

QUAKER ECO-BULLETIN

Information and Action Addressing Public Policy for an
Ecologically Sustainable World

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Gandhi Statue Blocks Entrance to Goldman Sachs in Boston

Lewis M. Randa with photos by Dan Dick



It was quite a sight indeed. A nine foot statue of Gandhi, flanked by police and security guards, was blocking the entrance to the Goldman Sachs offices in Boston on October 28, 2010. Intended as a gift to be placed in the lobby as a warning against the evils of greed, the statue ended up being rejected and then used to close down the entrance to the building. Hanging off the wrist of the statue was a large poster with Gandhi's words: "The World Holds Enough for Everyone's Need, But Not for Everyone's Greed".

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.

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The poster with the Gandhi quote, printed by Quaker Peace and Service at Friends House, London, brings together the ecological fact of natural abundance with the sad reality of human greed, and challenges us to address Gandhi's admonition. And that we did, on an autumn day in the center of Boston with a statue of Gandhi, who, throughout his life was inspired by the Quaker tradition of social activism and direct action. His criticism regarding the indifference and greed of the wealthy was legendary. His example to live the change we wish to see in the world was so morally compelling that doing nothing simply wasn't an option.

Here is how the demonstration unfolded. Students with special needs from the Life Experience School and members of the Peace Abbey* in Sherborn, stood their ground, as together we moved the Gandhi statue step-by-step toward Boston police officers and Goldman Sachs security guards. Slowly and thoughtfully we made our way from the sidewalk to the front of One Twenty-Five High Street in the financial district of Boston. Despite warnings from police to stop advancing with the statue toward the entryway, we finally placed it in front of the revolving door. For the next couple of hours, the traffic of Wall Street greed, represented by unethical business practices of Goldman Sachs, had to find another way in.

Entering the main entrance of the building required not only getting around Gandhi and through locked doors, but also stepping over a long, out-stretched chain with tags for several major religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Sikhism, Baha'i, Shinto, Native African, Native American, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity—each of which stated that the faith abhorred greed. The American religion, Capitalism, could make no such claim, however, as greed holds sacramental status on Wall Street.

Committed and determined, this Quaker-inspired, conscientious band of both able-bodied and physically-challenged peace activists sought to demonstrate their outrage over the sacking of the economy by a group of Wall Street barons. Many of the protesters had just seen the documentary film "Inside Job" which exposes how Goldman Sachs and other Wall Street firms nearly destroyed the economy of this country and the world.

Through an elaborate Ponzi scheme that mixed and matched predatory, subprime mortgage loans and credit card and college tuition debt with commodities and derivatives, Goldman Sachs packaged, sold, insured through AIG, then bet against the very financial products they marketed and made billions of dollars in profits in the process. These practices led to the worst financial recession since the Great Depression with severe and continuing affects on the lives and well-being of all of us. We now have a government that functions increasingly as the handmaiden of Wall Street and large corporate interests, an economy that makes a mockery of free enterprise and functions in a way that is destroying our planet.

The ecological implications of a worldwide recession are clear, as the well being of Earth and all its inhabitants become secondary to the profits of investment firms like Goldman Sachs. It is time to take eco-action where it belongs—straight to the corridors of Wall Street and the large corporations they fund. Our next action will be in New York City when the statue of Gandhi takes the bull by the horns at Merrill Lynch. This time we'll highlight the environmental devastation of capitalism-run-amuck, and the continued need for effective regulatory measures of financial institutions.

During the two hours Gandhi blocked the entrance, hundreds of office workers, tourists and local Bostonians took photos with their cell phones, and sent them across the internet. A tourist from China, who marveled at the sight of a statue of Gandhi used for peaceful protest, took a photo with his cell phone and commented to Dot Walsh, Peace Abbey Chaplain, "I'll send this right now to everyone in China."

In an age when instant communication is global, demonstrations such as ours serve to remind us that each day we fail to raise our voices against injustice, we miss an opportunity to reach across the planet with a message of hope and struggle, solidarity

and justice. A picture is worth a thousand words, and thanks to cell phone cameras, the equivalent of millions of words went out through the image of Gandhi's anti-greed message—our world holds enough for everyone.

As fellow activist and Peace Chaplain Dan Dick, John Bach from Cambridge Friends Meeting, and I lifted the statue onto the Peace Abbey pick-up truck to return to Sherborn, I turned to the two police officers who were on detail and said, “you gotta admit that a bank protest is better than a bank robbery.” They both grinned, and I added, “but in this case, the robbers run the banks.” They smiled and nodded ... and we called it a day.

When we planned this action we thought nonviolent civil disobedience would be necessary at Goldman Sachs, but it turned out not to be. No one was arrested. We all got to sleep in our own beds and reflect on what we had experienced and how we had been affected by this action.

Did this action change anything? Highlighting the abuses of greed on Wall Street was a public denunciation from a small group of people, who could not remain silent in the face of gross inequality and injustice. We know that a single action must be accompanied by many more actions elsewhere by others, if fundamental change is to occur. We hope this protest, which prevented the use of a single revolving door, will encourage others to block doors to places where injustice calls out for action.

On our ride back to the Peace Abbey, we drove through the beautiful countryside west of Boston and were reminded that our action against Wall Street greed was also a prayer for this tiny fragile planet that suffers immeasurably under the burden of our species. It was also a clarion call to come home to the Quaker values of pacifist activism, engaged citizenship, and an emboldened willingness to take risks for causes we hold dear.

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Dan Dick is a Chaplain at the Peace Abbey, an educator, musician, songwriter, vegan and activist. He finds time to use his skills as a photographer to document events for the peace movement.

**The mission of the Peace Abbey is to create, maintain and promote innovative models for social change that reflect the principles of nonviolence that exist within the major faith traditions of the world. In Quaker tradition, it is dedicated to empowering individuals on the paths of nonviolence, peacemaking, and cruelty-free living. It offers a variety of programs and resources that teach, inspire and encourage one to speak out and act on issues of peace, the environment, and social and economic justice. Faith in action is the cornerstone of our fellowship and activist pacifism is our creed.*

Challenging the Have Mores' 2010 Con Job

Susan C. Strong

In a video shot at a fundraiser for the 2004 presidential campaign George W. Bush was caught “joking” to his affluent audience that some referred to those in attendance as the “Haves.” He said he saw them as the “Have Mores” and called them his “Base.” The party of the “Have Mores” is now claiming their 2010 win justifies radically downsizing government, because, they say, it's the only path to economic recovery. We know they are also trying to damage President Obama's 2012 election prospects.

We understand very well that “smaller government” means destroying government programs and policies that promote greater equality and opportunity for all Americans. Anything else the Have Mores say is just a big con. But it's an “American” con. We Friends need to understand this, so we can be more effective as we challenge those powerful special interests.

When I say it's an “American” con, what do I mean? It's “American” because it draws on deeply embedded pieces of the American cultural story, a narrative we all implicitly know and share. The Right has long been well versed in using it to promote its own agenda. It's time we people of good will learned to use ideal American story language with integrity to promote the public good.

“Speaking American” means expressing our concerns in the language and metaphors commonly used to convey pieces of the ideal American identity story. These words and phrases are well known parts of standard American political dialogue. “Speaking American” is deeply Quakerly, as we are advised by our Quaker forebears to speak in language people can understand.

The first step in learning to “speak American” is understanding how the Have Mores have used pieces of the American story to cover their tracks.

Two elements of the American identity story were highlighted by the Have Mores in the 2010 campaign, and they are still using them. The first is the idea of freedom—freedom from any constraints on the action of individuals. This rebellion against any community rules, pressure, or constraint is a founding piece of the American character. Americans can be very easily scared by the idea that someone is going to take away their freedom. And they continue to believe that individual freedom is the key to American prosperity.

The second American story idea the Have Mores used is a little more complex: essentially it's about being responsible. In this case it involves fear of being controlled by a government that goes into deficit the way the people as responsible individuals don't dare do, especially now.

We need to reclaim these ideas and develop ways to use them in service to the values of social justice and ecological integrity. We, and President Obama, must find ways to tell a different American story about freedom, the deficit, and government. So what would a different American story about these things be? First, we need to

raise our own red flags about freedom. “Cut taxes for the super rich and then cut Social Security and aid to the states to pay for it?” Who is free if that happens? Who is truly free when there aren't enough federal laws or enforcement agencies to protect us from high-end, white collar crooks stealing from the people and getting off scot free? So we could say, “Real freedom in America means freedom from being ripped off by the super rich.”

As for the idea that business should be free (no rules again) to do the job creating and that tax cuts for the super rich will somehow magically create those jobs—that's a free lunch for the super rich at tax-payer expense. Mountains of evidence show that only rising consumer demand creates jobs, not tax cuts for the super rich, corporate CEOs, or even for “small” businesses. Give the rich the money, and they are free to pour it into the sea, for all we know or can trace. (A few media events featuring people dressed as top-hatted bigwigs pouring currency in the form of green water into the ocean would be nice right now.)

Government-monitored tax credits, incentives, or programs are more accountable and responsible ways to give the economy a leg up. We can follow that money, because it leaves tracks. If by the time you read this, we've lost the fight to stop the next round of tax cuts for the super rich, we need to keep repeating the message. Let's demand responsible accounting for the way the super rich actually spend their tax-cut money. That would be a nice public education follow up, if it comes out that way.

Let's look at the other big con the voting public seemed to buy in November—the idea that we should bring our federal deficit down by shrinking federal employment. Laid-off government employees won't have money to spend on consumer goods, and they may start losing their houses too. Cut federal jobs and America bleeds faster. When others refuse to hire, government must prime the pump itself. Keeping its own people employed is the first step. That's the responsible thing to do. Public deficits are temporary; new wage earners fix them.

The most fundamental problem with the deficit issue is the household finance analogy. Individual voters have a legitimate fear

of personal deficits these days. There's an American story here too. If you find your expenses exceed your income, you don't just cut everything, you look for other sources of income. You get busy and try new things, like the responsible “can-do” American you are. In hard times, as bitter recent experience shows, government is the only reliable backer of the American future, via traceable tax incentives, tax credits, new research and development programs, outright purchases, or direct employment.

If the economy stalls, government is the only agent we have with the responsibility to seed American jobs here at home, to ensure the well-being and prosperity of our whole society. The last few years demonstrate just how much the American people need that kind of advocate. The Have Mores have shown their contempt and lack of concern for their fellow Americans; we certainly can't rely on them the way they are right now.

So, we must push our wobbly president a lot harder and shame our selfish, irresponsible Have Mores in every way we can think up. We can do that by telling our own American stories everywhere—online, offline, in the press, in person, and in the streets with smart, highly strategic media events. The action at Goldman Sachs in Boston described above is one example. Another is the Earth Quaker Action Team's challenge to investments made by PNC Bank in Massey Mining Company's mountain top removal for coal in Appalachia, which is described in a previous *Quaker Eco-Bulletin*.

Susan C. Strong is the Founder and Executive Director of *The Metaphor Project* helping progressive activists frame their messages for mainstream audiences since 1997. She is a member of *Strawberry Creek Meeting*, in Berkeley, California.

Resources

- Lakey, George and Sharon Cantor, 2010. Earth Quaker Action Team. *Quaker Eco-Bulletin* 10:4. A video of the action is at <youtube.com/watch?v=b3EGB0PHKwU> To learn more about how to do effective street actions in a Quakerly fashion, watch the video of famed Quaker teacher and activist George Lakey talking about the strategy behind it <vimeo.com/16464173>.
- Strong, Susan C., 2004. Eco-friendly Persuasion. *Quaker Eco-Bulletin* 4:4. A range of free “Speaking American” tools, resources, and message builders is available at <metaphorproject.org>.

SOCIAL FAIRNESS & ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY **A Workshop on Strategy and Action For a Moral Economy** **with George Lakey and Keith Helmuth**

We have serious environmental and societal problems that are undermining our society. These problems cannot be solved in isolation but only by adopting new policies that address them in a coherent and coordinated way. The same political and economic systems that institutionalize inequality also institutionalize ecological destruction by insisting on unlimited and inequitable economic growth on a finite Earth.

Our challenge is to work toward development of more equitable societies, while maintaining the ecological integrity of our planet. How can Quakers contribute? Drawing on the elements of Quaker heritage that inspire and guide us, we will focus our strategic inquiry and action planning around the following questions:

- What are the common roots of the environmental and socioeconomic crises of today?

- What kind of strategic changes should we advocate?
- How can Quaker witness and action become more effective in helping to make these changes possible?

The workshop will incorporate short focused critiques that move into a detailed and practical visioning of priorities for change, and then into action planning for effective Quaker engagement on the front lines of societal transformation.

March 4 - 6, 2011 at the Quaker Center, Ben Lomond, CA (near Santa Cruz) for information and to register <quakercenter.org>

Sponsors: Moral Economy Project of Quaker Institute for the Future (QIF) and The Ecoberries Affinity Group, Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting, Berkeley, California.