

QUAKER ECO-BULLETIN

Information and Action Addressing Public Policy
for an Ecologically Sustainable World

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Friends Testimonies and Economic Project Summary

In June 2005, twelve Friends who are engaged with public policy in a variety of ways met for a day-long Policy Consultation under the auspices of the Friends Testimonies and Economics Project. The purpose of this Consultation was to experiment with a process for helping Friends with varying perspectives explore a challenging issue in a way that integrates spiritual values, personal experience and professional expertise.

Participants' report

The focus of the Policy Consultation was to explore two aspects of Friends Committee on National Legislation's Statement of Legislative Policy: seeking "a society with equity and justice for all" and seeking "an earth restored." After opening worship, we began by sharing personal experiences of contributing successfully toward one of these goals. We then turned to exploring several questions:

- Friends seek "a society with equity and justice for all" and "an earth restored." In what ways are "an equitable society" and "an earth restored" competing goals? In what ways are they complementary goals?
- What understandings and policies are needed to promote synergies rather than conflicts between the goals of increasing economic and social equity and restoring earth's ecological integrity?
- What are we willing to give up for policies that further both equity and environmental restoration? What is the "opportunity cost" for these policies?

An "equitable society" and "an earth restored"

We agreed that the meanings of these terms were not easily defined, and the terms did not adequately explain how Friends could seek to create a socially and ecologically just society. We therefore spent time expanding on their intent, trying to include the complexities and uncertainties of ecosystems and human organizations.

We agreed that **restoration** of the earth reflects what human societies must do if ecological systems in which humans participate are to reestablish conditions of integrity and resilience. **Equity** has different meanings in different contexts: **Economic equity** requires a balancing of income distribution based on performance in a market economy with the needs of every person for life's basic necessities. **Ecological equity** requires a balancing of humans' appropriation of the earth's resources for our own use with the needs of all species and of earth's biological systems for self-regeneration.

Opportunities

We identified an essential relationship between greater equity in human societies and a resilient, integrated biosphere that includes human societies. To bring about a society characterized by both ecological and economic equity, we would have to ration and redistribute our resource use to help preserve and protect the earth. To ensure that we use resources in service of **ecological equity**, our societies need to manage the personal

About the Friends Testimonies and Economics (FTE) Project

Friends Testimonies and Economics (FTE) is a joint project of the Earthcare Working Group of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW). The project seeks to engage Friends in:

- learning more about basic economic concepts, current institutions and policies as they relate to our historic testimonies in an ecological context, and
- supporting advocacy for a comprehensive reformulation of U.S. economic policy through Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) and other Friends' organizations

We see this as essential for any enduring progress toward a world of peace, justice and ecological health.

The FTE project is, in part, a response to a statement that "Friends do not agree on economics," offered as a rationale several years ago for why economic policy was largely ignored during otherwise spirited and informed discussions at an FCNL annual meeting. Members of the Earthcare Working Group had already become clear that concerns for ecological

sustainability could not be addressed without a consideration of economics.

The events of 9/11 highlighted the relationship of economics to the causes of violence and injustice. This led the Earthcare Working Group to sponsor a Gathering of Friends at Pendle Hill on Economics and Friends Testimonies in June of 2003. Thirty Friends participated, among whom were Friends active with American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), Friends Association on Higher Education, FCNL, QEW, and a number of yearly meeting committees.

The Gathering participants united in a "Letter to Friends" that was mailed to all monthly meetings in the U.S. They also agreed on the need for educational materials on basic economic concepts and the relationship between economics and ecological issues for use in monthly meetings to engage Friends with the concerns raised in the Gathering and shared in the Letter. A working group was assembled to prepare these materials.

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Quaker Eco-Bulletin (QEB) is published bi-monthly by Quaker Earthcare Witness (formerly FCUN) as an insert in *BeFriending Creation*.

The vision of **Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW)** includes integrating into the beliefs and practices of the Society of Friends the Truths that God's Creation is to be held in reverence in its own right, and that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring the Earth's ecological integrity. As a member organization of Friends Committee on National Legislation, QEW seeks to strengthen Friends' support for FCNL's witness in Washington DC for peace, justice, and an earth restored.

QEB's purpose is to advance Friends' witness on public and institutional policies that affect the earth's capacity to support life. QEB articles aim to inform Friends about public and corporate policies that have an impact on society's relationship to the earth, and to provide analysis and critique of societal trends and institutions that threaten the health of the planet.

Friends are invited to contact us about writing an article for **QEB**. Submissions are subject to editing and should:

- Explain why the issue is a Friends' concern.
- Provide accurate, documented background information that reflects the complexity of the issue and is respectful toward other points of view.
- Relate the issue to legislation or corporate policy.
- List what Friends can do.
- Provide references and sources for additional information.

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and group behavior that affects ecological drivers, like the carbon and hydrologic cycles, and long-term trends, like greenhouse gas emissions and the increasing scarcity of fresh water.

Economic equity in societies could result in a better standard of living for many people. While requiring a less resource- and energy-intensive lifestyle for some, economic equity would also reduce impacts on the rest of the biosphere. As ecological systems are actively renewed through human actions, more eco-system services, e.g., purified water and productive soil, will be available for all. Healthy living is more readily possible for all people and societies when the allocation of ecological services among societies is more equitable.

Impediments

For market-based capitalist societies in their current form, adopting policies to promote more ecological and economic equity will be a very difficult. This is because changes would be required in both personal and group behavior (life style, purchasing decisions, financial investments, etc.) and because consideration must be given to all species' needs.

We considered some of the tensions generated within our societies between the goals of economic equity and environmental protection. Some people claim that the preservation of land and resources is a tool used by elites to restrict the income growth of the poor. There are many perceptions of conflicts between job creation and environmental regulations. There is a perception that the payment of taxes is not related to the provision of public services and goods. These tensions lead many people to believe that ecological health and economic stability cannot go hand-in-hand to create vibrant, healthy and economically secure communities.

Many people also assume technology will come to our rescue; that if nature can no longer provide for humankind, then technology and human invention will make up for losses of ecosystem services. Another impediment is the belief that economic growth can be unlimited. Economic growth is tied directly to earth's stock of resources; so there are limiting factors to the amount of growth that human creativity and technological innovation can generate. Much human activity relies on the underlying absorptive and regenerative capacities of the earth, which in turn affect the productive potential of economic systems.

In view of these widespread beliefs, we agreed that the lack of public understanding about ecological realities is a major obstacle to achieving greater economic and ecological equity.

Promoting understandings and identifying opportunity costs

We sought to find values, ideals, and understandings on which Friends can find unity to move us toward a revitalized earth and an equitable society. Friends need to become more familiar with economic and ecological concepts. We can promote an understanding that the well-being of other species is essential to our own species' well-being. By coming together to support our testimonies in concrete policy proposals, Friends can be more effective participants in an informed public debate, and increase the possibilities of turning our ideals into reality.

While policy is created slowly over time, we recognized the importance of acting with persistence despite and within political constraints. Finding a way to address long-term global problems by reinforcing small changes is the policy challenge we face today. We shared our perceptions about these questions:

- How does policy get made, and who makes it?
- How, why, and by whom is policy-making interest driven?
- Does a crisis spawn authoritarian actions?

- How can policy-making become a tool for greater collaboration and representation?

To achieve greater representation and collaboration in policy-making, it will be necessary to first overcome the view of some people that institutions of government are necessarily foreign to our interests and infringe on our lives. Then we can more readily and effectively take policy action together.

We explored the potential for policy alliances that might cross liberal and conservative political lines, and fundamentalist and mainline religious lines. These alliances may seem incongruent but are necessary to the realization of these goals. Complete agreement on all issues need not preclude cooperation on specific issues.

For collaboration to be effective on a large scale, and for policy advocacy to be representative of the public interest, more active participation is needed. We think it is especially important to insure that all groups and stakeholders are invited to the table, perhaps through the use of public funds to include marginalized groups.

Finally, we explored ideas to promote an understanding that economic and ecological equity are interdependent aspirations. To achieve a socially and ecologically equitable global society, a change needs to be made in the consumer mentality of economies based on lifestyles that absorb increasing amounts of resources.

We need to elevate **freedom** as a personal value to a global context and to ask the question: what does it mean for all people and all life to be free? For many in affluent nations, freedom has come to mean license to do whatever we want, without an understanding that our freedoms often impinge upon the freedoms of others.

Human rights should be balanced with human obligations; not only to oneself and one's neighbors, but to all people and all life. Paying taxes should be seen as an "investment" in future well-being and a way to provide public benefits of ecological and economic improvement, rather than as an imposition or unfair burden.

We believe that Quaker testimonies facilitate methods and create understandings that can contribute to this work. Through outreach and education, we can advance the process of taming the global economy to create a nonviolent economy for humans, and all life on earth.

Queries for further exploration

We pose these queries as a basis for continuing the conversation and widening the circle of Friends who participate:

1. How can Friends clarify and expand what we mean by and understand about "a society with equity and justice for all" and "an earth restored?"
2. How do we promote economic and ecological equity as inseparable, rather than as competing goals?
3. How can Friends identify and act upon potentially fruitful relationships with other groups and agencies? When should Friends celebrate incremental steps on the journey towards an "earth restored" and an "equitable society"?
4. In what ways should Friends seek to reevaluate attitudes towards government and conceptions of freedom, rights, and obligations?
5. What are the recommendations for redirecting policy on which we as Friends can find unity? How can we remain mindful that our recommendations will be more feasible because of the different perspectives and experiences each of us brings to the process of corporate discernment?

About the Friends Testimonies and Economics (FTE) Project (cont'd from p. 1)

We have held workshops in a number of monthly and yearly meetings to test and revise materials being developed as an FTE resource. In the summers of 2004 and 2005, workshops at the Friends General Conference (FGC) Gathering on "Ecology, Economics, and Integrity," were well-attended and favorably received.

The FTE resource, entitled "Seeds of Violence, Seeds of Hope: Exploring Economics in an Ecological Context," is nearing completion and will be posted on the FGC website in early 2006. It will also be available in hard copy on request. 23 Friends from 11 yearly meetings have contributed to the resource as authors, editors, or consultants.

Another outcome of the 2003 Gathering has been the establishment of Quaker Institute for the Future (QIF) that is seeking ways to bring the results of public policy research by members of the Society of Friends to the attention of regional and national policy-makers.

The FTE Project Group will now focus on identifying and equipping a group of committed Friends to provide workshops and presentations in monthly meetings, at yearly meeting sessions, and as other opportunities arise, to further the purposes of the FTE project.

Ed Dreby

For more information on QIF, contact Keith Helmuth, Board Secretary, at 215/545-3417 or <ekhelmuth@mindspring.com>.

The FTE project is overseen by a Project Group whose current members are Ed Dreby and Donn Kesselheim from QEW, and Keith Helmuth and Hollister Knowlton from the Earthcare Working Group. The FTE Project is funded solely by unsolicited donations and by grants for specific purposes. Contributions, payable to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, with a note "for FTE," can be mailed to: Ed Dreby, FTE project leader, 14 New Jersey Ave, Hainesport NJ, 08036.

June 2005 Policy Consultation Participants

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Peter Brown, ethics and public policy, McGill University (QIF)
David Ciscel, economics, University of Memphis (FTE)
Gray Cox, human ecology, College of Atlantic (QIF)
Hollister Knowlton, environmental education and advocacy, (FCNL, QEW)
Don McNemer, international studies, Bentley College (AFSC)
Nancy Milio, public policy and health, University of North Carolina - retired, (FCNL)
David Ross, economics, Bryn Mawr College (FTE, QIF)
Ned Stowe, lobbyist, FCNL
Louise Tritton, forest ecology, senior environmental consultant
Sarah Waring, program associate, socioeconomics program, Sonoran Institute (QIF)

Facilitator

Therese Miller, principal consultant, Horizon Partners

Participant Observers (FTE)

John Brady, wildlife biology, Army Corps of Engineers - retired
Ed Dreby, social studies education (project leader, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Earthcare and FTE)

Reflections on the June 2005 Policy Consultation

The FTE project sponsored the June 2005 Policy Consultation because several workshop participants suggested that Quaker practices, particularly non-violent conflict resolution, might help to find common ground among Friends with different values and perspectives about economics.

The primary purpose of the Policy Consultation was to experiment with a process for helping Friends with varying viewpoints to explore challenging issues in a way that integrates spiritual values, personal experience and professional expertise. A planning group consisting of an experienced facilitator, one of the participants, and two FTE participant-observers, designed an intensive one-day program that reflected this purpose.

After opening worship, participants engaged in a process known as “Appreciative Inquiry” to begin substantive discussion of the topic. This acquainted everyone with the relevant experiences and successes of each participant, and brought to the forefront the shared values that participants held in common as Friends. As a result a sense of community emerged very quickly within the group.

After a brainstorming session to identify ways in which “an equitable society” and “an earth restored” are both complementary and conflicting goals, participants met in small groups to consider the challenges of pursuing these goals in tandem. Then the whole group explored ways to promote synergies and address potential conflicts arising from the need for Friends’ advocacy for both of these goals.

The day was characterized by careful listening, acknowledging the views of others, and seeking common ground which

enabled participants to consider the topics from several angles. Even so, it became clear that much more time together would be necessary to cover this complex topic—especially the areas where potential for conflict are most obvious—and to make full use of the expertise participants brought to the discussion. Nevertheless, we covered enough ground that by the end of the day, we found it challenging to find coherence among all the themes explored.

The Consultation fulfilled our purpose of establishing a community of shared values as a basis for seeking common ground. It demonstrated how Friends who come with different expertise and points of view can work together to shed light rather than heat on difficult policy issues, thereby offering valuable support to Friends who are working for equity, justice, peace, and ecological sustainability.

We hope the areas of agreement and the queries described in this report from the Consultation will stimulate further thought and discussion among Friends. We also hope the process used can serve as a model for Friends to explore differing perspectives on economic growth, the monetary system, and other challenging issues relating to economics and Friends testimonies.

Ed Dreby

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