

QUAKER ECO-BULLETIN

Information and Action Addressing Public Policy
for an Ecologically Sustainable World

Volume 9, Number 4

July-August 2009

Quaker Eco-Bulletin: The First Nine Years

Judy Lumb and all the QEB Authors

When we began publishing Quaker Eco-Bulletin (*QEB*) in May of 2001, the new Bush Administration was pandering to their corporate sponsors and diluting or reversing many environmental laws and regulations. The looming reality of global climate change was ignored or dismissed by most government public policymakers. Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), responding to the stated wishes of Friends Meetings across the United States, had not yet included “an earth restored” as one of their active priorities. *QEB* was initiated as the publishing arm of a larger effort of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s Environmental Working Group committed to:

“integrating into the beliefs and practices of the Society of Friends the Truths that God’s Creation is to be held in reverence in its own right, and that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring the Earth’s ecological integrity [and]

“to strengthen Friends’ support for FCNL’s witness in Washington DC for peace, justice, and an earth restored.”

Now a project of Quaker Earthcare Witness, *QEB* has a two-fold purpose:

- 1) to inform Friends about public and corporate policies that have an impact on society’s relationship to the earth, and
- 2) to provide analysis and critique of societal trends and institutions that threaten the health of the planet.

Highlights from Past QEBs

From the first *QEB* we have recognized that a basic problem underlying environmental issues is the impact of the human population on the planet—our numbers, our way of life, and the economic systems under which we live. In the past nine years, we have published 48 *QEBs*, all of which are available on the Quaker Earthcare Witness website <quakerearthcare.org/Publications/QuakerEco-bulletin/QEB_Archive/index.htm>. Here are some excerpts from previous *QEBs*:

Population

The population of Homo sapiens on planet earth has grown very rapidly over the past century from 1.6 billion in 1900 to 2 billion in 1930, 3 billion in 1960, 4 billion in 1974, 5 billion in 1987 and 6 billion in 1999. ... More concretely, about 200,000 more persons need food and housing today than yesterday! The United Nations medium projection estimates that there will be 9.3 billion persons on the planet in 2050. (*QEB* 1:1)

Abortion is here to stay—whether legally performed by a physician or illegally by a quack. ... If legal abortion becomes more limited, women will return to back alley abortions, which

will result in many needless deaths of women. Like preventing war, it is best to take away the cause for abortion. Emergency contraception has the potential to significantly reduce the occasion for abortion—but a woman needs to know about it before the emergency arises. (*QEB* 3:2)

As we enter the 21st century, the human population—its rate of growth, total size, and distribution over the earth and the relative size of important age groups—continues to challenge our thinking about how to achieve a sustainable world. (*QEB* 4:6)

Our consumption of Earth’s resources is way out of balance with that of the rest of the world’s population and far exceeds the capacity of even our own natural resources. Our challenge is to recognize that our over-consumption is a direct result of our culture. We must find ways to change our culture so we can reduce our impact upon Earth. (*QEB* 6:6)

Air Quality

If we are concerned about air quality, we are also called to examine what we are doing that contributes to air pollution. We are called to “walk our talk” and live closer to our professed ideals. Most of us have some control over how much we drive, how much we travel, what kind of fuel-efficiency our cars get, how much and how efficiently we heat and cool our own homes. (*QEB* 4:1)

Water

Worldwide demand for water is increasing with population growth, but at a faster rate due to “improved” living standards—golf courses, pools, hot tubs, etc. Since 1950, per capita use of freshwater has trebled and the global rate of water withdrawal from surface and groundwater sources has increased almost fivefold. (*QEB* 2:5)

Forests—Biodiversity—Land

The federal Roadless Area Conservation Rule is the most significant U.S. forest conservation measure of the last 100 years. It protects approximately 58.5 million acres of wild, pristine national forest lands. These areas are vital sources of clean water; quality recreation; and native fish and wildlife habitat, including important habitat for endangered species. Now we need to urge our government leaders to leave the Roadless Area Conservation Rule alone and implement it as soon as possible. (*QEB* 1:3)

The evidence is mounting that biodiversity, the variety of life and organisms in our natural habitats, is decreasing due to habitat loss and overexploitation of our basic life support systems. ... Lobby for U.S. ratification of the Convention on Biodiversity. (*QEB* 1:3)

Quaker Eco-Bulletin (QEB) is published bi-monthly by Quaker Earthcare Witness (formerly FCUN) as an insert in *BeFriending Creation*.

The vision of **Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW)** includes integrating into the beliefs and practices of the Society of Friends the Truths that God's Creation is to be held in reverence in its own right, and that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring the Earth's ecological integrity. As a member organization of Friends Committee on National Legislation, QEW seeks to strengthen Friends' support for FCNL's witness in Washington DC for peace, justice, and an Earth restored.

QEB's purpose is to advance Friends' witness on public and institutional policies that affect the Earth's capacity to support life. QEB articles aim to inform Friends about public and corporate policies that have an impact on society's relationship to Earth, and to provide analysis and critique of societal trends and institutions that threaten the health of the planet.

Friends are invited to contact us about writing an article for **QEB**. Submissions are subject to editing and should:

- Explain why the issue is a Friends' concern.
- Provide accurate, documented background information that reflects the complexity of the issue and is respectful toward other points of view.
- Relate the issue to legislation or corporate policy.
- List what Friends can do.
- Provide references and sources for additional information.

QEB Coordinator: Keith Helmuth

QEB Editorial Team: Judy Lumb, Sandra Lewis, Barbara Day

To receive **QEB**:

Email: QEB@QuakerEarthcare.org

Website: QuakerEarthcare.org

Mail: write to address below

Projects of Quaker Earthcare Witness, such as **QEB**, are funded by contributions to:

Quaker Earthcare Witness
173-B N Prospect Street
Burlington VT 05401

Competition for private lands in the West is especially fierce. As land values skyrocket, and property taxes rise, landowners are increasingly inclined to sell out and parcel land off to be split up for housing development. ... Community-based conservation efforts solve problems that result from conflict over land use, and from cultural and social differences. (*QEB* 6:3)

Farms—Cyclical Production—Food

From the environmental, economical, political, and socio-cultural perspectives the smaller, family-sized farm is better for the local community than the very large, agribusiness farm. (*QEB* 3:3)

The 2007 Food and Farm Bill ... will have far-reaching effects on the nutrition and health of all Americans, on U.S. energy policy, on the future of rural communities, on the global climate crisis, and on global trade. (*QEB* 7:5)

Gunter Pauli founded ZERI on the idea that principles of the natural world can be applied to human manufacturing and waste removal practices, transforming those wastes from an expensive and sometimes toxic nuisance into a benign and revenue-producing resource. (*QEB* 7:6)

The high price of food is painful medicine, but it could help to decrease rural poverty and the rate of urban migration. ... The recently passed Farm Bill has locked us into another five years of the subsidy system that has had such a detrimental impact on food policy in our country. (*QEB* 8:5)

Transportation

Rail transportation is often forgotten as a part of the solution to global climate change and to our increasingly overcrowded highways and skies. ... A train uses half or less energy than road transportation to haul the same weight, whether in freight or number of passengers. (*QEB* 8:1)

Nuclear Energy

Like radiation itself, the problems of radioactivity are invisible. People are largely unaware of the dangers and problems of nuclear power. The nuclear industry and the government, including the very government agencies supposed to safeguard our nation from its dangers, disregard or minimize the dangers of nuclear power. ... The most effective way to decrease the need for more energy production is to decrease the demand for it through energy conservation. This change begins with each one of us, in the choices we make to live our own lives simply and sustainably. (*QEB* 5:4)

The greatest case for closing Indian Point and calling for the decommissioning of all nuclear plants in the U.S., besides preventing the obvious risks they pose, is the vision we as a people have of living in harmony and sustainably, in friendship with Earth. The waste from these reactors remains toxic for tens of thousands of years. (*QEB* 6:5)

Renewable Energy

Renewable electricity can be purchased from an independent electric supply company or an electric utility. ... The renewable energy now being sold, mostly from landfill gas, wind turbines, and hydropower, would be cheaper than energy from coal, oil, or nuclear fuel if all government subsidies were eliminated. (*QEB* 4:3)

Fossil Fuels

Events of recent months shed glaring light on the dark side of our nation's dependence on fossil fuel. The World Trade Towers' destruction is, perhaps, its most dramatic expression to date. (*QEB* 2:2)

The U.S. and world today are facing two mounting threats to basic human security due to our dependence on fossil fuels: harmful climate change and deadly

conflicts over oil. ... Today our nation is divided, distracted, and consumed by war and the quest for absolute global military supremacy in large part because of our dangerous oil dependence. (QEB 7:3)

Global Climate Change

Global warming is just the first in a chain of potentially disastrous disturbances that are apt to occur because of the increase of greenhouse gases (GHG). (QEB 1:2)

How much can global temperature rise before the capacity of large scale ecosystems to survive is exceeded? Some analysts have suggested that a 2°C rise (3.6°F) above the 1990 average may be as much as many ecosystems can withstand. ... What greater sacrilege could there be than to knowingly and wantonly participate in unraveling the fabric of life on Earth as God creates it? (QEB 5:5)

Why not set our own personal goals, too? Anyone may choose to set a tougher goal, of course, but each of us could make a meaningful response to climate change by matching the California reductions with 30 percent decreases in our personal GHG emissions. You'll feel better and save money, too. (QEB 9:1)

American Exceptionalism

The advocates of American exceptionalism are absolutely confident there is no reasonable alternative. But what seems to many Americans like the natural evolution of progress worldwide often contributes to the increasing breakdown and disordering of social and ecological relationships. (QEB 4:5)

Governance

In the 1886 *Santa Clara v Southern Pacific* decision, artificial legal fictions, corporations, were given due process and equal protection rights of biological human beings for the first time. ...

A corporation is defined today as a legal "person" apart from the human persons that are connected to it. A corporation possesses many of the same rights that human beings hold sacred, rights which the government and military protect with armed force, and rights to govern which prevent us from exercising our rights as human beings to govern ourselves. (QEB 5:6)

Fair Trade

Trade is an essential feature of the global economy, but free trade agreements are increasing both the concentration of wealth and power, and the inexorable expansion of human enterprise within a finite and increasingly fragile ecosphere. (QEB 3:5)

Friends are concerned that the trade negotiation process is unequal and unjust. Developed nations frequently overwhelm developing nations with the sheer number of lawyers they use and the demands they make. Developing nations, desperately seeking economic growth, are under great pressure to accommodate to the wishes of the developed nations. Friends' testimonies of justice and equality compel us to address this inherently unequal and unjust situation. (QEB 6:2)

Economic Policy

Friends are now reaching deeply into questions of economic policy and behavior with new resolve and discernment. Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) and American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) have both recently issued public documents that explicitly link "structural economic violence" with the prospects for justice, peace and human betterment, and they have done so within the context of Earth's ecological integrity. (QEB 5:2)

The real economy is about producing and exchanging goods and services. It uses money to help make and do things people want and need. The financial economy helps to develop the real economy, but it also invites speculation—the practice of buying and selling financial instruments in order to make a profit on their shifting values. Buying stock in a company is an investment in the real economy when a reasonable rate of return is expected from the sale of a useful product, but buying to sell when the value goes up is pure speculation.

In 1970, the financial economy was about twice the size of the real economy. The dollar value of all stocks, bonds, and other paper contracts was about twice the dollar value of all goods and services, farms and factories, schools, hospitals, etc. By the 1990s, the financial economy had become 20 to 50 times as large as the real economy. (QEB 2:4)

An economics of stewardship is needed now—an economics dedicated to preserving and enhancing the commonwealth of life with which we share this planet. The success of the current policy regime in providing economic prosperity and social mobility for some is undermining the prospects for social stability and economic prosperity for many others, as well as destabilizing the climate and weakening the resilience of ecosystems around the world. (QEB 4:2)

For many, Woolman's witness has strengthened our modern critique of unjust or unsustainable economic systems. Recognizing our own role in supporting these systems, we can avoid products, services and businesses that rely on relationships that run counter to our understanding of just and sustainable economics. Organized examples include divestment and boycott campaigns, and investment in "screen" funds that do not invest in particularly pernicious enterprises such as the production of weapons and tobacco. Such approaches can dramatically influence the values and conduct of economic institutions.

But disengagement can take us only so far in realizing more sustainable models of commerce. We may reduce our own role in unjust relationships, but risk absolving ourselves of other ways in which we benefit from the broader economic structures that remain in place. The critique of prevailing economic systems can also devolve into a negative attitude toward business in general, discouraging Friends' participation and reducing the potential impact we may have in bringing our witness to bear on trade and commerce. (QEB 5:3)

The theoretical framework from which this free-market advocacy was derived excludes the concept of the common good by the assumption that all wants are independent. There is no need for social goals because they have been assumed not to exist. ... Economic theory could then suggest ways of redistributing income that might do the least damage to the efficient working of the market. Eliminating the concept of the common good in economic theory is profoundly significant in shaping contemporary society because this omission allows us to ignore how economic policies have a major influence on the way we relate to one another. (*QEB* 7:1)

Money

In my view, the growth of the global money supply is the most insidious population explosion associated with the human enterprise. ... But all this new money is not being used for basic necessities. Rather, it's being leveraged through various financial arrangements to make even more money for the already wealthy, to provide pensions and other retirement income for the already comfortable (which includes most Friends in the United States), and to promote more frivolous consumption by people who already have too much stuff. Meanwhile, many of these same people are going heavily into debt to support their excessive consumption, along with corporations that compete or merge with one another to produce and promote the excess and our government which enables it all. (*QEB* 7:2)

Natural Capital

Ecosystem services are those fundamental life-supporting services—seemingly infinite and free—that we take for granted, such as, purifying air to breathe, purifying water to drink, and providing fertile soil to produce the food we eat. We are even less aware of the other services that ecosystems provide: pollination, dispersal of seeds, climate stabilization, flood protection, erosion prevention, decomposition, detoxification, maintenance of biodiversity, control of agricultural pests, and carbon sequestration, to name a few. (*QEB* 2:5)

In economic terms, we are using up our natural capital. As the economy grows and grows, it acts in a very imperial manner. What used to belong to other species turns into property; what used to be scenery becomes new subdivisions; and what used to be considered “useless” land, is transformed into useable farmland. But modern industrial economies have largely operated on the assumption that these portions of the Earth were just free. And, sadly, they were. There were no natural courts enforcing payment for use of the air, the land or the seas. (*QEB* 7:4)

Persuasion—Myth—Friends Testimonies

Before we speak about “the facts,” we need to invoke another level of truth, one that appeals to the hearts of a great many citizens, whatever their party designation. This includes traditional American values such as concern for the common good, equal opportunity, fair play, and ensuring a livable future for our children. These and other core American values are essential frames for our environmental messages because they help establish common ground between us and our audience. (*QEB* 4:4)

Friends testimonies, and the activities that have flowed from them, have been a central factor in the movement for human betterment that has grown over time into a full recognition of the spiritual significance of human solidarity. The emerging ecological world view suggests that Friends are now called to build on this value of human solidarity and imagine a world in which our solidarity extends to the whole community of life on Earth. (*QEB* 6:4)

Changing Role of QEB

Thanks to a concerted effort of visitation by Friends from Quaker Earthcare Witness to Friends Yearly and Monthly Meetings, more Friends are now aware of the interconnections between peace, justice and an earth restored. For several years FCNL has responded accordingly with their very effective lobbying efforts and communication of legislative issues to Friends. The movement of environmental issues into the mainstream is reflected in the larger society where acknowledgement of the threat of global climate change is now widespread and the policies of the Obama Administration give us new hope.

As a result, the QEB editorial team has become less involved with specific environmental legislation and policy. Our two-month production schedule does not lend itself to function in the current fast-paced legislative atmosphere.

Instead, the QEB editorial team has focused more on systemic issues related to our economy and the impact upon Earth. The national and global economic crisis is providing opportunities for systemic change in our economic system.

The QEB editorial team and David Ciscel are involved in a Circle of Discernment (CoD) focusing on the interrelationships among natural capital, the commons, economics, and deep ecology. The last two QEBs are products of this CoD. As much as possible we are trying to use Quaker process, allowing ourselves to be Spirit-led, while working via email and monthly conference calls. We anticipate future QEBs will come from this process, but we decided to allow this CoD to be open-ended, that is, we will not set arbitrary deadlines. We plan to keep going until we feel a clear endpoint, after which we anticipate producing a pamphlet in the Quaker Institute for the Future series.

What Can Friends Do?

The QEB editorial team is very interested in your feedback about our publication. Help us to plan for the future of QEB. Use the following queries if you wish, but please respond with an email to Keith Helmuth <ekhelmuth@mindspring.com>.

- To what extent do you use QEB?
- What is it about QEB that you value?
- Have you used a QEB for a group discussion, class or other gathering? If so, which one(s)?
- What is less than useful about QEB?
- How would you like to see QEB changed?
- What do you want from QEB in the future?
- What specific subjects would you like to see covered?
- Are you interested in writing a QEB?