



# Economic Mythbusters course

## Additional material for Quaker participants: Week 1 (for session Tues 14 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](mailto:Mythbusters@quaker.org.uk)

Our suggested readings for week 1 consist of various minutes about economic justice and sustainability made by Britain Yearly Meeting in 2011 and 2012. We hope that these explain the context for why QPSW is supporting Friends to take part in the Mythbusters course.

## Reading 1

### Britain Yearly Meeting 2011- Minute 23: Economic Justice

How can we renew our commitment to our testimonies of truth, justice, integrity and equality, and discern action to take our witness forward?

We have heard today of a number of initiatives in which our Yearly Meeting and its members are involved: the Ethical Trading Initiative and the work of Quaker Social Action. We have shared something of our experience, ideas and discernment from around the Yearly Meeting.

There are many small steps we can all take, as individuals and as meetings. But we also feel called to work on a larger scale. The global economic system is posited on continued expansion and growth, and in its pursuit of growth it is often unjust, violent and destructive. Several Friends have said 'we must move out of our comfort zone', and we have heard that rage and passion may also have a place in our responses.

We need to continue to learn more about how we are influenced and constrained by the economic system. We need to ask the question whether this system is so broken that we must urgently work with others of faith and good will to put in its place a different system in which our testimonies can flourish.

As individuals, and in our meetings, we must return to the place from which testimony comes, to open ourselves to the Spirit and to wait humbly in the light. Together, we can help one another to overcome our inertia.

We rededicate ourselves to a corporate discipline of waiting and opening to the leadings of the Spirit on the issues before us at this yearly meeting. We ask Meeting for Sufferings to keep this in view over the coming year.

## Reading 2

### Britain Yearly Meeting 2011- Minute 36: As led (Gathering up the threads)

'Sustainability is an urgent matter for our Quaker witness. It is rooted in Quaker testimony and must be integral to all we do corporately and individually.'

*(A framework for action 2009-2014).*

A concern for the Earth and the well-being of all who dwell in it is not new, and we have not now received new information which calls us to act. Rather we are renewing our commitment to a sense of the unity of creation which has always been part of Friends' testimonies. Our actions have as yet been insufficient.

John Woolman's words in 1772 sound as clearly to us now?: The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.' *{Quaker faith & practice 25.01}*

So we have long been aware that our behaviour impoverishes the earth and that it is our responsibility both to conserve the earth's resources and to share them more equitably. Our long-standing commitment to peace and justice arises in part from our understanding of the detrimental effect of war and conflicts, in damaging communities and squandering the earth's resources. As a yearly meeting we have considered this before, and in 1989 we adopted The World Council of Churches' concern for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, minuting that this concern 'grows from our faith, and cannot be separated from it. It challenges us to look again at our lifestyles and reassess our priorities, and makes us realise the truth of Gandhi's words: "Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion is"'.

In 2009 the Yearly Meeting endorsed the statement made by Meeting for Sufferings on 'A Quaker response to the crisis of climate change'. This statement was addressed to the Copenhagen Conference and all Friends and meetings were urged to take up its challenges.

In preparation for this yearly meeting gathering, in the background reading, in many of the events and activities, in the Swarthmore lecture and in yesterday's introduction and threshing groups, prophetic voices have prompted us to wrestle once again with the immensity of the challenge we face.

We are grateful to those Friends who have responded in their own lives and who have encouraged and informed us. We know that some Friends and meetings have made changes to reduce their impact on the environment, and that there is much more which may yet be done.

We need to arrive at a place in which we all take personal responsibility to make whatever changes we are called to. At the same time, we need to pledge ourselves to corporate action. The environmental crisis is enmeshed with global economic injustice and we must face our responsibility as one of the nations which has unfairly benefited at others' expense, to redress inequalities which, in William Penn's words, are 'wretched and blasphemous' (*Quaker faith & practice 25.13*).

The action we are ready to take at this time is to make a strong corporate commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community. This will require a process to establish a baseline of current witness and a framework in which individual Friends and local meetings can share their successes.

We need to allocate adequate resources to this process. This process needs to be joyful and spirit-led, with room for corporate discernment at local, area and national Level. We believe this corporate action will enable us to speak truth to power more confidently. Growing in the spirit is a consequence of taking action, and action flows from our spiritual growth; here is the connectedness we seek. Only a demanding common task builds community.

'Whom shall I send?' We hear the call to this demanding common task. How will we answer it?

We have been reminded of the current work of Quaker Peace and Social Witness. We ask Meeting for Sufferings to work with area meetings and our staff to make better known our current witness and to give thought to appropriate aims for our corporate commitment and the framework which will allow our successes to be shared. We ask them to look at the priorities in A Framework for Action and ask Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees to see where there are resources that can be allocated to these priorities to support our corporate commitment and to take our action forward. In addition we ask Meeting for Sufferings to look at the issues of public policy that we might be led to adopt and advocate in the political arena.

We ask Meeting for Sufferings and Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees to report back to Yearly Meeting each year on the progress of this concern.

We ask area meetings to consider how truth prospers with regard to sustainability, taking care to relate this to all our testimonies - peace, truth, simplicity, equality and care for the environment.

We encourage local and area meetings to practise speaking truth to power at local level by establishing relationships with all sections of local communities, including politicians, businesses and schools, to encourage positive attitudes to sustainability.

To individual Friends we issue a clear call to action to consider the effect of their lives on the world's limited resources and in particular on their carbon usage. We ask Friends to keep informed about the work being done locally, centrally and throughout the Quaker world and to educate themselves.

But above all that, Friends keep in their hearts that this action must flow from nowhere but love.

If we are successful in what we set out to do, we will need to be accountable to one another, but we will also need to be tender with one another, and to support one another through the grief and fear that radical change will provoke. 'I may have faith enough to move mountains; but if I have not love, I am nothing... Love keeps no score of wrongs, takes no pleasure in the sins of others, but delights in the truth. There is no limit to its faith, its hope, its endurance. Love will never come to an end.' (1 Corinthians ch. 13: verses 2-8 (parts), New English Bible)

## **Reading 3**

### **Britain Yearly Meeting 2012 - Minute 14: Economic justice and sustainability 1**

In minute 23 of Yearly Meeting held at Canterbury 30 July – 6 August 2011 we pledged ourselves to continue to learn more about how we are influenced and constrained by the economic system. We rededicated ourselves to a corporate discipline of waiting and opening ourselves to the leadings of the spirit on this issue, as we seek to develop an economic system in which our testimonies can flourish. We have today heard an introduction on 'The Good Economy' which takes further our thinking on the spiritual basis for action towards a more just economy, one based on goodness, justice and selflessness, rather than greed, selfishness and waste.

We look forward to continuing our work on this matter in our next session.

## **Reading 4**

### **Britain Yearly Meeting 2012 - Minute 16: Economic justice and sustainability 2**

Further to minute 14, we have heard from members of Junior Yearly Meeting on issues of economic justice and sustainability; what a more socially and economically just world would be like; and how we are challenged to change.

They have talked to us of a community founded on justice and kindness, with real equality of opportunity; they have encouraged us with the insight that however big problems are, we can make a difference, that we should not underestimate the power of even just a few words. They have described the blessings of seeing the world freely, without the distraction of unnecessary possessions, and the distorting effects of disproportionate wealth.

We will carry their insights into the next part of this session.

## Reading 5

### **Britain Yearly Meeting 2012 Minute 17: Economic justice and sustainability 2 (continued)**

Further to minute 16, we have continued our consideration of this theme and have heard prepared ministry from a member of Young Friends General Meeting on the human aspects of economics and how we can come to understand better the incentives which lie behind the banking system which we see as broken.

In our wider consideration today we have reflected on economic justice and sustainability, peace, and political power, and on the human relationships which underpin them and are daily affected by them.

Many of us see the current system as inherently unjust and therefore unsustainable. Can we change it to embrace our testimonies to peace and equality?

We acknowledge that continued economic growth in the developed world is not acceptable and we agree to work together with others of goodwill to achieve a better economic system. However we know that this will be a long journey with an, as yet, unknown outcome.

We stand in this light and wait to discern what the new system could be. It is an enormously hard and transformative thing to pray for the emergence of a good economy – isn't this the Kingdom of God which we pray for?

He has bought down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.

Luke 1 vs 52-53

As well as praying, our waiting will include the daily spiritual discipline of: creating community; treating each other justly and kindly; putting our money and energies into places which support our testimonies; accounting 'peace', 'joy' and 'respect' alongside financial values.

Are we ready, Friend by Friend, to do this?

The path we are now travelling will only be sustainable if it begins in a deep place; this journey needs to be illuminated by the light within; the measurements and targets need to be infused by love. The changes we bring about can only be achieved together.