



# **Associative Economics**

In our souls and in the world

ECONOMICS CONFERENCE  
Report of the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting

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# Associative Economics

In our souls and in the world

*This meeting was held at André Gasset College, Montreal, Canada from 27 – 30 June 2013.*

This year, over 30 people gathered in Andre Gasset College in Montreal, Canada. As a participant from Germany, Nicholas Dodwell, put it: “It was the first time in my life that I was in a room with so many people who had read Steiner’s economics course! And not only read, but studied!” For some of us, this meeting began off-stage, as it were, with a lecture in French by Marc Desaulles on ‘Christian Rosenkreutz and the Challenge of our Times’. This was in many ways a distillation of the work undertaken in previous years at L’Aubier and was a fitting passing of the baton to Montreal, where we have decided to stay for the next two years (21-24 June 2014, 20-23 June 2015), also choosing the time of St John’s Tide for our annual gathering so as not to conflict with Michaelmas.

We began with the verse given by Rudolf Steiner on 28 September 1924, the last he gave to the members and now adopted until the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Christmas Conference (so, until the meeting in June 2023!). This decision was reflected also in Kim Chotzen’s choice of the Hymn of St John as part of her report on publications. Both texts are included at the end.

France Beaucage welcomed everyone with a clear and resounding confirmation of the importance of the work of the Economics Conference for the future, and of her hope that it would find ever-wider recognition and participation. The ‘child’ is only 12 years old, however, and needs the support and protection of wise parents. Christopher Houghton Budd then shared something of the history and aims of the Economics Conference, drawing attention to its main highlights. His review ended with a brief overview of the Economics Conference Research Fund worldwide.

The first evening was given over to a consideration in the light of the 4<sup>th</sup> Lesson of the First Class of the School of Spiritual Science, in which Marc Desaulles outlined the premises to enter the sacred space of the School. He then described the fundamental gesture that leads to a widening of egoism from selfishness to selflessness and how our social life is nothing else but the field *par excellence* for exercising entry into the spiritual world through the development of our faculties, especially the sense for human dignity and our readiness to meet one another’s economic needs.

The next day began with France asking everyone to make a proposition for the future work, but also asking Marc and Christopher to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to them; giving their reasons at the end of the session. The suggestions summed up well the views and aspirations of everyone present, as well as giving an orientation for the next ten years.

There were then two detailed research sessions in which true price became the focus and the decision was taken to make this for the time being our one agreed area of work. Many other themes merit attention, but it was felt that this focus would enable us to give a more solid foundation not only to the work of the Economics Conference as an otherwise dispersed worldwide activity but also for general economic life. It would be important that we looked at how true price could be given effect in both theoretical *and* practical terms – that, according to Steiner, being the sign of a true economic science.

Kim Chotzen and Susan Gravelle reported on the fledgling Publications Fund that was begun in the spring and has as its aim the furtherance of the publication of works in associative economics. They also described their process with the publication of *Towards Christmas 2023, Renewing our Covenant with Rudolf Steiner*<sup>1</sup>, entailing getting grips with the various problems confronting modern publishing. The book itself has been published in order to make more widely available the contents of the Economics Conference as represented in lectures given by Christopher Houghton Budd in 2011 in Argentina, Brazil and Spain. As an outcome and in keeping with the true price focus, one participant made arrangements to send regular financial contributions to the Publications Fund in compensation for any ‘untrue’ price she encountered in the future – a seed idea that could both bring attention to the theory of true price and, even if in ‘homeopathic’ doses, give it practical expression.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://economics.goetheanum.org/towards-2023/>

The second evening focused on the questions of how, with regard to the Anthroposophical Society, we can answer the three calls regarding finance given by Rudolf Steiner at Christmas 1923. Can the commitment we then made to work with Rudolf Steiner be reinforced on a financial and monetary level?

The third day was devoted to the question of how associative economics can be understood as a school of thought and how its 'message' can be imparted, whether by teaching in schools, lecturing generally, or in other ways. In short, the answer was twofold. Firstly, by treating the course not simply as a cycle of lectures, but as a schooling in itself, a path one needs to follow very deliberately from beginning to end. Its methodology is very precise, if extremely difficult to practice. Thinking in ways that are neither inductive nor deductive is a huge challenge. As far as economics is concerned, however, it is the method of spiritual science when outwardly described.

The second thing was to adopt the question of financial literacy as a formal activity of the Economics Conference. This was a theme for a single session, but was taken further in the one-day meeting that followed (separate report attached) and will be made an annual theme under Economics Conference auspices. Next dates: 25 & 26 June 2014, 24 & 25 June 2015.

In the afternoon we heard from various projects: Meg Freeling's impressive research into spend-out foundations, a project that could have serious benefits for the Waldorf movement; Stephen Vallus's work with double entry bookkeeping, in regard to which he said Marc Desaulles's "Money as Global Bookkeeping" in 1997 had been for him a 'Copernican' event<sup>2</sup>. Vivianne Rael's publication of lectures on 'Inner and Outer Aspects of Associative Economics', a workshop held in Viroqua in October 2008; Marc Desaulles on the work of the Swiss pension fund, Coopera; and Christopher Houghton Budd on his youth bond work.

The day culminated in an evening of singing including old favourites from the AE 'play list'. Over the years, a repertory of songs and poetic literature has developed that mirrors the themes of associative economics, while providing a fun way of embedding these ideas more in our culture. Just as there we strive to give effect to structures that elicit the noblest qualities of the human being, whether acting alone or in collaboration, so singing involves creating a structure – 'tuning our instrument' – such that each voice can be heard in its purest quality, both individually and in harmony with others. Many of these songs have been penned or modified by Economics Conference participants. One such example this year was Stephen Vallus's rewording of 'Simple Gifts':

'Tis a gift to be human, 'tis a gift to be free.  
'Tis a gift to see what other people see.  
And when we find ourselves in the economic life,  
'Twill be in the midst of accounts done right.

When true transparency is gained,  
To spend and to lend we shan't be ashamed.  
To serve, serve will be our delight,  
'Til by serving and funding we come round right.

The final morning brought things to a close by focusing on the year ahead, discussing more precisely how the theme of true pricing could be worked on. Sebastian Bilboa advocated using The Scrum and Agile iterative and collaborative methodology to help move forward initiatives and research (see wikipedia/Scrum and wikipedia/Agile). The meeting ended with Doug Wylie sharing the following verse from Rudolf Steiner:

For in future time must come,  
when men exist for one another  
and not the one by means of others.

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen specifically said that what are usually considered 'owned by me' (Assets) are actually 'owed to me.' This standpoint immediately makes one conscious of the debtor/creditor relationship which has implications for Steiner's concept of 'True Price', not to mention reflecting the fact that the entrepreneur is a steward of community assets. Daniel Osmer also gave an extended presentation in a break, which led to the idea that next time more space should be given to double entry seen from an associative or spiritual scientific point of view.

So shall the goal of earth be gained,  
when each at rest within himself  
shall gladly give to others  
what neither would demand.

By way of a postscript for some participants, Christopher Houghton Budd gave a public lecture outside the meeting proper on globalisation and Rudolf Steiner's place in economic history. From the point of view of our work together, it provided some background in terms of the development from Aristotle through Thomas Aquinas to Rudolf Steiner, with the theme to watch being the evolution from 'the mean', through 'just price' to 'true price'.

*Hymn to St John (the Baptist)*

Ut queant laxis  
resonare fibris

Mira gestorum  
famuli tuorum

Solve polluti  
labii reatum

Sancte Johannes

Sonnenmächten Entsprössene,  
Leuchtende, Welten begnadende  
Geistesmächte, zu Michaels Strahlenkleid  
Seid ihr vorbestimmt vom Götterdenken

Er, der Christusbote weist in euch  
Menschentragenden, heil'gen Welten-Willen;  
Ihr, die hellen Ätherwelten-Wesen  
Trägt das Christuswort zum Menschen.

So erscheint der Christuskünder  
Den erharrenden, durstenden Seelen;  
Ihnen strahlet euer Leuchte-Wort  
In des Geistesmenschen Weltzeit.

Ihr, der Geist-Erkenntnis Schüler,  
Nehmet Michaels weises Winken,  
Nehmt des Welten-Willens Liebe-Wort  
In der Seelen Höhenziele wirksam auf.

That thy servants may,  
their voices loosened,

Thy wonderous acts  
in their own souls resound,

Clean thou the guilt  
from our ill-stained lips.

O Saint John  
(*CHB rendering*)

Springing from Powers of the Sun,  
Radiant Spirit-powers, blessing all Worlds!  
For Michael's garment of rays  
Ye are predestined by Thought Divine.

He, the Christ-messenger, revealeth in you  
Bearing mankind aloft – the sacred Will of Worlds.  
Ye, the radiant Beings of Ether-Worlds,  
Bear the Christ-Word to Man.

Thus shall the Herald of Christ appear  
To the thirstily waiting souls,  
To whom your Word of Light shines forth  
In cosmic age of Spirit-Man.

Ye, the disciples of Spirit-Knowledge,  
Take Michael's Wisdom-beckoning,  
Take the Word of Love of the Will of Worlds  
Into your souls' aspiring, actively!

*Financial Literacy*

In 2005, work began to bring together those who teach economics in the upper classes of Waldorf schools. The idea was to provide tea and biscuits and to host meetings in which those concerned could discuss the how, what, when and why of teaching economics in general and associative economics in particular. An initial meeting was held in July 2005 in London, since when various gatherings and discussions have been held around the world, including Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, England, and Argentina. Work has also been undertaken (for example, by Arthur Edwards, Gary Lamb and John Bloom) to teach a more coherent programme in secondary schools, both Waldorf and state. (Not only at the secondary level, but also tertiary.) The idea of this day was to consider how this work might be given a wider basis and become a regular part of the work of the Economics Conference.

Crucial is for those who would teach to have experience of their subject matter. In the case of associative economics this would tend to mean entrepreneurial experience, as it is a paradigm more linked to business than banking, for example, and to accounting rather than maths. But key also is the challenge to think descriptively in the sense of Steiner's economics course. Examples were given of the true price formula (lecture 6) and Steiner's treatment of the relationship between price, supply and demand (lecture 8).

We heard from various projects: John Baring concerning Camphill's Academy and the aim to introduce associative economics into its curriculum, Daniel Osmer on his financial driving license, 'aecafe' and other projects. Nicholas Dodwell, the only actual Waldorf teacher present, was able to give us something of the 'inside story'. The introduction of financial literacy in secondary schools throughout the world was also drawn to our attention, this having been the high point of a recent conference at Oxford university on the future of finance. The main need remains for teachers of associative economics to get into the room together, to share their experiences and to build together a common ground, in order to improve the coherence between them, and with regard to Steiner's ideas and today's realities.

The first afternoon session benefited from the prior discussion in the Annual Meeting concerning the need to focus on true price as a synonym for the entirety of Rudolf Steiner's economics course, as also a touchstone for action. The discussion had two main parts: the idea of true price and the role of accounting, especially double entry bookkeeping, in the teaching of economics.

We considered how economics is taught, and when it should be taught. For example, should one teach compound interest at age 12? Marc Desaulles pointed out that compound interest is an example of exponential growth and may not be the best choice for that age. It would be better to find another example, so that one does not bring a young person's mind prematurely into link with money. Prematurely meaning in ways that imply that money is a thing in itself and can be placed above all else. A lively discussion ensued!

Given today's world, also important is how to catch a young person's sense of injustice without this being caught by false economic notions, such as basic income. False in the sense that it looks to a higher instance as the arbiter of economic justice, rather than the actions of individuals.

There also needs to be a clear context given through economic history and the history of economic thought – elements of which abound in the Waldorf curriculum with its recapitulation of evolution, working from the whole to the parts (thinking of the world economy first, then its parts), and so on. Another important aspect would be the introduction of perspective in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, then multi-perspective in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and their musical, accounting and other corollaries.

Can true price be operationalized via accounting? Beginning with double entry, that has the nature of a theorem, then out into the world of accounts and balance sheets, the means through which modern economic life can be made visible and transparent.

Indeed, can one observe or give effect to true prices if one does not know the balance sheets of the parties to any transaction?

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The day ended with a session that considered the pros and cons of accreditation. Do we need an external measure? Do students need some kind of measure (external or otherwise) to check themselves against? Finally, it was agreed to reconvene next year and to take as our focus the question of creating a coherent curriculum in (associative) economics.

*Note: The rent for the day was paid through a kind donation from the Economic Literacy Project; incidental costs were met by the participants.*