

CTH Forum 19/11/2015 Justice & Peace Presentation

The Justice and Peace Group held its 49th meeting on October 15th – and that reminded me of a boyhood memory relating to PC 49 a comic book character! Unfortunately Peace and Justice issues are not the stuff of comic book fantasy, but rather a case for serious attention and resultant action by those who would be Christ-like. Only on Sunday last I was told off for raising political issues in church whilst leading the Remembrance Sunday Service! Tonight I am not in church but rather simply addressing ‘The Church’ – which you are part of! But first some information about the sort of things that are on the current J&P agendas:

Transatlantic Trade Investment Partnership Basically a secret deal between corporate businesses in the USA and the EU. But something that fortunately was picked up by some canny investigation and has become a major concern which the media have been loath to publicise, either widely or in detail, due to what seems like censorship. The basic inherent danger within this agreement is that it would allow corporations to control what can be done rather than governments of affected countries. A recent foretaste of what might happen has been companies trying to sue governments when their Health and Safety legislation has impinged on the profit margins of the companies. The tobacco industry in Australia is one such event.

Other agencies locally and nationally with members of J&P have taken part in lobbying in the town square over the past 7 months. Ignorance among the public has become a real concern as not even all MPs or MEPs have seen the inherent dangers for democracy as we know it. Big business and finance within the USA are the instigators and are attempting to establish similar Trading Partnerships in Asia and the Pacific. Unethical practices are but one other aspect of our concerns.

Bhopal Many years ago Union Carbide (USA) had a major accident contaminating the township around their plant in India. They made token gestures but refused to carry out a clean-up of the toxic waste causing deaths, malformed children and serious life-long illnesses among hundreds of people etc. The battle for compensation still rages due to the Indian Government appearing to be complicit in not correctly dealing with Union Carbide. Now, decades after U.C. were taken over by Dow Chemicals - who refuse to recognise the authority of the Indian Courts - the local people and their descendants are still seeking redress. A fund raising concert is to be held in the New Year on March 5th @ 7.30 pm at Market Harborough Methodist Church to help these folk for whom the powerful are unwilling to help.

Climate Change Global warming appears to be accepted by scientists unless they are employed by businesses opposed to spending on such things as greenhouse emissions etc. Some governments accept the scientific views but are loath to face up to big business. Other governments are so hell bent on growing their economies no matter what that they have no wish to comply within the short-term. They only want larger returns on investment regardless of the consequences for low lying countries that may well be drowned within my life-time. Ironically, other large swathes of our globe are experiencing extremely life-threatening hardship due to long-term droughts far greater than ever experienced before! The health of the world’s population seems of little interest to most industries – profit before people – but if there are no wealthy people how can they expand their market opportunities?

“Baked Alaska” was a great success. Many other agencies joined in the ‘Saving our Planet ’day and used it for net-working. It was an excellent occasion.

However, of real concern for us is our government’s current intention to scrap the improved energy efficiency requirements for new housing; introducing a new levy to be placed on renewable energy sources; and cutting the subsidy for wind energy whilst allowing the subsidy for fossil fuel generation to remain! Robert Knapp can give you more of the low-down as can Sustainable Harborough and The Green Party.

There is to be a gathering at the Old Grammar School at 12 noon on the 28th November to publicise this issue via a photo shoot. Avaaz, 38 Degrees, and other agencies are getting together. The Church is not alone in this! Details from me if you would like to join us.

Benefit Sanction and Poverty The latest report from the Joint Public Issues Team of the Free Churches, "Enough", should be available for you collect tonight. This is following up their earlier reports highlighting the discrepancies and down-right lies that are promulgated by HMG in spite of their own statistics. This particular report takes a further look at things such as Tax Credits and those adversely affected by the lack of consistency in applying the rules. The public perception that all employed people are assumed to be F/T and not at the mercy of a Minimum Hours contract is widespread. I've been horrified to hear church members assuming that all contracted people have a living wage coming in – where have they been hiding I ask myself!

Other Issues - No Less Important that we still try to keep up to date with:

Food Poverty via our local Jubilee Food Bank;

Child Labour and Trafficking;

Fair Trade and Sustainable Harborough;

Transition Town Community Energy Co-op – did you know they're making a share offer on solar initiatives?

Clockwise Credit Union is publicised;

National Justice & Peace Network news and updates are shared; and a continuing interest is maintained in Israel/Palestine and other Human Rights issues.

Peace Vigil The annual Peace Vigil is to take place around the Memorial in the town square on 8th January at 4.30 pm. The committee recognised that there may be a need to review this for following years in possible alignment with the Week for Christian Unity. Posters and fliers are being circulated to all the churches.

Please help us make this a more remarkable event by having far more people supporting this. 30 minutes once a year is so small a price to pay – even if it's chilly – some folk don't even have a roof over their heads the rest of the year! So bring a candle and let your light shine!

So I leave you with this thought: If we are to remain true to our calling we'd like to know why so few people support so many important issues facing our churches.

Too few are wearing too many hats – and not because they're big headed – but simply because The Witnessing Church seems so miniscule compared with our numerical returns of attendance! The answer lies within us allnot just the few.

Our Next Meeting is on February 25th 2016 at 7.30 pm – and we hope that the Coffee Lounge of the Methodist Church will be crowded!

Father Owen expressed thanks for all the work which the Justice & Peace team do.

Richard Brand – said that from the Justice & Peace Group it would be better to focus on one thing rather than having too many projects on the go all at the same time. DT assured that this was normally the case but a few new issues have arisen.

Maureen Douglas – said that there is strength in unity and that the J&P Group had representatives from CTH but new members are always welcome.

Rose Williams asked that publicity be sent to her to distribute to encourage people to attend the Peace Vigil in January.