



**THE POSITIVE**



**PROTEST**



**ANTHOLOGY**



**A collection of positive protest stories from SCM members and friends...**



# Introduction

Sometimes we can feel helpless protesting... how do we know if we are making a difference? With growing concern around attending protests, and more and more injustices which need battling it can be uplifting, even necessary to share stories of protest being a positive, energising experience. That's what this is! A collection of stories from SCM friends and members, sharing 'successful' protest tales, and the many different ways 'success' can look. If ever you feel taking action is hopeless, hard or tiring- turn to one of these stories, and be inspired by the community protesting can build!

**"If I spend my life on the losing side, you can lay me down knowing that I tried!"**

Grace Petrie



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# Making your 'mark'

## PETITION

As I came towards the end of my studies, there was a marking and assessment boycott by University staff. Staff were being underpaid, had precarious working conditions and were experiencing burnout - and we as students were not going to graduate as a result of the strikes. I organised a mass petition in response, in solidarity with the concerns of striking workers. We ended up getting 1500 signatures, which we had planned to deliver at a rally to the University offices. Alongside my peers, I organised this demonstration, with 200 people attending at short notice. It was beautiful to gather with peers and with staff, united against an institution happy to throw our futures under the bus to avoid paying staff fairly! Although nervous, I delivered a heartfelt and passionate speech. Our organising worked, because just before the rally the University was the first to release a joint statement with UCU calling for the pay review body to negotiate.

--Bella

## Queer Joy is a Protest



**'Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.'** - Audre Lord

The concept of queer joy as an act of protest is one of the ways LGBTQ+ people can find strength and hope in a world that oppresses and attempts to vanish us. Loudly and proudly being who we are and visibly loving our life and community is a sure-fire way to confuse the people who reckon queer folk have a terrible life. This is an act of protest we can perform in our daily lives and one that has helped me in my journey of accepting who I am and feeling pride for our community. I find great solace in reminding myself that just living as who I am and going about my quiet, joyful day-to-day life is an act of resistance against oppressive systems. I am determined to become the content, optimistic and joyful queer representation that I wish I had seen when I was younger, and that is the most powerful act of protest I can imagine.

--Mo

# Power of a well worded e-mail...

Last year I was diagnosed with a life-changing illness with no treatment available in Wales. The consultant basically said "we're trying but the government won't fund it". That day, I emailed my Member of Senedd to make her aware of the situation, and she not only responded, but asked the Welsh Minister for Health and Social Services for a response on my behalf. I wasn't satisfied with the minister's response, so I decided we had to make change. I asked my Member of Senedd to sponsor an awareness event at the Senedd, and when she agreed, the relevant people were put in touch with the main charity supporting people with my illness. Around six months later, the awareness event took place at the Senedd, and we were able to talk with a good number of Members about the impact of the illness, the options for treatment, and how common it is in Wales. I don't know if this will change things quickly, but I hope that the next time the doctors I met at the event ask for funding for a clinic, there might be more support from government.



Click [here](#) for help contacting MPs and decision makers.

--Sorrel



## Collective Strength

My first protest was back in 2013, as part a global campaign for Food Security. Despite being such a great cause, it was an early start (08:30 in central Birmingham), which I found morally questionable...

After recovering from the early start, the protest started. It saw different organisations and people coming together to declare the right of everyone to have enough food to eat, and demand the government take action to ensure this. This was a very simple ask, but the dream currently feels further away with rising inequality and poverty in the UK.

As a normal citizen, it is easy to feel small and powerless.

But that day I never felt alone, and that has kept me going to rallies and protest is that I never felt alone. Seeing hundreds or thousands of others who also care about the issue was, and continues to be, deeply encouraging.

You are also actively doing something. You are making a stand for what you believe in and prophesying about a better future. Maybe it won't see immediate results. Maybe it won't change the world. But then again, maybe it will. If we never take that step, we'll never know. Actively doing something helps me to envision a better future.

There is power in solidarity and the collective action. We are not small nor powerless when we work together for good. Protests help me remember that collective strength.

--John

# Protesting Because We “Must”



Let me level with you: I don't like protesting. It can be tiring, loud, and to be honest a lot of the time actually quite boring. I'd much rather be reading Ursula Le Guin or playing Baldur's Gate III. Most people who know me would say I fit the activist stereotype more readily than the nerd stereotype, always criticising capitalism or trying to recruit for X,Y or Z march. What I suspect most people don't realise is that few protesters actually *want* to protest. We do it because we must. For those of us in the Christian bloc, we do it because Jesus' insistence on love as the only way to salvation was built on a fundamental challenge to injustice and the belief that each and every human being is made in the image of God. Those core truths are incompatible with the genocide being meted out by Israel using British bombs and they are incompatible with the platitudes and outright genocide apologia being offered by British political and, shamefully, Christian leaders. So as I prepare for yet another national march in solidarity with the Palestinian people this weekend, I am reminded that I am marching alongside those who share that insistence on love, justice and human dignity. And that is a beautiful thing.

--Adam



## Integrating Protest into Our Lives

Sometimes protesting can feel like a virtuous, duty bound chore, something we know we ought to engage with and try to find collective joy in striving for justice in, but a chore nonetheless. This means a clash of liberative faith against an earthly context that may view protesting as taboo, setting yourself apart from 'normal' people. We can combat this by finding value in protest itself as well as its aims. When a protest is reduced to an obligation of faith, we can't see the joy of being with friends and comrades, in a collective 'bubbling up' of exhilaration and satisfaction. We don't have to apportion time separately for ourselves and our neighbour, we can do both! When I joined in a prayer walk outside the London HQs of various arms companies, I followed it up with lunch with a friend; no frills, but I got to spend my time valuably across both halves of the day. Integrating protest into our lives can fulfil the needs of self and other, rather than being reduced to an altruistic chore.

--Thomas

# No Military Solutions to Spiritual Problems



When I attended the DSEi vigil in 2021. I was reminded that there is a big difference between knowing about something in the academic sense versus what this means on a human level. This event, which was organised by Quaker Peace & Social Witness, Pax Christi and Quaker Roots, was a mainly silent, multifaith candle-lit vigil that took place the night before the DSEi arms fair opened in London. Aside from the silence, time was given to allow the voice of those who have been directly impacted by the UK arms trade to be heard, when organisers read out the personal stories of those living through the war in Yemen. This included the testimony of a woman who found out she was pregnant a couple of weeks before the war broke out. Her story detailed her journey from the joys of a first-time expectant mother to the horrors of cowering with her family as bombs fell, during which time she began to question what kind of world she was bringing her child into. This personal first-hand account reminded me that human suffering is intrinsically linked to the UK arms trade.

There are no easy answers to solving the problems of war. Weapons won't be turned into ploughshares in the near future, but as one of the speaker's so adequately summarised 'there are no military solutions to spiritual problems'. Rather, I believe the solution will come from events like the DSEi vigil, as standing there in prayer and reflection with 300 people it felt as though the silence was deafening. Knowing that I stood there with hundreds of other people who recognised the human suffering of the arms trade was profoundly moving, energising and restorative. You can find out more about the DSEi arms fair and the campaign against it by visiting [Stop the Arms Fair](https://www.stopthearmsfair.org.uk).

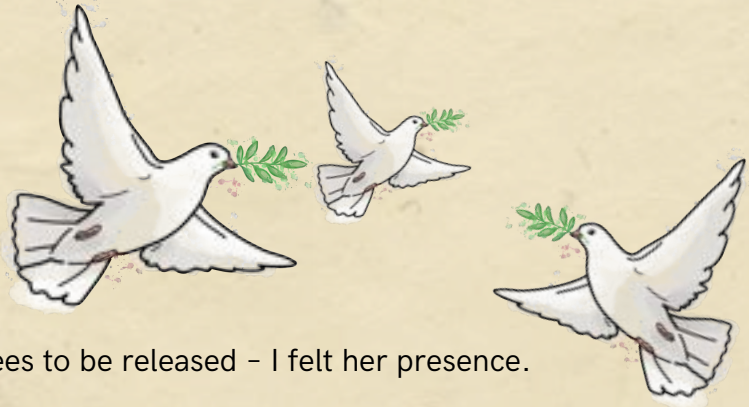
--Lizzy



# No Faith in War: Reflections from the Arms Fair

The presence of God is all around us. The difficult thing is being aware of her presence. Sat in the middle of a road, surrounded by people, singing and praying – I felt her presence. As the police began arresting Quakers in the middle of an act of worship – I felt her presence. Hearing the repeated chant sung:

**Dear Friends. Dear Friends.  
Let me tell you what I know.  
You have given me such treasures.  
I love you so.**



I felt her presence.

Sat in a police station waiting for arrestees to be released – I felt her presence.

The No Faith In War day on the 3rd September was part of a wider protest against the DSEI Arm's Fair that is held at the ExCEL Centre in London every 2 years. The aim of the protests was to disrupt the setting up of the Arms fair by blocking the roads leading up to the gates. Leading up to the No Faith In War day I didn't really know what to expect. I just knew that I believe in peace and that war is never the answer. But what I didn't expect was the strong sense of community among strangers. The abundant generosity we all shared. The fact that despite our differences and disagreements, we stood united in our individual desires to see a more peaceful and just world. We were all united in our belief in peace.

It was hard looking at the ExCEL centre and looking at the weapons that did get in. Physically, those weapons are just pieces of metal. However, they are used to fuel war and conflict that lead to civilian displacement, the emergence of extreme views, and ultimately the death of innocent lives. In the past it has been proven that UK law has been broken at this Arms Fair. Yet the police put so many resources into ensuring that it happens. They were actively enabling an Arms Fair that will lead to the facilitation of oppression which our government claims to be against. As the police began arresting protestors for obstructing the road it felt like they'd got it all the wrong way round. The police who are meant to protect us and uphold UK law were enabling the selling of weapons at a fair that has previously broken UK law.

When the police did move in and begin arresting people they did it whilst a Quaker meeting was taking place in the road. However, instead of fleeing, people stayed - they continued praying and singing. Watching police arresting worshipping protestors whilst singing songs of peace was such a surreal experience that I feel so blessed to have been part of.

**In the end the Arms Fair did go ahead, but what matters is that we all stood up for what we believed in. We showed people that not everyone believes war is okay. Blessed are the peacemakers.**



--Jack

# The Big One: Praying at Parliament

When Extinction Rebellion (XR) announced on social media that they were aiming to get 100,000 people outside Parliament to put pressure on the UK government to act on climate change, I knew I had to be there. The climate crisis is such a dominating and complex issue that it is easy to feel like the small acts don't matter. By being there I was hoping to make a big impact and ease my anxieties surrounding the thousands and thousands of people already displaced due to climate change. So, with my make-shift canvas sign reading, 'People over Profit' complete with a handle made from an old piece of wood I found in the garage at home, I made my train journey from Leeds to London.

I met SCM at the Faith hub where young people from a collection of different faith organisations, were to lead a service. SCM asked me if I wanted to be part of the service and read from the book of James, chapter 2 verses 14-26; declaring these words right next to Westminster was my chance to shout truth to power; I put my faith into action and challenge others to do the same, to play my part in a universal fight for freedom. However, this was also a peaceful protest and spending time in prayer and singing hymns also felt important. We sang some classic hymns, and some I had never heard before, within a community I felt truly included in. This felt almost restorative - restorative of past hurt but also of a future without hope.

--Emily, an extract from [Movement Issue 168](#)



## Moving My Money

As a student, I chose to bank with a big high street bank that gave me a free railcard and a decent overdraft. What I didn't know at the time, was that my bank was also financing the arms industry, including nuclear weapons manufacturers.

As I grew to understand the power that banks wield, I decided to switch to a bank that was more in line with the change I wanted to see in the world. My involvement with SCM challenged me to take Christian discipleship seriously - to engage with big issues in society and take steps to act more justly. Moving my money became part of my attempt to 'seek peace and pursue it' (Psalm 34:14).

Do bank switches make a difference? As with any individual financial decision - like buying Fairtrade products or boycotting fast fashion - we add impact by being part of a bigger movement and holding companies and institutions to account. By inspiring others to switch, telling our old bank why we are leaving, calling for policy change, we put pressure on the banking sector to put people and planet first. Lots of Christians are choosing to switch to a greener bank as part of their climate action. Will you join the [movement](#)?



Want to also make a switch?

Use our resource [here](#) to help!

-Rosie Venner, Programme Manager, JustMoney Movement SCM Friend.

# Revolutionary Gardening



Barack Obama has a fantastic story that he told during his first presidential campaign. We haven't the space to tell the whole story but it crescendos with a mantra: if one voice can change a room, then it can change a town, and if it can change a town, it can change a city, and if it can change a city, it can change the nation, and if it can change the nation, it can change the world.

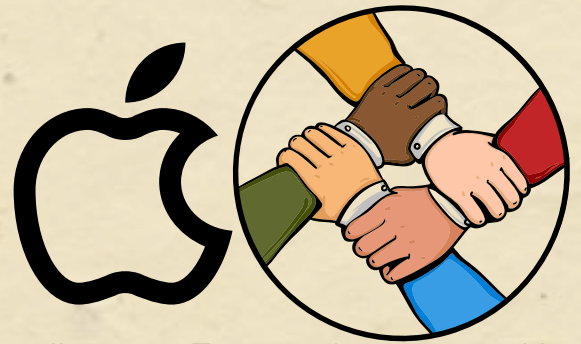
I believe that the 'simple' act of growing food can change the world. Our food systems are part of a global power structure, a structure that exploits and oppresses in the global south for the privilege of global northern consumption and the economic benefit of an incredibly small group. That oppression takes form in the guise of land grabs, environmental degradation, poor working conditions, unpaid labour, and so much more.

However, it is important to note that growing food is not some benevolent rescue mission performed by the powerful on behalf of the meek – absolutely not. In the Global North, we are all incredibly vulnerable and, on the most part, completely disconnected from our food supplies. We are beholden to a tiny minority of big agri-businesses, and their only concern is profit. Growing food is about mutual emancipation. We are at once complicit in the global food system, but also victims of it.

Growing food, then, is about an act of solidarity and interdependence. In the global south there are some fantastic movements that have emerged to resist domination in the name of food. Via Campesina are one such group that work internationally to articulate the rights of peasants to retain stewardship over the land they live on and to grow food for the needs of their community. It makes clear that the relationship they hold to the land is key to their identity and their humanity.

The eagle eyed among you will see that there are some pretty interesting theological and biblical themes that emerge connected to land, who we are as humans made in the image of God, stewardship, and not least issues of social justice and oppression. Throughout the bible there is a constant shadow cast over the Israelites; that shadow is the various empires that emerged throughout the course of history. There are numerous examples that we encounter through God's story; the Babylonian, Egyptian, and then later the Roman empires. God's story with the Israelites throughout is a consistent message of liberation for the oppressed and dominated. God promises the Israelites land, and freedom to live out God's distinctive desire for the world. In the global south, corporate land grabs and environmental degradation are doing huge harm to people and planet, and in the global north a similar pattern of privatisation of space and subjectivity to food systems that we have little control over. I believe that guerrilla gardening provides us an opportunity to join in God's work of an inclusive Kingdom by transforming our communal relationship to land and space for the common good.

# Unionising Apple



In my previous job as a retail worker, I spoke with colleagues about our working conditions, and many of us felt that work-life balance was poor, pay was low compared to the companies' profits, and there was a lack of transparency regarding pay. To try and counteract this we decided to join a trade union and begin organising our workplace. Eventually we successfully won union recognition. There were certainly mistakes made along the way as none of us had done any organising work before. Even when employees achieve union recognition in a workplace it is always necessary to continue to organise. So, whether you are in a unionised or non-unionised workplace there is much that can be done to strengthen the union in a workplace and to push for worker's right and justice.

None of this work is easy and as with all human organisations they are messy and complicated. The biggest challenge in my previous workplace was the Monaghan report which was a report detailing the sexism and misogyny present in GMB union, the very tool intended for worker's liberation and empowerment had been used by those in power to harass, abuse and subjugate others. That is why in all our work to improve our workplaces there is a need for solidarity and intersectionality. We must recognise that our working relationships are affected by our differing identities and that even if we are in a good position personally that we must act in support of our colleagues. Our greatest exemplar as Christians in this work is Jesus Christ as Hebrews 4:15 says, "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are". Jesus demonstrates God's solidarity with humanity, and we should follow this example by acting in solidarity with our colleagues, locally and globally, recognising that for many workers in the supply chains of our workplaces, they do not have the same legal protections that we have available to us in the UK.

-William, extract from blog '[Trade Unions in the UK](#)'

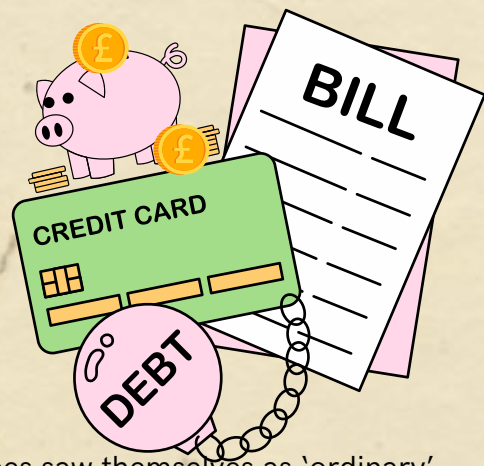
# Peace protest



One of the first interactions I had with SCM was at the peace protest against the DSEI arms fair in 2021. There is something powerful about holding a space of peace in the chaos of London. However, the most poignant moment of the vigil was the way in which we were forced to stand. Initially, the plan was for the protestors to hold a silent vigil within the gates of the Excel centre in London. However, as we began filing in, the security decided that too many people had turned up, and we weren't all allowed in because of 'health and safety'. The irony of stopping a peaceful vigil because of 'safety' when weapons are being sold and dealt inside did not go unmissed. However, it forced us to build a circle through the gates of the excel centre. This created an even more powerful image as we were divided by a wall but the community we made could not be broken. The symbolism of this is unavoidable, as around the world walls are there to break apart communities- but as folk-singer Grace Petrie so aptly puts it; "You build a wall, we'll build a ladder".

--Phoebe

# “People were listening to me.”



Kath Carter and Maureen Hagan from Stockton-on-Tees saw themselves as 'ordinary' mothers and grandmothers. But they found they could make real change by speaking out and telling their stories.

They got involved with Thrive, an organisation set up by Church Action on Poverty to work with local people in Stockton to tackle poverty in the area.

Kath, Maureen and other local people had shared their anger at being exploited and ripped off by high-cost lenders. Unable to get credit elsewhere, they were forced to pay astronomical rates of interest. And one particular company provided televisions with a coin meter attached. If you didn't regularly make payments towards your debt, you couldn't watch TV.

Jesus wasn't afraid to take direct action. The story of how he turned over the money-lenders' tables and threw them out of the temple is a powerful challenge to modern Christians. Do we get angry about injustice, or do we prefer to keep things polite and respectful? Are we prepared to challenge the powerful structures that trap people in poverty?

With that in mind, the 'Rip-off TV' campaign was born, aiming to challenge not just the extortionate interest rates charged to people on low incomes, but also the intrusive, stigmatising use of devices like the coin meter.

Kath, Maureen and the other local campaigners tried to get the company's CEO to meet them but they were ignored. So they made a comedy YouTube video satirising the high-cost lenders, and used it to mobilise Church Action on Poverty's campaigners across the UK. When hundreds of people emailed the CEO and pressed him to listen to his customers' concerns, he promised to meet with them ... but then pulled out at the last minute. But the campaigners persisted. When people started ringing his office and asking to talk about the issue, he realised that he would have to really do something.

The CEO met with his customers - and when they met face to face as human beings, he began to understand the impact of his company's practices. He became an ally.

Since other companies needed to be challenged too, he helped the activists to set up a roundtable event in Westminster, chaired by a bishop and attended by many of the high-cost lending companies, as well as the local people who had started the whole process. It led to a new code that regulated some of the worst practices in the industry.

Maureen said: "People were listening to me. A nana, a mother, a normal everyday person. It was electrifying."

It was one key step in a struggle that eventually led to proper regulation, and many of the worst-offending high-cost lenders went out of business. It came about because the real experts - people like Maureen and Kath, affected by the issues - stood up and challenged the people in power.

--Extract from Church Action on Poverty's anthology, *Dignity, Agency, Power*



# The Pilgrimage Against Poverty

Nearly a quarter of a century ago, as the world was counting down to the year 2000, hundreds of people took part in an extraordinary 670-mile journey.

The Pilgrimage Against Poverty, organised by Church Action on Poverty, shone a light on poverty in the UK and pressed for change, mobilising and energising supporters all over the country as never before.

The pilgrims began on the Scottish island of Iona in August 1999, and ended nine weeks later in London. Seven people walked the entire route. Dozens more completed long stretches. And hundreds joined in for a few hours at a time, walking through their own village, town or region. Along the way, the pilgrims prayed, visited local groups and projects, listened and learned, and discussed how poverty could be ended.

"I had no experience of anything like that before, and it was a magical time," recalls Val Simcock, one of the Pilgrims. "We became a close-knit group, and I recall we always seemed to be walking in sunshine. It was a time of prayer and penance as well as pilgrimage. We started every day with prayer and ended every day with a time of reflection."

"Our accommodation was very varied – sometimes we slept on church hall floors and at others we would be taken in pairs to sleep in the houses of local people. I am always reminded of this experience when I hear the Gospel story of Jesus sending out the disciples to spread his message – they too were totally dependent on the generosity of strangers for their bed and board. For me it was quite frightening but also liberating to have to put my total trust in God for all that I needed and the path I was to walk each day."

Another Pilgrim, Pat Devlin, says: "It was the strongest experience of church I have ever had and I do not think I was alone in that. There was a real strong solidarity and camaraderie. It made me realise what it is to be part of the body of Christ – if one suffers, we all suffer."

--Extract from Church Action on Poverty's anthology, *Dignity, Agency, Power*

**We are not to simply bandage  
the wounds of victims beneath  
the wheels of injustice, we are to  
drive a spoke into the wheel  
itself”**

**-DIETRICH BONHOEFFER**

