



Economic Mythbusters course

Additional material for Quaker participants: Week 3 (for session Tues 28 May)

Each week QPSW will provide Quaker participants on the Mythbusters course with additional preparatory information to help link the course content to Quaker Concerns and to support independent study, reflection or action. Material will usually consist of extracts from Quaker writings or minutes that QPSW staff consider particularly pertinent to or which may help to provide a useful frame of reference for that week's Mythbusters topic and the general course content provided by nef.

This additional material should be treated as optional (but recommended!) reading. Participants may also have their own ideas about relevant Quaker writings. If so, feel free to use them. We would also encourage you to share your favourite writings with QPSW staff via Mythbusters@quaker.org.uk

Our suggested readings for Week 3 concern the Quaker testimony to equality as well as ethical and spiritual observations on poverty and austerity. We hope that these will offer useful perspectives on the content of the session.

Reading 1

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the Lord your God.

Leviticus 23, 22 (NRSV)

Reading 2

We are distressed that the United Kingdom has now a greater disparity in incomes than at any time since the 1930s. We know the government intends to make cuts, but we object to it being at the expense of those who are unable to work. We reject judgemental labels and affirm our testimony to equality, and ask that an equality statement be issued to the media. We support the lobbying of the House of Lords in relation to the Welfare Reform Bill, and in particular to challenge the benefit cap which takes no regard of family size and could split families; and the cut to the mobility elements of the Disability Living Allowance. Letters from Friends to the press may also assist.

We encourage all Friends to lobby their MPs, and to ask for wiser use of public money, rather than expenditure on war.

Our local meetings could consider introducing a living wage instead of the national minimum wage.

Our Quaker based work in Law for All and Quaker Social Action are models of working we would like to see established more widely.

We will need to be prepared to lobby for greater contributions from the wealthy. Our representation to government, to be effective, needs to argue clearly that increasing poverty now creates greater social and financial costs later.

***Meeting for Sufferings of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain,
1 October 2011***

Reading 3

In the beginning of time, the great Creator, Reason, made the Earth to be a common treasury, to preserve beasts, birds, fishes, and man, the lord that was to govern this Creation; for man had domination given to him, over the beasts, birds, and fishes; but not one word was spoken in the beginning that one branch of mankind should rule over another.

And the reason is this: every single man, male and female, is a perfect creature of himself; and the same Spirit that made the globe, dwells in man to govern the globe; so that the flesh of man being subject to Reason, his maker, hath him to be his teacher and ruler within himself...

But... selfish imaginations taking possession of the five senses, and ruling as king in the room of Reason therein, and working with covetousness, did set up one man to teach and rule over another; and thereby the Spirit was killed, and man was brought into bondage, and became a greater slave to such of his own kind, than the beasts of the field were to him.

And hereupon the Earth (which was made to be a common treasury of relief for all, both beasts and men) was hedged in to enclosures by the teachers and rulers, and the others were made servants and slaves. And that Earth that is within this Creation made a common store-house for all, is bought and sold, and kept in the hands of a few, whereby the great Creator is mightily dishonoured, as if he were a respecter of persons, delighting in the comfortable livelihood of some, and rejoicing in the miserable poverty and straits of others. From the beginning it was not so.

***Gerard Winstanley, The True Levellers' Standard Advanced, 1649
(written shortly before he became one of the first Quakers)***

Reading 4

Our hearts go out to those suffering from poverty, hunger and the destructive effects of inequality. It is horrifying to us that people in our rich society in the twenty-first century – and in our own town - go hungry....

We also recognise the force of various question marks over food banks, most of all that the fast expansion of food banks in the UK may act as a distraction from addressing the underlying causes of poverty, inequality and social injustice, especially through government action, and that they provide only a “sticking plaster” solution...

We also recognise that the food bank movement might provide a vehicle for sharpened protest against

injustice, and influence on public attitudes, and that if Quakers were involved in the movement, they might be able to contribute to this advocacy, and perhaps to essential action in other forms.

Luton Friends Meeting, 2013

Reading 5

How many distressed souls and helpless orphans lie in our streets as the dry bones in the valley. They are our neighbours, our flesh and blood, our relations, our children, however mean contemptible they may now appear. How much is owing to birth and education that hath made the difference between them and us? Was it our virtue and their vice that made the difference? Had we any capacity before we were born?

John Bellers, Epistle to Friends, 1718

Quaker Peace & Social Witness
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