

Focus Group Report June 2020

We continue to work as part of the Cytun Laser group through the hard work of David Harris. This keeps us very much in touch with participation, through responding to consultations, in Welsh Government decision making.

The Google Group has had a mixed reception since it was set up following the last Meeting of Friends in Wales. Twenty posts have been shared including newspaper articles, Parliamentary briefings, Cytun information and personal views, and there have been four responses from Friends. Membership of the group, however, remains at only twenty Friends. Friends who would like to have a “taster” of the materials being shared should contact me at tyolaf@gmail.com and I will send an invitation.

Legislative activity has been limited, initially through the process of Brexit and now because of the Covid 19 pandemic. Both events have obscured the independence of the devolved administrations, although latterly the mixed messages coming from the UK Government, along with mismanagement, have forced the devolved Governments to present a more independent face.

The main concern at this time is the way in which the country emerges from lock-down. There are strong pressures for a return to the status quo, for example Lord Lamont speaking on radio this week, saying that it is essential that we start consuming again without delay. Meanwhile more considered voices are anxious that the new experiences of the lock-down, Venice's clean water, London's clear skies, people living near the main highways able to breathe, should grow into a new green economy. For some weeks our electricity has been provided by non fossil fuel means! See my post on the google Group, and Chris Riddell's brilliant cartoon in the Observer (3rd May) both titled “Rough Winds Do Shake the Darling Buds of May”. The storm winds of the pandemic have blown over the old order and a young couple have brought a new sapling to plant. The speech balloon asks “What next? Bail out Richard Branson, Sir Philip Green and that Brexit bloke from Weatherspoons or reform social care, abolish student debt and tackle climate change?” So, what do we, as Quakers in Wales want to see happen? What are we going to do about it? Our testimony to the World makes it clear how we should act, but is that enough?

The level of unpreparedness of the UK for the pandemic questions our very characterisation of ourselves. It is becoming increasingly clear that the extent of the problem that the pandemic has created is due to political choices, particularly those of the last dozen years but also throughout this generation. While Cuba taught as many young people as were able, to become doctors and nurses, to the extent that they were able to supply medics to the whole of Latin America and many places where help was needed, the UK choose to limit the number of doctors and nurses that it would train to one third of our requirement. Our colonial mindset was content to draw talent from the whole of the rest of the world.

Even after the life changing pandemic and applauding on our doorsteps every Thursday the NHS still needs to be protected against being used as a bargaining chip in trade talks with the US!. Our prisons and justice system are a disgrace. Wales still has some of the most deprived areas of Europe. Old order or sapling? Consumption or New Green Deal?

Peter Hussey, Clerk of Wales Focus Group