etc. are very difficult to change – if Quakers find this difficult how can we expect to bring about change in others!

The 'low hanging fruit', though, is far more easily gathered – the UN recognise 220 million women worldwide are desperate for support seeking contraception, maternal health and child health care. Just think of the changes that could be made if Quakers worldwide worked to raise awareness and changes in governments' policies towards this.

New Zealand is a large and remote country of almost 5 million people of which nearly 2 million live in one city, Auckland. Although it is in some ways sheltered from the massive movements in population and consequent suffering which will be brought about by climate change it has recently been suggested that the world's richest are considering moving to New Zealand to avoid breakdowns in society as inequality, climate change and population growth bring their inescapable consequences.

It is my belief that Quakers worldwide need to recognise all three major challenges, not just inequality and consumption, if we are to hold true to our testimonies and bring about change which would benefit both developed and developing nations.

*David Tinsley – Resident Friend, Wellington Meeting, NZ*

## [New Membership / supporter's category](#)

Until recently all our members/supporters have been individual Friends. However, we have now received a request from an Area Meeting to join. At our last Steering Group Meeting the Steering Group have decided that we should have such a category so that Meetings can join and support the Group. This could take one of two forms. Either it could be no more than a request to subscribe to the Group so that they will receive newsletters and notices, or it could be a more formal wish to join QCOP following a minute from the local or Area Meeting. If anyone thinks their meeting would

benefit from joining QCOP we would hope they would encourage their meeting to do so.

To contact us, or for further information, go to our wide-ranging QCOP website, [www.qcop.org.uk](http://www.qcop.org.uk)

## [New display materials and logo](#)

It has become increasingly obvious to the steering group that we need to invest in one or two pop-up banners and possibly a projector and other equipment so that we can give talks and get the message out to Friends. We are also considering a logo for QCOP. If anyone has the skills to design one please let Jonathan Riddell know.

## [Upcoming Events](#)

QCOP will have a stall at the Groups' Fair at Yearly Meeting in London. on Sunday from 18.00-20.30 and have organised the following talk by Simon Beard on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> May at 17.30 at Drayton B05, in Drayton House:-

### [Quaker Concern Over Population](#) ***Quakers, population and the future of humanity***

*This session will be presented by Simon Beard (Quaker, Cambridge University Research Associate, New Generation Thinker, radio and TV speaker). Quaker testimonies, to simplicity, equality, sustainability and peace, have much to say about population. Yet, as a Society, we seem to prefer talking about other things instead. What can, and should, Quakers say about issues of fertility, mortality, migration and urbanization that are shaping humanity's place in the world, and what does this mean for us now and for future generations?*

Enquiries: [jmrr57@outlook.com](mailto:jmrr57@outlook.com) or via the website [www.qcop.org.uk](http://www.qcop.org.uk)  
Please let us know if you hope to attend.

### [QCOP AGM](#)

Our AGM will be from 12-4pm on Saturday 29th June at Oxford Meeting House, 43 St Giles', Oxford OX1 3LW. Short formal AGM followed by film/presentation and facilitated discussion. Bring your own lunch. All welcome.

## **BYM Sustainability Gathering 2018: Bridging the gap – hope and action**

This was the third gathering and although the second had left me depressed the first had truly inspired me so I hoped that this weekend would do likewise. Unfortunately it did not. I came away feeling that it was a wasted opportunity. At the first gathering I learnt what many Friends and others were doing. This time there was just one late evening slot in which Friends could hold their own sessions about issues close to their hearts. With over 10 sessions running simultaneously and competing against entertainment in the main hall I was only possible to attend one and so most were poorly attended. QCOP's Nick Chetwood led a session to which a few Friends turned up. QCOP had offered, well in advance, to run a programmed session on population but our offer was not taken up. This was a pity as QCOP is one of the very few Quaker Recognised Bodies whose sole purpose is to consider important aspects of sustainability.

Of the main sessions that by Paul Hogget (co-founder of the Climate Psychology Alliance) spoke to me. He asked us to consider exceptionalism in relation to our environmental concerns. Exceptionalism is the perception that a species, country, group, or individual, is exceptional. This implies that one considers oneself or one's group superior. In environmental terms this could mean that we consider humans are special compared to other life. Or that Europeans, one's town, Quaker Meeting, or oneself is special. This can imply that it is others who are responsible for the damage being done to the environment and that one's own exceptionalism means that others must adapt not oneself. I fear that it is exceptionalism that leads most humans, including Quakers, to not consider the question of over-population except that of other species.

*Jonathan Riddell - Alton Meeting*

## **Why become a member?**

The value of having members is that it shows that many Quakers feel that population issues are an area of concern not to be dismissed by Friends. The value to members is in being kept in touch with worldwide news through email briefings and newsletters.

If you know of any concerned Friends please tell them that membership is free and also mention the website, which is full of facts, and has the membership form and contact details. [www.qcop.org.uk](http://www.qcop.org.uk). We encourage members to contact us with queries, and suggestions.

It would also be useful if all Quaker members of a household who supports us would join individually. That way we can get a better idea of the support we have in the Society.

*Cherry Foster, Membership Secretary*

## **QCOP – Who are we?**

QCOP grew out of the Canterbury Commitment and was established after the successful lecture that we held at Yearly Meeting in Bath in 2014. We have over 70 supporters, mainly from Friends in Britain but also a few from around the world.

## **Annual voluntary donations.**

We have no membership fee so ask for an annual voluntary donation of £5-£20 per supporter. Cheques payable to **QCOP to: Roger Plenty, Ashleigh, Rodborough Hill, Stroud, Gloucs, GL5 3RT**

## **Newsletters – date of publication**

It is hoped to produce two newsletters each year in the spring and autumn. Contributions to the Editor, Jonathan Riddell; [jmrr57@outlook.com](mailto:jmrr57@outlook.com).

*The opinions expressed in this letter are the views of the contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or QCOP.*

## **Committee and contact details**

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