

The Future of Peace News – discussion paper for subscribers, Dec 2024

Before we can discuss PN's future, we should reflect on what we want PN's ultimate mission and goal should be. What should it be trying to achieve?

Then we should look at our ***theory of change***: **how do we envisage this goal being achieved?** Without some model of how society might move in the direction we desire, we cannot meaningfully work out how PN can contribute to it.

With a *theory of change*, we can explore **what PN's role might be in furthering the dynamics of change.**

When we begin to see PN's role or roles, we can consider **what means might be used to fulfil them.** What is our practice to be?

Out of this will fall details of content, contributors, staffing, marketing, management and so on. Finally, it needs to be put into a business case, looking at relaunch and ongoing costs, and potential income and funding streams. But that's for later.

Mission/goal – What are we trying to achieve?

Let's try: *The creation of a pacifist world free from war, in which issues of social, economic and environmental justice are addressed through nonviolent means.*

Theory of Change

Small changes come through grassroots campaigning and activism. Grassroots campaigns bend politicians and businesses, starting with those who are already sympathetic. At some point the political and economic costs of opposing an expanding campaign exceed the costs of making concessions.

(Enlightened self-interest by those in power can bring about top-down reforms, but these will always be limited and compromised, and are likely to be delivered to head off more radical demands. Nevertheless, top-down changes are part of the dynamic.)

This applies to anti-war and anti-militarist campaigns, as much as to campaigns focusing on (for example) social justice or the climate crisis. Reformist they may be, but they are vital to achieving lasting change. Radical actions for ostensibly moderate reforms can be extraordinarily powerful – witness the Suffragettes, Gandhi's salt marches, MLK's tactics.

Such campaigns generate broader radicalisation and cultural change as people make links between different issues, and develop a common understanding of the root causes of their problem. Campaigners increasingly see that their concern is just one manifestation of systemic injustice and powerlessness.

Larger transformations come when this common understanding triggers a mass movement: campaigners on single issues combine with other causes in a broad coalition. This is potentially revolutionary in that it can bring down governments.

But it is not necessarily permanently transformative across society as a whole. There are too many examples of "revolutions" that within a few years have succumbed to renewed dictatorships. And too many examples of successful radical campaigns – for example on

equalities – that barely affect underlying economic and political structures.

George Lakey identifies this common culture and understanding as one precondition for embedding radical and potentially revolutionary transformation. Another precondition is to develop common and compatible approaches to achieving their aims. We believe that this approach must be nonviolence.

A third precondition is that these groups, campaigns and movements contain people and networks with the skills, knowledge and aptitude to run vital institutions, be they public, charitable and community, or private.

Therefore the informal coalition must include, or at least not alienate, public sector and community administrators, politicians, entrepreneurs, professionals, and of course workers. And (circling back to those actors who seek reforms within the current system) it should engage with existing organised coalitions such as leftist and green parties.

Part of this theory of change is the value of alternatives (such as co-ops, alternative and ethical business, community organisations). This part holds up such alternatives as *being* the revolution (or at least, profound evolution). They can certainly be inspirational, and they can be a refuge. As can music and culture.

Role

In the light of a theory of change, PN can aim to fulfil several roles:

1. House magazine for pacifists and consciously nonviolent activists.
2. Flying the flag for pacifism, and acting as a reference point for public discussion.
3. Wider radicalisation and education
 - Information about pacifist / nonviolent campaigns, strategies and achievements
 - Promoting learning and discussion of nonviolence principles and practice
 - Promoting mutual understandings of the common causes of war, inequality, injustice, and environmental breakdown
4. Movement tool
 - Facilitating alliances of understanding horizontally, between different campaigns
 - Facilitating alliances of understanding vertically, between grassroots campaigners, and potential sympathisers in influential positions in the community, politics, social administration (eg health, education, housing), in the professions, and in business.
 - Sharing lessons and inspiration from alternative forms of organisation
 - Celebrating transformative cultures – art, music, theatre, writing, festivals...
 - Sharing ideas and inspiration from overseas
 - Promoting discussion on the above

Means

All this implies a wide range of reporting, analysis and discussion. To cut to the chase, there is a debate to be had about the merits of print and online media for this.

Not that it's either/or. But if we were starting PN now, would we leap to print as the first and main means of getting out there?

Peace News Directors, company members, and the parent company Peace News Trustees, welcome your thoughts and comments on all or any of the above.

Print is good for analysis and reflection. It is accessible in ways that digital media isn't. Some people simply prefer it. It can be handed out at demos and events, but other promotion has costs. The downsides are that it is not "live" – unless it is at least weekly, news is out of date; and if less than monthly, discussion trails in the wake of events. Printing and postage has costs that digital output doesn't. Interaction between readers is slow and clumsy.

Online media can be immediately topical, even real time, in terms of news. It can react overnight in terms of discussion, especially if it's a platform with activist-generated input. It can be a permanent online one-stop reference, with content accessible by category and by tags. It can directly link to other resources.

An online platform can also itself be linked directly to social media, benefiting from viral and trending effects, as well as proactive promotion. Equally, it lends itself to video blogs and interviews – which can be put out on a YouTube platform – video reportage, and to audio podcasts. All of these are increasingly popular means of accessing information, especially among new generations of activists. Other media respond to online trends more than to old-school press releases.

This implies a greater emphasis on video and audio, relative to the written word. And a need for clarity about where paper media still has advantages.

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