



Economic Mythbusters course

Additional material for Quaker participants: Week 7 (for session 25th June)

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 7 highlight several Quaker and other perspectives on the issues of class, welfare support, disability, poverty and inequality.

Reading 1

The following is a letter to the Daily Telegraph, printed on 7th June 2013, regarding misleading and inaccurate statements made by ministers about those on benefits. Among other Church representatives, Recording Clerk Paul Parker signed the letter on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting. A letter was also sent to Prime Minister David Cameron.

April saw some of the most controversial and wide-ranging changes to the benefits system in a generation. Policies affecting the lives of millions of the most vulnerable people in our society were introduced. In a letter to the Prime Minister, we have highlighted three demonstrably untrue claims made by politicians in support of these reforms.

These are, that 900,000 disability claimants stopped claiming sickness benefit "rather than" face a medical assessment; that 8,000 people had got into employment as a result of the total benefits cap policy; and that there was a rush of claims for Disability Living Allowance before new rules introduced a tough medical assessment.

All three of these statements have drawn on high-quality Government statistical data which has then been misused and misinterpreted. All serve to undermine the credibility of benefit claimants.

The signatories of this letter hold no common view on welfare reform. However, we do hold the view that these misrepresentations deny people the respect and dignity that they are due.

We are calling on the Prime Minister to ensure that these untruths are corrected, and that similar statements are no longer allowed to pollute the public debate.

The Revd Stephen Keyworth (The Baptist Union of Great Britain), **The Right Revd Nick Baines** (Bishop of Bradford), **Niall Cooper** (National Coordinator, Church Action on Poverty), **Alison Gelder** (Chief Executive of Housing Justice), **The Revd R. Kenneth Lindsay** (President of the Methodist Church in Ireland), **The Revd Dr Mark Wakelin** (President of the Methodist Conference), **The Revd Robert Hopcroft** (Chairman of the Moravian Church in Great Britain and Ireland), **Paul Parker** (Recording Clerk, Quakers in Britain), **The Revd Sally Foster-Fulton** (Convener of the Church and Society Council, the Church of Scotland), **(The Very Revd Ian D Barcroft)** Convener, Church in Society Committee, Scottish Episcopal Church, **The Revd Roberta Rominger** (General Secretary of the United Reformed Church), **The Revd Carol Wardman** (Bishops' Adviser for Church and Society, the Church in Wales).

For more information on this joint statement visit: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/news-and-events/news-releases/bishops-and-church-leaders-call-on-government-ministers-to-apologise>

Reading 2

A public statement by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain agreed in session at London Yearly Meeting 22-25 May 1987:

Quakers in Britain have felt called to issue this statement in order to address a matter of urgent national priority to promote debate and to stimulate action.

We are angered by actions which have knowingly led to the polarisation of our country - into the affluent, who epitomise success according to the values of a materialistic society, and the 'have-leasts', who by the expectations of that same society are oppressed, judged, found wanting and punished.

We value that of God in each person, and affirm the right of everyone to contribute to society and share in life's good things, beyond the basic necessities.

We commit ourselves to learning again the spiritual value of each other. We find ourselves utterly at odds with the priorities in our society which deny the full human potential of millions of people in this country. That denial diminishes us all. There must be no 'them' and 'us'.

We appreciate the stand taken by other churches and we wish to work alongside them.

As a Religious Society and as individuals we commit ourselves to examine again how we use our personal and financial resources. We will press for change to enable wealth and power to be shared more evenly within our nation. We make this statement publicly at a time of national decision [a general election] in the hope that, following the leadings of the Spirit, each one of us in Britain will take appropriate action.

Reading 3

Quaker Faith & Practice 23.64

There is much work to be done which is not paid, but which is vital, desperately undervalued and undertaken to a large extent by women. I refer, of course, to caring for children and/or elderly disabled relatives and homemaking. The work itself is often hard, stressful, mundane and repetitive, unseen and

unacknowledged, with low status. We need a transformation of our attitudes to this work, giving it all the esteem it deserves. Experience of running a household teaches innumerable management skills, but these skills are often not perceived by employers as useful to them. Self-image is extremely poor in this group, not because they do not make a contribution but because their contribution is not appreciated.

Another reason for the low self-image of this group is one of the primary indicators of status in our society - income. Caring for a family is unpaid and therefore low status... We must value the work done by carers in a domestic situation because it is essential to the wellbeing of individuals and the community; bringing up the next generation should never be undervalued...

Related to the unpaid caring work carried out in many families is the voluntary work on which our communities depend which is, by definition, unpaid. Without volunteers many of the statutory services would be overwhelmed...

Voluntary work gives the sense of being able to give something - whether in time, money or expertise - and that is precious to the person doing the giving. The feeling of having contributed, the satisfaction of a job lovingly done, is the reward. We should not regard voluntary work as of less value because it is unpaid and the rewards intangible, nor should we exploit the goodwill of volunteers...

Whichever sphere of activity we are involved in, we have to be responsive to the Spirit's leadings and try to put into practice our deepest beliefs, for our faith is a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week faith, which is not excluded from our workplace, wherever that may be. Everything in the end can be distilled to relationships - our relationships with each other and the earth. Our work must benefit our relationships rather than damage them, and we must ensure that neither the earth nor other people are exploited. Caring, not exploitation, is the key.

Jane Stokes, 1992

Reading 4

Quaker Faith & Practice 20.63

So much has the public conscience been warped from the living Truth that a man who has acquired wealthy by operations on the Stock Exchange is spoken of as having "made" his money regardless of whether any useful purpose has been served. One who identifies the status quo with the divine law regards such an accession of wealth as something to be accepted with thankful heart like manna from heaven. True enlightenment would show that, if nothing has been given in return, the wealth so gained has been misappropriated and the whole transaction, though sanctioned by law and custom, is, in its essence, a violation of the eighth commandment.

Shipley N Brayshaw, 1933

Reading 5

As he [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him".

John 9, 1-3 (The Bible, NRSV)

Reading 6

When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist.

Helder Camara, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, 1964-1985

QPSW

18 June 2013