

**From 'the Friend' of 11 September 2009**

## **Comment**

### **Lessons to be learned.....**

Walking down Wat Tyler Road on Blackheath Common, I realized that the campers had chosen an ideal spot for their camp: site of the Peasants Revolt in 1381, it's also common land from which they could not be evicted. The city of London, their target, could be seen clearly. The camp itself comprised elements of conference, strategy planning event and festival including many workshops. I felt enormous energy around me: excitement, anger, and a passion to bring about change. Above all a sense of urgency about what needs to be done, not surprising since most people were in their twenties and thirties and will have to live with the consequences of climate change. I was especially interested in the way the camp was run. No one is in charge and all campers are involved in decisions about the camp, through a very structured process of consensus decision making. It is seen as inferior to our business method but having seen it in operation, I believe there are things Quakers can learn, for instance the use of hand signals to signify agreement or the different signs used if one wants to speak, as well as the way disagreements are dealt with - through standing aside or blocking a proposal if it goes against the fundamental aims of the group. As with our clerks and our Meetings, the role of the facilitator is crucial and the outcome may be very different from what people expected or initially wanted. At times I felt they could benefit from some Quaker silence to pause to reflect.

I believe we have become complacent about our own business method. It can be very slow, doesn't always generate new ideas or energy, and can leave people feeling frustrated at not having had the opportunity to speak. We have an obsession with developing the perfectly crafted minute, leaving less time for reflection and discussion.

The essence of Quakerism is being spirit-led and we need to examine our practices in this light, including our business method.

I came away feeling encouraged and inspired. The climate campers' goals are very ambitious, nothing less than the transformation of society. Can we share their vision?

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