

The New Economy (A tentative record of the discussion)

An ambitious but vital topic.....

Q. How do we effect major change without violent revolution?

Our group raised some questions queries and suggestions for future discussion and debate, in response to this question. (see below)

INSPIRATIONAL SOURCES-

1. The building / re-building of community, individual and group self esteem, and inspiration to contribute to change..

THAT IT JUST TAKES 10%OF THE POPULATION

2. Some were inspired by (our second speaker) Symon Hill's research ref that only 10% of the population need to know something's wrong for things to change. This encouraged us to focus on the import of education.

EDUCATION?

3. The use of education to provide access to a wide range of views. In particular to encourage teachers to present alternatives to orthodox interpretations, - particularly in areas like economics.

CRITIQUE OF CONSUMERISM?

4. It was suggested that we might develop a critique of consumerist culture using historical film footage charting the advertising initiatives of the big corporations. It would seem that Directors of big business required a shift from the post First World War focus on necessary utilities, to a culture of persuasion that encouraged the mass purchase of commodities,

hence enabling the dimensions of supply and demand to quadruple This was perhaps essential for capitalist growth at the time, but is it serving us now as we move to more sustainable life styles and more austerity?

HUMAN VALUES/QUAKERLY VALUES -WELL BEING ?

5. One member of the group drew on the views of Vance Packard and others, to question whether Mass Consumerist Culture, had impacted on our sense of well being and our real values of love, respect justice, security, spirituality, community, adventure, creativity, and the like. It was suggested that our real values and needs may get displaced onto products in the advertising process, so that they appear to be qualities intrinsic to commodities. It was suggested that public meetings and school debates about this process may lead to a deeper understanding about who we really are, and what really matters to us and whether we really want to buy more than we need. Such discussion might point towards sustainable consumption strategies (source info for this on net in BBC Documentary by Adam Curtis -The Century of the Self.)

THE DEVELOPING WORLD

6.. This suggestion led us to discuss a further challenge. Throughout the history of market economies there has been a need to balance the economics of supply with demand. But if we reduce demand by buying less and living more sustainably (so reducing our carbon footprints,) the economy might stagnate or collapse because the balance between supply and demand is weakened. (Though it's worth remembering the Quakernomics came up with the notion of zero growth as a coping strategy for this development.)

But another possible solution to this challenge involved the expectation that there would be an

increased demand for vital utilities particularly in the developing world, Such an increase would (it was claimed) enable this balance between supply and demand to be maintained. But supply in the west, would need to be managed sustainably if this were to work. Questions were raised about the nature of commodities required by previously impoverished populations, and whether sustainable utilities would meet people's current demands.

Some members of the group felt that people all over the world would want the same things as us . The feasibility (and ethics) of imposing, or requiring any consumer regulation in developing countries was therefore felt to be open to doubt. It was less clear how the twin goals of social justice and sustainability could be achieved in a mutualistic world economy. Climate Change Summits still struggle to find agreement, but there is sometimes a shared intent.

MANUFACTURER RECYCLING

7. A further alternative sustainable economic practice might involve manufacturers taking back /leasing products when useless and recycling to reduce waste and short-termism. The ideas on this, in the book called **'Natural Capitalism'** by **Hawken and Lovins** seem really relevant. One member of the group described the problem of how natural resources are limited on planet earth, yet these resources will be needed in increasing amounts to supply the needs of a growing number of consumers. It was pointed out that we behave as if earth's resources are infinite. The authors suggest a shift in attitudes. Consumers could hire/lease goods rather than owning them. Manufacturers could be made responsible for taking goods back at the end of their useful lives . They would then start to design goods to last and to make materials easy to reuse, rather than design them with built-in obsolescence. Government intervention would

presumably be needed to set up this sort of regulation of manufacturers but there would be far less waste to dispose of too.

CHANGES TO THE WORLD ECONOMY.

8. There was some recognition that creating a sustainable and just world, required further changes to the world economy. It was thought that this might require a critique of our monetary system. It was suggested that governments might need to re-position Finance Capital to high light it's capacities as a Service industry .Mention was made of Joseph Stiglitz 's view(as ex Head of the World Bank) that finance capital worked to take possession of larger amounts of the existing wealth produced by industrial capital, rather than being productive itself. Financiers will be getting a good income from usury and land rent, but by manufacturing extra paper currency (quantitative easing), and massaging exchange rate mechanisms like LIBOR ,they had been able to obtain an effective influence on Sovereign State GDPs. Again there wasn't time to find out if this was a shared concern, or a strongly contested view, but further debate and guidance would be really welcomed. But some among us were less than certain that a socially just sustainable world was ever going to be possible given the brief amount of time needed to make it happen.

9.CHANGING THE EXCHANGE RATE MECHANISM?

It was suggested that moving back to the gold standard (or similar tangible metal) as the standard measure for the exchange rate mechanism, (rather than any particular paper currency) might provide the managed stability necessary, for the factoring in of a wellbeing index , allowing 'mutuality' changes to the ongoing nature of economics. In this way, enabling a more

ethical sustainable practice based on prosperity without growth. To some extent this economic technology has been in place with the welfare state in the `UK, and in particular our NHS, but a developing concern to make a profit from it, might already be affecting the quality of well being.

10.WELL-BEING

The focus on well being, (much enhanced by the research findings of Prof Wilkinson's 'Spirit Leveln' was seen as a crucial feature of any new economy). he claims that countries with a large income divide between rich and poor (like the UK and USA) have much lower well being readings for the whole populace.

Footnote:- It is hoped that the above suggestions queries and concerns might usefully contribute to the generation of further debate.

**In friendship ,Gail
(have drawn on my memory of proceedings, alongside being a very amateur economic scribe!)**