

# Quaker Concern

## The Messy Work of Seeking Justice

By Matthew Legge



*"Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you. Avoid hurtful criticism and provocative language. Do not allow the strength of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken."*

– Canadian Yearly Meeting, *Advices and Queries* #17

**H**ave you ever changed your mind on an issue you cared deeply about? If so, how did that transformation happen? If not, why do you think that is?

Seeking justice and peace—the mission of Canadian Friends Service Committee—only seems easy when we're overly confident that we're right and have it all figured out. The more we understand the details and challenges of what peace and justice demand of us, the less straightforward our work becomes. Every approach has trade-offs and pitfalls, and striving for a way forward demands that we remain open to new Light; that we keep listening, letting go, and being willing to change.

Such openness is a major challenge. People who care about social justice can particularly struggle with it, because we tend to be so certain that we're fighting for the right cause or are on "the right side of history." Our sense of being on the right side can severely limit our readiness to engage "the wrong side" with tenderness and with curiosity.

In the 1700s, John Woolman discerned that to "grasp after wealth" was impossible "without having connection with some degree of oppression." He called for people to look at their material possessions to see if the seeds of war were present. Imagine if Woolman, already a radical, had gone much further. What if he had begun to perceive the seeds of war in every single possession, not just luxurious ones? What if he'd found those seeds in his every choice of word and concept? What if he'd started to deconstruct each element of his culture to recast it as a problem?

A major challenge for those involved in social justice activism is just this—a vague or ever-expanding definition of the problem. Justice can be an endless concept, as can harm. This means that we can interrogate any word, any act, or any social institution, and call it harmful and oppressive. Deconstructing and critiquing through such critical analyses can be immensely valuable and powerful. It can give us a new understanding of harms that were formerly obscured, perhaps helping us to address them. It's a bit like when a physicist peers through a microscope to get a deeper view into matter.

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1. John Woolman, *The Journal of John Woolman, 1761-62*, <https://bit.ly/2REY6WD>, Chapter 8.



## CFSC welcomes new Program Coordinator Nancy Russell!

We're pleased to announce that Nancy Russell has joined our team as the part-time Criminal Justice Program Coordinator. Nancy is also currently a part-time faculty member at Humber College and until recently held the position of Advocate at the Office of the Ontario Child Advocate for ten years. Throughout Nancy's 30-plus-year career she has worked both front line and management positions in many settings: children's mental health centres, youth justice facilities, group homes, outreach, and hospitals in both urban and rural environments. Nancy takes over from Verena Tan, who moved back home to Australia. We thank Verena for her service and wish her all the best.

## Answering questions about Indigenous rights

Jennifer Preston spoke with Shannon Perez of the Christian Reformed Church to answer a number of questions about the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Scroll to the end of the article for several short and informative videos from their conversation: <https://bit.ly/2so2dxr>

Jennifer also presented alongside CFSC associate Paul Joffe at a roundtable on Human Rights Day organized by one member of each of Canada's political parties. The roundtable was to create non-partisan understanding about the key human rights issues that Canada's 43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament should prioritize. Read the presentation Jennifer and Paul gave about the human rights of Indigenous peoples:

<https://quakerservice.ca/HumanRightsDay>

## Israel/Palestine updates

As Quakers, we seek to live out the testimonies of peace, integrity, equality, simplicity, community, and unity with creation. For many years we have used investment screens that align our funds as closely as possible with these testimonies. We are pleased to say that our investment practices have proven sound and we do not hold investments in companies profiting from the illegal and immoral occupation of Palestinian territory. In keeping with our long history of ethical investments, this summer Quakers formally decided that this remain the case as long as the occupation continues.

CFSC Clerk Lana Robinson had the chance to join a church leaders' delegation to Israel/Palestine recently. Read her blog post on KAIROS' website: <https://kairoscanada.org/lost-harvest-seeds-of-hope>

## Are We Done Fighting?

Since CFSC's book *Are We Done Fighting?* was published in May, Matt Legge has been doing a number of interviews about it. Find links to radio, print, and TV interviews as well as his *Psychology Today* blog at: <https://quakerservice.ca/AreWeDoneFighting>

## Friends call for diplomacy with Iran

A letter sent to the Canadian government from CFSC expresses deep concerns about the prospect of war and reminds that in times of increased tension more communication is needed, not less. We call for Canada to tirelessly engage in diplomacy with Iran. The letter notes, "Opposition to war is not advocating doing nothing, it is advocating actively investing in and pursuing the many viable and effective alternatives, rather than imagining that alternatives must be impossible although they haven't yet been fully tried." Read the open letter: <https://quakerservice.ca/Iran>

## New decade, new look!

Can you believe we found a way to bring you Quaker Concern in colour for less than we used to spend on black and white? What do you think of our **new Quaker Concern design**? Let us know.

**Quaker Concern** is the three times a year newsletter of Canadian Friends Service Committee, the peace and social justice agency of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Canada. Since 1931 CFSC has been a small team but has had a significant impact.

**Donations** are received with gratitude. The generous support of individual donors makes all of the work described here possible. CFSC issues tax receipts for all donations over \$10.

Read current and past issues online at [QuakerConcern.ca](http://QuakerConcern.ca) (contact us to switch to a digital subscription).

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# A Slow Moving Glacier

By Dick Cotterill



Working in partnership with other organizations is a cornerstone of how CFSC operates. We connect with those directly involved or affected by injustices, supporting the needs and initiatives that matter to them. We also consult with a range of experts who help deepen and compliment our work and perspectives. We value these partnerships because, being such a small organization, CFSC couldn't achieve as much on our own as we do through collaborating with others. Our work on criminal justice and penal abolition is no exception.

One key relationship is our membership in the National Associations Active in Criminal Justice (NAACJ). NAACJ was founded in 1975 to provide a forum for members to share and generate information, ideas, and support.

One of the great values of partnerships like this is the connections that form. NAACJ has introduced me to many people representing much larger organizations than CFSC. At present, there are 18 members including groups like the Canadian Associations of Elizabeth Fry Societies, the John Howard Society of Canada, the Mennonite Central Committee, the Canadian Criminal Justice Association, and the Canadian Bar Association (which represents some 36,000 lawyers, judges, notaries, law teachers and law students from across Canada). While representing CFSC at NAACJ events I have met Members of Parliament, Senators, and Canada's Correctional Investigator. I have had the chance to share with them about who Quakers are, our testimonies, and to mention our worldwide involvement in penal abolition, for instance through the Quaker United Nations Offices. This gets people's attention, and usually results in worthwhile discussions.

Over the years NAACJ has built a strong and respected relationship with the federal government of Canada, providing its members with a means to act as catalysts

for change within criminal and social justice through its connections to the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), Department of Justice, Department of Public Safety, Office of the Correctional Investigator, and Canadian Senate. This gives CFSC the opportunity to participate in consultations, and to keep abreast with changes to personnel, legislation, regulations, and policy at the federal level.

At the invitation of the CSC, we have participated in some recent consultations, including: changes to the Institutional Mother-Child Program in federal prisons to place a stronger emphasis on maintaining the mother-child bond, enhancements to the Employment and Employability Program to improve services offered throughout an offender's sentence, and the introduction of the new Structured Intervention Units, which are replacing solitary confinement. I believe that meaningful improvements in these and many other programs happen in part through the persistent work of those involved with NAACJ.

It makes no sense to try to reform a system that is fundamentally wrong. That is why we are abolitionists and not reformers. (For more about a world without prisons see our 2019 handout *Alternatives to Prison*, which highlights community-based sentences; Restorative Justice; education, employment, and training; addiction and mental health services; Healing Lodges; and what can be done about the "dangerous few": <https://quakerservice.ca/AlternativestoPrison>). However, just as Friend Elizabeth Fry visited the women in Newgate Prison in the 1800s, anything that we can do to reach out to those who are incarcerated, any way that we can help improve their situations or influence their conditions of confinement and help plan for their release, is good.

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# Celebrating BC Indigenous Human Rights Legislation

By Rachel Singleton-Polster and Keira Mann



Above: A totem pole in front of the BC Legislature building in Victoria. Photo: Flickr/"The Brit 2" CC- BY 2.0

November 26, 2019 was the historic day when British Columbia (BC) adopted provincial legislation to implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. The *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (previously known as Bill 41) was co-developed with Indigenous peoples in BC through the First Nations Leadership Council.

Like Bill C-262, federal legislation that was killed in the Senate in June 2019, Bill 41 would align government laws with the *UN Declaration*, which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission concluded was the framework for reconciliation.

Unlike Bill C-262, Bill 41 was unanimously adopted. This is an important step for BC, where Indigenous peoples' human rights have long been denied, particularly in the development of resource-based extraction projects like pipelines, dams, and mines.

The Act provides the opportunity for open and transparent collaboration between Indigenous peoples and the provincial government on how free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) and other standards in the *UN Declaration* can be implemented in a consistent and just manner. The Act requires the province to collaborate with Indigenous peoples to develop an action plan to implement the *Declaration* and also calls for annual public reporting to monitor progress.

The Act also provides recognition for the diverse forms of Indigenous governments in agreement-making processes, such as multiple Nations working together as a collective, or hereditary governments. The absence of such recognition has been a longstanding barrier to reconciliation in BC. This legislation can potentially assist in addressing land rights cases, such as the current conflict between the Wet'suwet'en

hereditary Chiefs and Coastal GasLink, and create positive changes in how such cases are handled. (See CFSC's letter in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en at <https://quakerservice.ca/Wetsuweten>). With the legal recognition of traditional governance models, the province can now work cooperatively with the hereditary leaders to address their concerns. The rights affirmed in the *Declaration* should inform state and corporate obligations so that such conflicts are addressed in a peaceful and rights-based manner. If the *Declaration* is being truly respected, such situations should be addressed before escalating to the point of tense conflict.

In the joint press release celebrating the passing of the Act, the BC government and the First Nations Leadership Council stated, "It is time we recognize and safeguard Indigenous peoples' human rights, so that we may finally move away from conflict, drawn-out court cases and uncertainty, and move forward with collaboration and respect." The BC government also asked for a quote for the press release from CFSC's Indigenous Rights Program Coordinator Jennifer Preston, in recognition of her expertise and efforts toward implementation of the *Declaration*. Jennifer said, "Creating a legislative framework in BC for the implementation of the *UN Declaration* is vitally important for achieving reconciliation and safeguarding human rights. Supporting this effort is critical to ensuring Indigenous peoples' rights are respected, as we move away from the legacy of colonization into a new reality."

Quakers across BC expressed their hopes for this new legislation. Lower mainland Friend and CFSC member Barb Everdene stated that "With this Bill in place, BC has laid the foundation for building a real reconciliation with Indigenous peoples."

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Cowichan Valley Friend and CFSC Clerk Lana Robinson stated, "This is such great news, and there are any number of current situations that testify to the necessity of this legislation being fully enacted with integrity and transparency. My hope is that the legislation will serve to bring together Indigenous peoples and settlers in new and innovative ways that will transform society as a whole, and create the conditions for social, environmental, and economic justice in this province."

Vancouver Friend and CFSC associate member Rob Hughes stated, "This legislation is the fulfilment of one of the key calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is important that all levels of government commit to implementing the *Declaration*. Other provinces and territories need to step up to the plate and follow BC's example. I hope our government acts in good faith and adheres to the minimum standards for free, prior, and informed consent. This includes respect for traditional forms of leadership set out in the *Declaration* to resolve conflicts with Indigenous peoples about natural resources."

Not only is this a major victory for BC, but it will also have positive repercussions for successfully passing federal legislation in Canada as quickly as possible. BC has set an excellent example that Canadians expect across the country.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promised federal legislation in his speech from the throne, and has included it in his mandates to both the Minister of Justice and Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations (see: <https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters>).

The work to develop this legislation has already begun. Canadian Friends Service Committee is involved with many Indigenous partners in the beginning stages of this new federal legislation, which uses Bill C-262 as a minimum standard. It is our hope that this legislation will be adopted as quickly as possible in the life of the current parliament. Keep an eye on our social media and E-news in the coming months for more information on the progression of this legislation and what you can do to help.

Adopting the *Declaration Act* in BC is an important milestone, and CFSC recognizes that this legislative framework is one of many steps to meaningful and enduring reconciliation, as called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

To read the legislation in full, see: <https://bit.ly/2TbDzLw>

For more resources from BC, see: <https://declaration.gov.bc.ca>

To learn more about the UN Declaration, visit our website: <https://quakerservice.ca/UNDeclaration>

*Rachel Singleton-Polster, Cowichan Valley Meeting, is the Clerk of CFSC's Indigenous rights program and Keira Mann is CFSC's Assistant Coordinator, Programs and Events*

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That is why we participate in CSC consultations regarding their policies and procedures. This is another example of promoting Quaker testimonies and values.

At times it is easy to get discouraged and feel that we have made little progress in transforming the justice system since Friend Ruth Morris did this work forty-five years ago. This is when I reflect and realize that many small victories contribute to big change. I really feel that justice reform and penal abolition in particular is like a slow moving glacier with earth changing power. I feel this way because we are right—people should not be put in cages.

I have a personal friend who was incarcerated in federal prison for forty years, from age 18-58. There is a high probability that much of this confinement will be proven to be unlawful. My friend is seeking recognition of this fact. Because of my work with CFSC and NAACJ, I have been able to help connect my friend with various organizations that can support him. Because of my Quaker faith, I have been able to find Inner Light in this person who suffered painful incarceration for so many years.

Years ago, Quakers were imprisoned and even executed when their religious beliefs landed them in conflict with the established "rule of law." Let us remember that governments are not always right or just. Let us continue this work with our partners to transform Canada's criminal justice system from one based on punishment to a system that better recognizes the root causes of conflict and directs resources toward healing and toward the elimination of social injustice.

*Dick Cotterill, Halifax Meeting, is a member of CFSC's criminal justice program committee.*

## *Seeking Justice* continued from pg 1

The more we deconstruct to search for violence and oppression, the more we find. But we never reach a final solid ground.

First it was discovered that what was thought to be irreducible matter was actually made up of atoms, the final irreducible building blocks of life. Then there came the insight that atoms themselves have a nucleus and neutrons and protons. These eventually gave way to reveal a full chaotic-seeming particle zoo. At each level of increased detail in our exploration of oppression, we might learn something, but we lose some perspective too.

There certainly is plenty of needless and brutal harm in our world. CFSC is continually working to identify and effectively address many forms of it. But in our search for how to do so, we bump up against the uncomfortable fact that there is no bedrock of purity or total harmlessness on which to rest. Some branches of Jainism have pushed non-harm as far as humanly possible, but the results are *still* imperfect (and far too demanding for most of us to emulate).

Not recognizing the complexity and imperfections of our world can have very damaging consequences if we're not careful. Consider the case of Trent Eady, who was the target of homophobia while growing up and, understandably, became deeply involved with social justice activism upon arriving at McGill University.

Eady set out to make the world more just. This led to increasingly critical thoughts and ever more radical understandings about oppression and its causes. Eady became more and more certain and quick to blame and call out others who didn't share this same analysis of power and oppression. This certainty was dogmatically reinforced by considering it morally wrong and even violent for anyone to question it. Do you believe anything that, if someone questioned you on it, you wouldn't simply consider them incorrect, but also morally reprehensible or violent? We each need to tread with care when we find that we hold such staunch beliefs.

Eady joined social justice groups that carefully watched, and then aggressively shamed, their members for any perceived infractions. This made questioning the groups' beliefs rare, as saying the wrong thing met with such harsh judgments and stigma. This lack of questioning and dissent also turned the groups' activism into an urgent moral crusade. Everyone who went against them was easy to

dismiss without further reflection. They were simply on the wrong side of history.

With all this deconstructing and protesting, the groups never constructed a viable and realistic positive vision. They were trying to enforce a highly abstract and non-existent purity instead.

Eady writes, "I can't convey to you how bleak my worldview was. An activist friend once said to me, with complete sincerity, 'Everything is problematic.' That was the general consensus."<sup>2</sup> Caring so much about justice, and seeking to address oppression, had led Trent Eady to a deeply destructive and desperate place. I've read other similar stories.

There are many less extreme examples that are also worth reflecting on. I was at a conference where I heard a speaker critiquing racism and colonialism in various thoughtful and thought-provoking ways. She then expanded her critiques to the point of saying that using international law to protect human rights is immoral because international law is a system founded on white patriarchal institutions and values, and so can only be oppressive. She wasn't generating any new or better ideas for action though; simply expressing understandable frustrations with real injustices, but doing so in a way that didn't seem to be informed by specific knowledge about what was being criticized—international law or the details of how it works. The criticism can't simply be ignored, there's certainly something to it. But because it was so sweeping in its quest for purity, I expect that it didn't accomplish much, other than appealing to folks who already agreed, and further polarizing them from those who don't see the world in such terms.

Generally, the more we understand the details of an issue, the less we create such simple binaries—international law is purely oppressive—and the more we recognize complexity. We can *both* be highly critical and still celebrate the many positive achievements of people working within the international legal system. Whatever the issue, remembering that our thoughts and reactions may be incorrect or overly simplistic, and looking for counter-examples, can help us get past narrow or stereotyped thinking and broaden our ideas for action.

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2. Trent Eady, "Everything is Problematic," McGill Daily, November 24, 2014, <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2014/11/everything-problematic>

## Seeking Justice continued from previous pg

Successful social change campaigns do this. They bring together people who work in a range of ways including advocating, organizing, helping to improve institutions from within, and rebelling and applying pressures from without. This means collaborating with people who think differently and have different priorities. It means broadening support through sharing a positive vision and starting with achievable goals, first steps on a long path. As Friend and lifelong activist George Lakey says, "To win the right to vote, women only needed a majority to agree, not to vanquish the patriarchy."<sup>3</sup> Research suggests too that, contrary to what we might assume, it could be when we're feeling better, rather than when we're feeling outraged or depressed, that we're most likely to become active to address injustices.<sup>4</sup>

Here are some of the common threads I've found, and think do not serve us well, as we work for justice and peace:

- » distancing from the perceived enemy rather than considering if there is any common ground,
- » failing to recall a shared humanity, or what Quakers often experience as "that of God" in people,
- » assuming that anyone perceived to not be in agreement has bad intentions, is immoral, and deserves to be attacked,
- » believing that shame and punishments like banning presenters from speaking, having professors fired, or engaging in physical intimidation or violence are the best or only ways to bring about justice,
- » being vague or so broad in defining and applying important terms like racism, trauma, oppression, and injustice that just about any word or act might fit with the definition,
- » assuming that a preferred theory about these terms is correct without formulating it in a way that allows it to be tested or revised if needed,<sup>5</sup>
- » assuming that if an idea offends us or makes us uncomfortable, it can automatically be completely rejected because our feelings are all that matters,<sup>6</sup>
- » demanding conformity through heavy policing of language and ideas.<sup>7</sup>

These approaches make it challenging and uncomfortable to question them, because any attempt to do so can be called out as oppression. (Some readers may feel that this article itself is oppressive.) Yet we need not let such flawed tactics hijack important efforts toward a more just and peaceful world. We can learn to sit with and consider claims about

oppression before jumping to conclusions one way or another. We can identify some of our own biases and inconsistencies in standards and behaviours, recognizing too that our biases may be implicit and different from overt prejudices.<sup>8</sup> And, although certainly not always possible, we can work toward healthier disagreements and genuine win-win solutions.

Did anything in this article feel familiar? Quakers aren't immune to adopting unhelpful social justice thinking and approaches from the broader culture. But there are also excellent resources to help us overcome these trends. Canadian Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice* is one source of wisdom on the topic of building caring community. CFSC has also developed a new resource about engaging in peace and social action, which may be helpful (contact me for copies). The resource highlights the importance of worshipful discernment, which involves listening within and without, and letting go (recognizing places of attachment and ego and allowing them to drop). If we can do the difficult work of settling ourselves, we may hear what wasn't available to us before. If you find yourself struggling with this, a clearness committee may help you to reorient your social justice work, so that it can arise from a place of centeredness and peace.

Matthew Legge is CFSC's Peace Program Coordinator. He is the author of CFSC's book *Are We Done Fighting? Building Understanding in a World of Hate and Division*, which offers powerful stories and practical tips about what we can do to constructively transform polarizing conflicts.

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3. George Lakey, *How We Win: A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning* (Melville House Publishing, 2018), 111.

4. Matthew Legge, "The Surprising Role of Happiness in Acting for Social Change," *Psychology Today*, September 17, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/are-we-done-fighting/201909/the-surprising-role-happiness-in-acting-social-change>

5. Musa al-Gharbi, "Microaggressions: Strong Claims, Inadequate Evidence," *Heterodox Academy*, January 30, 2017, <https://heterodoxacademy.org/microaggressions-macro-debate>

6. Julie Beck, "The Coddling of the American Mind 'Is Speeding Up'," *The Atlantic*, September 18, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind-is-speeding-up/570505>

7. One study found that in the US, social justice activists, more than any other group, report feeling pressure to conform. Stephen Hawkins et al., "Hidden Tribes: A Study of America's Polarized Landscape," *More in Common*, 2018, [https://hiddentribes.us/pdf/hidden\\_tribes\\_report.pdf](https://hiddentribes.us/pdf/hidden_tribes_report.pdf), 74.

8. Keith Payne et al., "How to Think about 'Implicit Bias,'" *Scientific American*, March 27, 2018, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-to-think-about-implicit-bias>

# Friends on the Move



Staff **Matt Legge** presented content from CFSC's book *Are We Done Fighting?* in Kitchener, Ottawa, Vancouver, Duncan, Nanaimo (twice), Gabriola Island, Victoria, Lillooet, Kamloops, Kelowna, Edmonton, Orillia, and facilitated a workshop in Toronto together with CFSC member **Daisie Auty (Toronto Meeting)**. Discussions focused on practical responses to hate and polarization. A huge thank you is due to all of the local volunteers who helped to organize and promote these talks. Contact our office if you would like to host a talk.

Associate member **Linda Mussell** and staff **Keira Mann** attended the Canadian Criminal Justice Association's annual congress in Quebec City in November. Linda presented about CFSC's work on children of incarcerated parents.

Staff **Jennifer Preston (Hamilton Meeting)** attended the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, was in Ottawa for meetings with the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples and federal government representatives, and presented at the University

of Guelph with CFSC associate Paul Joffe. She attended the "by invitation" event *Canadians Changing the World*, was pleased to join Friends and others in London, Ontario for a presentation on reconciliation, and later she and Paul presented on the *UN Declaration* to the Canada Energy Regulator in Calgary, and then traveled to Vancouver for meetings at the University of British Columbia on the creation of an international research network. She also attended the Assembly of First Nations Special Chief's Assembly in Ottawa.

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