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Blessed are those persecuted in the cause of right



had some court fines for my part in the Insulate Britain (IB) protests in 2021. Previously I refused to pay fines, all resulting from peaceful protest. Eventually, after dealing with some moderately stressful visits from bailiffs attempting to enter our house and take away property, I spent a few weeks in prison here and there for refusing to pay up.

This time, however, things were different. For an assortment of reasons, I did pay the fines. The support networks for climate change activists who might have helped me pay the fines, did not do so. I knew why. The IB motorway blockades I had taken part in were highly controversial. Some of the groups I had been involved with had disowned these actions. Others followed suit and would not support those experiencing the costs and consequences of taking part.

This raises some questions. What does solidarity mean, and what are its limits when there is honest disagreement on tactics or principle? Dorothy once reported someone saying, "these Catholic Workers will protest with anyone"! If we only act with those we fully agree with, we will be left to act alone, whereas "Unity is Strength". Over the years, I have been part of anti-war marches organised by the Socialist Workers Party, where I have disagreed with their ultimate (but not immediate) aims and their methods of organising. I have been on Poll Tax, Anti-Racism and Reclaim the Streets protests where some started fighting with the police, or threw 'missiles' at them. I was happy to benefit from their organising efforts, and only left when I felt unsafe. Some peace movement friends have intervened to prevent violence in such circumstances, rather than leave and vacate the space. On the annual May Day march, the Kurdish Workers Party used to have banners of Lenin, Marx, (Continued on p. 2)

This Issue: News & Updates p. 3; Br Johannes on Calais p. 4–5; Henrietta Cullinan on CW buildings p. 6–7, Br Johannes interview p. 8–9; Anne Jones on our 'current crisis' p. 10–11.

and Stalin, which I kept well away from. In recent years, there has been tension for a number of friends of the Catholic Worker (CW) in relation to this question of unity, solidarity and diversity of actions.

One example is that of Jessica Reznicek and Ruby Montoya. In 2016 and 2017 they damaged machinery and equipment as part of the "Dakota Access Pipeline" protests in the USA. The pipeline was built to bring oil from the shale oil fields to a refinery in Illinois. Part of it affected Native American land and sacred sites. So opposition came from environmentalists, Native Americans and allied rights activists. Jessica and Ruby's actions are estimated to have stopped the flow of 30 million barrels of oil. Despite being connected to the Des Moines CW community, their actions were controversial within the CW movement.

Property damage as part of nonviolent protest is not new to the CW. There is the anti-nuclear and anti-war Ploughshares movement, for example. Locally, there has been the annual Ash Wednesday witness at the Ministry of Defence in London and others. These actions have included targeted property damage while retaining a focus on non-violence and accountability. Perceptions that Jessica and Ruby did not follow this practice of accountability led some CWers to critique rather than support their

action. I myself had some doubts about their methods. But I admire their courage and sincerity and the rightness of their cause. I also recognise how the shock of the 'new' can create a negative reaction which changes on further reflection. I think of Dorothy Day's first, and then later, reactions to the draft board raids in Vietnam War era America. So I wanted to offer Jessica and Ruby what solidarity and support I can. Especially since they received multi-year prison sentences.

Friends close to home have also needed solidarity following controversial actions. Richard, a former member of this community, stayed here recently during a trial at Wood Green Crown Court. Richard, Nick and other friends were charged with 'conspiracy to commit criminal damage' for actions taken with the group 'Beyond Politics' (later 'Burning Pink') in an effort to motivate political parties, NGOs and campaigning groups to actively support mass civil disobedience on climate change. Criticism this time was due to the organisations targeted rather than the methods. Again, I too had doubts about the wisdom of some of their actions. At the same time I wanted to offer support and solidarity, especially when facing the possibility of extended time in prison. Some were already on remand, tagged, or under restrictive bail conditions with a very real impact on daily life.

When Tom and I went to support them in court, they were so grateful. It reminded me of how little support they had outside their own circle, and how important that support can be. They were acquitted by the jury, as have many other groups in recent years, thank God. Juries at least have often recognised the need for drastic action to respond to the climate emergency.

I am reminded of the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: 'those who love community, destroy community. Those who love those around them, build community'. This does not give easy answers or clear rules. It is that love, that care for each and every person, especially those who suffer, which is at the heart of what we do, of the Christian life. And especially those who suffer for conscience sake, because they had the courage and faith, in God or humanity, to do what is right. And for us as Christians, especially for those whose courage comes from that deepest and most secret place in the heart, the place where we meet God, where the Divine Voice speaks heart to heart, where 'deep calls unto deep' as the psalmist says. This is unconditional love, agape, this is living God's Reign, the true revolution, in every moment. As Jesus said, 'blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of right, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven'.

Martin Newell

The Unreported Report

A few highlights of important news neglected by the mainstream press

Nord Stream 2 bombings

The United States government ran a covert operation to carry out the Nord Stream 2 pipeline bombing, according to a February 8 report by the Pulitzer prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh, released on his personal substack. The September attack on the major German-Russian gas infrastructure project, which resulted in the largest recorded methane leak in history, had received curiously little coverage up to that point. The New York Times and Die Zeit soon countered Hersh's anonymously sourced account with US intelligence claims that the attack had instead been carried out by an unnamed 'pro-Ukranian group'. The rival reports did 'not specify the members of the group, or who directed...the operation.'



Nord Stream Attack, Kustbevakningen

Decade of Defiance

A recent study found that at least 1,733 environmental activists were killed in the last decade. Global Witness' 'Decade of Defiance' study looked at years 2012-2021 and found that an average of one killing took place every two days, with 68 per cent of victims coming from Latin America. The authors added that this number was 'almost certainly an underestimate,' because 'conflict, restrictions on a free press and civil society, and lack of independent monitoring of attacks on defenders can lead to underreporting'.

Millions in Congo for the Pope

Over a million Congolese faithful gathered for the Papal Mass in Kinshasha on February 1, in what was globally the largest public gathering of the year. 5.7 million people remain displaced in the war ravaged country and the Pope appealed to Christians caught up in the violence to 'Lay down your arms' and 'embrace mercy'.

Refugee sues EU Border Agency

A Congolese refugee, Jeancy, has brought the first legal case against Frontex, the EU's border agency. In 2020, Jeancy had watched his friends drown after high waves generated by the Greek coast guard boat struck their dinghy, which he claims was done deliberately. 'They intended to kill us,' he said. A recent EU summit agreed increased funding for Frontex.

House Update

A quick roundup of the recent comings and goings in the community

Henrietta's article on CW buildings (p. 6-7) comes at an appropriate time, as the house has currently descended into a building site amidst asbestos removal work, fire door installation, the fitting of a new bathroom and additional planned refurbishments. The situation is not unlike the time Dorothy Day complained of having 'Mott Street house ...torn down around us, and put together again' in order to 'conform with the law' around fire safety. Though, that time it was done by installing 'all sorts of strange asbestos' (let's hope our modern methods age better!). Despite the carnage, we have still managed to get back into the swing of things. We had a Valentine's Day protest outside Barclays bank, one of the biggest funders of fossil fuels, as well as the first of our monthly liturgy and social evenings, where we shared a Eucharistic meal before catching up over a more down-to-earth dinner.

Finsbury Park is a beach!

Henrietta Cullinan chats with Br Johannes Maertens about his pastoral ministry in Finsbury Park



Finsbury Park, East End Prints

Firstly, what do you do?

I try to do... pastoral presence. Or prayerful presence. That means, practically, that I am [based] around Finsbury Park, mostly focused on Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees. We call them Habesha. But for other people too. I mean, I don't wear a sign that says, 'Refugees Only'.

People talk to me because they're interested in why a monk in a habit is walking around there. Most of the Ethiopians and Eritreans know

what I'm doing there, so they automatically come to me if they have problems they need help with. So, I try to be present. It's not just being there on the street. It's not just being there in the cafes or in the station. It's a quality of being. And that's the most difficult part... to be there and to be... to use a modern term ... 'mindfully present'. It's not always easy. Because the rhythm of the city, of London, is quite overwhelming, even for people who walk. Even if you're just

going somewhere you're swept into that rhythm. And I struggle with it. Sometimes in the summer I have less of a problem because I can go into the park. I can force myself to sit down on a bench. And wait and see if somebody comes and speaks to me.

So what do you when it's cold and rainy?

I go to one of the cafes where people know they can come and get help. They know that I'm there most afternoons. And that works mostly for casework support. For the 'pastoral presence', to be there for people, to talk with them about things other than practical help, the park in summer provides a better [environment]. The park is more [conducive] to what they would call 'chilling'.

There is much less constraint in the park. People come to the park because they have time [on their hands]. In the street they might be on their way home, to work or to school. The urgency with which you move in the street is different from in the park and so the kind of talks you have will be different.

What other factors influence your work?

The time of day has an enormous influence. There's a completely different vibe in the evening. The chance [of meeting someone] is greater. I talk with two or three people at the same time who might be slightly under influence of a substance, while during the day I might just speak with one person. Most people are either busy or sleeping in the morning.

And would you say that your habit is part of your space?

Well, my habit is literally the space which I inhabit. And the habit, when I wear it, and I wear it often, determines a part of the space and I know it's not just clothes, it's also identity. It's also inviting or not inviting people to have a conversation about something that points to the non

-material world, that is also the idea. I mean that consciously I wear it to invite people, not necessarily to a conversation, but simply to think about the non-material world. And for some people that works. For other people, that works also, but in a negative way, right?

Tell me why the people that you work with congregate around Finsbury Park. What's special about that location?

Well, principally, the park is a meeting place for very different groups of people. Because it's such a green, wide, open space. In the summer it attracts people who are looking for a bit of space. In the summer you could even almost say it's a beach. It's like coming to the beach for people who don't have the money to go to the seaside. You do see people sunbathing on beach towels.

In the winter, of course, the park is completely different. Then it is mostly a meeting place of different like-minded groups. The largest group that comes to Finsbury Park once a week would be the football fans. Because it is on the way to the Arsenal stadium the surrounding pubs, the Arsenal fans are very present, which is a completely different public from the one I actually work with.

Tell me a bit about not having a hub or a house in which to do your work?

Not having a house for me personally is a big poverty. Even

if I live here and, as you can see, I have a big room and I have all the facilities I need, what I don't have is agency over the space. I have agency over my room, but not over the space. And is that important? It is if you want to do hospitality. I live in relative poverty for the moment, I mean financially. The most painful poverty is the poverty of not being able to offer hospitality. It is new for me because I've been doing 'hospitality' for almost 25 years. Not being able to give somebody a bed or a room for one night even...Yeah, that is a very, very big poverty for me.

I need to learn from this in the sense that there are many people in the world who are on the streets or sofa surfing, staying with other people or living in a room somewhere at somebody else's apartment. And they cannot give hospitality either.

I won't say that giving hospitality is a luxury. Not at all, because there are many people who offer hospitality, who are not rich. Probably more people who are not educated offer hospitality than people who are rich. But it is a poverty that is difficult to accept. Especially when you know that there are rooms available in several places. You know that there are places where rooms are free and you don't have agency.

Henrietta Cullinan and Br Johannes Maertens

From wasteland to welcome

Henrietta Cullinan talks about the perennial Catholic Worker task of building from ground zero

When I first visited the empty church buildings that are now Giuseppe Conlon House, I found a maze of indecipherable rooms of different sizes. Suddenly vacated, there were still signs of the previous occupant, a worn patch of carpet, a favourite armchair, artificial flowers, hymn books. Now it is a Catholic Worker house where guests have their own rooms, there is a new hygienic kitchen and a sofafilled living room.

Chaos, dirt and abandonment becomes, through community, physical building work, gathering of friends, a state of being able to offer a welcome to different visitors. This common Catholic Worker story is also familiar to me personally. I write from my own experience of being one of four adults who came together to build two self-build houses.

The resulting architecture is a direct expression of the relations between us, of negotiations over space that went on late into the night. For years we shared the building work, tools, meals, cars. Even the TV got passed back and forth. The work depended on and was limited by our own expertise, physical strength, resources from the



Giuseppe Conlon House

day job. It fitted around 'life events', such as the birth of a baby. For a while the shared work felt impermanent but creative. The process of building itself became the ground for a community of sorts and a place of welcome for the many friends and relations who came to try their hand at extreme DIY. When the concrete lorry arrived for the next 'pour' of 1.5m of wall, there was a general feeling of hilarity, of all hands on deck, and after months of preparing the form work, a celebration of achievement.

The empty site, when we bought it in 1987, was a playground for foxes, pigeons, cats and amateur arsonists – setting fire to things was popular in the neighbourhood at that time. Our first step

was to plant a tiny lawn and invite people for picnics. Eventually we divided the land legally and physically into two gardens and two houses. When the next-door house was sold, then came another reality. The self-build dream was a piece of real estate.

Johannes Maertens uses not a wasteland but the public spaces of Finsbury Park to do his work of 'pastoral presence' [See page 4]. He tells me it's hard to resist the speed of the city, the rush of commuters at rush hour or fans on match days. Without a building, his work is influenced by the weather. His pale blue habit attracts comments, both positive and negative, but at the same time is a sign to some that he is there to help.

Undoubtedly, Catholic Workers need a weatherproof structure, in which to do their work of offering shelter. Building work and participating in building work, then, is an inevitable feature of Catholic Worker life.

Giuseppe Conlon House uses a 'big old building' leased at no cost from the Archdiocese of Westminster for the purpose of offering a roof to homeless asylum seekers. At first the community set up a night shelter, where guests slept on mattresses in a hall. As Fr. Martin told me, 'It was safer than being on the streets'. Over more than a decade, the community has gradually made improvements in energy conservation, health and safety. Under the tenancy agreement, the community must take responsibility for the fabric of the buildings, and fulfil health and safety regulations. Most important though is the desire to provide the guests with comfort, privacy and security. All of which has involved constant building work, sometimes done by contractors, sometimes by artisans offering their skills for free, sometimes with the help of outside volunteers. Former community member, Nora Ziegler, describes Do It With Others (DIWO) days:

'It would be a Saturday and we'd just invite people to come and help us with things. We'd have a big clipboard with a list of all the stuff that needs to be done and that could be things like cleaning and sorting donations, painting steps, repairing a broken door frame, fixing a leaky tap, carrying some heavy piece of furniture from one place to another. [..] And then people would just get on with it and we'd have a big lunch together in the middle of

the day.'

'There was a way that anyone who came could be useful and a valuable member of the group.'

Building together can break down barriers, she tells me:

'When you come from very different places and speak different languages it's hard to just sit together and talk and bond in that way, but working together, working side by side [..] doing real DIY projects together was a really great way for people to feel comfortable with each other and learn about each other without having to talk a lot.'

For me the lesson from self -build is that from the moment of claiming a piece of space, through ownership, squatting, renting, putting up a tent, making a den, an allotment, the desire to open the door, if you have one, is natural. However, still, the cultural attitude, satirised by Dickens in John Wemmick's castle, complete with drawbridge and cannon, persists.

Nora comments, 'We can't avoid formally private property or very rarely can but if you own a house and you constantly open it to visitors and to your neighbours and so on there's ways of kind of breaking that down a little bit, maybe.'

It is possible to offer space and welcome during the process of building itself. The physical nature of working with our bodies breaks down barriers. The collective purpose of building engenders feelings of wellbeing.

A self-build house is always an incomplete journey towards a space to offer a meal, whether a picnic or a wild party, towards a clean, spare room, ready for someone to sleep and, in modern times, work from home.

From wasteland to habitation, on whatever terms, comes the opportunity to welcome others along the way. At the same time, along with comfort and security, comes the option to close the door on the world.

Henrietta Cullinan

« Calais: ville des pierres »

Br Johannes Maertens reflects on Calais, the 'city of rocks'

hursday, March the 3rd, Calais as usual is very windy and cold. The large rocks the municipality puts down in open areas don't make Calais feel any warmer. The rocks are there to deter refugees from living or putting up tents in public spaces, while other rocks have been there longer blocking volunteers from getting to the refugees with their vans with food, drink or other aid. "It's almost like a 'childish' game" from the authorities we thought simultaneously. Evelyne, one of my hosts I stay with remarked "Did you see all the rocks? In spring normally it's flowers that spring up, but in Calais it's rocks!"

We prepare tea and coffee at the Secours Catholique day centre. Around 9am we head out visiting the refugees camped around the town. The hot tea and coffee will be much appreciated and are a good conversation starter. The first place we visit is inside Calais alongside one of the canals. Here new comers often camp. We meet a young Algerian who speaks French and it sounded like he had left the UK disappointed, but hasn't settled in France yet. He was together with a young Syrian man listening to the radio on his



Calais: Quai de la Gironde, Bobby Lloyds, Art Refuge UK

smartphone. We give them some tea, a refugee information sheet and invite them to come to the "Catholic Centre". Further along the canal we come across an Afghan man in his thirties, and near a bridge two Syrian men trying to get some sleep on a bed made of wood pallets and sleeping bags. The two men pop their sleepy heads out of the sleeping bags for a short talk and to enjoy the warm 'gahwa' (Arabic for coffee). They promise to come to the daycentre in the afternoon.

From there we drive on to the industrial area around "rue des Huttes", where for a long time a large refugee camp was scattered between bushes, dunes and heavy industry.

Nowadays the dunes and green

area have been raised, with high fences put in to stop people moving back in. We meet, talk and share coffee with two Iranian men, one of whom is there with their 10-year-old son. They share a little tent together alongside the derelict road.

We carry on to "Old Lidl", a very wet area, we see up to 50 tents. There used to be a Lidl shop at the beginning of the terrain but the shop, the woodland and dunes behind it have been flattened. The land is being prepared for storage warehouses, and yet another secured and high fenced lorry-parking site for lorries going to the UK. Most of the tents are in a long stretch where, as long as the police don't come, refugees camp quietly.

The people are from Sudan. A few of the men are sick or have (had) a fever. The men are walking around in slippers and in wet socks on the wet sandy ground, while their sneakers hang up to dry. The cold shivers through my body. Amongst the young men even younger faces hidden behind scarves, keeping away icy wind and nosy people. Despite the cold and wet, people try to smile or be friendly with us. Again we give out tea, coffee and also tissue paper, so people can blow their runny noses.

I wondered where other nationalities were living. The day before at the Day Centre I met a teenage boy (15-year-old) from Guinea. He spoke French and Pular. He must have felt lonely in Calais as very few refugees trying to get to the UK actually speak French and nor did he speak Arabic. His

voice gave away how young he was. The way he looked at Miriam, the art therapist, hinted that he was missing his family, especially his mother. That evening he agreed to go to the official youth housing in St. Omer, a one-hour drive from Calais. Waiting for the car to come and pick him up the young man looked vulnerable and uncertain. I said goodbye to him "and may God bless you." He said thank you back in French. That day 265 refugees came to the Catholic centre, for an afternoon out from the wind, cold and stress of refugee life. Worried about the young boy's future, I headed to the warmth and safety of my hosts.

This afternoon some young men are playing football in the courtyard of the Catholic centre; others washing their clothes in basins and hanging

HOLDE AND THE STATE OF THE STAT

Community Table at the Secours Catholique day centre. A young refugee constructs a little house with miniature bricks.

them up to dry. Inside, the warmth, French class, English class, and a movie are going on, and information offered about asylum applications and the dangers crossing the Channel. Mostly young men gather around our Community Table (an Art Refuge UK project). Some of the faces I recognise from the morning coffee and tea outreach had come. The young Algerian is there, and another Guinean in his early twenties. The "Community Table" is something different. It's a place where you don't have to do anything, you can have a talk, or just use your hands and be a bit creative. You can create something from the past or try to imagine the future, write a poem or a letter and just be there in the now. I am thinking of the big rocks again. While the politicians seem to 'play' childish games with big rocks to create a hostile environment for refugees, these young men sit at our table creating or building something which often resembles a dream for their future or a longing for home.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus asks us: "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?"

Br Johannes Maertens

The Tipping Point

Anne Jones responds to Martin Newell's article on our 'current crisis'

dubious advantage of being old (i.e. well past three score years and ten) is hindsight, a thinking process only useful if one learns and applies the learning from it. Fr Newell paints an apocalyptic picture of the future ahead for our planet, and few of us cannot disagree, albeit with a shudder.

My hindsight reacts with an angry "We saw this coming." The name Rachel Carson is currently being revived. She was writing in the 1960's about the dying of the world of wildlife and plants around us, and, as a parent of small

children in the 1970's, a few of us were attempting to take heed.

In my locality the children's librarian set up 'ecology clubs' to guide young children towards respectful understanding of the natural world, and in particular to where the effects of industrial pollution had taken hold.

However, concurrently, other things were going on, far stronger than a handful of hippy mothers. Fr Newell's reference to that phrase "You never had it so good" took me back to the time when it was shouted about, by the Conservative supporters of *that* politician, as if asking



the discontented masses of working-class, "What more do you want?". Certainly, in the cities, where memories of the Second World War were still strong, people were justified in expecting things to be better. These included wanting an inside toilet, a bed not shared by siblings, blanket coverings, not sacking off potato bags, carpets over floor boards, maybe a refrigerator, maybe a washing machine, and, dare we ask, a TV (last in line was a telephone).

People like me, the middle of five children, delighted in the sheer luxury of a permanent home and regularly washed clothes, and people like my mother, grateful, continued her old ways of re-using every scrap of food, darning socks, and sewing up holes in clothes. One outfit for 'best', i.e. Sundays, another for weekdays, were adequate. So where did Bare Necessity lose focus and Greed take over? The power of advertising cannot be underestimated. When was the point at which I felt compelled to own a second smart dress, or to give way to an impulse to buy a crippling pair of shoes that would distort my feet for ever? Putting aside the underlying vanity, the images from advertising about attractiveness and personal value were and are so closely interwoven, that it takes a fair bit of mental effort to unravel them.

As food became more plentiful mostly due to factory processing as well as factory farming, the notion of reuse fell into a realm of disapproval. Insidiously, a throw-away culture took over. Examples: My re-using scraps was mocked by visiting friends as "using your fridge as a dustbin". And, living in a suburban environment, the urge to keep a neat front garden seemed expected, so, once more, under the influence of advertisers, I headed for the packet of weed killer that promised 'best effects'. But it was my middle son, with his friend, who immediately noticed the effects, saying, "Mum, the birds have stopped singing."

It seems that only very recently have others woken up enough to the birds not singing, and all the other disasters that Fr Newell lists, which is why my hindsight is filled with anger. Why did my generation not speak out louder? Partly I think because the notion of economic growth based upon robbing the world's resources has been (still is) so ingrained.

I agree with Fr Newell, the die is cast. So what hope is there? Hindsight again: against this backdrop, many good things have taken place. My main examples are the abolition of capital punishment, the nuclear proliferation treaty, and attitudes to children.

During my primary school years, the regular caning of 'naughty' children was a daily ritual. Today this is viewed as child abuse, rightly. And a favourite research finding I recall from my days as a psychotherapist in child mental health, came from a lecture by one Prof Black who spoke on how parental approaches to discipline have so radically altered in recent years that almost none approves of physical punishment. So we now have a generation of argumentative, persuasive, loquacious young people, who are infinitely more familiar with a discursive, reflective and co-operative approach to deeply serious problems. Group problemsolving as contrasted with the didactic 'expert-led' model has become the norm.

Yes, I know one cannot talk one's way out of a flood or a heatwave. But these powerful strengths and skills will help find better ways forward towards facing these terrible challenges, finding recourse to better ways of managing basic needs without depleting the planet and taking a more considered approach to bogus claims thrust upon us.

Anne M Jones

Giuseppe Conlon House Wishlist

FOOD

Chopped tomatoes

Peanut butter

Cooking oil

Lentils

Tinned Chickpeas and Kidney Beans

Noodles

Hummus

Soy sauce

Spices & herbs

Honey

Long life juice

Squash

Chilli sauce

Nuts and seeds



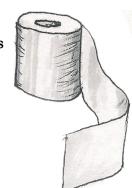
TOILETRIES

Toilet paper **Toothbrushes**

Toothpaste Deodorant

Shampoo

Razors



CLEANING

Floor cleaner

Eco-friendly products Anti-bacterial spray Bicarbonate of soda Multi-purpose cleaner Toilet cleaner Laundry detergent



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