

2. The Redistribution of Wealth

With regard to the request for information about the Bahá'í perspective on the redistribution of wealth, it is useful to preface the discussion by considering a number of statements excerpted from letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi concerning the contribution of the Faith to economics:

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.

(26 December 1935 to an individual believer)

The Bahá'í Writings give us only a few principles which can guide future Bahá'í economists in their efforts to bring about the necessary readjustments in the economic and industrial system.

(30 June 1936 to an individual believer)

Now with regard to your questions concerning Bahá'í economic teachings: the writings of Bahá'u'lláh do not contain any technical teachings on the subject of economics, and on such specific financial questions as gold standardization, monetary standards and exchanges, etc. -- what they provide however are certain general principles in the light of which future Bahá'í economists will have to evolve the Bahá'í Economic System of the future. These principles contribute the basis of all future economic schemes, but at present it would certainly be premature to foretell what definite economic system will be evolved and established by the Cause. The Bahá'ís, therefore, cannot claim to possess at present an economic order or system which they can officially associate with the Faith, nor should they now attempt to establish any such economic scheme, which would obviously be beyond their present-day capacity and resources.

(22 April 1939 to an individual believer)

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 co-operatives: 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. 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. 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 to an individual believer)

It is noteworthy that Shoghi Effendi envisages that:

while the Bahá'í Faith does not at present possess an "economic order or system" its principles constitute "the basis of all future economic schemes".

the Universal House of Justice, in consultation with economic experts, will "assist in the formulation and evolution of the Bahá'í economic system of the future".

it will be necessary to bring about "readjustments in the economic and industrial system", and to

establish "such institutions as will adjust the economic relationships of the world".

2.1 Context

There are a number of fundamental principles and issues that, when taken together, help to provide a framework for considering the subject of the redistribution of wealth. These include the principle of the oneness of mankind, the "coherence" of the material and spiritual aspects of life, and the Bahá'í perspectives on wealth and on the elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty. The extracts, cited below, provide brief examples of each of the above-mentioned themes:

2.1.1 Oneness of Mankind

The Bahá'í Faith upholds the unity of God, recognizes the unity of His Prophets, and inculcates the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the entire human race. It proclaims the necessity and the inevitability of the unification of mankind, asserts that it is gradually approaching, and claims that nothing short of the transmuting spirit of God, working through His chosen Mouthpiece in this day, can ultimately succeed in bringing it about.... It unequivocally maintains the principle of equal rights, opportunities and privileges for men and women, insists on compulsory education, eliminates extremes of poverty and wealth, ... prohibits slavery, asceticism, mendicancy and monasticism, ... emphasizes the necessity of strict obedience to one's government, exalts any work performed in the spirit of service to the level of worship, ... and delineates the outlines of those institutions that must establish and perpetuate the general peace of mankind.

(14 July 1947 from a
Statement by Shoghi Effendi addressed to a United Nations Commission
[Ed. - p. 3])

2.1.2 "Dynamic Coherence"

The Bahá'í Teachings remove the artificial barrier between the material and spiritual aspects of life and underline the significance of both to social progress and material well-being. On this theme, the Universal House of Justice in a letter dated 20 October 1983 addressed to the Bahá'ís of the World, wrote:

From the beginning of His stupendous mission, Bahá'u'lláh urged upon the attention of nations the necessity of ordering human affairs in such a way as to bring into being a world unified in all the essential aspects of its life. In unnumbered verses and tablets He repeatedly and variously declared the "progress of the world" and the "development of nations" as being among the ordinances of God for this day. The oneness of mankind, which is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of His Revelation, implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth. The indispensability of this coherence is unmistakably illustrated in His ordination of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the spiritual centre of every Bahá'í community round which must flourish dependencies dedicated to the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific advancement of mankind. Thus, we can readily appreciate that although it has hitherto been impracticable for Bahá'í institutions generally to emphasize development activities, the concept of social and economic development is enshrined in the sacred Teachings of our Faith....

Now, ... the Community of the Greatest Name has grown to the stage at which the processes of this development must be incorporated into its regular pursuits... The steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Bahá'í Community itself, with the friends endeavouring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant. Moreover, these exertions will conduce to the preservation of human honour, so desired by Bahá'u'lláh. In the process and as a consequence, the friends will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole, until all mankind achieves the progress intended by the Lord of the Age.

2.1.3 Wealth

The value of wealth -- used for the benefit of humanity -- is recognized in the Bahá'í Writings. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in "The Secret of Divine Civilization", writes:

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, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a

judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor. If, on the other hand, it is expended for the promotion of knowledge, the founding of elementary and other schools, the encouragement of art and industry, the training of orphans and the poor -- in brief, if it is dedicated to the welfare of society -- its possessor will stand out before God and man as the most excellent of all who live on earth and will be accounted as one of the people of paradise.

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2.1.4 Elimination of the Extremes of Wealth and Poverty

The Bahá'í Teachings call not only for the alleviation of poverty, but for the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth. From the extracts provided below, it will be noted that the rich are called upon to share their wealth voluntarily and that the redistribution of wealth does not imply that all people will receive exactly the same amount. In "The Promulgation of Universal Peace", 'Abdu'l-Bahá is recorded as stating:

...divine justice will become manifest in human conditions and affairs, and all mankind will find comfort and enjoyment in life. It is not meant that all will be equal, for inequality in degree and capacity is a property of nature. Necessarily there will be rich people and also those who will be in want of their

livelihood, but in the aggregate community there will be equalization and readjustment of values and interests. In the future there will be no very rich nor extremely poor. There will be an equilibrium of interests, and a condition will be established which will make both rich and poor comfortable and content. This will be an eternal and blessed outcome of the glorious twentieth century which will be realized universally (p.

132

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And:

The fundamentals of the whole economic condition are divine in nature and are associated with the world of the heart and spirit.... 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. (pp. 238-39)

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The following extract from a letter dated 26 December 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer comments further on this theme:

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.

...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.

2.2 Some Specific Measures for the Redistribution of Wealth

We attach a compilation of extracts from the Bahá'í Writings and from the letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice entitled "The Redistribution of Wealth -- Some Specific Measures"

. From a close perusal of this material, a number of possible measures can be noted. For example:

Change in values and attitudes on individual and societal levels. See extracts

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Payment of Huqúqu'lláh: Payment of the Right of God reduces individual wealth. It also increases the donor's prosperity (extracts

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). Funds from this source, available to the Head of the Faith, can be dispersed for humanitarian, charitable and other purposes (extract

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Legal and governmental actions: There are several pertinent themes; e.g., recognition of the interdependence of the world's economic problems and the need for new governmental structures, the role of government in introducing legislation to guarantee social justice and to ensure the right of the individual to work. See extracts

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Introducing changes to the relationship between capital and labour: Relevant, here, are such issues as the status of capitalism and socialization, profit-sharing, private property, the wage system and consultation between management and labour. See extracts

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Taxation; See extracts

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The storehouse as a basis for the economic organization of the village (extract

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Philanthropy (extract

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A "peace dividend" (extract

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THE REDISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH -- SOME SPECIFIC MEASURES

Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings and from Letters written by or on

Behalf of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

O SON OF MAN!

Bestow My wealth upon My poor, that in heaven thou mayest draw from stores of unfading splendor and treasures of imperishable glory. But by My life! To offer up thy soul is a more glorious thing couldst thou but see with Mine eye.

("The Hidden Words" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), Arabic, no.

57

, p.

17

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O CHILDREN OF DUST!

Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.

("The Hidden Words", Persian, no.

49

, p.

39

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The beginning of magnanimity is when man expendeth his wealth on himself, on his family and on the poor among his brethren in his Faith.

The essence of wealth is love for Me; whoso loveth Me is the possessor of all things, and he that loveth Me not is indeed of the poor and needy. This is that which the Finger of Glory and Splendour hath revealed.

("Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-I-Aqdas" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p.

156

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It is clear and evident that the payment of the Right of God is conducive to prosperity, to blessing, and to honour and divine protection. Well is it with them that comprehend and recognize this truth and woe betide them that believe not. And this is on condition that the individual should observe the injunctions prescribed in the Book with the utmost radiance, gladness and willing acquiescence. It behoveth you to counsel the friends to do that which is right and praiseworthy. Whoso hearkeneth to this call, it is to his own behoof, and whoso faileth bringeth loss upon himself. Verily our Lord of Mercy is the All-Sufficing, the All-Praised.

(From a Tablet - translated from the Persian) [4]

This ordinance [Huqúqu'lláh] is binding upon everyone, and by observing it one will be raised to honour inasmuch as it will serve to purify one's possessions and will impart blessing, and added prosperity. However, the people are as yet ignorant of its significance. They continually endeavour to amass riches by lawful or unlawful means in order to transmit them to their heirs, and this to what advantage, no one can tell. Say: In this day the true Heir is the Word of God, since the underlying purpose of inheritance is the preservation of the name and traces of men. It is indubitably clear that the passing of centuries and ages will obliterate these signs, while every word that hath streamed from the Pen of Glory in honour of a certain individual will last as long as the dominions of earth and heaven will endure.

(From a Tablet - translated from the Persian) [5]

From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

As preordained by the Fountain-head of Creation, the temple of the world hath been fashioned after the image and likeness of the human body. In fact each mirroreth forth the image of the other, wert thou but to observe with discerning eyes. By this is meant that even as the human body in this world, which is outwardly composed of different limbs and organs, is in reality a closely integrated, coherent entity, similarly the structure of the physical world is like unto a single being whose limbs and members are inseparably linked together.

Were one to observe with an eye that discovereth the realities of all things, it would become clear that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that co-operation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are closely

related together and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly....

And thus when contemplating the human world thou beholdest this wondrous phenomenon shining resplendent from all sides with the utmost perfection, inasmuch as in this station acts of co-operation, mutual assistance and reciprocity are not confined to the body and to things that pertain to the material world, but for all conditions, whether physical or spiritual, such as those related to minds, thoughts, opinions, manners, customs, attitudes, understandings, feelings or other human susceptibilities. In all these thou shouldst find these binding relationships securely established. The more this interrelationship is strengthened and expanded the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity. Indeed without these vital ties it would be wholly impossible for the world of humanity to attain true felicity and success.

Now consider, if among the people who are merely the manifestations of the world of being this significant matter is of such importance, how much greater must be the spirit of co-operation and mutual assistance among those who are the essences of the world of creation, who have sought the sheltering shadow of the heavenly Tree, and are favoured by the manifestations of divine grace; and how the evidences of this spirit should, through their earnest endeavour, their fellowship and concord, become manifest in every sphere of their inner and outer lives, in the realm of the spirit and divine mysteries and in all things related to this world and the next. Thus there can be no doubt that they must be willing even to offer up their lives for each other.

This is the basic principle on which the institution of Huqúqu'lláh is established, inasmuch as its proceeds are dedicated to the furtherance of these ends. Otherwise the one true God hath ever been and will always be independent of all else beside Him. Even as He hath enabled all created things to partake of His boundless grace and loving-kindness, likewise is He able to bestow riches upon His loved ones out of the treasures of His power. However, the wisdom of this command is that the act of giving is well-pleasing in the sight of God. Consider how well-pleasing must this mighty act be in His estimation that He hath ascribed it unto His Own Self. Rejoice ye then, O people of generosity!

(From a Tablet - translated from the Persian) [6]

Render thou thanks unto God, for He hath graciously enabled thee to observe the injunction set forth in His Most Holy Book, inasmuch as thou hast arisen to fulfil the obligation of Huqúq, and God hath accepted thy goodly deed.

Know thou, moreover, that those who faithfully serve the All-Merciful will be enriched by Him out of His heavenly treasury, and that the Huqúq offering is but a test applied by Him unto His servants and maidservants. Thus every true and sincere believer will offer Huqúq to be expended for the relief of the poor, the disabled, the needy, and the orphans, and for other vital needs of the Cause of God, even as Christ did establish a Fund for benevolent purposes.

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 honour upon humankind.

I have seen the good effects of your own philanthropy in America, in various universities, peace gatherings, and associations for the promotion of learning, as I travelled from city to city. Wherefore do I pray on your behalf that you shall ever be encompassed by the bounties and blessings of heaven, and shall perform many philanthropic deeds in East and West. Thus may you gleam as a lighted taper in the Kingdom of God, may attain honour and everlasting life, and shine out as a bright star on the horizon of eternity.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdul-Bahá" (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), no.

79

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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.

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.

This storehouse also has seven expenditures:

General running expenses of the storehouse, such as the salary of the secretary and the administration of public health.

Tithes to the government.

Taxes on animals to the government.

Costs of running an orphanage.

Costs of running a home for the incapacitated.

Costs of running a school.

Payment of subsidies to provide needed support of the poor.

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. 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. 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.

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.

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(From a Tablet dated 4 October 1912 to an individual believer translated from the Persian) [9]

But the principal cause of these difficulties lies in the laws of the present civilization; for they lead to a small number of individuals accumulating incomparable fortunes, beyond their needs, while the greater number remain destitute, stripped and in the greatest misery. This is contrary to justice, to humanity, to equity; it is the height of iniquity, the opposite to what causes divine satisfaction....

Then rules and laws should be established to regulate the excessive fortunes of certain private individuals and meet the needs of millions of the poor masses; thus a certain moderation would be obtained. However, absolute equality is just as impossible, for absolute equality in fortunes, honors, commerce, agriculture, industry would end in disorderliness, in chaos, in disorganization of the means of existence, and in universal disappointment: the order of the

community would be quite destroyed. Thus difficulties will also arise when unjustified equality is imposed. It is, therefore, preferable for moderation to be established by means of laws and regulations to hinder the constitution of the excessive fortunes of certain individuals, and to protect the essential needs of the masses. For instance, the manufacturers and the industrialists heap up a treasure each day, and the poor artisans do not gain their daily sustenance: that is the height of iniquity, and no just man can accept it. Therefore, laws and regulations should be established which would permit the workmen to receive from the factory owner their wages and a share in the fourth or the fifth part of the profits, according to the capacity of the factory; or in some other way the body of workmen and the manufacturers should share equitably the profits and advantages. Indeed, the capital and management come from the owner of the factory, and the work and labor, from the body of the workmen. Either the workmen should receive wages which assure them an adequate support and, when they cease work, becoming feeble or helpless, they should have sufficient benefits from the income of the industry; or the wages should be high enough to satisfy the workmen with the amount they receive so that they may themselves be able to put a little aside for days of want and helplessness.

When matters will be thus fixed, the owner of the factory will no longer put aside daily a treasure which he has absolutely no need of (for, if the fortune is disproportionate, the capitalist succumbs under a formidable burden and gets into the greatest difficulties and troubles; the administration of an excessive fortune is very difficult and exhausts man's natural strength). And the workmen and artisans will no longer be in the greatest misery and want; they will no longer be submitted to the worst privations at the end of their life.

("Some Answered Questions" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 273

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The question of socialization is very important. It will not be solved by strikes for wages. All the governments of the world must be united and organize an assembly the members of which should be elected from the parliaments and the nobles of the nations. These must plan with utmost wisdom and power so that neither the capitalist suffer from enormous losses nor the laborers become needy. In the utmost moderation they should make the law; then announce to the public that the rights of the working people are to be strongly preserved. Also the rights of the capitalists are to be protected. When such a general plan is adopted by the will of both sides, should a strike occur, all the governments of the world collectively should resist it. Otherwise, the labor problem will lead to much destruction, especially in Europe. Terrible things will take place.

For instance, the owners of properties, mines and factories should share their

incomes with their employees and give a fairly certain percentage of their products to their workingmen in order that the employees may receive, beside their wages, some of the general income of the factory so that the employee may strive with his soul in the work.

No more trusts will remain in the future. The question of the trusts will be wiped away entirely. Also, every factory that has ten thousand shares will give two thousand shares of these ten thousand to its employees and will write the shares in their names, so that they may have them, and the rest will belong to the capitalists. Then at the end of the month or year whatever they may earn after the expenses and wages are paid, according to the number of shares, should be divided among both....

("Foundations of World Unity" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972), p. 43

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Certainly, some being enormously rich and others lamentably poor, an organization is necessary to control and improve this state of affairs. It is important to limit riches, as it is also of importance to limit poverty. Either extreme is not good. To be seated in the mean

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is most desirable. If it be right for a capitalist to possess a large fortune, it is equally just that his workman should have a sufficient means of existence.

A financier with colossal wealth should not exist whilst near him is a poor man in dire necessity. When we see poverty allowed to reach a condition of starvation it is a sure sign that somewhere we shall find tyranny. Men must bestir themselves in this matter, and no longer delay in altering conditions which bring the misery of grinding poverty to a very large number of the people. The rich must give of their abundance, they must soften their hearts and cultivate a compassionate intelligence, taking thought for those sad ones who are suffering from lack of the very necessities of life.

There must be special laws made, dealing with these extremes of riches and of want. The members of the Government should consider the laws of God when they are framing plans for the ruling of the people. The general rights of mankind must be guarded and preserved.

("Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911 - 1912" (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), pp.

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The fourth principle or teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the readjustment and equalization of the economic standards of mankind. This deals with the question

of human livelihood. It is evident that under present systems and conditions of government the poor are subject to the greatest need and distress while others more fortunate live in luxury and plenty far beyond their actual necessities. This inequality of portion and privilege is one of the deep and vital problems of human society. That there is need of an equalization and apportionment by which all may possess the comforts and privileges of life is evident. The remedy must be legislative readjustment of conditions. The rich too must be merciful to the poor, contributing from willing hearts to their needs without being forced or compelled to do so. The composure of the world will be assured by the establishment of this principle in the religious life of mankind.

("The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912"

(Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p.

107

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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. 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.

Bahá'u'lláh, likewise, commanded the rich to give freely to the poor. In the Kitáb-I-Aqdas it is further written by Him that those who have a certain amount of income must give one-fifth of it to God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

("The Promulgation of Universal Peace", p.

217

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From Letters Written by and on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Some form of a world superstate must needs be evolved, in whose favour all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for purposes of maintaining internal order within their respective dominions. Such

a state will have to include within its orbit an international executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the commonwealth; a world parliament whose members shall be elected by the people in their respective countries and whose election shall be confirmed by their respective governments; and a supreme tribunal whose judgement will have a binding effect even in such cases where the parties concerned did not voluntarily agree to submit their case to its consideration. A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of Capital and Labour definitely recognized...

("The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p.

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Concerning the economic teachings of the Cause: ... Even though the Cause has much on the economic life of society, such as progressive income tax, a high death duty and consultation in industry between capital and labour, yet what it has on the international question is far more important and interesting, especially in the light of present world problems.

(27 January 1932, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[16]

Question V -- "Profit-sharing" should be used rather than "income-sharing", as the former is the term used actually in the Bahá'í Writings....

Question VIII -- As already referred to in answer to question II, 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)

[17]

With reference to Bahá'u'lláh's command concerning the engagement of the believers in some sort of profession: the Teachings are most emphatic on this matter, particularly the statement in the "Aqdas" to this effect which makes it quite clear that idle people who lack the desire to work can have no place in the new World Order. As a corollary of this principle, Bahá'u'lláh further states that mendicity should not only be discouraged but entirely wiped out from the face of society. It is the duty of those who are in charge of the organization of society to give every individual the opportunity of acquiring the necessary talent in some kind of profession, and also the means of

utilizing such a talent, both for its own sake and for the sake of earning the means of his livelihood. Every individual, no matter how handicapped and limited he may be, is under the obligation of engaging in some work or profession, for work, especially when performed in the spirit of service, is according to Bahá'u'lláh a form of worship. It has not only a utilitarian purpose, but has a value in itself, because it draws us nearer to God, and enables us to better grasp His purpose for us in this world. It is obvious, therefore, that the inheritance of wealth cannot make anyone immune from daily work.

(22 March 1937, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly) [18]

As regards the objections raised against Bahá'u'lláh's law of Inheritance: even though a Bahá'í is permitted in his will to dispose of his wealth in the way he wishes, yet he is morally and conscientiously bound to always bear in mind, while writing his will, the necessity of his upholding the principle of Bahá'u'lláh regarding the social function of wealth, and the consequent necessity of avoiding its over-accumulation and concentration in a few individuals or groups of individuals. It is his duty as a loyal and responsible believer to make such provision in his will as would make it fully conform to the spirit if not actually to the exact provisions of the Aqdas regarding the division and distribution of inheritance....

No country can possibly solve its economic difficulties alone, for economic interdependence is an unescapable economic reality, a fact of economic life which can neither be ignored nor deliberately opposed.

The Teachings do not state what the exact relationship between Labour and Capital will be in the future. Neither do they indicate any directions regarding the payment of wages, or whether the wage system will be retained, modified or altogether abolished. They, however, explicitly uphold the institution of private ownership, but stress also the necessity of introducing certain fundamental changes in its methods and features.

(22 April 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [19]

Concerning your question whether the heirs to whom the principal residence, furniture and clothing of the deceased are transferred by way of inheritance will be exempt from the payment of Huqúq or not, he said: Since the residence, furniture and the tools of trade have, in accordance with the explicit Text, been granted exemption from the Huqúq, therefore when the transfer of ownership takes place such possessions continue to be exempt.

(29 September 1942, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran - translated from the Persian) [20]

The income tax, according to the Bahá'í teachings, mounts at quite a steep rate so that great sums of money would be very heavily taxed. But the individual is free to make his will as he pleases. What he has laboured for he

has the right to dispose of. The greater the sum inherited, the higher the tax will be.

(11 February 1944, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)
[21]

Profit-sharing is recommended as a solution to one form of economic problem.

There is nothing in the teachings against some kind of capitalism; its present form, though, would require adjustments to be made.

(19 November 1945, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)
[22]

From Letters Written by and on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice

...the most urgent need of human beings is to recognize the Manifestation of God and thereby to learn how to collaborate constructively. All over the world tremendous efforts are being made to improve the lot of mankind -- or of parts of mankind, but most of these efforts are frustrated by conflicts of aims, by corruption of the morals of those involved, by mistrust, or by fear. There is no lack of material resources in the world if they are properly used. The problem is the education of human beings in the ultimate and most important purpose of life and in how to weld differences of opinion and outlook into a united constructive effort. Bahá'ís believe that God has revealed the purpose of life, has shown us how to attain it, has provided the ways in which we can work together and, beyond that, has given mankind the assurance both of continuing divine guidance and of divine assistance. As people learn and follow these teachings their efforts will produce durable results. In the absence of these teachings, a lifetime of effort only too often ends in disillusionment and the collapse of all that has been built....

(3 January 1982, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [23]

The inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war. Few societies have dealt effectively with this situation. The solution calls for the combined application of spiritual, moral and practical approaches. A fresh look at the problem is required, entailing consultation with experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, devoid of economic and ideological polemics, and involving the people directly affected in the decisions that must urgently be made. It is an issue that is bound up not only with the necessity for eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty but also with those spiritual verities the understanding of which can produce a new universal attitude. Fostering such an attitude is itself a major part of the solution.

(
October 1985
, from the Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World)
[24]

Your comments concerning poverty emphasize the extent to which society must change its attitudes before a solution to that social problem can be found. It is not simply a matter of economics; the solution deeply involves the adoption of spiritual principles at the grassroots as well as among governments. It imposes upon the Bahá'ís a clear duty to teach the Faith with unabating vigour.

(27 April 1988, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [25]

Notes

[1]

"The Secret of Divine Civilization" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), pp. 24

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[2]

"The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá During His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982)

[3]

Earlier translation can be found in "Foundations of World Unity" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972), pp. 39

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[4]

"Give me neither poverty nor riches" -- Prov. xxx., 8.

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