

An Introduction to the Quilligan Seminars:  
Rebuilding our Beloved Commons

*In reviewing the topics for *The Emergence of a Commons-Based Economy*, it's clear that each of the presentations in this series is different. While each of the Quilligan Seminars is indeed unique, they are not discrete or unconnected segments. The greater thematic unity which interlinks them is essentially a "commons of the commons". More than anything, it is a worldview which calls us to rebuild and restore our Beloved Commons as part of the world renaissance that has now begun.*

Throughout most of human history, people have lived in deep relation to the meaning expressed in the public life of their societies. The spirit of the people is demonstrated in our common institutions, through which we define our identity. We are what we are in virtue of participating in the larger life of society. But how much longer can we be loyal to the debilitating forms of modern society? The rules and disciplines of the Market State are neither the creation of the public, nor are they the creation of what is best in us and truly ourselves. The public experience of society has become irrelevant and often monstrous. Globalization is about corporatocracy, not the democratic aspirations of the world's people. Through their homogenization and interdependence, business-controlled governments have become an intolerable imposition on the citizens of this planet. The Market State has trampled our power to gather together, collaborate and produce, destroying the lives and livelihoods of people everywhere it has appeared. The theories and practices of the Market State, expressed through economic and political totalization, are a travesty of our ideals for the public life of the community.

Those who have chosen to champion a particular view of either the *social good* or of *individual rights* have generated an enormous political polarity. The ideal of mass equality has led to homogenization and uniformity of society and submission under omnipotent governments. People today find little value in participating in forms of political decision-making which are merely demonstrative and not substantive. Extreme emphasis on the collective good has undermined the traditional commons because few people identify with the local political units that are carved out essentially to perpetuate social hierarchies and secure our complacency. As the saying goes, "the system is not broken, it's fixed".

Likewise, the ideal of mass freedom has become an empty vessel, offering no means for people to identify with their local commons. Only the individual can create change, not society. Societies must nurture the freedom of the individual, but this is often

accomplished by abolishing collectivities and returning society to primitive conditions. These upheavals are often carried out by zealous minorities with a vision of militant nationalism or totalitarian ideology. Such reckless programs depreciate and crush the individuality and diversity that arise from the commons, uprooting people and destroying their traditions and means of livelihood.

This duality between the ideals of social equality and political freedom discourages personal and social reconciliation, the transformation of our communities and the creation of a commons-based economy. When the individual is set in competition with the whole, the moral will and creativity of the people are suppressed. Mind and body are seen as separate units. Our being is split from our actions. Our common purpose is lost.

For those seeking to overcome this alienation through a Third Way, the problem is that in attempting to combine the common good and individual rights in a neutral fashion (by not emphasizing one over the other), a very strong kind of relativism has resulted. This polarity is not transcended through the autonomous and dynamic countervailing power of the people. This is because our middle path for social alternatives is passive rather than active and creative. We have not fully recognized that the society which sees itself as an inevitable polarity between the social good and individual rights destroys the forms of life that are rooted in the commons. We do not seem to recognize how the individual fits in society or how society can support personal growth and creativity. Without a sense of the indivisibility of human existence, the modern ideologies of collective rights and individual rights are both devoid of the realization that people take part in a variety of commons which are the source of our livelihood and well-being. This has left us starved for the equality and freedom which express the interrelatedness of human life and which can arise only through our commons.

All of this is changing now as a result of the commons movement. The Quilligan Seminars in London underscore various facets of our commoning activities which unite individual freedom and collective freedom through a social order based on Oneness. *New Era Economics and the Commons* (16 May) describes the most irreducible fact in economics — that resource systems may either be depletable (natural, material) or replenishable (natural, solar, social, cultural, intellectual, digital). This means that economists — and all of us — need to be looking at the complementarity of the stocks and flows of resource systems for a better indicator of sustainability in a world of disequilibrium and instability. In refusing to affirm a preference for the common good or the rights of the individual, while seeing both as important but imperfectly expressed through the Market State, we are creating a framework that is neutral among ends but highly transformative. Our conventional approach to economics needs to be radically reconstructed so that the relationships between individual, institutions and the commons are better understood.

*Political Economy and the Inclusive Commons* (8 May) examines how the aggregation of the social good and the radical atomism of individual rights have both eroded the

meaning of citizenship and communities. It describes the commons as a third sector that can create a more beneficial balance in society, bringing people a new form of political power. Through the co-production and co-governance of a commons, resource users become the producers of their own resources, allowing the traditional model of property ownership (utility, self-interest, profit) to be eclipsed by a new framework of trusteeship (sustainability, quality of life and well-being).

*Restoring the Commons or Terminal Decline* (9 May) describes the enormous costs to planetary society that occur when citizens are not aware of the commons and their responsibilities for stewarding them. This seminar also demonstrates how the principles of Henry George and Peter Barnes may be applied to a commons-based economy, creating a far more representative balance of power and wealth between the commons, business and government than currently exists. In this vision of a new society, private industry provides the public with goods and services which are produced from the surplus resources rented from commons trusts. Government then recycles these rents as social dividends for the public and as funds for the preservation and regeneration of the commons.

Of course, a new political and social balance is not possible unless the public life of the commons expresses the deep ontological structure that has been missing in the Market State. *Democratizing the Global Political Commons* (7 May) describes the units and scales of political accountability that are necessary for post-liberal forms of multilateral cooperation, a new international economic system and the creation of a democratic confederation of world citizens. In realizing this ontology for restoring the local and global communities through our commons, a new kind of collective value must arise. This social dynamic — emerging from the shared values and meanings of people's life-experiences in the organization and production of their commons — includes but transcends the market and state, bringing people new forms of political power. These new political accountability structures involve pluralism, subsidiarity, polycentrism, checks and balances, and horizontalist decision-making.

*Organizational Practice and the Commons* (15 May) focuses on what needs to be done to adjust our organizations models, systems and ways of working to better serve the common interests and protect well-being of all. Besides maximizing the power of networks to create greater synergy through cross-sectoral cooperation among existing institutions, many new forms of commons collaboration are emerging, leading to new ways of interacting and coordinating social and economic life. For example, social charters, co-governance, co-production, commons trusts, autonomous civil society initiatives, partnership governments and peer-to-peer job creation are rapidly generating new forms of value and political management, teaching civil society organizations how to adopt new values and structures.

*Financial Innovation and the Commons* (10 May) describes how the modern economy can be reconceived as a subsystem of the biospheric commons, providing the long-term

signals and incentives (through ecological, energy and exchange rate stability) that businesses are presently seeking. It describes how the global commons — material, natural, genetic, social, intellectual, cultural and digital — provide a range of assets that can create the reserve base for a new global monetary system and standard of value. This, in turn, will create a new dynamic in the world of business and finance, opening broad opportunities for the development of Commons Wealth Funds.

The emerging commons society rests upon a non-polar framework which does not make the common good more important than individual rights, or individual rights more important than common good, but recognizes the mutual importance of both. We can recover the meaning of citizenship and community — which has been lost through the corporate economy and the bureaucratic state — by focusing on the production and management of our commons. *The Great Transition and the Commons* (14 May) describes a new epistemology of resource sovereignty, shared responsibility and legal accountability which recognizes the moral and political legitimacy of people's rights to preserve, access, produce, manage and use their own resources. It demonstrates that all individuals take part in a larger life, since human beings are vitally dependent on one another. No person is either completely socialized or completely separate — everyone has both qualities of existence. Commons trusts can express this understanding through a methodology and political mechanism for the management and valuation of society's common goods. These trusts preserve the commons for the benefit of both present and future generations.

As a politically organized community, the commons express the self-sufficiency and indivisibility that underlie society and nature. The commons are a community which, like a living organism, resolve the polarizing distinction between means and ends. There is no difference between what is and what ought to be. Being and doing are one. In this way, *Property, Value and the Commons* (11 May) demonstrates how self-organizing communities transcend the traditional division of labor by allowing resource users to become directly involved in the process of production. It focuses on the norms and rules that alternative communities have developed to oversee their collective resources sustainably, including both natural and human-created commons and how they correspond (or not) to relevant laws of nature or natural law.

*The Crowd and the Commons* (12 May) also describes how deriving value through crowdfunding has the potential of involving resources users in the process of producing their own resources, thereby generating new forms of value, cooperation and trusteeship. Since each of us has roles defined by our communities which are deeply embedded in their collective accountability structures, the commons provide the basis of the individual rights and obligations that already exist in the social good. This greater good is achieved by individuals working collectively on a voluntary basis — freely offering one's labor for the social benefit. Applying this principle to crowdfunding, financial resources can now be amassed by individuals for the social good without the need for traditional banks or venture capital.

*Covenant Stewardship and the Inclusive Commons* (13 May) examines the spiritual dimension of the commons. This is the vision of a completely integrated society, a community of love and justice where brother and sisterhood are realized through all of social life. It is not the competition for resources that we seek, but the demonstration of our common ideals and notions of what it means to be human. The set of practices and institutions which comprise the public life of the community, expressing the norms and purposes essential to the identities of its people, are sustained only through their participation in these practices and institutions. Ultimately, harmony and cooperation between nations is achieved only through the advancement of culture. Evolution emerges through the dynamic of the group expressed by individuals acting together but also voluntarily. Whatever the collective action is attempting to generate, if human free will is not involved, the social good will not be realized because the individual is not invested in the outcome. Society cannot grow unless the individual is also growing.

*Convergence Working Group* (17 May) and *Convergence for a Commons-Based Economy* (18 May) are attempts to provide broader thinking among the seminar conveners and the public on a *commons for the commons* — not a set of solutions, but a process for reaching such solutions. Obviously, these are deeply challenging and momentous questions. How do we overcome our alienation and revitalize the democratic possibilities of a shared public life? How do we recover our autonomy and return to the norms of a differentiated society and the moral obligations of the community? How do we identify and engage with the decentralized federation of communities producing and organizing their own resources as in the past?

In sum, reality is comprised of structures that form an interrelated whole. Yet our present practices and institutions are not embodying the kinds of goals, norms and ends which manifest that whole. The public expression of society no longer has genuine meaning. The Quilligan Seminars suggest that individual rights can be achieved only through the ethical norms of the social good embodied in a community where the individual can realize the moral possibilities that are already there, however distorted or repressed they may be. The commons recognize the dichotomy between individuals as the sum of their desires and ends (through the common good) and the individual being who is free to make choices independent of those desires and ends (as in individual rights). This shows how deeply the commons are already embedded in the human networks of mutuality and the means of attaining this intergroup and interpersonal living through nonviolent means. We are now realizing how individuals can be separate from others *and* part of a greater wholeness. This unity or interrelatedness of the commons transcends differences in tribe, race, class and nation, demonstrating that whatever affects one person affects everyone.

The commons recognize that the politics of individual rights and the politics of the commons good are both important, but have become highly distorted by the

communities of power in the market and the state. The commons reveal how the Market State expresses a worldview in which people are considered more like material animals than transcendent spiritual beings. It shows that the separation or distancing of the human mind from life and matter is the basis of all economic and political dysfunction. We are now recognizing that our Beloved Commons are both the state of individual being and the collective state of the world. The non-dualism of individual rights and the social good is teaching us how to rebuild our commons, create collective intentions for the planet based on sustainability and restore the peace and tranquility of the world. This will lead to a World Renaissance in the Twenty-First Century, including the creation of a federation of global citizens, a common system of government and public services, and a common pool of financial resources. Our task is ultimately to reconcile the mind and the body and advance the consciousness of Unity among all citizens of the planet.

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