



Earth and Economy



Quaker Peace & Social Witness Sustainability & Peace and Economic Issues programmes

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Quakers board the tax justice bus



Some of those who boarded the bus, including the Most Reverend the Primus, Scottish Episcopal Church; the Bishop of Scotland; the Moderator of the Church of Scotland; and the Head of Christian Aid Scotland. Photo: Christian Aid

On 24 August a 'tax justice bus' began a 40-day tour of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The bus tour spread the message of how tax dodging hurts the poor to thousands of people.

£35 billion of tax revenue is lost every year in the UK because many multi-national companies are engaging in legal tax dodging. In fact, 98 out of the FTSE 100 companies operate subsidiary companies in offshore tax havens, potentially allowing the companies and their clients to avoid huge sums in tax.

Every pound lost in tax revenue is another pound that can't be spent on essential public services. The current government has engaged in a round of spending cuts which

amounts to about £30 billion a year. There has been widespread concern, both inside and outside Britain Yearly Meeting, about the impact the spending cuts are having on the most vulnerable in our society. By permitting the current scale of tax dodging while at the same time making such large spending cuts, the government is effectively making a choice to withdraw services from the poorest and most vulnerable rather than get tough on multinational companies. This doesn't just happen in the UK or Europe; tax injustice is a global issue. Developing countries are losing out on an estimated \$160bn a year: more than one and a half times the global aid budget!

The bus tour, organised by Christian Aid and Church Action on Poverty, raised the profile of tax injustice and made specific demands for financial transparency as the basis for ending it:

1. Country-by-country reporting

Currently companies only have to publish their global profits, so it's very hard to see where they make money and where they pay their taxes. If companies had to publish the profits they make and the taxes they pay in each country where they operate, governments in poor (and rich) countries could see more easily where tax dodging is occurring.

2. Automatic information exchange

Tax havens are not legally obliged to share information about the companies that use them. Without access to this information it is very difficult for governments to retrieve all tax owed to them.

The campaign has asked David Cameron to use the opportunity of the G8 (the forum for the governments of eight of the world's largest economies) meeting in 2013, which the UK is hosting, to raise these issues.

Alison Prout, staff member at Quaker Peace & Social Witness, travelled with the bus for a week of its journey. Reflecting on her trip she said that "the bus proved to be an eye-catching sight as well as a mobile space for engaging with people, and many Quakers came on board in the towns visited. The bus also hosted influential faith leaders and meeting with MPs. I was involved in meetings with Menzies Campbell MP, Danny Alexander MP, a number of MSPs and senior Scottish religious leaders."

Quaker Peace & Social Witness is a member of the Church Action on Poverty's 'Close the Gap' Campaign, calling for fair taxes, fair pay, fair prices and a fair voice.



Photo: Christian Aid

Editorial

Welcome to *Earth and Economy*, the joint newsletter of the Economic Issues and Sustainability & Peace programmes of Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW).

We hope this newsletter will give you an insight into the work of these two programmes, and will provide you with some ideas and opportunities for action.

You will see from the 'Friends in action' and 'Conversation starter' pages that the newsletter is not just for telling Friends what QPSW is doing. It's also for Friends to share news about how they've been taking action. Please get in touch if you have something you would like to contribute.

You can also read and comment on these articles on the Quakernomics blog at www.quaker.org.uk/quakernomics.

This issue of the newsletter is edited by Sunniva Taylor, Sustainability & Peace programme manager.

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Find out more

Quakers will continue to speak out on tax justice in 2013. Keep an eye on our website for more information. To find out more about the bus tour see www.church-poverty.org.uk/taxbus

The Energy Bill: a vital opportunity for climate action

Chris Walker of the Sustainability & Peace programme writes of an opportunity to call on government for action to transform our energy system and cut carbon emissions

Quakers in Britain are calling on government to commit to ambitious action on climate change in the Energy Bill. The Bill, due to pass through Parliament at the end of 2012, will determine for years to come how the UK will produce and regulate electricity. Currently, around 40% of the country's carbon emissions derive from power plants. The Bill could determine whether the UK commits to invest in low-carbon energy, or remains reliant on fossil fuels to produce electricity.

Quakers, along with Methodists, Baptists and the United Reformed Church, are calling on decision-makers to take the opportunity to commit to build a renewables-based energy system by 2030. The faith groups are also calling for almost entire cuts in carbon emissions from power plants by 2030. Quakers across the country have contacted at least 30 MPs about the issue. Some groups have written collectively as a meeting. Oxford Local Meeting contacted four local MPs including David Cameron.

Research commissioned by WWF-UK shows how with the right financial and political support, renewables could meet at least 60% of UK electricity demand by 2030. This percentage could increase if energy demand was reduced and if the power grid was interconnected with other European countries.

However, the Bill has caused concern amongst campaigners and those in the renewables industry. Many argue that under a proposed new system of financial support, renewables companies and independent generators would lose out to large fossil fuels and nuclear companies.

The Bill also shows inadequate ambition to cut greenhouse emissions, and proposes increased reliance on gas plants. Details of the



Photo: CC/ Charles Cook

Bill suggest that coal, the most polluting fossil fuel, could have a significant role in the UK's energy future. Even with new Carbon Capture & Storage technologies fitted – which stop a proportion of CO₂ being released into the atmosphere during the generation process – gas and coal plants could still emit high levels of emissions. Evidence suggests that new forms of gas and coal extraction, such as shale-gas fracturing or 'fracking', also lead to dangerous levels of emissions.

Britain Yearly Meeting staff, along with representatives from other Free Churches, engaged with Ministers and MPs on the issue at the three main party conferences earlier this Autumn. Staff are also meeting with members of the House of Lords to call on peers to ensure the bill will tackle the UK's climate impact.

Get involved

There will be further opportunities for action on the Energy Bill in the new year. For updates on our Energy Bill campaign and other sustainability issues, and to read the detailed policy briefing on the Bill visit www.quaker.org.uk/speak-out or read upcoming *Earth & Economy* e-updates.

Indian land march highlights the cost of inequitable development

Suzanne Ismail, Economic Issues programme manager, finds out more

A 50,000 person-strong land march has secured a major victory in the non-violent struggle for land reform in India. The march, or Jansatyagraha, was led by Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) partner Ekta Parishad and saw poor and landless people from all over the country walk for nine days between the cities of Gwalior and Agra. Originally intended to continue to Delhi, the march was halted when the Indian government signed an agreement setting out concrete measures for land reform.

Secure access to land is a massive problem for India's poorest people, many of whom are Dalits (the 'lowest' Caste) or Adivasis (tribal people). Through its work in communities across India, Ekta Parishad has witnessed how poor families are being driven off the land by tactics that include intimidation, violence and deception. QPSW staff member Gerald Conyngham heard some of these stories for himself, having taken part in both the recent Jansatyagraha and a similar march in 2007. For example, one family told how a company took their land having produced papers that 'proved' it owned the land. Later on it became apparent that the documents were forgeries.

The common backdrop to all these stories is the Indian government, who push an economic development path that prioritises economic growth and seems to assume that its benefits will automatically 'trickle down' to the poor. In the process poor people are being pushed off their land so it can be used for activities such as intensive farming, aquaculture, tourism, mining and the building of factories and 'special economic zones'. Undoubtedly some of this will help create jobs and contribute to poverty reduction; nevertheless the benefits are bypassing or actively harming the 'poorest of the poor'. Many of the industries highlighted above exist for export to industrialised countries



Photo: Gerald Conyngham

like the UK or are financed by money raised in financial centres like the City of London, showing how a globalised, consumer-driven, international economic system connects almost all of us to these injustices.

The agreement signed between Ekta Parishad and the Indian government includes the principle that every poor household will be entitled to a parcel of land. It also sets out steps to improve the land registration and judicial systems. Ekta Parishad will be a key player in the developing reforms. The struggle for land reform in India is far from over; nevertheless the Jansatyagraha has brought it a significant step closer and has shown how mass non-violent protest can bring about policy change.

Find out more

Show solidarity with landless communities by asking your local or area meeting to sign the Jansatyagraha solidarity statement at www.quaker.org.uk/ekta-parishad-documents

Reversing the flow

Steven Heywood, Quaker United Nations Office Geneva, writes about the new report he authored



Photos: Steven Heywood (left); <http://mochiladeviajes.blogspot.com> (right)

A new paper from the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) in Geneva has challenged the popular idea that climate change will inevitably lead to more conflict over natural resources. The report, entitled *Reversing the Flow: cooperation over international water resources*, explores the links between climate change, water scarcity, conflict and cooperation, and finds that international 'water wars' have been very rare. Leading water experts found that only one war over water has ever taken place – in 2500BC – and that situations like the Darfur conflict, which has been called the first 'climate change war', actually resulted from a number of social and economic contexts, of which the environment is only one.

There is evidence from around the world that cooperation is not only possible, but is seen by countries as the most rational way to secure water for the future. Once in place, agreements are robust – the Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan was still adhered to even during the two wars fought by those nations, and disputes over how to use the river have been solved amicably. In the Trifinio region of Central America water cooperation has been used with the specific aim of increasing peace, development and integration across borders in remote regions.

The paper argues that the focus on climate change as a security threat and a cause of

war can create a self-fulfilling prophecy and a misallocation of resources into the military, with countries trying to protect against future 'climate wars' rather than mitigating their causes in the first place. Without being complacent about the risks, countries could instead focus on sharing the multiple benefits of water, ensuring that this vital resource is conserved and used wisely in the future.

The report was positively received in a recent side-event at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva

QUNO Geneva, which focuses on a number of issues of concern to Quakers at the European headquarters of the UN, has been developing its Human Impacts of Climate Change programme over the past year. As well as looking at the possibilities for cooperation over natural resources, staff have attended UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) climate negotiations, and is looking at ways to address the topic of climate change and migration.

Find out more

Reversing the flow is available to download at www.quno.org, where you can also read more about the work of QUNO Geneva.

Deep ecology: an introduction

by Sunniva Taylor, Sustainability & Peace programme manager

In 2011, when Britain Yearly Meeting committed to becoming a low-carbon, sustainable community, it arose from 'a concern for the Earth and well-being of all who dwell in it' (Minute 36, YMG 2009). What did Friends mean by the word 'all', and how might this shape what we do? An exploration of the deep ecology movement may provide some starting points for reflection.

Deep ecology is founded on two basic principles. Firstly, the scientific insight that all life on Earth is interrelated and of equal value, including human beings. Deep ecologists believe that we have no privilege over the rest of life. They reject anthropocentrism (human-centeredness). The second founding principle is that of the need for what they call 'human self-realisation' of our ecological selves, by which they mean identification with the whole of the ecosphere, including the trees and animals, as much as with our own egos and immediate families. Deep ecologists believe that this would result in a radical shift in consciousness and lead to behaviour more consistent with the well-being of all life. We wouldn't do certain things to damage the Earth, just as a healthy person would not commit self-harm.

The term 'deep ecology' was coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1972, and he helped to provide the theoretical foundation to the philosophy. He derived the eight point 'Deep Ecology Platform' (see box), which helps to explain the basic views shared by proponents of deep ecology. From the philosophy has grown a movement committed to redesigning our whole systems – including our economic systems – based on values and methods that truly preserve the ecological and cultural diversity of natural systems.

What does this mean in practice? Arne Naess considers a shallow ecological approach to be the belief that the big environmental problems that we face can be overcome within our capitalist, industrial society, and that much of the environmental movement is concerned with



Photo: Blmiers2/Flickr

protecting the planet for the sake of humans, rather than because of the intrinsic value of all life and to help maintain healthy ecosystems for their own sake. He felt that people are able to maintain this misunderstanding because of a failure to realise our deep connection to the natural world. We can overcome this through 'deep experiences', in which we feel our place within the Earth's ecosystem, identifying with nature and therefore expanding our empathy and concern to non-human life. He speaks of feeling the mountain on which he lived to be his 'father'. The Buddhist environmental activist Joanna Macy has developed a form of group work called 'the Work that Reconnects', intended to help people experience this reconnection.

According to deep ecologists 'deep experience' results in 'deep questioning' in which people question the fundamental assumptions of society, such as the notion that the Earth is a resource for the use of humans: if all life is equal we do not have the right to exploit it for our own purposes. Satish Kumar, an Indian activist and author, expresses this by saying that the river has as much right to flow as we do to live. Though we can take water to drink we should do so as though it

were a gift. We should receive with gratitude and reciprocate by looking after it and giving respect to it. Such 'deep questioning' results in a 'deep commitment' to take action to create alternatives.

Examples of this action include the development of economic alternatives that see the role of the economy as being to work for the well-being of all life. Peter Brown and Geoffrey Garver, co-authors of the book 'Right Relationship', which originates in the Moral Economy Project of the Quaker Institute for the Future in Canada, call this a 'whole earth economy'. In Bolivia the belief that all life has rights, not just humans, has been enshrined in law with the passing of the 'Law of the Rights of Mother Earth' which declares both Mother Earth and life systems (which combine human communities and ecosystems) as titleholders of inherent rights specified in the law.

Deep ecology has been criticised by some as being only 'nature mysticism' and as 'eco-fascism' stemming from the concern that respect for nature may be enforced on a majority by a minority through draconian policies. Others have said that deep ecology fails to understand that environmental problems are caused by the structures of hierarchy and oppression that have also caused social problems such as poverty. However, this has been countered by deep ecologists who say that their focus is on an end to authoritarianism and the growth of new, more localised, relationships.

Friends may wonder if and where addressing human injustices fit into the deep ecology approach. Naess said that his movement for widening compassion towards non-humans did not imply diminishing compassion towards humans. "We don't say that every living being has the same value as a human, but that it has an intrinsic value which is not quantifiable. It is not equal or unequal. It has a right to live and blossom. I may kill a mosquito if it is on the face of my baby but I will never say I have a higher right to life than a mosquito."

Friends express a range of feelings as to how far and how deep our concern for the Earth extends. It is an important conversation to continue as we discern the way forward.

The Deep Ecology Platform

1. All life has value in itself, independent of its usefulness to humans.
2. Richness and diversity contribute to life's well-being and have value in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs in a responsible way.
4. The impact of humans in the world is excessive and rapidly getting worse.
5. Human lifestyles and population are key elements of this impact.
6. The diversity of life, including cultures, can flourish only with reduced human impact.
7. Basic ideological, political, economic and technological structures must therefore change.
8. Those who accept the forgoing points have an obligation to participate in implementing the necessary changes and to do so peacefully and democratically.

This version of the Deep Ecology Platform has been formulated by those attending the Deep Ecology course at Schumacher College, May 1995.

Find out more

Guardian obituary of Arne Naess: go to www.guardian.co.uk and search "Arne Naess Walter Schwarz"

The Call of the Mountain, film about Arne Naess and deep ecology

Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy by Peter Brown and Geoffrey Garver

Satish Kumar talking about deep ecology: search on YouTube.

The work that reconnects by Joanna Macy: <http://www.joannamacy.net/theworkthatreconnects.html>

Northfield Ecocentre: from small ideas great projects grow

Judith Jenner (of the Management Committee) and Georgia Stokes (Manager) explain this exciting project of Central England Quakers

When the lease expired in 2005 on a fairly dilapidated second-hand bookshop owned by Central England Quakers, a plan emerged to refurbish it as sustainably as possible and develop an Ecocentre. It would give practical ideas, advice and information to local people in a Birmingham suburb on how to live more sustainable lives.

By the end of 2008, two part-time coordinators were employed to develop the empty building into an active community hub. Four years later Northfield Ecocentre runs numerous projects both at the centre and in the community, employs 11 part-time staff, has around 30 active volunteers and is pushing the sustainable, low-carbon agenda across the city of Birmingham.

Incredible Edible Northfield encourages growing organic food locally and supporting local produce by sharing skills, knowledge, resources and land. With Northfield's Orchards we are planting 1,400 fruit and nut trees across the constituency creating at least 30 community orchards; from that we are setting up a community harvest project to ensure locally grown fruit does not go to waste. Grow Zones encourage neighbours to help each other to start growing fruit and vegetables in their own gardens.

The Ecocentre garden is a shining example of everything we are working to achieve. Four years ago it was an overgrown wilderness; today it is a flourishing hive of activity, with fruits and vegetables in abundance planted in allotment style plots with forest, sensory and wildlife areas.

We have offered impartial, practical home energy advice at the centre and to community groups and have continued to develop our service to householders across Northfield. We now offer home visits, have three qualified Energy Performance Certificate advisors, run



Photo: Luke Olly

the only green deal pilot project in Birmingham and are working with housing associations to deliver energy advice to their tenants.

From the start everything has been done to reduce the environmental impact of running a centre. We repair, reduce, reuse, and recycle wherever we can. Our desks are made from the bookshelves left in the bookshop, and our greenhouses are made from 2-litre plastic drinks bottles. In 2011 the Ecocentre became accredited with ISO14001 and international environmental management standard.

In addition to offering practical advice we work with children, young people and their families on all aspects of sustainable living. We offer workshops to schools and children's centres, real nappy information sessions, group bike rides to inspire confidence on the road, and travel clinics.

Find out more

See www.northfieldecocentre.org for more information about the Ecocentre, including over 100 fact sheets on a wide range of issues to help you reduce the carbon emissions of your home or meeting house.

Green is working

Chris Walker, Quaker Peace & Social Witness Sustainability & Peace programme co-ordinator, reports on a photo stunt QPSW took part in

In October, Quakers joined 250 campaigners outside the Treasury to call on the government to support the emerging green economy. Groups including Quaker Peace & Social Witness, Greenpeace, Christian Aid and the RSPB, gathered in green hard hats to tell government that 'green is working!' According to the Confederation of British Industry nearly 1 million people are now employed in UK sectors that contribute towards reducing environmental impacts or adapting to environmental changes. Despite this, the government has shown little sign of providing green sectors like renewable energy with the financial support and commitments to help the UK end dependence on fossil fuels and make the economy more sustainable.

Kristin Skarsholt, a London Quaker, was outside the Treasury. "I'm here because it's so important to speak about economic justice and sustainability as the same idea," said Kristin. "It's not an either-or prospect, and many Quakers have a realistic vision about how to make the sustainable economy happen today. We need government to be bold and tap into the new thinking that is going on all around."



Join the call for a 'Jubilee for Justice'

by Alison Prout, Quaker Peace & Social Witness programme manager

Europe's debt problems are the latest in a long line of debt crises stretching back across the last thirty years. The crises may have happened in different countries across the world, but almost everywhere their costs have been born disproportionately by the poor.

According to Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) Campaigning partner, the Jubilee Debt campaign (JDC), a key factor precipitating these crises has been a 'liberalisation' process that has seen the gradual removal of laws and regulations that control the financial sector. Instead of the financial system serving the needs of people and the economy, the system has become self serving and brought the global economy to its knees.

Inspired by the ancient celebration of jubilee, a time when debts were cancelled, slaves were freed and land was redistributed, JDC is calling for a new 'jubilee for justice'. This would not just involve the cancellation of unpayable debts, but would take additional steps to prevent future debt crises. A key reform would be the

introduction of just and progressive taxation systems so that countries could draw on their own resources rather than being over-reliant on expensive foreign debt. The reintroduction of regulations to limit speculative trading and bring greater stability to the international financial system would also be necessary.

Take Action

QPSW is backing the call Jubilee for Justice. You can add your voice in a number of ways:

- Sign a 'Jubilee for Justice paper chain link' available from QPSW. One copy is included with the paper version of this newsletter.
- Ask your local or area meeting to back the call by agreeing to put its name to the 'Jubilee for Justice Faith Leaders' letter (an individual will have to sign on behalf of the Meeting). The letter can be downloaded at www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk

Church investment: witness or whitewash?

Date: Weds 13 March 2013 Time: 1–5pm
Venue: Central London – tbc

This is an Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR) conference to consider whether church investors provide a strong ethical lead and example or whether they are too conservative. It will examine the key ethical investment issues for the faith community and explore what the person in the pew can do about responsible use of money – by themselves and by their churches. There will be speakers, plenary discussion and workshops.

Justin Welby, Bishop of Durham, will be the keynote speaker. Bishop Justin is a member of the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards.

QPSW is a member of ECCR.
See www.eccr.org.uk for more information.

Trading Away Peace

QPSW has joined with 22 other non-governmental organisations across Europe to launch a report entitled Trading Away Peace: How Europe helps sustain illegal Israeli settlements.

The report highlights inconsistencies in European Union policy towards the settlements. On one hand EU high-level statements have repeatedly made clear that the settlements are illegal and constitute an obstacle to peace. Yet on the other, hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of settlement goods are imported by Europe every year. Trading Away Peace calls on European governments to adopt a range of economic measures designed to stop assisting settlement expansion. Recommendations include introducing a ban on the import of settlement goods, the exclusion of settlements from bilateral and EU level co-operation agreements and the introduction of measures to prevent financial transactions being made in support of the settlements.

See www.quaker.org.uk/settlement-produce

Progress towards a ban in trade of settlement produce

In mid-September the Irish Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade agreed to urge the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to commit to bring in a national ban on the import of goods from the illegal Israeli settlements. The Joint Committee gave their unanimous support after they received a submission from the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) and heard testimony from an Ecumenical Accompanier and the EAPPI Irish Advocacy Co-ordinator.

We are hopeful that this support will result in a national ban. While the value of trade in Ireland from the illegal settlements is relatively small, around €7–8m, Irish support is strategically very important as they take up EU presidency in 2013. This could be an important platform for them to advocate a wider EU ban in trade with the illegal settlements.

The illegal Israeli settlements in the Palestinian West Bank have long been recognised by the UN, the US and the EU as the biggest barrier

to peace in the region. Britain Yearly Meeting's Economic Issues programme is working together with our colleagues in EAPPI (the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel) to support a ban in trade.

To learn more about our work on settlement produce and to access a comprehensive briefing on the current situation, an action guide, and other resources take a look at:

www.quaker.org.uk/settlement-produce

More information on the Irish decision can be found in the following locations:

www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/breaking/2012/0919/breaking57.html

www.businessworld.ie/livenews.htm?a=2985402

The developments in Ireland come off the back of a successful Parliamentary Event held by QPSW in partnership with Christian Aid over the summer.

◆ Friends in action

Living under a flight path

by Chris Nickolay, Luton and Leighton Area Meeting

I live under the flight path of Luton airport. The noise is hugely destructive of sleep and rest – there are few restrictions on flying at night and companies like DHL use noisy cargo planes. Classes in the village school often have to stop as planes pass over. Ancient woodlands are polluted; gardens and ponds have films of pollution on them. Three miles away residents of Luton suffer as much, if not more, from noise and pollution. The noise includes night testing of engines – sometimes louder than flights themselves. And what for? Mainly holidays, short haul business and work travel, private jets and some cargo. If you fly, please think again.

Luton airport, owners and operators, have proposed expanding passenger numbers from 10 up to 18 million. There are several local and long established opposition groups – some a little tired. We will soon go into resisting planning proposals, which are bad for the neighbourhood, people, animals and Earth as a whole. A new network grew out of a community west of Luton because of recent noise blight. A meeting was convened of these groups and local and county councillors. This was, perhaps, the most C/conservative meeting I have ever been part of – I began by feeling quite uncomfortable, like a potentially naughty child who might need to be contained. However, the whole meeting recognised the need for a mix of strategies – political, legal and activist.

So, how have Friends been involved? After this meeting a smaller strategy group met in Luton Quaker Meeting House. There were three Quakers at this meeting – half of the meeting! A publicity action in my village grew from this meeting. At 8am on a Saturday morning 82 people met in the village hall under the flight path – windows open to let the noise in for cameras. Spokespeople from the airport failed to come. The BBC filmed and local newspapers

took pictures and interviews. Again there were three Quakers present. Some weeks later a small but noisy demonstration was held at the airport – out of twelve noisy people two were Quakers. At each of the meetings and events Friends have said or otherwise shown they were Quakers.

You never know who is listening or will be affected by our actions, style and intentions. These have been small actions that have reached thousands of people through TV, newspapers and internet.



Luton Airport. Photo: Diamond Geezer/ Flickr

Do you have something to share with Friends? We are always looking for contributions to the 'Friends in Action' section. Articles should be about an activity you have been involved in relating to sustainability or economics. We are particularly keen to hear from Friends about how their meeting has been involved and/or why your Quakerism motivated you to be involved. Use the contact details in the editorial box at the start of this edition if you have an idea.

Conversation starter...

Conversation starter is a space for Friends to voice a hope or concern relating to sustainability or economics, and challenge us to think about how they can act on it.

In this edition, Annie Miller from Central Edinburgh Local Meeting shares her hope for the introduction of a Basic Income scheme in the UK.

Basic Income

Hope

I hope that in a radical reform of the current UK Social Security, most National Insurance and means-tested benefits (MTBs) will be replaced with a Citizen's Income (CI) or Basic Income (BI). The current system is complex, unwieldy, inefficient and unjust. It keeps many people trapped in poverty, including one in four children. MTB withdrawals, added to income tax, discourage claimants and low-paid workers from seeking further employment. A BI is similar to a Child Benefit, but for everyone. It is defined as universal, is based on the individual, and is unconditional. The amounts can be a Full BI, a Partial BI or a Child BI.

Values

A BI scheme values all individuals, and can help to create a more united and inclusive society. It would introduce **simplicity** and transparency into the welfare system, reducing administration costs. It embodies the value of **equality**, can help to reduce poverty, and contributes to financial security. To redistribute income from wealthy to poor, men to women, and geographically, a restructured income tax system would be required.

Action

Please become familiar with the concept of a BI. The Citizen's Income Trust publishes a thrice-yearly Newsletter, (available on its website at www.citizensincome.org). A group on the continent is preparing a 'European Citizens' Initiative on Unconditional Basic Income' to put to the European Parliament. Inform your MP and MEP about a BI, and ask them to support the concept and the new project.

Questions for Friends

1. The average income per capita in the UK in 2011 was £17,690 pa (£1,474 pm). Imagine a scheme where a quarter of this is given to everyone as a Partial BI, and a further quarter is given to elderly people, those with disabilities, and unpaid carers of an adult or child, to top it up to a Full BI. This could be financed by a hypothecated, restructured income tax without any tax loopholes, and where everyone pays the same tax rate of 40% on all sources of income apart from the BI. This is economically feasible. What difference would such a BI scheme make to you, your family and friends?
2. A BI scheme can be designed to meet a set of particular objectives. What would be your priorities among the following objectives: prevent poverty; increase financial security; reduce income inequalities; restore incentives to work-for-pay; simplification of the welfare system; to stimulate aggregate demand?

You could continue the conversation with Friends in your meeting, and respond collectively or individually on the Conversation starter page of the Quakernomics blog at www.quaker.org.uk/quakernomics. Do you have a Conversation starter to offer? If you'd like to write for a future edition please let a member of the programme staff know using the contact details in the editorial box on page 2.