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## THE REAL Y2K PROBLEMS

### Challenges for Public Policy

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BY KAREN KLASSEN  
HARDER

Karen Klassen Harder chairs the MCC board of directors and teaches economics at Bethel College.

Two serious problems at the dawn of the 21st century are increasing income disparity and our apparent inability to live with diversity.

I wish all the big challenges we face as a global community were as neat and accessible as the Y2K problem. There is something very appealing in being able to recognize a significant problem, develop solutions to address it, arrive at the day of reckoning and then accept the consequences of those efforts. January 1, 2000 is the watershed—the events of that time will be the subject of our history.

Other Y2K problems will continue into the new millennium. Two serious problems at the dawn of the 21st century are increasing income inequality and our apparent inability to live with diversity. But these problems have not received the same media attention and the collective problem-solving focus as have our computer problems. And while these national and global challenges arguably endanger even more lives than do the Y2K computer challenges, without a known date of reckoning there does not appear to be the will to address them with the same vigor.

No author who writes about the rapidly consolidating global economy today escapes the conclusion that concentration of market power is yielding unprecedented concentration of income and wealth. The inevitable result of economic restructuring is increasing income disparity between regions and countries and within them.

The ratio of the wealthiest 20 percent of the world's population to that of the poorest 20 percent changed from 30 to 1 in the 1960s, to 78 to 1 in the late 1990s. In the United States, one-fifth of the aged and one-fourth of children live beneath the poverty line. The resources to address the disparity of income are not lacking. The collective will to redistribute resources in order to meet basic human requirements apparently does not currently exist—and people suffer.

Our apparent inability to live with diversity of culture, race and religion seems almost paradoxical in a world bound together by global markets that demonstrate an increasing global consciousness. Each day's news provides us with fresh evidence that many are unable to accept and embrace difference. From Sierra Leone and Kosovo to Columbine High School, the mentality of "we-they" exclusion leads to intolerance and violence. What will it take to overcome this needless cause of so much human suffering and destruction?

The optimist in me acknowledges and celebrates the small, successful, often local efforts that address the challenges of income maldistribution and our inability to live with diversity. But my wish, at the start of this new millennium, would be that the problem-solving commitment which has been the hallmark of the Y2K computer campaign could continue. Can we use the impetus of a new millennium to put a much needed focus on other, much more significant, Y2K problems? ■

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BY J. DARYL BYLER

## Y2K Has Come, But Real Problems Have Not Gone Away

On a recent trip to California I stayed with an elderly couple who live on a fixed income. To prepare for January 1, 2000 they plan to spend more than \$1,000 for a generator and gas grill. Just in case. For some this may sound like prudent precaution. For others, an expensive way to assuage anxiety.

Indeed, billions of dollars have been spent preparing for the “Y2K Problem”—the now famous computer glitch that some claim will create global chaos. Never has it been so popular to be a computer programmer. And many an entrepreneur has made money tapping into people’s worst fears. Even some religious leaders have fanned the flames of fear, announcing plans to stockpile food and guns. As a concession to worried business leaders, Congress has set a liability cap for lawsuits based on Y2K problems.

By the time this issue of the *Washington Memo* reaches most homes, January 1 will have come and gone. I expect that there will be some technological glitches as we roll into the new millennium. But I doubt that we will see planes fall from the sky, prison doors swing open or ATM machines melt down.

Still, the real Y2K problems will be with us long after January 1—global poverty, wars, racial and ethnic injustice, environmental degradation and power imbalances. Will we spend as much energy addressing these issues?

As Karen Klassen Harder suggests, people of faith cannot sit idly by while one fifth of the elderly and one fourth of the children

in the United States live below the poverty line. And we dare not passively watch while the world’s wealthiest fifth amass 78 times more resources than the poorest fifth. Martin Shupack argues that the new global economy has contributed to this disparity. David Whettstone’s call for a “beloved community” reminds us that we still have a long way to go in addressing racial injustices in our country. Rachele Schlabach offers compelling reasons why people of faith must give greater attention to global warming.

There are other Y2K problems that deserve our attention. What does it mean for the United States to be the world’s sole superpower? What will be the long-term impact of muscling the U.S. will on other countries through military means?

Like my friends in California, many Americans will buy generators and gas grills to prepare for the Y2K problem. But if only 20 million American households would instead contribute \$1,000, it would be possible—according to figures published by the Council on Economic Priorities—to:

- Provide primary health care for the one billion people who never see a health professional.
- Immunize the two million children who die annually of preventable infectious disease.
- Eliminate severe malnutrition and cut in half moderate malnutrition for the world’s 192 million malnourished children.
- Provide safe drinking water for the 1.3 billion people who lack access to good water.
- Offer primary education for 80 million children who do not attend school.
- Cut the adult illiteracy rate in half (from 900 million to 450 million) and improve the female literacy rate to that of men.

Such an investment would not solve all the world’s problems. But it might move us beyond our obsession with the first day of the new millennium, and help us begin to face the real Y2K problems. ■

The real Y2K problems will be with us long after January 1. Will we spend as much energy addressing these issues?

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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.

Staff: J. Daryl Byler (Editorial Director), Rachele Schlabach (Managing Editor), Martin Shupack (Senior Associate Editor), David Whettstone

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# Taking Stock of Our Food

BY RACHELLE SCHLABACH

In Cambodia, MCC supports community irrigation projects. In Bangladesh, workers administer micro-credit loans to farm families. In El Salvador, MCC helps link farmers from various regions so that they can share their methods for sustainable agriculture.

People around the world benefit from these efforts to create environmentally sustainable, community-based food systems. But what about the food systems and agricultural techniques in our own country?

In recent years, a movement has begun to grow around the notion of “community food security.” The movement unites a diverse group of people, including anti-hunger groups, urban gardeners and small farm advocates.

The group articulates many concerns, including: lack of access to fresh, affordable food, particularly in cities; resources wasted on packaging and transportation; and farmers and pickers who must rely on food stamps to feed their families.

What would an alternative vision look like? “Community food security” describes their approach:

**Community.** This is a favorite term among Mennonites. It reminds us that we are not isolated individuals, but part of a larger group. Community, in this case, can mean linking farmers directly with their buyers through farmers’ markets. It also means buying locally produced food when possible.

**Food.** All persons have a basic right to adequate food for their physical development. But we also want food to be free of chemicals, nutritious and taste good.

**Security.** Last year, the lone remaining supermarket in one section of Washington, D.C. closed down. None of the supermarket chains made enough profit to justify staying. Entire neighborhoods lost access to fresh and affordable food. Buying groceries suddenly meant either paying high prices at small convenience stores or long bus trips across town. Meanwhile, residents in wealthier neighborhoods have their choice of grocery stores within walking distance.

The response of the residents illustrates the notion of community food security. They began to organize farmers’ markets and cleaned up vacant lots for gardens. Not only do the residents now have access to fresh fruits and vegetables, they are rediscovering a new sense of community.

Community food security takes us beyond the fear of Y2K supermarket crashes. More importantly, it reflects a vision for feeding ourselves sustainably with the resources God has granted us. ■

## CAPITAL QUOTES

*“I have been here five years and I have yet to vote for foreign aid and I do not intend to vote for foreign aid until I see it see it down in single digits—\$6, \$7 billion instead of \$12 or \$14 billion.”*

Rep. Walter B. Jones (R-NC), Nov. 2, 1999. The United States is already the stingiest industrial nation in percentage of national wealth set aside for poor countries.

*“I am not an assassin, I’m a good old Army guy. . . . If we close the school maybe we’re going to have to go back to the interventionist policies of Teddy Roosevelt, because when there is a security threat in Latin America, you know we’re going to be there.”*

Major Llinet, an SOA instructor responding to efforts to close the U.S. Army School of the Americas.

## Pondius' Puddle



# Economic Globalization

BY MARTIN SHUPACK

Globalization is the revolutionary movement in economics at the turn of the millennium. National barriers to trade and investment are dissolving. Goods, services and money move more freely throughout the world. In addition, the role of governments in regulating economic activity is being reduced.

Economic globalization results both from new technologies and public policies. These make it easier for investors to move capital where and when they wish. In addition, corporations can conduct activities wherever they can reduce costs and increase profits. A product purchased in a nearby store, or through the Internet, is likely to have parts made and assembled in several different countries.

Many economists argue that a “free” global market will increase efficiency and raise overall income. Some government leaders insist that economic interdependence will promote democracy (e.g., in China) and reduce the number of wars. However, many people living in the global South say they are being severely harmed by economic globalization.

People of faith across the political spectrum are concerned about economic globalization because of our biblical call to justice for the poor. How can we tell if globalization is helping or harming the two-thirds of the world’s people struggling to overcome poverty? Here are some indications:

- *Is poverty being reduced because more people are able to obtain good jobs?* Globalization has caused many peasant farmers in the global South to lose their land and livelihood. Their governments’ agricultural support has shifted from

food staples to so-called “cash crops” for export. Urban unemployment has also grown. Much domestic manufacturing and many small and medium-sized businesses have been destroyed by reduced access to credit and competition from transnational corporations.

- *Do people have enough to eat, basic medical care, affordable public transportation and educational opportunity?* Under globalization people in the global South now pay more for food, health services, children’s education and public transportation. This is because their governments, pressured by rich countries and the International Monetary Fund, have reduced social spending. Indeed, the people of sub-Saharan Africa actually consume less than they did 20 years ago!
- *Are workers earning an adequate wage with improving working conditions?* Globalization has meant declining working conditions in many countries. Many governments seek to attract international investment by offering a low wage, non-union labor force and lax environmental protection.
- *Is the natural environment respected and preserved?* Globalization’s emphasis on exports has resulted in deforestation, over-fishing, depletion of mineral wealth and widespread use of poisonous chemicals in farming.

Economic globalization, at least in its current form, is not inevitable. Some critics want to return to more national-based economies, while others believe globalization can be shaped to serve the needs of ordinary people. If so, economic globalization will have to foster the values of equitable development, poverty reduction, fair trade and environmental responsibility. This will require ordinary people working through citizens’ organizations and governments to regulate international trade and investment so that it serves the common good. At the turn of the millennium people of faith and others concerned about justice for all are finding ways to work toward this goal. ■

Many people living in the global South say they are being severely harmed by economic globalization.

## NEW RESOURCE ON INTERNATIONAL ECONOMICS

“Toward Justice, Peace and Compassion: The MCC U.S. Washington Office International Economics Issues Packet,” a new resource from Mennonite Central Committee, addresses economic globalization and related concerns.

The packet is available for \$3 and can be ordered from Mennonite Central Committee, 21 South 12th Street, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501. Martin Shupack is available to speak to congregations, classes and campus groups about the Jubilee 2000 debt cancellation campaign and other issues covered in the packet. He can be contacted at (202) 544-6564 (email: mccwash@mcc.org).

# A Chance For Beloved Community

BY DAVID M. WHETTSTONE

Actions of fear and prejudice often betray our encounters of new people or even longtime neighbors. The strain goes further when we try to be a community or nation. Even our public policy reveals this tension. Often our choice of being separate and apart is maintained by barriers—stubborn and harmful in their effects, yet thin in virtue. In spite of barriers, God uses, embraces, and loves many nations. God causes different folks to interact, working to establish peace and love—shalom—between and within communities. This is how the reign of God draws us beyond our own limited images and exclusiveness.

We all wonder what America will look like in the new millennium. Within a few decades, we will be without a clear majority of any one specific ethnic group. Persons of color (as a group) will soon comprise more than half of our population. With this reality quickly approaching, it is good to reflect on policy history, the role of biblical advocacy, and the concerns people of color bring to the policy arena.

Last year's issues included controversies regarding appointments of persons of color to federal judgeships, racial insensitivities in Congress, continuation of church burnings, a Justice Department report indicating the high rate of racial victimization of Native Americans, and a continuing debate over reparations and trust responsibilities to people of color.

Recognition of individuals is an occasional and symbolic acknowledgment of communities of color—Congress awarded Mrs. Rosa Parks its Gold Medal, secured a memorial site for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and is attempting to obtain his papers for the Library of Congress. Yet these communities share many mainstream concerns: protecting Social Security, increasing the minimum wage, a Patients' Bill of Rights, public school construction and improvement, fair employment, economic development, etc.

Where do we go for direction in matters of race and public policy? The Bible is full of God's concern for the welfare and right

relationship of all people. Accounts of Moses, Esther, Jonah, the prophets, Paul, and Peter all speak of this theme.

Anabaptists seek to provide relief and intervention to others, practice restorative justice, steward land and creature according to the Scriptures, and wage peace. The new earthly and future vision of a people whose "gentleness [is] evident to all" (Phil. 4:5) should reflect a renewed sense of community and nation. Let's hone a clear heart and mind, then the will and action to ensure that:

- others get an equal opportunity to pursue their calling;
- others are fairly served by a system of justice that is transformative, redemptive and reflects the full participation of all;
- others' history, identity and dignity do not get pushed aside by fear and false systems of law, social welfare, and education;
- others' ways are listened to and learned especially to till the land and maintain community, all of us joining as equal active partners;
- and others are not subject to violence because of who they are or look like.

Jesus' command to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind has a high priority attached to it. Love our fellow neighbors as we would ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39): it is the obvious bottom line applied to matters of race and public policy. ■

**Persons of color, as a group, will soon comprise more than half of our population.**

## RECENT CIVIL RIGHTS CONCERNS

- Upholding Equal Opportunity Programs
- Enhancing Hate Crimes Prevention and Protection
- Ensuring a Fair and Accurate 2000 Census
- Protecting and Restoring Voting Rights
- Diverse U.S. Supreme Court Law Clerk Appointments
- Reparations for Farmers of Color
- Passing an Africa Trade Bill
- Preserving the Community Reinvestment Act
- Establishing Effective Law Enforcement Training & Accountability
- Ending Death Penalty Racial Disparities

# The Frog in the Kettle: Global Warming

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BY RACHELLE SCHLABACH

According to one story, a frog in a slowly-heating kettle of water will inevitably die. Although he would be able to jump out, he is fooled by the water as it gradually warms and does not realize what is happening until it is too late.

Sadly, it seems that we humans are prone to the same reaction, as our climate warms unnaturally around us. We are all too willing to deny that temperatures are rising, let alone admit that we might be the ones kindling the flames.

A small number of scientists, well-funded by the fossil-fuel industry and with ample access to the media, have managed to convince many that global warming is a myth.

But the overwhelming bulk of evidence says otherwise. In 1995, the 2500 scientists of the International Panel on Climate Change agreed that not only is global warming occurring, but that humans are contributing directly to its rapid pace.

The facts speak for themselves: the ten warmest years on record have occurred since 1983, with the last several years each setting a new record. Rising sea levels, temperature increases, the earlier onset of seasons, and extreme weather events like droughts and flooding have matched scientists' predictions with alarming accuracy. These effects are expected to continue and could get much worse—leading, for example, to shrinking coastlines and even the disappearance of small island nations in the Pacific.

The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere began to increase around the same time as the Industrial Revolution and is now nearly a third higher than it was at the turn of the century. Rapid accumulation of “greenhouse gases” such as carbon dioxide causes global warming. These gases are released when fossil fuels, such as coal and oil, are burned.

Unlike the frog, we still have a chance to jump out. While the damage cannot be undone, we can slow it down. Individuals and communities can help by reducing the amount of energy they use—for example, bicycling or carpooling to work and using energy-efficient appliances.

But change also needs to happen on a much larger scale. For example, subsidies for fossil fuels should be shifted toward renewable energies. And fuel economy standards should be raised for light trucks and sport utility vehicles, in order to take advantage of cleaner technologies that are already available.

In 1997 industrialized nations negotiated the “Kyoto Protocol,” pledging to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to specified levels by 2012. But Congress has been less than agreeable to the protocol, even blocking attempts to fund research on renewable energies with the *potential* to reduce our emissions level and thus “implement the Protocol.”

With four percent of the world's population but 21 percent of annual emissions worldwide, the United States should take a leading role to stop global warming. An important first step would be ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

Without such commitments, we may all soon find ourselves in very hot water indeed. ■

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# An Arms Race With Ourselves

A 1999 report by the London-based Institute for International and Strategic Studies contains good news and bad.

The good news is that global military spending is shrinking as we enter a new millennium—from \$1.2 trillion in 1985 to \$785 billion in 1998.

The bad news is that, during this same period, the U.S. share of military spending grew from 30 to 36 percent of the total.

The Center for Defense Information reports that “the U.S. military budget is more than nineteen times as large as the combined spending of the seven countries traditionally identified by the Pentagon as our most likely adversaries—Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria.” Together, these nations spend just over \$15 billion annually.

Admiral Eugene Carroll, Jr. concludes, “For 45 years of the Cold War we were in an arms race with the Soviet Union. Now it appears we’re in an arms race with ourselves.”

This fascination with military spending exposes troubling trends as we enter the 21st century:

**Military dominance.** No longer is the U.S. military satisfied to be *superior* to others. The new term is *dominance*. Lockheed-Martin, which manufactures the sophisticated F-22 “dominance fighter” jet, boasts that the F-22 is “equipped to destroy the enemy in the sky and on the ground on the first day of a war.” Dominating weapons like the F-22 (which cost \$200 million per plane) are in large part driving military spending increases.

**New rules of engagement.** Recent U.S. military clashes in Kosovo and Iraq reveal a new standard in war: no American casualties. This standard is expensive—financially and in civilian lives. Costly cruise missiles are fired from ships hundreds of miles away from their targets. In Kosovo, to avoid U.S. casualties, war planes dropped cluster bombs from higher than normal altitudes—resulting in wide scatter patterns that increase risks to civilians.

**Double standards.** The U.S. Senate’s failure to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) denotes a disturbing double standard. While the United States will continue to demand that other nations neither build nor test nuclear weapons, it reserves the right to both keep and test the world’s most powerful nuclear arsenal.

These trends are not simply costly. They undermine global security. Both U.S. allies and adversaries are annoyed by this display of American arrogance. Indeed, it is delusional to think that other countries will only maintain or even downsize their military capacity while the United States keeps building. An arms race with ourselves can only lead to a global arms race.

If the United States wishes to find the hopeful way forward in the 21st century, it must be weaned from the intoxicating notion that raw power and military might are the way to build a secure world. ■

BY J. DARYL BYLER

“The U.S. military budget is more than nineteen times as large as the combined spending of the seven countries traditionally identified by the Pentagon as our most likely adversaries.”

MILITARY SPENDING	
<i>Selected Countries</i>	<i>Military Budget</i>
United States	\$288.8 billion
Russia	\$55.0 billion
China	\$37.5 billion
Iran	\$5.7 billion
Iraq	\$1.4 billion
North Korea	\$1.3 billion
Cuba	\$0.8 billion

# SOUND THE TRUMPET!

<p>In 1999, we asked readers to respond to a number of issues. Below are updates on some of those issues.</p>	
Debt Relief	<p>Congress agreed to President Clinton's request for \$123 million to cancel debts that poor countries owe the United States. However, Congress did not appropriate money for a "multilateral" trust fund to relieve poor country debts to regional banks.</p>
Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty	<p>The Senate voted 48-51 to defeat the CTBT which would ban all nuclear testing worldwide. Sixty-seven votes were needed to ratify the treaty.</p>
School of the Americas	<p>The House of Representatives vote to cut off funds for the U.S. Army School of the Americas was not passed by Congress as a whole. Feeling the heat, however, the SOA says it will change its name and mission.</p>
Juvenile Justice and Gun Control	<p>Containing both positive and negative provisions, the juvenile justice bill and its attached gun control amendments remains deadlocked in the House and Senate conference committee.</p>
Fairness for Legal Immigrants	<p>An attempt to restore benefits to immigrants lost during welfare reform in 1996 has not passed either the House or Senate yet but continues to gain momentum.</p>
North Korea	<p>The United States recently lifted some sanctions against North Korea. But many in Congress remain opposed to any warming of relations.</p>
Peace Tax Fund	<p>The Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Bill has not moved beyond being co-sponsored by several members of the House.</p>
U. N. Funding	<p>Congress approved payment of up to \$926 million of the U.S. debt to the United Nations, allowing the United States to keep its vote in the U.N. General Assembly without fully satisfying its outstanding debt. The U.N. says the U.S. owes \$1.5 billion.</p>

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