On March 4th, 2011, 44 participants gathered at the Quaker Center at Ben Lomond, California, for a weekend workshop, “Social Fairness and Ecological Integrity: Strategy and Action for a Moral Economy.” This workshop was organized to launch the second phase of the Moral Economy Project of Quaker Institute for the Future. The first phase produced the book Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy. The workshop was co-sponsored by the Ecoberrries affinity group of Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting (Berkeley CA). George Lakey served as facilitator with Keith Helmuth, Phil Emmi, and Sandra Lewis as resource people and Shelley Tanenbaum as workshop coordinator. Advance materials sent to the registered participants—three background papers by Sandra Lewis, Phil Emmi, and Keith Helmuth—are included in the expanded version of this QEB online <quakerearthcare.org>.

The idea for a workshop with a dual focus of social fairness and ecological integrity grew out of a deep concern that growing societal inequities and deepening environmental crises are destabilizing societies, undermining democracy, and threatening the capacity of Earth to support life as we know it now and in the future. These problems are intertwined and can only be effectively addressed together.

Our political, economic, and financial systems fail to provide equitable access to the means of life for all people or to sustain the long-term health of Earth’s life support systems. The same political and economic systems that institutionalize inequality also institutionalize ecological destruction by insisting on unlimited and inequitable economic growth on a finite Earth (See background papers by Sandra Lewis and Phil Emmi in the web version).

There is an increasing body of research showing that more equal societies do better by every measure: longevity, health, happiness, and economic gain. We cannot achieve equitable societies and maintain the ecological integrity of our planet without transforming the political and economic institutions that support business as usual.

Some of the questions that informed the content and format of the workshop included:

- What are the common roots of the environmental and socio-economic crises?
- What kind of strategic changes should we advocate?
- How can Quaker witness and action become more effective in addressing these challenges?

We believe the Quaker values of peace, integrity, equality and community can help us work toward the dramatic changes that are necessary.

Empowering and Inspiring Participants for Action

George Lakey skillfully led the 44 participants through a series of activities designed to inspire and facilitate spirit-led action directed toward the ecological and fairness issues of our time. We were each randomly assigned a buddy for the weekend for support and processing of the work. The workshop format alternated between large group and small group experiences followed by discussion and posting the highlights of our sharing for participants to consider throughout the weekend.

We opened on Friday evening with each of us participating in a small group of folks we didn’t know where we shared stories of when we first recognized that nature and environmental issues mattered to us. This helped us to get in touch with what brought us to the workshop and to begin learning what motivated other participants.

Keith Helmuth, Sandra Lewis and Phil Emmi briefly shared some of their concerns and motivations for participating in this workshop. Then we moved into a discussion in the whole group where we explored the question:

What ways have you found in your own life to maximize your chances to meet a challenge?

The attitudes and behaviors we found helpful were posted for reference throughout the weekend. We then turned to the question of ways we have undermined our chances to meet challenges successfully. Our responses to these two questions helped us recognize some individual and collective capacities, brought personal accountability into the room, and invited us to consider new behaviors during the weekend that could increase our power to bring about change.

We began Saturday morning with a revealing exercise where everyone was asked to stand in a line on a continuum at a point where they see themselves now between two poles that defined each of these dichotomies:

- “Current political and economic institutions can effectively address climate change.” versus “Fundamentally different institutions are needed.”
- “Micro-level behavior changes will add up to the change required.” versus “Macro-level policy changes are needed.”
**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 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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- “Powerholders will respond to persuasion.” versus “Coercion will be required to bring about change.”
- “I’m doing what I can to bring about change.” versus “I’d like to do more or be more effective in bringing about change.”

This exercise asked participants to “take a stand” (an empowerment tool), honored differences among us and showed the possibility of changing our stance in the light of the discussion that followed the exercise. Having four dichotomies highlighted the complexities of thinking about the issues and working with others to develop strategies and actions on these issues.

Small groups then sought consensus on a vision of what attitudes, actions and institutions are needed to support the emergence of Right Relationship as a guiding principle within societies. Some of these visions included:

- Shift from “I-focus” to “We-focus”  
- Reform corporate charters and financial structures to cooperatives  
- Focus on education putting families and children at the center  
- Identify Right Relationship Value Queries to guide all actions and institutions  
- Minimum-maximum income guidelines  
- Local community decisions that by-pass power structures  
- Eliminate wars  
- Develop systems that devalue competition and promote cooperation and community  
- Love and care for all life  
- Change the economy so that basic needs are met: income, health, shelter, education  
- Redesign the monetary system as a public service institution  
- Goal-based action from the community level instead of top-down

On Saturday afternoon a realistic scenario of an environmental conflict was used as the basis for a strategy game in which participants were divided into various interest groups (corporations, environmentalists, labor unions, unemployed, commuters, faith groups, minorities, etc.) for a role play. In a succession of “rounds,” the groups announced strategy “moves” to achieve the outcome they hoped for in the conflict and sought alliances with other groups to gain support for this outcome. The exercise allowed participants to explore the elements and dynamics of a campaign that are affected by actions and interactions of multiple stakeholders.

The debriefing of this exercise by the whole group led to a rich and lively discussion of the importance of forming coalitions across class lines if we want to be effective in bringing about deep structural changes in our political and economic institutions.

On Saturday evening the whole group explored how to build a sequence of tactics into a movement that offers a promise of social change. Participants wrote one change tactic they personally enjoyed engaging in on each of two pieces of paper and then placed each of the papers on the floor in the appropriate chronological order between:

- Point A—identifying a goal for change and  
- Point B—successfully bringing about that change.

This enabled us to see the logic of how successful movements go from stage to stage and develop an overall strategy. We were surprised to see the similarity of sequencing we had done for our own tactics and the general pattern Lakey describes in a handout he gave to participants after the exercise. There is, indeed, a rationale and step by step process for creating successful social movements.

At the Sunday morning session the weekend ended with worship sharing and discussion of our Quaker heritage of non-violent direct action and the realization that we have a deep tradition to draw on to support our work for social fairness and ecological integrity (See background paper by Keith Helmuth in the web version).
Excerpts from Open Dialogue

At the request of some participants, an additional session was offered late Saturday evening to allow interested folks to dialogue with workshop resource people and each other on themes evoked by the day's activities. The following are excerpts from that discussion:

Where are the leverage points, the opening wedges? Gregory Bateson wrote, "Look for the differences that make a difference." In talking about social change scenarios, he urged his students and others to look for the kinds of changes that, when they happen, allow a whole cascade of other changes to follow.

In the 1970's when many farmers were in bankruptcy and losing their land, folks were saying that farms were failing. But the farms were not failing. The sun was still shining, the rain falling, the plants growing, and the animals mating. It was the financial system that was failing. That led to a study of the monetary system.

The monetary system is one of those hinge points of change. It is currently designed to work in a certain way. It could be redesigned to work differently. If certain key features of the monetary system were changed, a whole cascade of positive social and economic changes would follow.

Why should a sovereign government ever be in debt? There is a whole history of why that has happened, but it doesn't have to be that way. There have been places where the control of money has shifted from the banks to the government and it worked very well for the common good, but the experiments were closed down because it worked too well and threatened the interests of the two percent wealthy class.

The monetary system moves wealth from the working class into the wealthy class. It is a systematic feature of the system, a huge inequality factor built into the system that is self-perpetuating. The wealthy class doesn't want that to change.

George Washington should not have been persuaded to turn over the banking system to the private bankers. Dennis Kucinich has introduced a bill in the U.S. Congress, a fully developed alternative to the current monetary system. It won't go anywhere in this congress, but it puts back in the hands of the US Treasury the power to create money. Some people are worried because it gives lots of power to the government. There would have to be all kinds of controls and regulations to manage money for the common good. Adequate income for everyone comes into this, too, as a basic right.

There are limits to the financial system and when those limits are reached, we have financial collapse. When we have financial collapse, we have an opportunity to make changes. But in this recent financial collapse, the wealthy were winning before the collapse; they won during the collapse; and they are winning during the recovery. Main street paid for the recovery in the bailout, and will continue to pay interest on the money that was used for the bailout.

One strategy is to set up parallel financial systems, local currencies. In Japan the economy has been stagnant, but Japanese people have been living very well because they have a whole panorama of alternative credit and monetary systems that the government has encouraged instead of suppressing them. For example, there is a credit system where you work to take care of elderly people and that builds up a credit that can be used for your care, or it can be transferred. It gives a real resilience to an economy that looks like it is not doing very well, but the people are doing well when they have that support system.

Alternative and local currencies are one good solution. A coal company in Germany was going broke because no one had money to buy coal, so they told their employees that they would be paid in certificates for coal. They told the businesses in the town that they would have to accept the certificates. Because it cost money to store the coal, the certificates lost money over time. The speed at which money was circulated was increased. That worked really well, but the government closed it down because it was a threat to the banking system.

Lewes in the UK has its own currency that is accepted by everyone. Also the Swiss have a system that started in the 1930s and is still going. North Dakota didn't suffer from the recent recession because they have a state bank that is devoted to the economic welfare of the state. North Dakota has no deficit. This example is being looked at. Credit unions work that way. Money is invested within the community and doesn't go out of the community.

The first question that this workshop was to answer is "what are the common roots of the socio-economic and environmental crises today?" Right at the top is the financial system itself, the economic system that it supports, the media that nurtures and expresses it, the government systems at all levels, the self-interested persons of wealth that drive it, the public that accepts the acculturated view offered by the media, and the technology that is changing the way we relate to one another.

This is a substantial list, a fortress that seems impenetrable. But its capacity to hold together depends on a lot of contextual situations. We can discover how stable all of this is, what are the challenges that are emerging with the continued stability of this system? Then when action-oriented people take initiatives they will have a better understanding of how those initiatives will succeed.

For example, the machinery of empire depends on an abundance of natural resources, cheap energy, a passive population and stable climate. Which minerals are we running out of that are necessary to support this imperial machine? What are the implications of the transfers of wealh between social classes and the implications for the stability or instability of class relationships?

We are approaching really dangerous levels of climate change, an increasingly fragile situation. The earth speaks and the earth will continue to speak, to generate a wide variety of events of sufficient magnitude to make us question. Tipping points can initiate a spiraling of secondary and tertiary consequences. The stability that maintains this system is vulnerable to small pushes by people like you and me. Identifying the resistance in the system, the larger power forces that hold the system in place, is the basis of a strategic approach. That does not mean you have to address them directly, but you need to know.

In the Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT) action, the PNC Bank was vulnerable to exposure of their hypocrisy. PNC had pushed their Quaker connection of great integrity. The activists did their homework and found that PNC was a big funder of mountain-top removal. They had presented this public image that they were the greenest bank, so they were vulnerable to exposure. The top 2% is not exempt to hypocrisy. By doing your homework, you can find their hypocrisies (Lakey and Cantor, 2010).

One must be careful about using shaming as a strategy. In the case of an action to stop johns from using underage prostitutes, an activist found that shaming of the johns was not effective. It just destabilized them, but no change occurred.
But in the PNC case, EQAT was not attacking individuals. They were holding the institution accountable. PNC stated that they were starting to change their policy on mountain-top removal coal because of public pressure. But that was not the most important outcome because the coal company will just find another bank. The most important outcome was that this group learned how to be effective in engagements with institutions like this bank.

EQAT started this and then Rainforest Action joined them in the attempt to get banks to withdraw from mountain-top removal. Several major banks have now stopped funding mountain-top removal. The banks have not withdrawn because they are wonderful people but because they understand that these investments come with risks, even climate risk. Political action might jeopardize the capacity of those companies to pay back their loans. In 2007 six major banks adopted a “carbon principle” that requires companies from this sector to demonstrate that they have gone through a series of steps to prove that the only way that they can proceed is to invest in fossil fuels. The banks understand where the risks are and what they have to do. There are risks in investing in a collapsing empire.

The oligarchs that have been in agreement about the need to redirect the wealth to the top are beginning to argue. The insurance industry suddenly discovers that the home-building industry is taking risks building on seashores, on flood plains. The transportation and manufacturing industries are arguing about who gets to use the carbon allocation in areas that are exceeding their standards. If the transportation sector makes an improvement, the manufacturing sector moves in and uses it. We don't get cleaner air, just a re-allocation of carbon. There is conflict and we can use that. If the oligarch system begins to fragment, we can use that.

It is not about finding perfect targets to go after. It is much more gray. Those who build buildings do some good things and some bad things. It is harder to find the leverage points. The green building movement has ignored social equity, so we could expose the hypocrisy. But affordable housing has allied itself with green building. There are now green building codes.

We are hearing about the disappearance of the 30-year home mortgage. Our changing demographic is that the supply of homes on large lots is sufficient until 2025. It would be bad business to extend 30-year mortgages to a home that will likely not maintain its value. It would be better to invest in condos.

The Wisconsin crisis provides largely faith-based communities an opportunity to make alliances with the labor unions. The Governor of Washington put forth a different model. She presented the issues to the labor unions and they agreed to make adjustments. She is the Chairman of the National Governor's Association and made a presentation on this recently.

How do we make taxes a good thing? Society doesn't allow us to do good things because we can't raise taxes. We have a Republican leadership that makes us think we cannot raise taxes.

The latest issue of Mother Jones is about the "Vampire Economy." There are three charts, the actual distribution of wealth, what people think it is, and what people would like it to be. Those are three totally different charts because people don't know about the great inequity in the distribution of wealth and how socially destructive this is.

Is there a graphic about this distribution of wealth that would be as powerful as the one of the slave ships and how the slaves were transported that led to the end of the slave trade? Many people have worked on this, but it is not graffiti on buildings. We have to get these graffiti artists involved. Which would be the graphic of choice? It is how to make things go viral on YouTube.

In these examples we have had very clear objectives in what we want to achieve. We can pick up various misbehaviors and address them. What we do not have is a vision of the society we want, what it would look like in these various dimensions. We do not really have a picture that holds together. What we need is a serious visioning project.

A vision of a new future: locally based economies, food production, and energy production. Access to the means of life for people in the community is governed by a commons approach. Those are elements of a vision of a society that can work that is an alternative to the one we have now.

Alternative models could demystify where our money goes. There are alternative, responsible mutual funds. Quakers have quite a lot of experience in banking. Why don't Quakers develop one of these mutual funds?

To a degree we are moving against the current, but it isn't the only current. Listen closely and you will hear alternatives. Quakers have traditionally served as the seed-bearers, the Johnny Appleseeds, spinning things off and then they get into the larger community. So it is not so much what the Quakers are going to do, it is what we are going to seed. Greenpeace was founded and bankrolled by a couple of Quakers. Our fingerprints might not even be on it in the end and that's OK.

References (websites accessed 3 April 2011)


