

Vision

On 27th January 1913, a Conference of representatives from the five Northern Quarterly Meetings of Quakers in Britain was held at York. It took place over a single day, at the end of which it was agreed that a permanent Northern Friends Peace Board (NFPB) should be set up 'to organise and develop the efforts of Friends in furthering the cause of Peace'. The Friends present recorded their decision in a Minute, declaring that the Board would have a special duty 'to advise and encourage Friends in the truth and through them their fellow Christians and citizens generally in the active promotion of peace in all its height and breadth.' Their vision has stood the test of time and still guides NFPB's work today.

A brief report (1) of the proceedings of the Conference gives an insight into the thinking of the Board's founders, a mere eighteen months before the outbreak of the Great War. Pointing out that 'the nation is standing at the parting of the ways,' Thomas Hodgkin said he believed 'the Society of Friends is called to take a very important part in strengthening the forces of pacifism.'

Joseph Rowntree is recorded as stating that 'organised Christianity seems at times to encourage the idea of a merely tribal deity by emphasising national differences.' He urged Friends to seek to restore 'the freedom of ministry for Christ on the part of all His disciples, [which] ... cuts at the root of militarism by the value it gives to the humblest individual.'

Many Quakers at this time supported Norman Angell's belief that war could bring no economic advantage, a view also echoed here. J W Graham welcomed 'the fact that peace is now being advocated on economic grounds' while F E Pollard agreed 'that all the various methods of attack on war have an underlying unity and it is not in accordance with Quakerism to separate off the secular from the religious.' He 'emphasised the great importance of the educational aspect of the question' with teachers having 'the opportunity of bringing a strong line of ethical criticism to bear on events in the past.'

J W Graham's widely distributed address to the founding Conference (2) begins by outlining how 'our Society has stood in the public mind as the representative of thoroughgoing hostility to war' and ends with the plea for swift action to be taken: 'The helpless rush of the maddened herd into the flood of armaments, which threaten to submerge civilisation, makes the matter urgent.'

Organisation

With the growing danger of war imparting a great sense of urgency, Friends moved swiftly to set up the Board. They had a sure sense of what would be needed and the York Conference proposed 'the formation of a new peace organisation with a competent staff and the establishment of a central bureau'. In an innovative departure from normal Quaker practice, NFPB did not have a Clerk but instead appointed Robert Long of York 'as organising secretary, with a salary of £200 per year and expenses.'

Initially, the North of England had 18 representatives with provision to co-opt three other Friends with useful skills. The Board made such an impressive start that by October 1915, Scotland and also Derby, Lincoln and Nottinghamshire had asked to join, and were allotted additional representatives. Bristol Meeting's concern in March 1914 to set up a Southern Friends Peace Board never came to fruition.

Finance

By December 1913, ?632 had been raised, made up of very large donations from Joseph and Arnold Rowntree and Sir James Reckitt and smaller sums from Meetings, individuals and families.

Speakers and Campaigners

Most Board members were experienced and enthusiastic speakers. George Prior visited 'all those in authority in the North East' and Harrison Jackson spoke at every available Methodist church. The Board encouraged other Quaker speakers and sometimes paid speakers. It is recorded that J W Barry, a former Australian Freedom League organiser, was 'especially effective among working men at dinner-hour meetings'.

Publicity and Campaigning

A Sub Committee promoted the publication of peace literature from Quakers and non- Quakers, including Norman Angell. A poster campaign was launched and later a newsletter too. The Board had correspondents in each local meeting and issued large quantities of what they termed 'propaganda'. Pamphlets were written for specific audiences, such the clergy. Open air campaigns and a Peace Caravan were organised.

The Board was involved in campaigning and lobbying MPs, opposing the naval arms race with Germany and supporting efforts to promote better relationships with other nations. Assistance in opposing conscription was given to Friends in Australia and New Zealand.

Education

'Education, Education, Education' would have been a good slogan for the early NFPB, which became involved at all levels from elementary schools to adult education. By March 1914 a Committee on Influencing Teachers had been set up, with links to the School Peace League and the National Union of Teachers.

Networking

In September 1913, arrangements with other Friends' organisations were regularised 'to avoid overlapping'. Prominent board members were closely involved with Yearly Meeting and Friends organisations nationally. The Board decided to work with the National Peace Council and the National Peace Society. Friends also agreed to get in touch with the Labour Movement, with the aim of strengthening the Party's 'appeal on the ethical side.' They formed links with local peace organisations in Hull, Leeds and other towns.

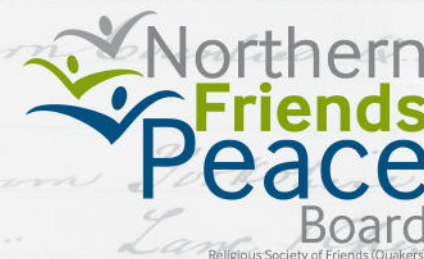
Conclusion

The Peace Board was set up by influential Friends who were already experienced Peace Campaigners and it hit the ground running with an impressively energetic, efficient and comprehensive campaign to seek to avert the dangers of imminent war.

References

1. Report of NFPB's founding Conference by Herbert S Walker, printed in the British Friend, February 1913
2. Our Call to a New Crusade: Address by J W Graham at the Peace Conference of Five Northern Quarterly Meetings at York, 27 January 1913: Offprint from Friends Quarterly Examiner 1913, p233-242, in Box 16, Graham Paper, John Rylands Library, Manchester University.

This and other articles about the early history of NFPB are based mainly on the surviving records of the Board Annual Reports, Minutes of Board meetings and Secretary's reports in the West Yorkshire Record Office, Leeds.



The Founding of the Northern Friends Peace Board in 1913

Barry Mills

Centenary Essays

Historic pieces drawn from the NFPB archives

them their fellow Christians and citizens generally in the active promotion of peace in all its height and breadth. That, as the review of the Committee opens out before it, ^{should} any Friend with concern offer to assist in this glorious cause, the Board be empowered to make such arrangements as see