

Economics for Social Action 1 Economic Principles

Themes for Social and Economic Development

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse – Social Action 13 Economics

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Engage in Crafts and Professions

O My Servants! Ye are the trees of My garden; ye must give forth goodly and wondrous fruits, that ye yourselves and others may profit therefrom. Thus it is incumbent on every one to engage in crafts and professions, for therein lies the secret of wealth, O men of understanding! For results depend upon means, and the grace of God shall be all-sufficient unto you. Trees that yield no fruit have been and will ever be for the fire.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, no. 80)

Bahá'í Economic Principles

Should these sublime teachings be diffused, mankind shall be freed from all perils, from all chronic ills and sicknesses. In like manner are the Bahá'í economic principles the embodiment of the highest aspirations of all wage-earning classes and of economists of various schools.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Tablet to Dr. Forel)

Voluntary Sharing

To state the matter briefly, the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh advocate voluntary sharing, and this is a greater thing than the equalization of wealth. For equalization must be imposed from without, while sharing is a matter of free choice.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pars. 79.2–79.3)

Voluntary Sharing

Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him. And sharing is a personally chosen righteous act: that is, the rich should extend assistance to the poor, they should expend their substance for the poor, but of their own free will, and not because the poor have gained this end by force. For the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order. On the other hand voluntary sharing, the freely-chosen expending of one's substance, leadeth to society's comfort and peace. It lighteth up the world; it bestoweth honor upon humankind.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pars. 79.2–79.3)

Moderation

One must therefore enact such laws and regulations as will moderate the excessive fortunes of the few and meet the basic needs of the myriad millions of the poor, that a degree of moderation may be achieved.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [Some Answered Questions](#), pp. 316–318)

Moderation

However, absolute equality is just as untenable, for complete equality in wealth, power, commerce, agriculture, and industry would result in chaos and disorder, disrupt livelihoods, provoke universal discontent, and undermine the orderly conduct of the affairs of the community. For unjustified equality is also fraught with peril. It is preferable, then, that some measure of moderation be achieved, and by moderation is meant the enactment of such laws and regulations as would prevent the unwarranted concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and satisfy the essential needs of the many.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 316–318)

Moderation

For instance, the factory owners reap a fortune every day, but the wage the poor workers are paid cannot even meet their daily needs: This is most unfair, and assuredly no just man can accept it. Therefore, laws and regulations should be enacted which would grant the workers both a daily wage and a share in a fourth or fifth of the profits of the factory in accordance with its means, or which would have the workers equitably share in some other way in the profits with the owners. For the capital and the management come from the latter and the toil and labour from the former.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, pp. 316–318)

Moderation

The workers could either be granted a wage that adequately meets their daily needs, as well as a right to a share in the revenues of the factory when they are injured, incapacitated, or unable to work, or else a wage could be set that allows the workers to both satisfy their daily needs and save a little for times of weakness and incapacity.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 316–318)

Moderation

If matters were so arranged, neither would the factory owners amass each day a fortune which is absolutely of no use to them—for should one's fortune increase beyond measure, one would come under a most heavy burden, become subject to exceeding hardships and troubles and find the administration of such an excessive fortune to be most difficult and to exhaust one's natural powers—nor would the workers endure such toil and hardship as to become incapacitated and to fall victim, at the end of their lives, to the direst need.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 316–318)

Moderation

It is therefore clearly established that the appropriation of excessive wealth by a few individuals, notwithstanding the needs of the masses, is unfair and unjust, and that, conversely, absolute equality would also disrupt the existence, welfare, comfort, peace, and orderly life of the human race. Such being the case, the best course is therefore to seek moderation, which is for the wealthy to recognize the advantages of moderation in the acquisition of profits and to show regard for the welfare of the poor and the needy, that is, to fix a daily wage for the workers and also to allot them a share of the total profits of the factory.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 316–318)

Human Equality

Among the results of the manifestation of spiritual forces will be that the human world will adapt itself to a new social form, the justice of God will become manifest throughout human affairs, and human equality will be universally established. The poor will receive a great bestowal, and the rich attain eternal happiness. For although at the present time the rich enjoy the greatest luxury and comfort, they are nevertheless deprived of eternal happiness; for eternal happiness is contingent upon giving, and the poor are everywhere in the state of abject need.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), pp. 182–183)

Human Equality

Through the manifestation of God's great equity the poor of the world will be rewarded and assisted fully, and there will be a readjustment in the economic conditions of mankind so that in the future there will not be the abnormally rich nor the abject poor. The rich will enjoy the privilege of this new economic condition as well as the poor, for owing to certain provisions and restrictions they will not be able to accumulate so much as to be burdened by its management, while the poor will be relieved from the stress of want and misery. The rich will enjoy his palace, and the poor will have his comfortable cottage.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), pp. 182–183)

Economic Readjustment

... Bahá'u'lláh set forth principles of guidance and teaching for economic readjustment. Regulations were revealed by Him which ensure the welfare of the commonwealth. As the rich man enjoys his life surrounded by ease and luxuries, so the poor man must, likewise, have a home and be provided with sustenance and comforts commensurate with his needs. This readjustment of the social economy is of the greatest importance inasmuch as it ensures the stability of the world of humanity; and until it is effected, happiness and prosperity are impossible.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), p. 252)

No Extremes

One of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is the adjustment of means of livelihood in human society. Under this adjustment there can be no extremes in human conditions as regards wealth and sustenance. For the community needs financier, farmer, merchant and laborer just as an army must be composed of commander, officers and privates. All cannot be commanders; all cannot be officers or privates. Each in his station in the social fabric must be competent—each in his function according to ability but with justness of opportunity for all....

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), pp. 301-303)

No Extremes

Difference of capacity in human individuals is fundamental. It is impossible for all to be alike, all to be equal, all to be wise. Bahá'u'lláh has revealed principles and laws which will accomplish the adjustment of varying human capacities. He has said that whatsoever is possible of accomplishment in human government will be effected through these principles. When the laws He has instituted are carried out, there will be no millionaires possible in the community and likewise no extremely poor. This will be effected and regulated by adjusting the different degrees of human capacity.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), pp. 301-303)

No Extremes

The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture, tillage of the soil. All must be producers. Each person in the community whose need is equal to his individual producing capacity shall be exempt from taxation. But if his income is greater than his needs, he must pay a tax until an adjustment is effected. That is to say, a man's capacity for production and his needs will be equalized and reconciled through taxation. If his production exceeds, he will pay a tax; if his necessities exceed his production, he shall receive an amount sufficient to equalize or adjust. Therefore, taxation will be proportionate to capacity and production, and there will be no poor in the community.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), pp. 301-303)

Economy Divine in Nature

The fundamentals of the whole economic condition are divine in nature and are associated with the world of the heart and spirit. This is fully explained in the Bahá'í teaching, and without knowledge of its principles no improvement in the economic state can be realized. The Bahá'ís will bring about this improvement and betterment but not through sedition and appeal to physical force—not through warfare, but welfare.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), p. 334)

Economy Divine in Nature

Hearts must be so cemented together, love must become so dominant that the rich shall most willingly extend assistance to the poor and take steps to establish these economic adjustments permanently. If it is accomplished in this way, it will be most praiseworthy because then it will be for the sake of God and in the pathway of His service. For example, it will be as if the rich inhabitants of a city should say, “It is neither just nor lawful that we should possess great wealth while there is abject poverty in this community,” and then willingly give their wealth to the poor, retaining only as much as will enable them to live comfortably.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), p. 334)

Spiritual Principles

There are practically no technical teachings on economics in the Cause, such as banking, the price system, and others. The Cause is not an economic system, nor should its Founders be considered as having been technical economists. The contribution of the Faith to this subject is essentially indirect, as it consists in the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic system. Bahá'u'lláh has given us a few basic principles which should guide future Bahá'í economists in establishing such institutions as will adjust the economic relationships of the world.

Spiritual Principles

... The Master has definitely stated that wages should be unequal, simply because men are unequal in their ability, and hence should receive wages that would correspond to their varying capacities and resources. This view seems to contradict the opinion of some modern economists. But the friends should have full confidence in the words of the Master, and should give preference to His statements over those voiced by our so-called modern thinkers....

(26 December 1935 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, Social Action §219)

Spiritual Principles

... Whatever the progress of the machinery may be, man will have always to toil in order to earn his living. Effort is an inseparable part of man's life. It may take different forms with the changing conditions of the world, but it will be always present as a necessary element in our earthly existence. Life is after all a struggle. Progress is attained through struggle, and without such a struggle life ceases to have a meaning; it becomes even extinct. The progress of machinery has not made effort unnecessary. It has given it a new form, a new outlet.

Spiritual Principles

... By the statement “the economic solution is divine in nature” is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man’s nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature.

(26 December 1935 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, Social Action §219)

Spiritual Principles

... As already referred to ..., social inequality is the inevitable outcome of the natural inequality of men. Human beings are different in ability and should, therefore, be different in their social and economic standing. Extremes of wealth and poverty should, however, be totally abolished. Those whose brains have contributed to the creation and improvement of the means of production must be fairly rewarded, though these means may be owned and controlled by others.

(26 December 1935 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, Social Action §219)

Labour Problems

With regard to your question concerning the Bahá'í attitude towards labour problems: these cannot assuredly be solved, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, through the sheer force of physical violence. Non-co-operation too, even though not accompanied by acts of violence, is ineffective. The conflict between labour and capital can best be solved through the peaceful and constructive methods of co-operation and of consultation.

(30 June 1937 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, Social Action §220)

Social Justice and Economics

Social justice will be attained only when every member of society enjoys a relative degree of material prosperity and gives due regard to the acquisition of spiritual qualities. The solution, then, to prevailing economic difficulties is to be sought as much in the application of spiritual principles as in the implementation of scientific methods and approaches. The family unit offers an ideal setting within which can be shaped those moral attributes that contribute to an appropriate view of material wealth and its utilization.

(Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010 to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith)

Social Justice and Economics

Referring to the exigencies of the material world, Bahá'u'lláh has affirmed that to every end has been assigned a means for its accomplishment. A natural conclusion to be drawn from reflection on this fundamental principle is that vigilance must be exercised in distinguishing “means” from “ends”; otherwise, what is intended as a mere instrument could easily become the very goal of an individual's life.

(Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010 to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith)

Social Justice and Economics

The acquisition of wealth is a case in point; it is acceptable and praiseworthy to the extent that it serves as a means for achieving higher ends—for meeting one's basic necessities, for fostering the progress of one's family, for promoting the welfare of society, and for contributing to the establishment of a world civilization. But to make the accumulation of wealth the central purpose of one's life is unworthy of any human being.

(Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010 to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith)

Social Justice and Economics

An idea closely related to the above, and well in accord with the spirit of the Bahá'í teachings, is that the end does not serve to justify the means. However constructive and noble the goal, however significant to one's life or to the welfare of one's family, it must not be attained through improper means.

(Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010 to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith)

Social Justice and Economics

Regrettably, a number of today's leaders—political, social, and religious—as well as some of the directors of financial markets, executives of multinational corporations, chiefs of commerce and industry, and ordinary people who succumb to social pressure and ignore the call of their conscience, act against this principle; they justify any means in order to achieve their goals.

(Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010 to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith)

Social Justice and Economics

The legitimacy of wealth depends, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has indicated, on how it is acquired and on how it is expended. In this connection, He has stated that “wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual’s own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, crafts and industry”, if the measures adopted by the individual in generating wealth serve to “enrich the generality of the people”, and if the wealth thus obtained is expended for “philanthropic purposes” and “the promotion of knowledge”, for the establishment of schools and industry and the advancement of education, and in general for the welfare of society....

(Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010 to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith)

Social Justice and Economics

Many would readily acknowledge that the acquisition of wealth should be governed by the requirements of justice, which, as a principle, can be expressed to varying degrees, on different levels. An employer and employee, for example, are bound by the laws and conventions that regulate their work, and each is expected to carry out his or her responsibilities with honesty and integrity.

(Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010 to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith)

Social Justice and Economics

At another level, however, if the deeper implications of justice are to be realized, the other two preconditions to the legitimate acquisition of wealth mentioned above must be taken into account, and prevailing norms reassessed in their light. Here, the relationship between minimum wage and the cost of living merits careful evaluation—this, especially in light of the contribution workers make to a company’s success and their entitlement, as noted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, to a fair share of the profits. The wide margin, often unjustifiable, between the production costs of certain goods and the price at which they are sold likewise requires attention, as does the question of the generation of wealth through measures that “enrich the generality of the people”.

(Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010 to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith)

Social Justice and Economics

What such reflection and inquiry will no doubt make abundantly clear is that certain approaches to obtaining wealth—so many of which involve the exploitation of others, the monopolization and manipulation of markets, and the production of goods that promote violence and immorality—are unworthy and unacceptable.

(Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010 to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith)

Welfare of the Whole

The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity's collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected.

(Universal House of Justice, message dated 1 March 2017 to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Welfare of the Whole

A stubborn obstruction, then, stands in the way of meaningful social progress: time and again, avarice and self-interest prevail at the expense of the common good. Unconscionable quantities of wealth are being amassed, and the instability this creates is made worse by how income and opportunity are spread so unevenly both between nations and within nations. But it need not be so.

(Universal House of Justice, message dated 1 March 2017 to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Welfare of the Whole

However much such conditions are the outcome of history, they do not have to define the future, and even if current approaches to economic life satisfied humanity's stage of adolescence, they are certainly inadequate for its dawning age of maturity.

(Universal House of Justice, message dated 1 March 2017 to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Welfare of the Whole

There is no justification for continuing to perpetuate structures, rules, and systems that manifestly fail to serve the interests of all peoples. The teachings of the Faith leave no room for doubt: there is an inherent moral dimension to the generation, distribution, and utilization of wealth and resources.

(Universal House of Justice, message dated 1 March 2017 to the Bahá'ís of the World)

How to survive rapid inflation Northern Ireland

Case Study of Social Action

Social Action 13_1

How to survive rapid inflation

In 2022, the little rural community of Magherafelt in Northern Ireland saw the wholesale gas price show a remarkable increase in price that would create rapid inflation across all sectors of the economy. Magherafelt is a farming community with energy imported as manufactured nitrogen fertilisers and higher-than-average fuel costs due to its geography with remote markets. In a few months, the inevitable high inflation rate would hurt.

How to survive rapid inflation

That reality spurred the Magherafelt Bahá'í Community to organise a day conference that would demonstrate how to pool the skill sets in the district and alleviate the hurt to an already struggling population. Many people were contacted and some champions who were passionate about their subject were recruited to donate time for this endeavour. They had experience in topics such as beekeeping, home-grown food, recycling, book sharing, homestead-based pig rearing, electric cars, passive solar, solar roofing, and home preserving.

How to survive rapid inflation

The role of the Bahá'í community was coordination, and it paid for the hall and administration so there was no financial impediment for anyone to attend. Each Champion was given a chair, a desk, and a white card on which to advertise their skill. Each was offered a speaking slot during the day, and the whole programme was advertised using social media and posters in shops.

How to survive rapid inflation

Attendance on the day was approximately 100 people, including the local Mayor. New networks were formed, and useful debate occurred around solutions to food poverty, energy poverty, mental health, and community wellbeing. The coffee shop next door was packed with people networking over coffee. The spirit was high, and the day ended with some hilarious line dancing.

How to survive rapid inflation

A major output was the listing of the Top Tips provided by participants. These covered issues such as food production, a warm home, qualities for new houses, finance, farming, health, travel and holidays, and communication in the community.

How to survive rapid inflation

Long-term results have been significant, with many people focusing on solutions and helping each other. The main organiser was invited to give a talk on the issues and the tips to upper school students and teachers in the largest school in the neighbouring town, which was well received. The community centre asked when this would be repeated.

Les Gornall, IEF 29th Conference <https://iefworld.org/eIRapidInflation>