

QUAKER ECO-BULLETIN

Information and Action Addressing Public Policy for
an Ecologically Sustainable World

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Earth Quaker Action Team

George Lakey and Sharon Cantor



A Wake-up Call in Appalachia

“Stop a minute and listen to the birds,” Larry Gibson said. We didn’t hear any.

Our group—seven Swarthmore College students and three members of the Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT) from Philadelphia—had traveled to Larry’s land on top of Kayford Mountain in West Virginia to see the brutality of mountaintop removal (MTR) surface mining for coal.

Blasting the tops off mountains destroys forests and the mountains themselves, buries valleys, contaminates streams and rivers, destroys biodiversity, and ruins peoples’ lives and communities. We read about the toxic chemicals that MTR deposits in the mountain valley villages’ water supply. Now we could see one of those communities nestled below, where the steep sides of Kayford Mountain and Coal River Mountain joined.

“The people down there are living in a war zone,” Larry said. “It’s a war against nature using dynamite and huge machines, and it hurts all our families. Their houses shake when Massey Coal blows up the mountain. The water goes bad, the air goes bad, and sometimes people are even hurt or killed by the flying debris.”

Larry led us along the ridge to the edge of his property, the breeze turning stiffer as the path grew narrower. Then, suddenly, we were standing above the lunar landscape of a slaughtered mountain. In the distance, looking like tiny children’s toys, yel-

low bulldozers rested from their labor of pushing debris over the side of what mountain remained. Beds of dynamite were already laid out for the next onslaught where black rock indicated the presence of coal.

While Massey Energy Company wants to blow up the land where Larry’s family has lived for generations, Larry has turned down millions of dollars and withstood violent intimidation to keep his home. He told us, “I’ve put the property into a land trust, so whatever happens to me, this part of the mountain will be safe. I just wish the country would wake up and save the rest.”

Bank Like Appalachia Matters (BLAM!)

Mountaintop removal and its consequences are part of the larger challenge of global warming. As burning coal releases more carbon dioxide than any other source of energy, ecological activists must help sway large actors to motivate systemic changes away from a coal-based economy. Coal is not, and cannot be, clean or green.

EQAT (pronounced “equate”) is a new group of Friends and friends of Friends who join millions of people around the world fighting for our threatened planet. Our mission is to build a just and sustainable economy through campaigns that draw on the Quaker legacy of nonviolent direct action. We are based in Philadelphia but open to becoming national. We’ve started with one campaign but are open to joining others as we grow.

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.

QEB Coordinator: Keith Helmuth

QEB Editorial Team: Judy Lumb, Sandra Lewis, Barbara Day

To receive **QEB**:

Email: info@quakerearthcare.org

Website: QuakerEarthcare.org

Mail: write to address below

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Quaker Earthcare Witness
173-B N Prospect Street
Burlington VT 05401

For our first campaign, Bank Like Appalachia Matters (BLAM!), we chose a target close to home: PNC Bank. PNC is a descendant of Provident National, the "Quaker bank" founded by members of the Religious Society of Friends in 1865. PNC currently promotes itself as a "green" bank, due to its buildings being certified by the U.S. Green Building Council and a policy of applying green construction standards to any renovated or newly constructed branch office. PNC states, "We're always looking for new ways to be green."

However, PNC Bank makes money from its involvement with MTR-practicing coal companies. In 1995, PNC bought a controlling interest in BlackRock, an investment firm specializing in coal and oil. Massey Energy, Consol Energy, and Arch Coal are among the top 10 holdings of BlackRock energy funds. All three companies practice mountaintop removal to mine coal in impoverished areas of Appalachia. PNC has also provided loans and directly managed Massey transactions, in one instance resulting in \$600 million to expand coal production.

We have asked PNC Bank to withdraw investments in any companies that engage in MTR and to refrain from making loans or offering other financial services to those companies. Instead, PNC should financially support alternative, renewable sources of energy along with community development in Appalachia.

Here is one of those junctures where climate change meets economic justice—where the profitable exploitation of people and nature creates local and global harm by pumping more carbon into the atmosphere. PNC Bank can choose a different kind of escalation. Instead of supporting the war against people and nature represented by MTR, it can escalate its own commitment to green practices, going beyond vegetated roofs on its local branches to cleanse itself of financial dealings with coal companies.

BLAM! uses nonviolent direct action to shine the light on PNC Bank and provide space for the bank to make the changes it needs to make. If PNC withdraws its support first from MTR and then from coal and fossil fuels, in general, and begins to lobby for sustainable policies on national and international levels, political leaders gain more ground to make planet-friendly decisions.

On the other hand, if PNC refuses to change, politicians who fail to vote green will increasingly be seen as aligned with special interests against people and the planet, and they will be disgraced. By shining the light on banks, we ultimately expose politicians to public accountability. Nonviolent direct action, as it did in the 1960s and other decades, will force a renewal of democracy.

Quaker Troublemakers

Nonviolent direct action is in our Quaker DNA, going back to the 17th century founder of the Religious Society of Friends, George Fox. Thousands of Quakers in that first generation spent time in jail in England. The founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn—whose statue on top of Philadelphia's City Hall is called "The Lawgiver"—engaged in civil disobedience in London. Many Quakers participated in a nonviolent invasion of Puritan Massachusetts, defying the theocracy and getting tortured and even killed for their trouble.

With a beginning like that, it's no surprise that every century since has had its "Quaker troublemakers"—the Underground Railroad being only the most famous example. In the 1960s, A Quaker Action Group (AQAG) defied the U.S. government by sailing to North Vietnam with medical supplies. AQAG also joined Martin Luther King's organization in the People's Campaign in Washington, DC and partnered with Puerto Ricans protesting the U.S. Navy's use of the island of Culebra for target practice. Group members were arrested while building a chapel on a targeted beach. That campaign ended the Navy's dangerous and environmentally destructive use of Culebra.

Many people are ready to unite the issues of economy and environment. Neither an ecologist's practice of seeing the big picture nor a Quaker's practice of seeking integrity supports a worldview that separates economic institutions from their impact



EQAT

(from left) Lily Cavanagh, Zein Nakhoda, Hannah Jones, and Julian Brelsford play the Fossil Fools during an April 1, 2010 action outside PNC headquarters in Philadelphia

on nature and nature's children. People die when an economic system "externalizes" the costs of pollution. Species die and the climate warms when an economic system pretends that the market is paramount. We need groups that support people to go outside the box to tell a regional president of PNC, as we did, that a bank has to take environmental responsibility for its financial dealings.

Protest, though valuable, is not enough. Climate change challenges basic assumptions, for example, that economic growth of the kind we're used to is still a good idea. When deep assumptions are challenged, people yearn for an answering vision. EQAT commits to bold visioning that affirms life.

While EQAT comes from a seedbed of past Quaker action, we welcome non-Friends to join us in a community of respect. EQAT's strategy is to design a campaign that focuses on a specific goal rather than trying to act on a variety of issues. Our values include creativity, participation, listening, empowerment, and attention to Spirit.

First Months in Action

In March 2010, our delegation had a face-to-face meeting with the regional president of PNC. We acknowledged that we, as individuals, can adjust our lifestyles in light of information about climate change, but major changes in business practices must be made by institutions like PNC. After that dialogue, we mounted our first action at the Philadelphia Flower Show—an annual event attracting over 250,000 people of which PNC is a longtime sponsor.

EQAT staked out various entrances at the Flower Show, working in shifts throughout the week and distributing over 2,500 flyers. Swarthmore student activists led a chorus of familiar songs with updated lyrics about PNC and MTR. We spoke with lots of people who were aware of MTR but shocked by their bank's involvement, as well as four visitors from West Virginia who expressed gratitude for our concern.

Our Flower Show action got the attention of the local press, with articles printed in the *Philadelphia City Paper* (Billman et al., "A Million Stories," 3/10/10) and *University City Review* (Bloom, "Earth Quaker Action Team Confronts PNC Bank at Flower Show," 3/10/10). We felt very encouraged and satisfied with this first effort!

Not long afterward was Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's March Sessions, one of two annual gatherings for business and fellowship. We spoke about BLAM! in a plenary meeting on contemporary prophetic witness. EQAT also joined the Middle School Friends program in a street-speaking session outside Philadelphia's Environmental Protection Agency office. Two passersby stopped and joined us, and several middle schoolers spoke.

On April 1, we partnered with another grassroots environmental group, Philly Rising Tide, to conduct a Fossil Fools Day action outside PNC's city headquarters. We carried signs with oversized voided checks, wore jester's hats, played the guitar and banjo, and sang folk songs. We also did street-speaking, handed out flyers, and engaged passersby with a spirit of fun. *The Daily Pennsylvanian* student newspaper covered this action (Trimmer, "Problems with PNC's business ventures," 4/8/10).

Most recently, we gathered for a memorial service after the tragic explosion in West Virginia that killed 29 Massey coal miners. About 35 people came to our vigil on April 13 outside the main city branch of PNC. Amid the cold and rainy weather, there were bright umbrellas and raincoats and posters to explain our witness. Those present experienced a deep solidarity and commitment, as they prayed for the families of the miners and for PNC's disengagement from this exploitative industry.

The Threat and the Vision

Coal companies say that coal is essential to keep electricity available, but not everyone agrees. Jacobson and Delucchi outline a plan to power the planet without fossil fuels by 2030, using

renewable energy technologies such as wind, solar, geothermal, and hydropower (Jacobson, M.Z. and Delucchi, M.A. Evaluating the Feasibility of a Large-Scale Wind, Water, and Sun Energy Infrastructure, *Scientific American*, November 2009).

Reputable and scholarly publications have denounced MTR and the coal industry as harmful to the nature and people of Appalachia, for example, the January 2010 issue of *Science* magazine (Palmer et al., "Mountaintop Mining Consequences") and a May 2006 article in *Mountain Research and Development* (Owen and Boyer, "Energy, Environment, and Sustainable Industry in the Appalachian Mountains").

Owen and Boyer see real potential for sustainable energy development in Appalachia, but only if regional activism enables wind energy to play a larger role. As reported in *Orion* (Reece, "Hell Yeah, We Want Windmills," July/August 2009), an engineering study of the Coal River Mountain found that a wind farm positioned on the ridge would create more electricity than the coal under the ridge could produce, create new jobs during construction, and require more workers for operation and maintenance in the long run.

William Penn is only the best known of the Quakers who believed that it is not enough to point out the injury caused by bad policies. We also need to point to a vision of something better. The crisis called "climate change" is in fact an opportunity to revamp structures that have been hurting people and nature for centuries. Just as Penn invented a "Holy Experiment" in Philadelphia to try new ways of planning and governing a city, living without an army, and dealing fairly with native people, so it is our generation's turn to try new ways of relating to Earth and to each other.

One guide is the book written for the Quaker Institute for the Future by Brown and Garver, *Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy*. Better than a blueprint, the book describes a different framework that makes harmonious the new institutions we build.

EQAT does not shrink from the necessary task of protest, especially under the increased urgency of environmental decline, but at the same time our protest is saying "Yes" to a better way. As the alliances grow from the grassroots, we expect that hope will grow as well. The widely shared values of justice, democracy, and respect for nature increasingly will guide the choices made in our society.

To join our BLAM! campaign or learn more about EQAT, please contact Ingrid Lakey at eqateam@gmail.com or visit our website eqat.wordpress.com.

George Lakey is a Visiting Professor and Research Fellow at Swarthmore College. He has led 1,500 workshops on five continents. He has worked with Cesar Chavez in leading strategy workshops for activists; and preceding the 1994 elections in South Africa, he co-lead peacekeeping workshops with African National Congress members and others in skills of nonviolent intervention. Lakey has founded and co-founded numerous organizations, including A Quaker Action Group, Training for Change, Movement for a New Society, and Philadelphia Jobs with Peace Campaign. In addition to his activism, he has authored eight books as well as numerous articles.

Sharon Cantor is a member of Bethesda Monthly Meeting (Maryland) and active in EQAT. From 2008–10, she served as Grants Associate at Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. She is now pursuing an MBA at Carnegie Mellon University and planning to work on environmental sustainability in business. She wishes to thank EQAT members for contributing their language and ideas to this article.



EQAT members and Swarthmore students gather in solidarity to mourn the 29 Massey coal miners killed in April 2010.