



Economic Mythbusters course

Additional material for Quaker participants: Weeks 5 and 6 (for sessions Tues 11 and 18 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 5 are mainly about the Quaker testimony to equality, as a Concern which we see as underpinning the conversation on tax.

Reading 1

Statement on equality

"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."

Quaker faith and practice 23.21

A commitment to equality is a hallmark of the world's great religions and a foundation of our Quaker faith . We are called by our experience of equality to voice deep concern over the widening gulf between rich and poor. Equality is the heart of good relationships. It is about our right to equal respect, regardless of gender, race, sexuality, health, disability, nationality, age or social class. It is the cornerstone of a society that affirms our common humanity and recognises wellbeing and human fulfilment as the desire of us all. A society that values equality cannot restrict the goods and benefits of society to any one country, caste or class.

We applaud progress that has been made towards equality in some parts of the world but lament the gross disparity between the life chances of those born in the wealthier countries and those born in the poorer

countries, and the continued widespread poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition in many parts of the world. Quakers in Britain deplore the increasing concentration of economic authority and the social stratification that transmits inequality across generations. We are angered that the UK now has a greater disparity in income than at any time since the Second World War and are compelled to speak out against government policy that makes cuts in spending that promote inequality. We challenge the culture and ethos that enable the leaders of finance and industry to take salaries and bonuses that are many hundreds of times larger than those of their employees. Deepening economic inequality cannot continue indefinitely without a risk of violence and oppression. We are dismayed that the government is giving so little consideration to the long term impacts of spending cuts on whole communities. Under-investment and short term accounting are putting the wellbeing of future generations at risk.

Quakers strive to uphold the values of justice and equality in the face of spending cuts that increase poverty and have a disproportionate impact on the poorest among us. Sacrifices shared can strengthen our society. We urge policy makers to address the deficit through a fairer tax system and measures that increase solidarity.

“...what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”
Micah 6.8

New International Version

Approved by Meeting for Sufferings by minute S/12/03/3, 31 March 2012.

Reading 2

3a.1. Our testimony to equality stems from our underpinning conviction that we are all equally children of God. It sets us against the prevailing inegalitarian temper of the times. The prevailing belief is that the individual should keep more and more of what they are given through employment or investment, to spend as much as you wish. This has led to massively increased inequality in British society. It has also meant that there is less available for decent standards in our common life – for instance, in education, housing, health provision and the maintenance of our public spaces. There is more public squalor than there should be, and more private affluence too...and these are two sides of the same coin.

3a.2. If the economic system is based on giving individuals free reign and the political consensus is that the resulting inequalities should not be markedly reduced by taxation, then we believe society will remain deeply divided and crime will be widespread; there will be too little sense of community. Indeed, in such conditions of gross inequality of wealth and power, it will be impossible to create the equality of esteem which we believe is central to any faith which see all human beings as equally children of God. We are, therefore, clear that taxation is a fit instrument for a fairer sharing of the community's resources and the provision of good services for all.

3a.on Equality and Community from *An expression in words of Britain Yearly Meeting's corporate Social Testimony drawn from the experience and understanding at this time*, prepared in draft by the BYM Co-ordinating Group on Rediscovering our Social Testimony (RSOT) at the request of Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee, and approved at Yearly Meeting 1997.

Reading 3

Protests at Barclays

Quakers have held a Meeting for Worship in a high street bank as part of a protest against corporate tax avoidance. Around twenty Friends peacefully entered Barclay's Bank in Cornmarket, Oxford, on Saturday and sat down in the public area.

Protests were held at Barclay's branches across the UK after the company admitted to paying only around one per cent of its profits in tax. They said they had paid £113m in UK corporation tax in 2009 despite record profits of £11.6bn. This is legal due to the company's financial arrangements, which involve subsidiary companies in the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands and the Cayman Islands.

Most of the Friends involved in the Oxford protest were visiting the city for Young Friends' General Meeting (YFGM), which took place over the weekend. They were joined by local supporters of UK Uncut, who argue that cracking down on tax avoidance is an alternative to the government's cuts.

Chris Wood, a YFGM member from Nuneaton, told the Friend that the protest formed 'part of a wider campaign to protect public services and oppose the cuts'.

The Friends spent around half an hour in the bank, including about ten minutes of Meeting for Worship. Police were called but allowed the protest to continue as long it did not block access to the bank. The Friends raised their concerns with customers and one family came over to join them.

Chris Wood said he considered the protest effective because it had helped customers and staff to make the links between corporate tax avoidance and cuts to public services. He insisted: 'In taking this action, we were witnessing to a higher power that has created us all equal'.

By Symon Hill

***Originally published in The Friend, 24 02 2011 and reproduced here with permission
Available at <http://thefriend.org/article/protests-at-barclays/>***

Reading 4

Are you honest and truthful in word and deed? Do you maintain strict integrity in your business transactions and in your relations with individuals and organisations? Are you personally scrupulous and responsible in the use of money entrusted to you, and are you careful not to defraud the public revenue?

Queries, 1964

Quaker faith & practice 20.43