



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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Economic Transformations

Amata Miller, IHM

Clearly, this is a time for economic transformation. Evidence, social analysis, and reflection on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching all call for it. Fortunately, current economic realities are also beginning to bring positive developments.

EVIDENCE

A critical feature of the past 40 years has been the drastic increase in economic inequality, enriching the wealthy at the expense of the powerless. Census data points out that the most neglected sector of our population is our children. Even before the pandemic one in six children lived in poverty and 39% of total US wealth was held by the richest 1% of households. In January 2021 America had 657 billionaires who are \$1.3 billion richer than in March 2020. However, more than 4 in 10 US children now live in a household struggling to meet basic expenses, and between 7 and 13 million are without enough to eat.

School closings cause low-income mothers to choose between jobs and

childcare and deprive children of previously available school lunches.

Data shows that our country's poverty problem is both persistent and structural, due to failures in public policy which for decades has prioritized economic growth over human well-being.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS / REFLECTION

Over the past 40 years neoliberalism has dominated public policy. The unrestrained market has been king and the spirit of laissez capitalism has shaped economic realities. Economic growth has been the goal. Greed has been good. And lifestyles of the rich and famous have been the fashion in a winner-take-all society.

Relaxed banking laws generated opportunities for new kinds of wealth creation among the already affluent. Corporations exceeded trillions in total worth and CEO pay and golden parachutes grew rapidly, hatching hundreds of new millionaires.

Manufacturing jobs were destroyed in favor of service sector growth. Labor unions declined and wage incomes stagnated along with labor power in shaping public policy.

Equity in distribution of income, a goal in the 1960s, was no longer a political goal as racist backlash against sharing the wealth shaped the politics of the 1970s and generated a "welfare reform" spirit, shifting party allegiances. The *laissez-faire* ethos of a free market, that is one free from social control, took over.

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LCWR
8737 Colesville Rd.
Suite 610
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-588-4955
fax: 301-587-4575
ascholz@lcwr.org

This led, over the next several decades, to times of boom and bust with lengthy periods of unemployment and dramatically growing economic inequality. It also helped create the pockets of forgotten Americans whose anger erupted into the deadlock that has politically polarized the nation and its government. One of the most tragic effects has been the neglect of our children in favor of more powerful sectors of our society.

The pandemic has revealed disproportionate economic plight of structurally disadvantaged low-income minorities -- Black, Hispanic, and Native American -- as well as the pervasive white supremacy at its root. Many have come to new realization that government in a democracy must be active to maintain markets that promote real freedom for all and safeguard and foster human welfare. To economists this means a return to Keynesian ideas dominant before the 1980s. Government use of spending and taxing policy for the common good, especially the most vulnerable, is imperative.

President Biden's American Rescue Plan reflects the return of this view with its emphasis on economic equity, particularly the needs of women and children. His plans to "Build Back Better" include permanent child allowances, universal access to high quality pre-K education, and ensuring access to affordable and effective day care.

Other evidence of movement toward economic transformation includes increased awareness of climate change due to dangerous reliance on fossil fuels. New discoveries in science and cosmology are widening the sense of universal connectivity. Younger generations seek a deeper sense of meaning through practices of yoga, mindfulness, Buddhism, and interests in monasticism and spirituality -- even as "nones" reject institutionalized religion.

Catholic Social Teaching is rich with principles of a just socio-economic reality. Pope Francis has consistently critiqued the prevalent economic system, denouncing the "idolatry of the market" which rules as an unchallenged monarch, determining values and neglecting the care of persons and of earth. His call for an integral ecology, for respecting the dignity and roles of persons and earth, challenges our current technocratic mindset and current understandings of human limits and responsibilities.

In his 2020 book, *Let Us Dream: The Path to A Better Future*, he specifically addresses the neoliberalism of recent years. He deplors lack of attention to the common good and to the God-intended universal destination of material goods. Clear that he does not disdain the market itself, he rejects its neglect of human needs, especially those of the poorest, amidst the inequality and wastefulness of the "throwaway society," citing its obsession with profit and absence of social goals. He recalls the Good Samaritan, calling for a new fraternity, of inclusiveness in a loving and caring global community.

ACTION

In the spirit of our calling as religious, reading of the signs of the times, we might consider these actions to foster economic transformation:

Are my choices made
in light of the needs of underprivileged and
marginalized peoples of the world
as I decide about what I do, how I serve,
the kind of example I give, the causes I
support, what I pray about,
and who I am to others?

1. **Deeper reflection on the social meaning of our commitment to evangelical poverty and wider sharing of our experiences and learning.** We have chosen an alternative economic lifestyle which holds lessons for a consumer culture. We can share those learnings and experiences more fully among our lay confreres. Simplicity of lifestyle, learning what it means to hold all things in common, coming to see all things as gift, emphasis on sharing rather than having -- all are meaningful for our culture.
2. **Questioning our personal attitudes toward material things.** Am I part of the "throwaway culture"? Do I live by the rule of my childhood to finish what is on my plate? Does my closet hold no-longer-used clothing or do I contribute it to the needy? Is "renew, reuse, and recycle" a habit for me now?
3. **Following Karl Barth's advice to read the Bible along with my newspaper.** Are my choices made in light of the needs of underprivileged and marginalized peoples of the world as I decide about what I do, how I serve, the kind of example I give, the causes I support, what I pray about, and who I am to others?
4. **Supporting groups that advocate for the needs of children** (Children's Defense Fund), the hungry (Bread for the World), raising the minimum wage, unions for worker justice (United Farmworkers), migrants and all federal policy (NETWORK).
5. **Becoming politically active in ways appropriate to my life-stage:** e.g., letters to the editor, attending prayer vigils, working for candidates for public office, keeping well-informed about current issues, conversing about these topics, and keeping all these people and events in continuing prayer.