

THE YOUNG QUAKER

For Young Friends Everywhere

NUMBER 3

OCTOBER 2013

PRICE: FREE

FOSSIL FUELS AND ETHICAL FINANCE

Ethical finance and environmental sustainability have both been issues on a lot of Quaker minds in the last few years, and a few weeks ago Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) addressed both concerns by announcing that they would be divesting from investment in companies involved in fossil fuel extraction.

The action is in line with calls from ecumenical charity Operation Noah for divestment from fossil fuels, but this action by BYM would make Quakers the first religious group in the country to answer the call.

In a Quaker context, this change in policy reflects the corporate decision made at Yearly Meeting Gathering in Canterbury in 2011 that Quakers would strive to become a low-carbon community.

Divestment from fossil fuels would mean selling off part of the £21 million that BYM currently has invested in the stock market. The sum in question, comprising shares in Norwegian oil company Statoil and the British BG Group, is around 4.17% of the total, or £875,000.

Quakers will continue to consider various issues around ethical investments, and it's a topic that will be discussed at this October's YFGM in Bristol. This week, Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) and the

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Bristol Redlands Meeting House, the venue for this month's YFGM

Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR) have got together to compile and launch a new online guide exploring the ethical and spiritual issues around the individual and corporate use of money.

Entitled "Your Faith, Your Finance", the site offers thoughts about banking, investing, and how to ensure a responsible and ethical approach when spending. You can visit it at:
www.yourfaithyourfinance.org

Oh! that we who declare against wars, and acknowledge our trust to be in God only, may walk in the light, and therein examine our foundation and motives in holding great estates! May we look upon our treasures, and the furniture of our houses, and the garments in which we array ourselves, and try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions, or not. Holding treasures in the self-pleasing spirit is a strong plant, the fruit whereof ripens fast.

John Woolman

BLOCKADE AT BURGHFIELD: ACTING AGAINST NUCLEAR WEAPONS

By ANDREW DEY, QPSW Peaceworker

Andrew is one of this year's six QPSW Peaceworkers, and works with War Resisters International (WRI) and Action AWE.

Action AWE is a grassroots, nonviolent campaign dedicated to halting nuclear weapons production at the Atomic Weapons Establishment factories at Aldermaston and Burghfield. The campaign is being supported by Quaker Peace and Social Witness in the form of a Quaker Peaceworker – I have just started work as a Peaceworker for the campaign, spending a day a week on outreach work and mobilisation.

Up until the general election in 2015, Action AWE will be piling on the pressure for disarmament by supporting and organising nonviolent direct action at government nuclear weapons bases. Last month, activists managed to successfully blockade AWE Burghfield, and we're looking forward to seeing people from across the country joining in the campaign against nuclear weapons in the UK.

Blockade

At 5:30am on Monday 2nd September, Burghfield Atomic Weapons Establishment was shut down by activists from across the UK and Europe who locked themselves together across the entrance roads to the base. Situated in Berkshire just a few miles from Reading, Burghfield AWE is a nuclear weapons factory, and critical to the construction and maintenance of British weapons of mass destruction.

On that clear, sunny morning, twenty-two people were arrested and over a hundred others supported the blockade of Burghfield AWE, which was completely shut for nearly an hour, and the ongoing running and development of the site was severely disrupted for the rest of the day. One of the blockades – organised by a Spanish speaking group – was still in the road at 7 o'clock in the evening!

Sitting in the road, physically



The blockade prevented workers from reaching Burghfield Atomic Weapons Establishment for around an hour.

Photo: Sian Jones / Action AWE

using our bodies to obstruct the machines of death, war and destruction is as empowering as it is effective – throughout the day we watched vehicles being turned away and construction workers stand by their vans, waiting for police cutting teams to remove the blockaders lock-on tubes so they were able to drive into the base. A number of Quakers, including one or two YFGMers, were also present at the blockade, and a Quaker meeting was held at the main gate of the base at 11 am.

This blockade is only the latest in a long tradition of nonviolent direct action, stretching back to the 1958 Alderston March. Since then, efforts to disrupt the work at Burghfield and Aldermaston plants have been regularly made by a range of groups. The current urgency is targeted at fighting the UK's Trident nuclear weapons system, as the government will be deciding whether or not to replace it shortly after the 2015 election. Now is the time to get active and show opposition to these plans!

Disarmament Camp

The blockade was one big day of action held as part of a fortnight long 'disarmament camp' organised by Trident Ploughshares and Action AWE. The camp – a beautiful, peaceful occupation of Ministry of Defence land – was held for two weeks from the 26th August to 7th September, and by its very presence acted as a protest against the UK's weapons of mass destruction. Our camp was positioned right against the fence of the base, and from where we sat to eat breakfast we could see the workers inside continuing the construction and development work that paves the way for the replacement of Trident.

By camping on MoD land we acted as a constant reminder to the workers, local residents and the government that any plans to build WMDs in Berkshire will face opposition. Over the two weeks activists from across the UK and Europe met to plan and take action, and we ate together, laughed, sang, plotted, and dreamed of what a

DISABILITY ACTIVISTS MEET EMPLOYMENT MINISTER

By SAM BARNETT-CORMACK

Several weeks ago, on the 10th of September, I spent a day in London. This wasn't some recreational trip, nor was it for work. I'd been asked to join a campaigning associate for a meeting with a minister in the current coalition government.

I imagine most of you are aware that disabled people, carers and allies have been getting quite exercised about, among other things, the state of social security (which our political class now prefer to call 'welfare'), especially as it applies to people who are chronically ill and disabled. I've been involved in an informal campaigning coalition which has ended up (quite inadvertently) being known as Spartacus. Due to some strange parliamentary wrangling, Mark Hoban, Minister of State for Employment at the Department of Work and Pensions, had agreed to meet with "Spartacus" about the much-criticised Work Capability Assessment (WCA). The WCA is used to assess whether people who are out-of-work are sufficiently ill or disabled not to be expected to engage with Jobseekers Allowance, but instead receive Employment Support Allowance (ESA).

A Minister of State is a step or two down from a Secretary of State, but still a political bigwig. This is the guy with direct responsibility for everything administered through Jobcentre Plus - basically, all out-of-work benefits. He's the politician most directly responsible for the WCA. A meeting was arranged with Sue Marsh, quite a prominent campaigner on this issue, and given the work we've done together, she asked me to come along for the meeting, along with Stef Benstead, another campaigner I've worked with on issues around the WCA and ESA.

We spent some time before the meeting working together online, and getting input from other campaigners, including some organised groups. Like a lot of groups campaigning on this, we want to see the WCA as it is stop. However, we believe that while calling for radical change to prevent harm to vulnerable people, we can also make specific, constructive suggestions that can be done quickly, to make things a bit better.

Blockade at Burghfield

world after nuclear weapons might look like. Throughout the fortnight we monitored the base and took other action (including street stalls in nearby Reading, and a 'nearly nude' protest made it into the local papers!)

Action AWE

"They build nuclear weapons there?" was the magistrates response to what he'd just heard. In front of him was stood one of the peace activists who, the day before, had been arrested for blockading one of the entrances to Burghfield AWE. She had just explained why she had acted to stop the ongoing work and redevelopment of the site, and was as surprised by his lack of awareness of what went on at Burghfield AWE as he was by the fact our government builds weapons of mass destruction just five miles down the road from his court! This simple story is a stark reminder of how important it is to put these factories of death and destruction back on the map and make sure the work carried out there

stops for good.

In 2016 the government will make the final decision on whether or not to replace Trident. Time is of the essence, and the government is acting as if the decision has already been made. Millions is already being spent on enhancing the

'They build nuclear weapons there?'

Aldermaston and Burghfield in preparation for building the next generation of nuclear weapons, and this large scale investment before the final decision is made could itself be used to force the hand of decision-makers, creating a climate where politicians do not want to be seen to waste taxpayers money.

However, we are currently being offered the best opportunity we have had for decades to scrap Trident, or will have for many decades to come - now is the time to act.

Aldermaston and Burghfield are key sites in this campaign.

Action AWE is inviting groups and individuals from across the country to hold vigils, acts of witness, street theatre, blockades, site occupations - whatever works for you! - at Aldermaston and Burghfield AWEs. Action AWE has all sorts of resources - nonviolence trainers and veteran peace activist speakers, maps, stencils, banners, props, practical information, meeting spaces and publicity information that we can make available to anyone and everyone ready to take action at Burghfield and Aldermaston AWE!

Fancy getting involved, hosting a nonviolence training session or visiting speaker in your area, or just want more information? Email andrew@actionawe.org or visit www.actionawe.org for more information. For more information on the Quaker Peaceworker scheme see: www.quaker.org.uk/quaker-peaceworker-scheme

QUAKERS AND EMPLOYMENT:

This article was contributed to TYQ by a worker in the Hospitality Department of Friends House in London, who wishes to remain anonymous.

Historically speaking, Quakers are, though not morally exceptional, often among the first to realise that a common practice is immoral, to challenge it within their own communities, and to actively take that discernment out into the wider world. Moving against the grain of a society, Quakerism often helps drag society in the right direction. However, what we find today in Friends House London is the reverse. Instead of leading the way, Quaker business practice itself is being led by the economic and cultural orthodoxy of the market and corporate “experts”. This is to the detriment of Quaker values and to the detriment of the material well-being of employees of Britain Yearly Meeting.

When compared to those working in equivalent jobs across the capital and elsewhere, staff in the Hospitality Department of Friends House London are better off. In terms of hourly rate, we are paid over the London Living Wage, we receive good holiday pay and can participate in the pension scheme. However, many of us are also employed on what management likes to call “variable hours contracts”.

What these should be called is “zero hours contracts”. These staff have no guaranteed hours each week. They may work a full 35 hour week, a single shift of 7.5 hours, or they may not work at all.

Nationally speaking, alarms have been sounded about these contracts. Unite the Union, the recognised union at Friends House, are explicitly opposed to them. Until recently, though not perfect, BYM’s use of such contracts actually provided an example of the organisation largely adhering to Quaker values. There was an understanding that a zero hours contract was a two way street, whereby a manager would offer largely regular work and employees could refuse it or specify their weekly availability without fear of losing out on hours in the future.

This arrangement suited many workers, who were often students, and in practice often led to zero hours staff having, if not as much and as regular work as set hours employees, then at least a measure of parity with them. Consequently, zero hours contracts, along with the existence of pay inequality and a myriad other things perhaps at odds with Quaker values, did not become an issue, and allowed those employed on them to lead satisfactory, if not ideal, existences. Dangerously, this is no longer true.

Before I explain further, some context is necessary. In Friends House, there is a considerable gulf between those who work ‘below stairs’ (the cafe, the restaurant, the conference rooms, and reception) and those in the offices. This holds true in terms of interaction between the two halves of the organisation – i.e. social interaction is minimal – but also in terms of the conditions of employment and the demographics of those employed. Those below stairs are more likely to be young, and/or non-British born, and speakers of a primary language that is not English. These workers are also less likely to be in the union or know of its existence than those upstairs. They are also on the lowest rates of pay in the building and, it would appear, are the only group of staff amongst whom zero hours contracts are used.

Over the last couple of years the hospitality business has undergone significant changes, changes that are acutely apparent in the way zero hours contracts are now used. What has happened very visibly in the last year, but has been an ongoing process for longer, is the erosion of the existing culture of respect and compromise by a very different culture. This culture concerns itself with the needs of business and the impositions of hierarchy in the name of those needs. It does this not only at the expense of Quaker values, but

SO WHAT IS A ZERO-HOURS CONTRACT ANYWAY?

The topic of zero-hours contracts has hit headlines recently, with workers and unions criticising a form of employment that can leave workers without the ability to support themselves and their families. But just what are they and why are they such a problem?

A zero-hours contract is, quite simply, a contract which doesn’t guarantee you work in any given week.

Generally, when you sign a contract, you’re guaranteed a minimum number of hours; there’s a contractual arrangement that you’ll work at least that many hours, and you’ll get paid for at least that many hours. You know you’ll earn a certain amount of money in a week and you’ll be able to use that money to pay your rent, feed your family, and pay your bills.

In a zero-hours contract, there is no guarantee. The boss might ask you to come in for one shift, or to come in every single day; you don’t know. Not only does that mean you can’t make plans, or find other work, it also means you can’t rely on

making enough money to live.

Employers insist these contracts are ‘flexible’, but the power over when and if you get work is generally in the bosses’ hands not the workers’. And 87% of those on them said they’d prefer not to be on a contract which promises less than three hours’ work per week.

These contracts often have poor conditions, with 36% not including holiday pay and 77% not including sick pay. They’re also much more common amongst younger workers, with over half of those under 30 being on contracts guaranteeing less than three hours per week.

ZERO-HOURS CONTRACTS

at the cost of the well-being of many of its employees.

Its most visible manifestation came with the employment of people from the corporate world to fill managerial roles, and the restructuring of the organisation's pay scale. Its presence is now being felt with a restructuring of the hospitality business itself, including the introduction of formal clocking in and out, and supervisory roles, euphemistically titled "Team Leaders". This is justified with talk of "professionalisation" and "flexibility", and with frequent reminders that BYM must keep in mind the norms of the market. Quaker values are at most given lip service, if they are mentioned at all, whereas the values of profit for profit's sake are stated as inarguable fact.

For many workers, particularly though not only for those on zero hours contracts, this cultural shift means a big change in our experience of being employees of BYM. We no longer have much say over when and for how long they work, and cannot count on knowing what is happening week to week. Some staff, particularly in the summer months, can go for weeks or even months without a single shift. Fundamentally, and not uncommonly, this means that zero hour contract jobs cannot be relied

upon to pay rent and basic living costs. If staff object to all this, they are doing so to people in positions of power that are largely unaccountable, at least to the employees themselves. When staff have verbally challenged the management, the latter have denied that anything is wrong, countering concerns with evasive non-answers, and reminders of how much better the conditions of work are in Friends House than in most similar workplaces, such as Starbucks or Costa.

Staff have even been encouraged to seek secondary sources of income. This neglects the fact that their precarious position means that zero hours staff do not have schedules that permit that, and attempts to normalise the idea that in order to earn a living people should have to have multiple jobs. Furthermore, it implicitly acknowledges that zero hours contracts, despite BYM's commitment to a living wage, result in its employees earning less than they need to survive.

Though I am not a Quaker, I have spent considerable time around a range of Quaker organisations. I thought that Friends did more than just make formal, shallow concessions to their values, while allowing a dominant, harmful culture to dictate how their organisation behaves.

I thought that even when this is difficult, when there are economic and cultural pressures to succumb to "How the rest of the world does things", Quakers were courageous enough to be committed to having the values of equality, honesty, the ends not justifying the means, and respect for autonomy permeate all that they do. What I see in Friends House is far from this, and as a result of this harmful cultural change, it is not only employee's wallets, standard of living, and ability to live independently that have taken a significant hit, but my trust in the ability of Quakers to practice what they preach.

Let us know your thoughts on this topic!

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BRITAIN YEARLY MEETING RESPONSE

TYQ asked BYM for a comment about the use of zero-hours contracts at Friends House. They told us this:

"Variable hours contracts have been used since 2010 by BYM for staff in several departments. They provide a flexible arrangement offering benefits to both employee and employer. They give the hospitality company the flexibility to increase staff in busy periods and to cover for absences. And an employee who cannot or prefers not to commit to a regular working pattern can work flexibly.

Staff on these contracts are not treated differently in more general respects from all other staff. Our employment practices include: a commitment to providing good training opportunities and working conditions; our 1:4 salary ratio from the highest to lowest; salaries which are in the upper quartile of equivalent employers; and our accreditation as a Living Wage Employer. We have a robust whistle-blowing policy and grievance procedure. All staff, on all types of contract, are invited to join the union.

Trustees are glad to be joining in a discussion of the nature of a Quaker workplace, glad that staff are being encouraged to appreciate the different types of work carried out by their colleagues, and recently minuted that "good employment practice should be Quaker employment practice and vice versa. Quaker values inform all the work done, and how it is done. A good workplace enables good service as part of its culture."

Jennifer Barraclough, Clerk, BYM Trustees

PEACEFUL AND PASSIVE

By TIM ROUSE

In our last issue, there was an article about The Leavers' intriguing project, Peaceful Not Passive. It sounds fascinating, but what caught my eye was the name. Quakers have a long history of being peaceful, but there's also a long history of being passive; and that's something to be proud of.

Nowadays, we tend to consider passive to imply submission or inactivity. But the dictionary definition, courtesy of Wiktionary, is to be 'subjected to action without producing a reaction', and that can be something that takes enormous strength and courage; it's the heart of nonviolent resistance.

To our Quaker predecessors, passive meant even more. I've spent a lot of the last year studying the early peace testimony, and where it came from. One of my favourite concepts was the idea of 'passive obedience', both because it's an incredibly clever idea, and because it helped me empathise with the people who were called Quakers centuries before I was even born.

The teachings of Scripture, second only to the leadings of the inner light in early Quaker experience, demanded obedience to the authorities of the material world, as well as to God (1 Peter 2:13-14). This posed a problem for Quakers, who in the 1660s saw the new king, Charles II Stuart, introduce a whole series of laws which persecuted Quakers for their beliefs and threatened their practices.

One of those laws, the Conventicle Act, prohibited non-Anglican religious gatherings, meaning that Meeting for Worship was illegal. The Quaker dilemma was this; if they stopped their meetings, they were being disobedient to their own consciences and to God, but if they continued them, then surely that meant they were being disobedient to the temporal authorities that Scripture required them to obey?

The solution lay with the word passive. More exactly, it lay with the phrase 'passive obedience'. I'm not sure if he was the first to use the term, but in a pamphlet addressed to the king in 1661, Edward Burroughs wrote this:

For Conscience sake to God, we are bound ... to yield obedience ... in all matters actively or passively: that is to say, in all just and good laws of the land, we must be obedient by doing ... but ... if anything be commanded of us by the present Authority, which is not according to equity, justice, and a good conscience towards God ... we must in such cases obey God only, and deny active obedience ... and patiently suffer what is inflicted upon us for such our disobedience.

The distinction between active and passive obedience gave early Quakers a loophole. If a law was unjust, then it was fine to break it, provided that you didn't resist punishment; you weren't being disobedient, merely passively obedient.

The doctrine of passive obedience meant that Quakers continued to meet openly, something which won them admiration at a time when most of the other radical sects of the period were either dissolving into nothingness or meeting in secret. Nowadays, we'd call their acts civil disobedience; but to early Friends, maintaining a form of obedience was an important part of being true to their religion.

When the authorities came to break up the Meetings, the Quakers wouldn't resist; they would allow themselves to be arrested and carted off to prison. Once they were there, they wouldn't pay bail, or cooperate with their persecutors; they would face the unjust punishment for breaking an unjust law. At no point would they be disobedient to authority; merely passively obedient to the extreme.

So severe was the persecution that in several towns including Reading and Bristol, every last adult would be arrested, and the children, too young to be arrested, were left to carry on the Meeting.

This was 'passive' in two ways; both in contrast to active obedience, the active upholding of acceptable laws, but also in the way in which they went about it. It meant being beaten black and blue just for going to Meeting on Sunday; it meant spending days, weeks, or even months in prison, with a high likelihood that you'd be sent there again a matter of months after leaving. It meant suffering – and that's where the name of Meeting for Sufferings comes from.

Being passive meant possessing an immense inner strength and determination. It must have taken an amazing amount of courage to face the persecutions introduced by the restored monarchy, as well as a deep and powerful faith.

The idea of passive obedience didn't just apply to the Conventicle Act, either; Quakers were 'passively obedient' to laws about tithe payment and many other persecutions of the Restoration era. Fundamentally, it's one of the key components of the peace testimony; the ability to be 'subjected to action without producing a reaction' is the message behind Christ's advice to 'turn the other cheek' and to respond to violence, not with more violence, but with love.

So don't reject passive, just because you hear it in a negative context from time to time. Pacifism and passive-ism go hand in hand, and taking the passive path can require huge amounts of strength and courage. The experience of those 17th century Quakers who used passive obedience to defend their faith and their principles, and who because of their actions suffered in a way that most of us never have, has a lot to teach us, both about Quakerism and about ourselves.

EDITORIAL

TYQ LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE!

Hello folks! It's been a while – unfortunately, TYQ wasn't able to release an issue for the last YFGM in May, so we printed one for Britain Yearly Meeting instead. That means some of you won't have heard from us since February, our first issue!

We have a great issue for you this month, although it seems to have quite a political focus, with young Quakers engaged in challenging government discrimination, government nuclear weapons policy, and government propaganda. The Powers That Be will be shutting us down if we're not careful.

One of the pieces I'm most pleased to see is our article on zero-hours contracts at Friends House. Personally I was shocked to find BYM using this type of contract, that have received national criticism in recent months.

But that's not everything in the issue, of course – we've got beautiful poetry and some reflections on Quaker history to round it out. Are we missing something? Let us know what you'd like to see in the magazine by emailing us at theyoungquaker@gmail.com

The other exciting news is that we have a brand new website! You can now visit us at www.theyoungquaker.org.uk to read articles, share your opinions, or download past issues.

This should allow us to post article and content throughout the year, rather than having to wait for the next YFGM. It'll also enable us to reach a wider audience of young Quakers from around the world. Don't worry, though, we're still going to be making paper editions of TYQ for every YFGM gathering.

Love and Friendship,
Tim & Tim

THE POETRY OF KHLIL GIBRAN

By ROSE OLIVER

When I first learned of the theme for YFGM in May, "identity and finding/becoming yourself", my mind immediately leapt to a poem which helped me to relate to the world around me during my university years. Many of you may be familiar with Kahlil Gibran's work. He was an inspirational poet from Lebanon whose poetry has been translated into many languages around the world. Personally, I find his words and imagery gentle and powerful, in much the same way as the silence in our meeting together. The following extracts come from Gibran's book "The Prophet". I have chosen lines from two sections entitled "On Reason and Passion" and "On Self-knowledge", although they are only two of twenty six; the rest of which I would recommend to Friends everywhere.

*And the priestess spoke again and said:
"Speak to us of Reason and Passion."*

And he answered saying:

Your soul is oftentimes a battlefield, upon which your reason and your judgment wage war against passion and your appetite.

Would that I could be the peacemaker in your soul, that I might turn the discord and the rivalry of your elements into oneness and melody.

But how shall I, unless you yourselves be also the peacemakers, nay, the lovers of all your elements?

Your reason and your passion are the rudder and the sails of your seafaring soul.

If either your sails or our rudder be broken, you can but toss and drift, or else be held at a standstill in mid-seas.

For reason, ruling alone, is a force confining; and passion, unattended, is a flame that burns to its own destruction.

[...]

Among the hills, when you sit in the cool shade of the white poplars, sharing the peace and serenity of distant fields and meadows - then let your heart say in silence, "God rests in reason."

And when the storm comes, and the mighty wind shakes the forest, and thunder and lightning proclaim the majesty of the sky, - then let your heart say in awe, "God moves in passion."

And since you are a breath in God's sphere, and a leaf in God's forest, you too should rest in reason and move in passion.

And a man said, "Speak to us of Self-Knowledge."

And he answered, saying:

Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights.

But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart's knowledge.

You would know in words that which you have always known in thought.

You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams.

And it is well you should.

The hidden well-spring of your soul must needs rise and run murmuring to the sea;

And the treasure of your infinite depths would be revealed to your eyes.

But let there be no scales to weigh your unknown treasure;

And seek not the depths of your knowledge with staff or sounding line.

For self is a sea boundless and measureless.

Say not, "I have found the truth," but rather, "I have found a truth."

Say not, "I have found the path of the soul." Say rather, "I have met the soul walking upon my path."

For the soul walks upon all paths.

The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed.

The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals.

YOUNG FRIENDS EXPERIENCE NEF 'MYTHBUSTERS' COURSE

By LUCY WHITE and KRISTIN SKARSHOLT

A group of Young Friends have been meeting at Friends House in central London to discuss 'economic myths' and how to challenge them. The Mythbusters course was run by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) in May-June 2013, and the lectures were broadcast online and recorded, allowing us to revisit the series.

The course as a whole sets out to address myths that we are told by the government and public commentators about the economic crash and the solutions to it. Each lecture explores a different 'myth', often those that have been propagated by the current coalition government and have become the dominant narrative.

Examples from the course titles are "Excessive government spending got us into this mess", "Britain's broke – we can't afford to invest", "A competitive tax system is a better tax system" and "Skivers and Strivers".

They're myths in the sense that they form the story we're living in, or the narrative that we use to talk about the economic problems and solutions to them. But they're not the inevitable solutions! And therefore NEF has set out to help us spot the myths when we come across them in the media and in conversations, and counteract them with arguments and solutions.

What I've taken from the lectures is that the austerity measures

made by the government are almost purely ideological – they don't actually make sense in economic terms. For example, the government has continuously used the metaphor of the UK being like a household that has spent more money than it has and therefore needs to cut back its spending in order to get back into a healthy state. This is common sense so it works as a narrative for justifying cuts in the welfare state.

But a country's economy doesn't function in the same way as a household's, so cutting back is exactly the opposite of what a government needs to do when the private sector has dipped. One of the early lessons in the course was that – very simply – one person's £1 spent is another person's £1 earned, and when there's less money in circulation the trust in the system lessens, and the economy dips further.

In economic terms we are interdependent so when there is a 'gap' in the economy the state needs to purposefully invest there in order for the whole system to stay afloat.

I've learned with some shock that the government's chosen measures are part of one pathway to try to solve the problems of a money gap (which is essentially what made the Western world panic in 2008), but much more than being constructive measures for the economic system we have, the government is able to use the bad situation to implement privatisation and lessen the size of the state. I'm finding it extremely

interesting and actually empowering to know the model of economics that we live by better.

Each meeting we watched the lectures and questions, then had a discussion, which drew on and shared our varying knowledge of economics and experience of the ideas discussed – and also included lots of tea and cake.

More information and materials can be found at www.quaker.org.uk/mythbusters



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The Co-Editors, Tim Rouse and Tim Searle-Barnes, would like to thank all our contributors.

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Please get in touch if you would like to contribute to the next issue, due out in time for the next YFGM, taking place between
21ST-23RD February 2013

The Young Quaker can be found online at

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The Young Quaker is produced by Young Friends General Meeting

www.yfgm.quaker.org.uk

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