

INTERRELIGIOUS AND INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION FOR WORLD PEACE

THE NEW EMANCIPATION

“Economic Justice in the Twenty-first Century: A Role for the United Nations”

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Between the 1830s and the 1880s ownership of human beings was eliminated from the so-called “civilized” world. Following the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1889, the world entered into a period which seemed to give promise of the opening of an era of freedom and prosperity, and so the opening of the twentieth century was seen, with all the requisite celebrations, speeches and fireworks. In 1911 a book named “The Great Illusion” was published, which sold more copies in more languages than any other book in history up to that time except the Bible. The illusion referred to was the possibility of another major war among the great powers, who were considered to be so interconnected economically and technologically that such a war was literally impossible.

Three years later the first world war began. From 1914 to the end of the cold war, which was in effect the third world war, in 1991, the twentieth century proved to be the bloodiest in all of human history, with only a handful of years, between 1918 and 1929, free of major warfare or economic collapse. Even those years saw the rise of totalitarianism of the left and the right which so horribly characterized subsequent decades.

The post-cold war world has, unfortunately, proven a period of widespread ethnic and religious strife, including massacres of defenseless peoples and huge military onslaughts using all the implements of ultra-modern war. There is little, frankly, to indicate at present that the twenty-first century will be significantly better than the twentieth, unless circumstances are changed fundamentally.

Property in human beings was effectively abolished in the nineteenth century; this was the first emancipation, and followed millennia when slavery was an accepted social relationship in most of the world. It is time to move to the second emancipation, under which human beings will be freed from the chains of wage slavery. In this glorious work the United Nations can have a central catalytic role, and one which would be greatly more important than occasional “peacekeeping” missions, which generally suffer from the problem that there is no peace to keep. By supporting the second emancipation, the United Nations can help create a world of truly free and autonomous individuals, and thus render much less likely that the new century will be simply a repeat of the old.

The purpose of government is to furnish an institutional framework within which the individual citizen can realize himself as fully as he is able. That includes the preservation and enhancement of life -- thus, public security and public health; preservation and enhancement of freedom -- civil, religious and political liberties -- and the pursuit of material prosperity since without command of a certain minimum level of resources, other goals are difficult or impossible to achieve.

The government must strive to prevent individuals and institutions within society from impeding access of others to life, liberty and material resources. Above all, it must not itself prevent its own citizens from access to and enhancement of all these attributes.

The actual implementation of the proper role of government can and does give rise to conflict and controversy -- however, unlike the principles themselves, techniques of implementation are subject to test by trial and error -- a process which is constant in societies which are governed more or less democratically.

Perfection in governing does not exist, any more than in any other human endeavor, but erosion and gradual loss of the inviolability of life and liberty in any society are rendered much more likely to the extent that the individual citizen is deprived of the resources with which to defend them in concert with his fellow citizens. In philosophical theory, access to income-producing property is not as important as life and liberty. In practice, it is a condition antecedent which, if allowed to diminish, will lead to the decay of all the rest.

History is full of examples of this and here is not the place to review them. What must be said, however, is that just as violation of life and liberty by the government is even more dangerous and reprehensible than by private citizens, state deprivation of the access to material resources is even more reprehensible than violation of civil liberties because it deprives the citizen of the ability to defend his own capacity for self-fulfillment.

Governments, including many politically democratic governments, engage in three kinds of activity which tend to restrict or destroy the economic autonomy of the citizens and their voluntary associations, and thus their ability to defend life and liberty:

1. By absorbing itself some or most of the means of production -- with or without compensation. This, as a great economist once proclaimed, is the road to serfdom.
2. By depriving the citizen of his resources through taxation above and beyond the needs of safeguarding life, liberty and property. This is the road to pauperization.
3. By depriving the average citizen of access to affordable financial credit, the only way intelligence, initiative and hard work can be translated into reproductive resources to the ultimate benefit of society as a whole. This is the road to stagnation.

It is thus incumbent upon government to avoid seizing the means of production and to turn back to society those it already has (privatization); it is incumbent upon government to limit its taxation claims to that amount necessary to fulfill its role of guardian of life, liberty and property, and it is incumbent upon the government to make sure that monetary credit is widely available to transform intangible assets into tangible assets.

This is not the time or place to enter into the technical details of the legal, structural, fiscal and monetary changes that are and will be necessary to make the world of the twenty-first century the century of the new emancipation, the century when economic justice becomes the goal and

objective of all civilized societies. This IS the time and place to dedicate the appropriate agencies of the United Nations, such as the UNDP, to the propagation of the manifold structures and policies of the new emancipation -- the employee stock ownership plans, the Community Investment Corporations, the Capital Ownership Financing Corporations and Capital Credit Insurance Corporations, the reconstituted and rededicated central banks and all the rest. The blueprints are there -- some have already been fleshed out and put into practice in parts of the world.

This, then, is the great challenge of our time, for the United Nations as for all of us, and particularly for the stale, worn-out shibboleths of economic development theory. It is time to recognize that not only is giving a fish to a starving man not sufficient, teaching him to fish is also insufficient so long as he can use his new skill only to feed himself or to work for someone else who owns the rod and reel and nets. The new challenge is to make him an owner of the fishing company, so that he can work not only for himself, but for many, feeding the world from the dignity of an owner of productive capital. Only then will he know economic justice and be a beneficiary of the new emancipation.

Thank you very much.