



# Economic Mythbusters course

**Week 1: (Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> May)**

***Introduction to Neoliberalism and Language and Debating skills***

## **Transcript of QPSW Consolidation Session**

*This session was presented by Suzanne Ismail, QPSW Programme Manager – Economic Issues. It followed presentations from:*

- *James Meadway of The New Economics Foundation (nef) who gave an introduction to ‘the 1% economy’ and the concept of neoliberalism.*
- *Richard Hawkins of The Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC) who used insights from psychological research to provide some practical suggestions about how to challenge economic myths*

## **Introduction to QPSW Consolidation sessions**

Each week, the last 10 minutes of the Mythbusters course will be delivered by a member of Quaker Peace & Social Witness staff. The purpose of these slots is to help make the connections between the content of the main lectures and our Concerns as a Quaker community.

Usually we will offer some reflections on what the lecturers have been saying, or highlight aspects that particularly link to Quaker concerns or QPSW work. We'll also suggest some things to help you consolidate or take action on what we've learned.

This week's session week will be slightly different as I thought it would be useful to explain a little bit about why QPSW is supporting Friends to take part in the course.

## **A response to the discernment of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM).**

This is one of the things we are doing to respond to recent BYM discernment about economic justice and sustainability. The additional reading material we sent round for this week included several recent minutes made by BYM in session which talk about how the current economic system is inconsistent with Quaker testimony.

The minutes talk about how this is based on greed, how it drives inequality, undermines our common wellbeing and is a major driver of the environmental crisis that we face. All of this is very much in line with what James Meadway's analysis of the damage caused by neoliberalism.

As a reminder, in 2011 BYM called upon Friends to learn more about how we are influenced and constrained by the global economic system. In 2012 we discerned the need to work with others to create a better economic system – 'The Good Economy' as it's referred to in minute 14. So we hope that the Mythbusters course will help with both of these.

### **About the course**

The course won't cover all of the economic and sustainability issues that Friends are concerned about – but it will be relevant to a great many of them.

It's important to point out that the new lecturers will quite often be talking about things we – as a Yearly Meeting don't have a corporate view on. QPSW isn't suggesting that the Yearly Meeting should necessarily adopt positions on everything the lecturers say. But we do think that what we learn will help our discernment and help us become more confident when speaking out and taking action on what are sometimes seen as quite technical economic issues.

From a QPSW perspective this course will be of most value if its content is made widely available within the Yearly Meeting. We will, in due course, be making a lot of the course materials available online. But we'd also like to encourage you to find ways of sharing what you have learned with others in your Local and Area meetings.

We'll be making some suggestions about how you could do this as the sessions go on.

### **Some reflections on today's lectures**

About James Meadway's talk on Neoliberalism: James was talking about neoliberal capitalism - a very particular form of capitalism that has emerged over the last 30 or so years. But I don't think that James was saying that capitalism in itself is an inherently bad thing.

So the question that arises for me is – is rolling back the neoliberal nature of our capitalist economy enough? Or is a fundamental change required? There are plenty of other ways that we could organise the economy – or at least parts of it. For example, economic activities organised co-operatively, or resources held mutually or in common.

*Should we be trying to build alternatives like these as well as working to tame the worst excess of neo-liberalism?*

On Richard Hawkins' suggestions: Richard's point about being careful about the type of language we use to make advocate economic and social change is based on the recommendations of PIRC's common cause project, more details of which can be found at [www.valuesandframes.org](http://www.valuesandframes.org)

The project highlights the fact that people are motivated to take action by their values perhaps won't be news to many Friends. But it does, perhaps have some important implications.

PIRC's *Common Cause Handbook*<sup>1</sup> highlights the fact that that people's values can be 'engaged' by certain types of communication or experiences. And the more that you 'engage' a particular set of values the more you reinforce them.

The thing that I will take away from that is that when we advocate for social and economic change, yes it's important that we get the facts right. But it would seem to be just as important that the way we communicate and advocate that change embodies our Quaker values. That doesn't mean that we can't use any factual or economic arguments but that we need to be careful not to let them dominate.

As someone who loves facts and figures and who works in a department where we tend to work really hard getting the details of what ever policy we are advocating just right, that is something I think we need keep remembering and coming back to!

It also makes me think that this is an area in which Quakers may have a particular role to play in the overall movement for economic change.

### **Suggestions for consolidation**

I have two suggestions for you to help consolidate the content of today's lectures and to share them with others.

Firstly talk to others in your Meeting or with friends or colleagues about what you heard today. Try and remember both James's economic analysis and what Rich's communication tips

Secondly, for those would like to comment on or discuss the course so far with other QPSW sponsored participants we have set up a special thread to do this on Quakernomics – our online discussion forum which you can find at [www.quaker.org.uk/quakernomics](http://www.quaker.org.uk/quakernomics).

QPSW staff will be looking at the thread regularly, so this is also a good place to let us know what you think about things so far.

I'll be back next week after the session on 'Excessive government spending got us into this mess'.

If you need to contact me or others QPSW staff working on the Mythbusters course email: [Mythbusters@quaker.org.uk](mailto:Mythbusters@quaker.org.uk).

If you've got specific technical enquiries you need to speak to Huw Jordan at nef – [huw.jordan@neweconomics.org](mailto:huw.jordan@neweconomics.org)

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: [http://valuesandframes.org/download/reports/Common%20Cause%20Handbook\(2\).pdf](http://valuesandframes.org/download/reports/Common%20Cause%20Handbook(2).pdf)