

A Quaker Declaration for Equality and the Common Good

A shortened version of the document produced by Quakers from Kendal & Sedbergh Area Meeting.

(For the full version see www.Kendal-and-Sedbergh-Quakers.org.uk)

We consider that over several decades our society has become dominated by the ideas of the marketplace and competition. The value of each individual now seems to be defined by our economic value to others. This has obscured the truth that we are valued because of our common humanity; there is that of God in all of us.

Those who are unable to sell their talents to others, for whatever reason, e.g. disability, lack of education, life events or being without accessible employment, have often been stigmatised by some in the media and government as 'skivers and shirkers'. Often, when people have turned to the Welfare State for support in their times of need, they have been penalised, causing humiliation, hardship and poverty. Resources and validation can be withdrawn from those with the least, leaving them in what they feel to be a hopeless situation.

When competition is used to shape our human relationships, it can foster the selfish part of us, setting one against another, harming the public realm and the common good. Social and economic injustices usher in unrest and peace is undone.

Through-out our history, Quakers have challenged the dehumanising actions of those in power. Examples of this are campaigns against the slave trade, the poor conditions of prisoners, poor housing and poverty. It is from this ground that we have always tried to 'speak truth to power'.

In 1660 our Friend Margaret Fell rode from Swarthmoor, now in South Cumbria, to London to deliver a testimony to King Charles II. At that time, Quakers were suffering from religious persecution. She told the King that Quakers wished to live and worship in peace and were not a threat to the state. We are now making a similar journey on behalf of those we feel are being unjustly treated. We are following her example, in our 'ride', to address our concerns to those who govern us.

Quakers and others are exploring ways to foster a new economy. This would be a system that serves the common good of all, helping to reduce the huge imbalance between the very rich and the rest. Our Ten Principles for the New Economy* are a starting point in this task. This would, we hope, foster the creative renewal of the Welfare State to meet its original purpose; one that embodies the truth that we can afford to care and through this serve the needs of everyone. We urge the Government to consider and adopt these principles as a way forward and to recognise the depth of our faith led concern.

*www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/economic-justice/new-economy