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FEAR OF SCARCITY

Naming the Fears Behind U.S. Security Policies

It seems that both escaping want and maintaining wealth drive us to desperate measures. In God's economy, by contrast, everyone has enough.

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A Fig Tree Per Person

BY BETHANY SPICHER

We're living in the Bible Belt here, and this tax inequity is a product of our laws, and our laws are a product of our voting, which is a product of our people. So we're talking about a bunch of voting Christians tolerating this. There's something wrong here."

—Susan Pace Hamill, quoted in *Sojourners Magazine*

Susan Pace Hamill, a professor at the University of Alabama Law School, was shocked to find that her home state's income-tax liability started at \$4,600. And she was tired of paying sky-high taxes on groceries. So she opened her Bible.

The article that resulted, "An Argument for Tax Reform Based on Judeo-Christian Ethics," convinced Alabama's governor to propose tax reform last year, despite pressure from big business. (Timber companies own 71 percent of Alabama's land and pay two percent of property taxes. Meanwhile, public school teachers beg for donations for basic supplies.) The governor's proposal failed, but Professor Hamill and others have only just begun.

Clearly, in Alabama, it's not a lack of resources that's the problem. "There's a vine and fig tree here for everyone," the prophet Micah might have told the timber companies. (Micah 4:4). Scarcity, in Alabama, as in many other times and places, is a consequence of others' prosperity. It seems that both escaping want and maintaining wealth drive us to desperate measures.

In this *Memo*, scarcity motivates impoverished rural communities to compete for prison bids (p. 5). It motivates developing countries to sign trade agreements against their best interests (pg. 4). Also in this issue, our nation's oil addiction spells destruction for a wildlife refuge (pg. 6) and tax breaks for the wealthy necessitate cuts in U.S. social programs (pg. 3).

In God's economy, by contrast, everyone has enough. The covenant with the Israelites established structures to care for the marginalized: a mandatory gleaning operation, a micro-credit lending institution and a land redistribution program every fifty years (Leviticus 25).

In the Gospels, Jesus proclaims a new order in which peacemakers are blessed and the community's poorest and weakest members inherit the kingdom (Matthew 6:20–21). The early church lived that order, understanding itself as a model of the kingdom. Wealthy and poor members alike pooled their resources and shared equally (Acts 2:44–45).

We in the church have been given a biblical mandate to do justice and love mercy. How might we call our legislators—most of whom identify as people of faith—to reflect something of the Jubilee economy in their policies, to move toward Jesus' new order vote by vote?

Perhaps Professor Hamill has shown us a way. ■

BY J. DARYL BYLER

“Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.”

—PSALM 118:5

A Broad Place

When our checking account balance gets low or my schedule gets packed or my options feel limited, I often become anxious, fearful, angry and less gracious in my relationships. Will we have enough money to make it to the next pay period? Will I have enough time to get everything done? Will I have any meaningful choices?

Scarcity creates tension. Indeed, scarcity is at the root of much of today’s global conflict. The scarcity of natural resources—land, water and oil—spawns many wars. The scarcity of jobs, as in the current U.S. economy, often results in hostile treatment toward recent immigrants. The scarcity of hope for many Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip contributes to suicide bombings. The scarcity of justice or respect for human rights has led to popular uprisings in many countries.

Government policies can contribute to our sense either of scarcity or of enough for all. High levels of military spending, for example, strip funds away from programs that would offer educational or housing opportunities. (John Perkins, founder of Voice of Calvary Ministries, has reminded the church for many years that poverty is, at its core, the scarcity of opportunities.) Consistent support for civil and human rights, on the other hand, creates the space for people to flourish.

The psalmist wrote frequently about scarcity. Many psalms reflect feelings of being trapped—the looming sense that enemies are closing in, that space is tight, resources are limited or options are shutting down. In the midst of scarcity, the psalmist declares that God is the one who offers space—a broad place.

“Answer me when I call, O God of my right! You gave me room when I was in distress,” declares David (Psalm 4:1). “And you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place,” David continues (31:8). “Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place,” the psalmist confesses (118:5).

In the face of scarcity, God offers generous provision for our needs (Psalm 103:3–5). God offers justice for the oppressed (Psalm 140:12). God offers deliverance from our enemies (Psalm 33:16–20). God offers hope for the despairing (Psalm 42:5,11).

God has created the world with enough for all its inhabitants. It is human greed and injustice that lead to scarcity.

As Christians, we join with God in offering one another a broad place when we share generously of our resources. When we act justly with whatever power has been entrusted to us. When we use our gifts to create opportunities for those with limited options. When we offer God’s hope to those who are downcast.

Doing these things is the basis for our appeal to governing authorities. Doing these things gives integrity to our appeal for public policies that create a sense of enough rather than contributing to the sense of scarcity.

By our lifestyles, actions and advocacy, will we contribute to the scarcity which spawns conflict? Or will we choose, along with God, to offer a broad place for our sisters and brothers around the world? ■

WASHINGTON MEMO is written by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office staff. It interprets national legislation and policy, seeking to reflect biblical concerns for justice and peace as represented in the work and statements of MCC U.S. and Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

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Crossing the (Poverty) Line

BY BETHANY SPICHER

Early this year, a survey by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) revealed that 56 percent of U.S. Americans fear that they will someday be poor. Between job loss, credit card debt, rising housing costs and increasing gas prices, the middle class is anxious.

However, when asked what poverty looks like, survey respondents guessed that there are 1 or 2 million poor people in the United States. They estimated the poverty line—the annual income it takes to supply a family of four with basic necessities—at about \$40,000.

The truth is that there are currently 34.6 million people living under the poverty line, which the government sets at \$18,400.

What does \$18,400 buy in today's economy? The CCHD added up current costs for rent, utilities, public transportation, food (with food stamps), health care (with employer benefits) and child care (with government subsidies). They came out over budget without counting clothes, furniture, education, vacation, life insurance—things that others might define as “basic necessities.” (See www.povertyusa.org.)

In the wealthiest nation in the world, those who suffer true economic scarcity are often invisible to the middle and upper classes. “Low-skilled,” low-wage workers who harvest crops, make beds, mop floors, pour coffee and repair roads are increasingly segregated in rural areas, inner cities and immigrant communities.

Those under the poverty line are often ignored by the government, as well. Faced with an out-of-control deficit, the administration refuses to sacrifice tax cuts or military spending. However, cuts in health care, child care, housing assistance and other social services are justified in order to “balance the budget.” Sounds like the government is feeling strapped for cash too!

Poverty, it seems, depends on one's perspective and one's priorities. How might those of us who live far above the poverty line—individuals, churches and nations—learn to see ourselves accurately? How might we move away from fear for our own security, toward concern for the prosperity of all? “Do not be afraid, little flock,” Jesus says, “for the Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). ■

CAPITAL QUOTES

“I'm a war president.”

—President George W. Bush, Meet the Press.

“We do not want to bear children for war anymore, therefore we ask that Congress cut military funding to Colombia.”

—Amanda Romero, Colombian peace worker, congressional briefing.

“If you don't share the government's view, you're their enemy.”

—Ricardo Esquivia, Colombian church leader, commenting on the situation in Colombia and noting the similarity to the U.S. political climate.

PARTNER STORY

Wonder Bread Woes

Supermarkets are built in neighborhoods that can support them financially. So if your neighborhood is by-and-large low-income, there will not be a SuperFresh coming to your block. Car insurance is ridiculously expensive in the city, and lugging groceries home on the bus is tedious at best. Convenience stores supply locals with essential items, like milk, eggs and bread. Dinner options include white Wonder Bread and Kraft macaroni and cheese. Produce at these shops is typically expensive and old. How can we who do not suffer from hunger, help get Philadelphia to a place where it is easier to access food, where living-wage jobs are abundant and quality education is free?

—Megan Scott, MCC service worker in Philadelphia, adapted from an article in *Shalom!*

Who's Afraid of Free Trade?

BY MARTIN SHUPACK

Fear of scarcity—and its crushing daily reality—drives countries to knuckle under to U.S. demands for “free trade.”

During a recent workshop, someone asked, “If people in developing countries are harmed by free trade treaties with the United States, why do their governments agree to them?”

Good question! I’ve asked MCC partners in developing countries the same thing. Part of the answer is desperation. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund require impoverished countries, as the conditions on debt relief and new loans, to cut government spending, lower barriers to imports and shift their economies toward production for export.

Attempts to develop flourishing domestic industries and agricultural markets are discouraged. As a result, developing countries experience increased joblessness. Economic insecurity becomes so great that they are desperate for any opening of U.S. markets to their products. Fear of scarcity—and its crushing daily reality—drives countries to knuckle under to U.S. demands for “free trade.” Furthermore, elites often benefit from international trade as importers and through other business interests.

Sometimes governments of poor nations have overcome their fear and stood up to the wealthy countries. At the World Trade Organization meeting in Cancun, Mexico, developing countries refused to accede to U.S. and European demands for unequal trade relations. They were encouraged and assisted by groups of their own citizens who came to Cancun to hold their governments accountable.

U.S. officials did not appreciate being challenged. Philippine civil society organizations reported that their government was threatened with reduced aid if they did not support the U.S. position. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick and Senate Finance Committee chairman Charles Grassley (R-IA) promised retaliation. Many Kenyans find it suspicious that immediately after Kenya defied the United States at Cancun, our government re-instituted a travel warning costing Kenya billions in tourist dollars.

Brazil and other Latin American countries have also balked at the U.S. push for a Free Trade Area of the Americas. The U.S. government wants a single agreement of all parties to a package of provisions including trade in goods, services, agriculture, rights for foreign investors and corporations, and patent rights. Latin Americans believe many of these provisions are stacked against them. They want a better deal and they want countries to be able to opt in or out of parts of the agreement, depending on their own interests.

In order to pressure these “uppity” governments, the U.S. administration is negotiating agreements with individual countries and small groups of weaker nations, who cannot afford to defy U.S. power and wealth. Fear of retaliation and the reality of economic misery are powerful motivations. It is a shame that our government is taking advantage of the insecurity and desperation of others. Is it not true that U.S. national security depends on more—not less—global human security? ■

PARTNER STORY

Feeling the Heat

The United States is pressuring Kenya to pass terrorism legislation limiting civil liberties, allow a new U.S. military base and take other security measures. One MCC partner responds, “In Kenya we believe the U.S. government and its allies are investing in the ‘industry of fear.’ When President Bush said ‘if you are not with us then you are with them,’ he made it clear that U.S. policy does not recognize the tenets of free thought, neutrality and sovereignty. The searches, screening and electronic security checks have become so common that we feel like we are all terrorists. The excuse of terrorism is being used by the United States as a way of entrenching [its domination], especially in the military and economic fields. The poor man is feeling the heat.”

Prison Towns Lock Out Restoration

Economic restructuring has devastated much of the rural United States. Family farms are declining. Unemployment remains a stubborn problem. People are leaving. Economic development seems unsure. Since the 1980s, the prison population has quadrupled to two million inmates. Many politicians called for locating prisons in rural communities as a solution.

In the past, few towns were willing to accept prisons. Now under economic duress, towns compete with each other. They virtually give away land, including farmland, and assume a greater share of supporting costs for prisons—roads, water and sewage systems. The high visibility of construction projects and the promise of new jobs offer quick psychological solace, not a real long-term remedy.

Often, out-of-town contractors with their own preestablished crews construct prisons. Additionally, residents do not gain a large share of prison jobs. Barriers include industry hiring dynamics, union obligations, off-site training and placement, a commuting workforce and even the transfer of trained residents to other locations.

The stigma of becoming a “prison town” affects opportunity for other ventures. Investment in community colleges and tourism decreases. Money is lacking for increased demands on a region’s court and emergency systems. Studies have also shown little or no net economic benefit to prison towns via tax revenues.

How do rural prisons affect cities? Their distant location separates large numbers of urban people from families, friends, commu-

nities and support structures—destroying the social and economic fabric of many neighborhoods. Ties that would aid recovery and re-entry are broken. Networks helpful to securing jobs and other needs are damaged.

If justice is meant to be restorative, then the current policy of rural prisons falls short. Prisons raise questions about profiting from the misery and disadvantage of people. Racial stereotypes surrounding crime are reinforced between rural and urban people. Little is invested in nurturing mutual understanding or working together to solve problems of scarcity and fear. We need to support alternatives for rural and urban areas as well as society at-large.

For More Information

Yes, In My Backyard: A Documentary Portrait of a Rural Prison Town. Galloping Girls Productions: Freehold, NY, 1999.
Order from: galgirls@francomm.com, 518-634-2170. ■

BY DAVID M. WHETTSTONE

In the past, few towns were willing to accept prisons. Now under economic duress, towns compete with each other.

PARTNER STORY

Long Road for Prison Families

The District of Columbia, because of federal laws, ships its prisoners all over the United States. One location is west of Winton, N.C., in rural Hertford County. Many D.C. prisoners come from high poverty neighborhoods. In many cases, it is impossible for a family member to come up with the resources to travel the 226 miles (about a 4½ hour drive) to see their loved one in prison. The cost of collect long-distance telephone calls is prohibitive. The result is estrangement from loved ones, sometimes for many months or years without any contact. This demoralizes the family, particularly children. Research has shown that the more contact with families, the less likely the prisoner will return to prison.

—Louis N. Jones, Director, Conquest Offender Reintegration Ministries, Washington, D.C.

Pontius' Puddle



The Bottom of the Barrel

BY LORA STEINER

“The solution to our long-term energy problems is not to just open this environmentally sensitive area to drilling.”

—SENATOR JEFF BINGAMAN (D-NM)

The United States uses about 25 percent of all oil produced globally and imports over half of its supply. Demand is expected to rise over the next two decades and domestic production is declining. “Energy security” is a phrase on a lot of minds these days.

For more than a decade, controversy has swirled around the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). The 19.5 million-acre refuge is estimated to hold 16 billion gallons of oil, making it the best prospect for a new source of oil in the United States. Referred to as “America’s Serengeti,” it is home to polar bears, caribou, wolves, and millions of migratory birds.

For most, the argument about whether or not drilling should be allowed in ANWR centers around one question: Should Congress open up the refuge to oil and gas exploration, or should it permanently protect one of the last remaining pristine areas of wilderness in the United States?

Those who support the Alaska drilling plan say that doing so is a matter of economic and national security. Reducing dependency on foreign oil, especially from countries whose citizenry are hostile towards the United States, is crucial. Opening ANWR to drilling would also pour money into an area desperate for jobs and school funding. They point out that the drilling would only affect ANWR’s coastal plain, and since technology has greatly improved in the last twenty years, they say, the impact on the earth will be much smaller than it was in other drilling areas in Alaska.

However, oil is a nonrenewable resource. Supporters of preservation point out that conservation practices, such as raising fuel economy standards, would be a much more efficient and viable long-term strategy than drilling in ANWR. One organization estimates that if fuel economy standards were raised to 40 miles per gallon, it would save 15 times the amount which could be extracted from ANWR over the next 50 years. Supporters of preservation also note that the recoverable amount of oil in the refuge is perhaps 5 billion gallons, a much lower amount than it’s estimated to hold. “The solution to our long-term energy problems,” said Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), “is not to just open this environmentally sensitive area to drilling.”

“We believe that human beings were created good, in the image of God,” says the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. “As creatures according to the divine likeness, we have been made stewards . . . to care for creation out of reverence and honor for the Creator.”

If the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, as the psalmist extols, then what is the best way to care for it and everything living on it? Who decides?

No one really knows for sure how much oil is in ANWR or what the impact would be on the refuge. But here are some questions to consider as the debate continues:

- Would better conservation practices alleviate the need for drilling? Would drilling diminish our reliance on foreign oil?
- What might be the economic impact on Alaskans of drilling or not drilling?
- How do we balance the economic needs of native Alaskans who live in the refuge and could use the money for schools with the needs of those who depend on the caribou herds (which might be adversely affected by drilling)? ■

Casting Out Fear in Philadelphia

U.S. Americans are very afraid these days, and if we believe our political leaders, there is much to be afraid of. Even now, we are told, terrorists are plotting to harm us and deprive us of our way of life. Unfortunately, the foundation for this way of life seems to be consumerism, the hallmark of the “American dream.”

Day by day, Circle Venture is working with marginalized folks in Philadelphia to begin building a different kind of future—in which love, encountered in community, casts out fear. If each tries to get his own, there won’t be enough, and our fear is warranted. However, if each realizes that God has abundantly provided for all, and so shares what he has, suddenly there is more than enough.

A good example is the story of Maurice, who has been blessed by the work of Brotherly Love Urban Youth Services, one of Circle Venture’s mission teams. Maurice moved to Philadelphia from New Orleans to follow his girlfriend. It was hard for him to find work without a high school diploma, and after his girlfriend broke up with him, he was stuck without money to fix his car and go home. He ended up sleeping in his car, and it was there that Bryan, a Circle of Hope pastor, met him. Maurice is slowly being transformed by the love of Jesus, and his life is being remade in community.

Another of Circle Venture’s ministries began when Tracey, a teacher at Frederick Douglass Elementary School, realized that her students had few chances to see beyond their neighborhood, especially since their families rely on public transportation at \$2 a ride. She started the Saturday Club and invited members of the Circle of Hope community to spend one Saturday a month mentoring students. Now the kids are working on a video to document their exploration of Philadelphia.

Circle Venture’s newest team, the Community Education Team, will provide birth and parenting classes in the Fishtown/Kensington neighborhood. The team was inspired by Christine, who became a mother at 18 and dropped out of high school. Now 20, with a GED and a job as a lactation consultant with WIC, she lives in the same neighborhood where she grew up, and she and her husband are leaders in Circle of Hope.

In the midst of this incredible work, there are some things that we are beginning to be certain of. We know that what we really need is love. We know that love is something we *do* face-to-face. We know that cell groups work—that people meet Jesus in them and are attracted to the right relationships that our cells, literally, aspire to embody.

Some folks are even beginning to take radically life-changing steps, including this writer. My wife and I are moving in with friends from Circle of Hope to attempt some form of intentional community. We’ll pool our money and other material goods, believing that this will free up resources with which to better build God’s kingdom.

We know it will be difficult, but we trust Jesus, and already see his Spirit knitting us together in new ways. We believe, in spite of our culture’s assumptions to the contrary, that scarcity is a lie, that God has provided us with a bounty of gifts to be faithful stewards of.

We trust that this bounty applies particularly to the love *in which we were created* and *for which we were made*. Here, too, scarcity is a lie, and we need not fear, for perfect love, even when received through imperfect fellow-travelers on this journey, casts it out. ■

IN OTHERS’ WORDS

BY ROBERT BUCK

Robert Buck is a member of Circle of Hope Brethren in Christ Church, a network of 27 cell groups and 3 congregations in Philadelphia committed to building the church for the next generation. Circle Venture is an arm of the Circle of Hope created to generate and support opportunities for compassionate service within Circle of Hope, Philadelphia, and the world.

Day by day, Circle Venture is working with marginalized folks in Philadelphia to begin building a different kind of future—in which love, encountered in community, casts out fear.



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SOUND THE TRUMPET!

ISSUE	SUMMARY	ADVOCACY NEEDED
LAOS	Laos is the only country with which the United States has full diplomatic relations but not Normal Trade Relations (NTR). In the 1960s and 1970s, the United States dropped more bombs on Laos than on Germany and Japan combined in World War II, and Laos has the lowest life expectancy and highest illiteracy rate in Southeast Asia. Granting NTR could significantly improve the Laotian economy, and would have virtually no impact on the United States.	Ask your representative and senators to co-sponsor or support the bill (H.R. 3493, S. 2200) to extend Normal Trade Relations to Laos.
GANG PREVENTION	Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) have introduced the Gang Prevention and Effective Deterrence Act of 2003. Its provisions, aimed largely at juveniles, would expand the use of the death penalty and create additional federal "gang" crimes that lack clear definition. In addition, felony convictions could be given to those who simply "hang out" with people who later commit a crime.	Ask your senators to oppose this bill (S. 1735).

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