

Economics for Social Action

Themes for Social and Economic Development

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse – Social Action 13 Economics

From a Compilation by the Research Department of Universal House of Justice - August 2020

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)

Establish Companies

Among the greatest means of achieving modern advancements, the prosperity of nations, and the civilization of the peoples is the establishment of companies for commerce, industry, and other sources of wealth, inasmuch as a company is a symbol of oneness, unity, and harmony in the Cause of God. It is most difficult for humankind to succeed in anything singly, but when an assemblage is formed and a company established, the members will be enabled jointly to accomplish great tasks.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §210)

Establish Companies

Consider, for instance, an army. If each soldier were to enter into combat singly, he would be fighting with the force of one man, but when a troop is formed, each member of that troop resisteth with a thousand-fold power, for the power of a thousand individuals is converged upon one point. It is the same in other matters. However, every business company should be established on divine principles. Its foundations should be trustworthiness, piety, and truthfulness, in order to protect the rights of the people and to become, as day followeth day, a magnet of fidelity, so that the confirmations of the All-Glorious may be unveiled.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §210)

Establish Companies

Moreover, a legitimate company must needs exert all within its power to safeguard the rights of the people in all matters, whether great or small, and to administer the affairs of the company with the utmost perfection, uprightness, and care. If it be so conducted, that company, beyond a shadow of a doubt, will become the embodiment of blessings, and that assemblage will attract the confirmations of the Lord of all bounties and, safe under the protection of the Greatest Name, will remain shielded from every misfortune. Upon you be greetings and praise.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §210)

Taxation and Expenditure

The question of economics must commence with the farmer and then be extended to the other classes inasmuch as the number of farmers is far greater than all other classes. Therefore, it is fitting to begin with the farmer in matters related to economics for the farmer is the first active agent in human society. In brief, from among the wise men in every village a board should be set up and the affairs of that village should be under the control of that board. Likewise a general storehouse should be founded with the appointment of a secretary. At the time of the harvest, under the direction of that board, a certain percentage of the entire harvest should be appropriated for the storehouse.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §211)

Taxation and Expenditure

The storehouse has seven revenues: Tithes, taxes on animals, property without an heir, all lost objects found whose owners cannot be traced, one third of all treasure-trove, one third of the produce of all mines, and voluntary contributions.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §211)

Taxation and Expenditure

This storehouse also has seven expenditures:

- 1. General running expenses of the storehouse, such as the salary of the secretary and the administration of public health.*
- 2. Tithes to the government.*
- 3. Taxes on animals to the government.*
- 4. Costs of running an orphanage.*
- 5. Costs of running a home for the incapacitated.*
- 6. Costs of running a school.*
- 7. Payment of subsidies to provide needed support of the poor.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §211)

Taxation and Expenditure

The first revenue is the tithe. It should be collected as follows: If, for instance, the income of a person is five hundred dollars and his necessary expenses are the same, no tithes will be collected from him. If another's expenses are five hundred dollars while his income is one thousand dollars, one tenth will be taken from him, for he hath more than his needs; if he giveth one tenth of the surplus, his livelihood will not be adversely affected.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §211)

Taxation and Expenditure

If another's expenses are one thousand dollars, and his income is five thousand dollars, as he hath four thousand dollars surplus he will be required to give one and a half tenths. If another person hath necessary expenses of one thousand dollars, but his income is ten thousand dollars, from him two tenths will be required for his surplus represents a large sum.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §211)

Taxation and Expenditure

But if the necessary expenses of another person are four or five thousand dollars, and his income one hundred thousand, one fourth will be required from him. On the other hand, should a person's income be two hundred, but his needs absolutely essential for his livelihood be five hundred dollars, and provided he hath not been remiss in his work or his farm hath not been blessed with a harvest, such a one must receive help from the general storehouse so that he may not remain in need and may live in comfort.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §211)

Taxation and Expenditure

A certain amount must be put aside from the general storehouse for the orphans of the village and a certain sum for the incapacitated. A certain amount must be provided from this storehouse for those who are needy and incapable of earning a livelihood, and a certain amount for the village's system of education. And, a certain amount must be set aside for the administration of public health. If anything is left in the storehouse, that must be transferred to the general treasury of the nation for national expenditures.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §211)

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)

The Spirit of Economic Life

He has also received the article you wrote for “The Bahá’í World” on the economic teachings of the Cause. As you say, the writings are not so rich on this subject, and many of the issues at present baffling the minds of the world are not even mentioned. The primary consideration is the spirit that has to permeate our economic life and this will gradually crystallize itself into definite institutions and principles that would help to bring about the ideal condition foretold by Bahá’u’lláh.

(20 December 1931 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly, Social Action §217)

The time has not yet come

With regard to your wish for reorganizing your business along Bahá'í lines, Shoghi Effendi deeply appreciates the spirit that has prompted you to make such a suggestion. But he feels, nevertheless, that the time has not yet come for any believer to bring about such a fundamental change in the economic structure of our society, however restricted may be the field for such an experiment. The economic teachings of the Cause, though well known in their main outline, have not yet been sufficiently elaborated and systematized to allow anyone to make an exact and thorough application of them, even on a restricted scale.

(22 May 1935 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, Social Action §218)

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)

Guiding Principles

Regarding your questions concerning the Bahá'í attitude on various economic problems, such as the problem of ownership, control and distribution of capital, and of other means of production, the problem of trusts and monopolies, and such economic experiments as social cooperatives: the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not provide specific and detailed solutions to all such economic questions, which mostly pertain to the domain of technical economics, and as such do not concern directly the Cause.

(10 June 1939 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, Social Action §221)

Guiding Principles

True, there are certain guiding principles in Bahá'í Sacred Writings on the subject of economics, but these do by no means cover the whole field of theoretical and applied economics, and are mostly intended to guide future Bahá'í economic writers and technicians to evolve an economic system which would function in full conformity with the spirit, and the exact provisions of the Cause on this and similar subjects.

(10 June 1939 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

Guiding Principles

The International House of Justice will have, in consultation with economic experts, to assist in the formulation and evolution of the Bahá'í economic system of the future. One thing, however, is certain: that the Cause neither accepts the theories of the Capitalistic economics in full, nor can it agree with the Marxists and Communists in their repudiation of the principle of private ownership and of this vital sacred right of the individual.

(10 June 1939 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

Many Ideologies

The ideologies now current in the world are extremely complex. Just as it is difficult to identify any longer a coherent system of teachings which could be called Christianity and embrace all those who call themselves Christians, so there are many kinds of Communist, often stridently at variance with one another. Even more so are there many kinds of “Capitalist” in the sense of those who advocate Capitalism as the most desirable form of economic system.

(13 November 1985 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

Many Ideologies

“The Promise of World Peace” was no place for an analysis of the virtues and shortcomings of these various theories, it could but allude to some of the most glaring deficiencies produced by extreme variants, and encourage all who advocate them to overlook their differences in a search for the real solution of the problems afflicting mankind.

(13 November 1985 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

Extremes of Economic Theory

One could postulate two extremes of economic theory: those who believe that the best solution is to remove all governmental control and intervention from the operation of the economic system, and those who believe that the functioning of the economic system should be closely supervised and adjusted by the State so that society is not at the mercy of the system but has it under its control.

(13 November 1985 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

Extremes of Economic Theory

As has become abundantly clear, neither extreme is workable, and proponents of both have gradually come to adopt more moderate stances, although there tends to be an oscillation of viewpoints in response to changing conditions.

(13 November 1985 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

Extremes of Economic Theory

It was to the proponents of one of these extremes and to the current highly unsatisfactory economic situation in the world that the House of Justice was alluding when it referred to those ideologies which have tended “to callously abandon starving millions to the operations of a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind, while enabling small sections to live in a condition of affluence scarcely dreamed of by our forebears.”

(13 November 1985 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

Fair Distribution of Benefits

An obvious example arises in discussions of the process of globalization, to which your letter alludes. The immense advantages, that this long-awaited stage in the evolution of human society brings with it, demand of government and civil society comparable efforts to ensure a fair distribution of its benefits to the whole of humankind. 'Abdu'l-Bahá sets the issue squarely before us:

(27 November 2001 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

Fair Distribution of Benefits

Consider an individual who has amassed treasures by colonizing a country for his profit: he has obtained an incomparable fortune and has secured profits and incomes which flow like a river, while a hundred thousand unfortunate people, weak and powerless, are in need of a mouthful of bread. There is neither equality nor benevolence.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in 27 November 2001 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

Fair Distribution of Benefits

So you see that general peace and joy are destroyed, and the welfare of humanity is negated to such an extent as to make fruitless the lives of many. For fortune, honours, commerce, industry are in the hands of some industrialists, while other people are submitted to quite a series of difficulties and to limitless troubles: they have neither advantages, nor profits, nor comforts, nor peace.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in 27 November 2001 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

Fair Distribution of Benefits

The challenges posed by this issue, which today affects the whole planet, are on a scale unprecedented in human history. Addressing them will require unity of understanding about what is at stake, an understanding that can be achieved only by searching analysis, open public discussion and an unrelenting commitment to putting into effect agreed upon systems of control.

(27 November 2001 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

An Appropriate Economic Philosophy

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter ... requesting clarification on what constitutes an appropriate economic philosophy for our time....

(31 July 2002 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, Social Action §224)

An Appropriate Economic Philosophy

In your ... letter you quote a passage from *Century of Light*, which refers to the current reigning system of thought on the planet as morally and intellectually bankrupt. The passage suggests to you that capitalism is regarded by the Bahá'í community as a useless economic philosophy for future world development. You find this stance surprising not only because it is in direct opposition to conclusions reached by thinkers today who consider capitalism the only viable system for global economic development, but also because it seems to contradict certain statements made by Shoghi Effendi.

An Appropriate Economic Philosophy

Capitalism has evolved into a system which you would argue is largely, if not entirely, consistent with Shoghi Effendi's statements. You wonder how Bahá'ís working in the field of economics are to move forward, when they hold such widely differing views on the subject, from those like you who see the Guardian's remarks as support for capitalism to others who believe it should be replaced.

(31 July 2002 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, Social Action §224)

An Appropriate Economic Philosophy

There are two aspects to the questions you raise. One concerns the statement about the moral bankruptcy of today's dominant world system, and the other is related to the validity of economic theories that embrace capitalism. As to the first, the passage you quote from *Century of Light* is intended as a general statement on the condition of the world, its political and economic structures, and the injustices that are tearing away the fabric of present-day society.

(31 July 2002 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, Social Action §224)

An Appropriate Economic Philosophy

One can rightly denounce as unjust the current global situation, in which a relatively few live in opulence while the vast majority of their fellow human beings are condemned to a life of utter material poverty. Surely this situation cannot be separated from the basic inadequacies of the dominant system of thought and the structures and processes to which it has given rise.

(31 July 2002 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, Social Action §224)

An Appropriate Economic Philosophy

The second aspect of your questions concerns the specifics of economic theory. That, as you mention, Bahá'í thinkers adhere to a wide range of views on capitalism and its various forms should not be a cause for alarm. On the contrary, the House of Justice finds the situation quite healthy and does not wish to elaborate further on the subject at this time.

(31 July 2002 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, Social Action §224)

An Appropriate Economic Philosophy

You are correct when you make the statement in your ... letter that the solutions to humanity's problems are to be found in the application of scientific knowledge and the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to social reality. It is to be expected, then, that the Teachings would be brought to bear on the choices humanity has to make about how to produce, distribute, multiply, apply and use material means.

(31 July 2002 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, Social Action §224)

An Appropriate Economic Philosophy

As is natural in the advancement of any science, insights into a proper economic theory will only be gained as people with divergent views explore different directions. Criticism of current economic practices should not be misconstrued as simply a denunciation of capitalism, nor should it be taken as an endorsement of socialism. As you would readily agree, the premise of private ownership can give rise to new and better ways than current modes of organizing the economic activity of the human race.

(31 July 2002 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, Social Action §224)

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

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>