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ADVOCATING FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Young Adults Speak Out

The Basic Things of Life

BY RACHELLE LYNDAKER SCHLABACH

Economic justice is about the most basic things of life. Enough food. Adequate clothing. Access to health care. Safe shelter.

When these essential needs are met, we often take them for granted. But take away any one of them, and life becomes a struggle.

In Exodus 16, we find the story of the Israelites in the wilderness, with little food or water. Hearing their cry, the Lord responds by sending them manna. When they gather only what is needed, there is just the right amount for each person. But when some try to gather extra and save it for the next day, it rots away.

This text holds some powerful lessons for us. Fundamentally, it reminds us that it is God who provides for our needs. Secondly, it teaches us to be mindful of what is “enough” for us, as individuals and as a nation. When we grab more than our fair share, the result can be rotten.

The United States is the wealthiest nation in the world, yet nearly one in five of its children live in poverty and 46 million people lack health insurance. U.S. foreign aid ranks among the lowest per capita of industrialized nations. And our country’s trade policies unfairly burden small farmers and businesses overseas while favoring multinational corporations.

Young adults have frequently raised their voices to protest such unfair conditions. MCC was started in part by young adults who wanted to reach out to their brothers and sisters experiencing hardship in Russia. In this tradition, we have invited Deborah Scott to share her perspective as a young adult working with MCC in Kenya (p.5).

Also in this issue, Krista Zimmerman (p.3) and Theo Sittler (p.4) examine the role of U.S. policies in promoting economic justice, at home and abroad. Gabe Schlabach (p.6) reports on mishandling of Native American monies dating back to the 1880s. Katrina Alger (p.7) portrays the housing predicament in New Orleans two years after the storm.

And on page 2 is Daryl Byler’s final “Other Side of the Hill” column. For thirteen years, his clear and insightful words have graced these pages. In Daryl’s tenure as director, the staff has grown in number and diversity, the office found a permanent home with the purchase of a lovely row-house on Capitol Hill, and many creative initiatives such as the high school essay contest were birthed. We are most grateful to Daryl for his wise and thoughtful leadership over the years.

In mid-September, Daryl and his wife, Cindy, will move to Jordan to serve as MCC representatives for Palestine, Iran, Iraq and Jordan. We pray that God will bless them richly as they begin this new venture. ■

When we grab more than our fair share, the result can be rotten.

IN THIS MEMO

Changes	2
Abundant Living	3
Capital Quotes	3
Remember the Sabbath	4
Globalization and Faith	5
Mismanaged Trust	6
Long Road Home	7
Sound the Trumpet!	8

BY J. DARYL BYLER

Changes

How does one summarize in a single column 13 years of work in the MCC Washington Office?

The temptation is to quantify. There were thousands of emails and phone calls that connected my work to fascinating people around the globe. I wrote hundreds of articles and action alerts about U.S. militarism and Middle East policy. I visited most congressional offices at least once. I received more than 100 speaking invitations from constituent congregations and schools. I made 20 international trips.

But how does one quantify the gift of serving with bright and energetic staff? From them I have learned much about the world, about team work and about being a better leader. Or how does one measure the value of a conversation with a Palestinian refugee or an Israeli peace activist or an Iraqi doctor working under oppressive sanctions?

Much has changed in the course of more than a dozen years in Washington.

The world has changed. There are at least two new nuclear weapons powers—India and Pakistan. There are stubborn and expanding wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—wars that U.S. leaders promised would lead to stability and security. On the brighter side, according to U.N. research, the number of conflicts globally is actually on the decline.

The nation has changed. When I came to the office, the Cold War had just ended and

there was hopeful talk about a “peace dividend”—or at least flat military spending. That hope completely evaporated on a fateful September morning in 2001. U.S. military spending has more than doubled in the six short years since Sept. 11.

Washington has changed. The tone on Capitol Hill is decidedly more partisan than when I arrived in 1994. It is all too rare to find Democrats and Republicans working together to address the major issues facing the nation—the war in Iraq, healthcare, immigration and the environment.

The church has changed. While the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church merged in 2000, a number of North American denominational bodies have separated across the U.S.-Canadian border. Funding for churchwide programs is an ongoing struggle, and justice and peace programs are often among the first to feel the pinch.

MCC has changed. Regional offices have brought MCC services closer to constituents, but not without major growing pains for MCC structures and leaders. MCC is both more sophisticated and more vulnerable than it was a dozen years ago.

The Washington Office has changed. Happily, the staff is much more diverse than it was in 1994. Today, people of color and women are a prominent part of the staff. Rachele Lyndaker Schlabach is the office’s first woman director. The office also has a new and more spacious location on Pennsylvania Avenue.

I have changed. I leave the office both more realistic and hopeful than when I arrived. I am more realistic about the church’s warts and about how difficult it is to change both church and public policies. Still, I am more confident than ever that God is constantly in the business of transforming the world. As human beings, we have a standing invitation to participate in that grand enterprise.

Thanks to all who have journeyed with me these years. As Cindy and I begin a new MCC assignment in Jordan, we will welcome your prayers and your emails. ■

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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.

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To contact the MCC U.S. Washington Office, please see our address on the back page. See our weekly commentary at www.thirdway.com and visit our web site at www.mcc.org/us/washington.

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Abundant Living and Public Policy

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says he came so we might have life “and have it abundantly” (10:10).

Proponents of the so-called “prosperity gospel” say this verse and others like it mean Christians will prosper financially and that following Christ’s commandments will yield material goods.

Many early followers of Christ, however, did not reap financial rewards as a result of their discipleship. Apostles left their fishing nets (sources of revenue) to follow Jesus. In return, they experienced hunger and life on the road.

They were willing to make that trade because they were in search of something greater than maximizing personal wealth. They wanted to reach out on a whole new level to follow Jesus and become fishers of people.

The same basic choices are still available in people’s personal lives today. They are also offered in public policy.

We can view the “abundant life” as one focused primarily on personal financial well-being or we can see it as one in which we forego some personal gain in order to assist others, especially the most vulnerable.

In order to create personal lives that account for the well-being of others, some already grow their own food, donate resources to churches or volunteer with non-profit organizations. All of these activities require some degree of sacrifice and primarily benefit others.

Similarly, public policies should provide for the needs of the environment, the poor and the sick, even when doing so not only benefits society but requires some extra offering of resources by society or some of its members.

But the president intends to veto reasonable increases in domestic spending of even 3.1 percent, despite the fact that such offerings will provide people with healthcare and protect the environment. Furthermore, spending on these items remained stagnant for years, while the president insisted on hundreds of billions for an unpopular war.

Instead of rejecting sensible funding requests for social endeavors, the administration should explore how government spending can be leveraged to create healthy communities using the “abundant living” model taught by the Gospels and employed by many of its citizens. Some of its recent tax cuts that benefit only the wealthiest may need to be repealed. Present levels of military spending should be decreased.

In government, as in the personal lives of citizens, reasonable concessions and offerings of resources are the trade-offs concerned individuals make, in order to achieve abundant lives for all members of the community. ■

BY KRISTA ZIMMERMAN

To learn more, see:

Geez Magazine
(geezmagazine.org)

Coalition on Human Needs
(chn.org)

Center on Budget and Policy
Priorities (cbpp.org)

CAPITAL QUOTES

“If it was up to me, I would close Guantanamo. Not tomorrow, but this afternoon. I’d close it.”

—Former Secretary of State Colin Powell on June 10, 2007, arguing the prison has tarnished America’s reputation.

“Cloaked as ‘real reform,’ the House passed a Farm Bill that perpetuates the status quo, wasting the rare chance to make meaningful changes in programs that simply help the rich get richer, while the poor get poorer.”

—Raymond Offenheiser, president of Oxfam America, in July.

“We’re spending billions and billions of dollars overseas in Iraq and not taking care of the people in our own country—we need help here!”

—Sharon Jasper, resident of New Orleans, speaking at a congressional hearing in July about the government’s ineffectual Gulf Coast recovery efforts.

Remember the Sabbath

BY THEO SITHTER

The biblical mandates on Sabbath and Jubilee Year are clear. God repeatedly directed the Israelites to remember the Sabbath and to keep it holy. God spoke through the law, the prophets and Jesus when he declared that God's Spirit had anointed him to "bring good news to the poor to proclaim the year of Jubilee" (Luke 4:18–19). In the Jubilee Year land was returned to its original owner, farmlands were left fallow, slaves were freed and debts were canceled. Life and shalom were restored.

Today, the poorest nations suffer due to enormous debts owed to wealthy nations and to financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Jubilee USA states, "Seven years after the beginning of the new millennium, we live in a world that is seriously out of balance. Every day, 13 percent of the world's population goes hungry. Every day, 30,000 children die of easily preventable diseases due to malnutrition and lack of adequate medical care. The Jubilee vision that we find in scripture calls us to challenge this horrible reality." MCC, along with Jubilee USA, actively advocates for debt relief.

Lutheran minister Russell Meyer points out that many heavily indebted countries spend as much as a third of their budgets on interest payments alone. "Every loan payment," he says, "is a child not fed, a school not built, a road not paved, a hospital not staffed."

Debt cancellation works. When Zambia received debt relief, it immediately designated the funds for training teachers and medical personnel, as well as HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs. Hon-

duras used the money it was no longer spending on debt payments to fund education programs. Overall, countries that received debt relief increased their social spending by 70 percent.

On June 7 the Jubilee Act was re-introduced by Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) along with six other representatives including Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-Ala.). At the bill's introduction Rep. Bachus stated, "Debt relief is not a total solution to poverty, hunger, and disease, but it is a necessary first step. It is where the journey should begin to free these countries of the burden of debt, the chains of poverty, and the shackles of despair to enable them to minister to the economic and social needs of their people and children."

The Jubilee Act is the centerpiece of Jubilee USA's 2007 Sabbath year campaign. The Act:

- calls on the Bush Administration, the IMF and the World Bank to ensure they keep their promises on debt cancellation and to challenge the activities of "vulture funds" (which specialize in buying securities in distressed environments);
- calls for expanded debt cancellation for all impoverished countries that will use the freed resources well and need debt cancellation to meet the Millennium Development Goals; and
- creates new standards for responsible lending and creditor transparency by calling for measures to address the problem of vulture funds as well as debt audits of odious and illegal debts from the past.

Remember the Sabbath and advocate for the rights of the poor and the oppressed. Due to the efforts of many conscientious people some countries have already experienced debt relief. However there is still much work to be done. The passing of the Jubilee Act will be one step closer toward the realization of the biblical vision of Sabbath. ■

Help cancel debt by participating in the "Cancel Debt Fast"—fast and take action for a day or more during a 40-day period. To learn more, go to canceldebtfast.org.

ECONOMICS FUEL CONFLICT: READ MORE ON WEB

"In both southern Sudan and Darfur, the roots of the conflicts lie in the way the government of Sudan has marginalized the outer regions. Parts of the Sudanese economy are booming due to increased oil production and high oil prices. Yet, the wealth is not being shared equally . . ."

Visit our website at mcc.org/us/washington to read more about how economic exploitation fuels conflict in Africa.

Globalization: A Matter of Faith

YOUNG ADULTS
SPEAK OUT

I used to think of globalization as U.S. fast food chains and North American corporate brands spreading over the world. Since coming to Kenya, I've seen that globalization is much more. For one, it includes European brands and South African supermarkets and Chinese electronic goods spreading over the world, too.

But imported goods are only a small part of what binds Kenya to the rest of the world. Travel to any rural area and, while you may not find a U.S.-manufactured good, you will find evidence of the impact of the United States on everyday life. U.S. policies—intangible though they may be—have tangible impacts, particularly on Kenyan farmers. Almost 75 percent of Kenyans depend on agriculture for their livelihood, and the majority are smallholder farmers. These farmers are vulnerable not only to changes in the weather, but also to changes in global commodity prices, international trade rules and policy decisions of key countries such as the United States, which plays a significant role in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In exchange for access to large loans in the 1980s and early 1990s, Kenya committed itself not only to loan repayments but also to a whole new policy framework. Like most African countries, Kenya followed the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), which dictated the liberalization of Kenya's economy. The theory was that SAPs would act like a bitter medicine—unpleasant to swallow, but ultimately “good for you.” Kenya withdrew subsidies for agricultural inputs, shut down the government source of credit for farmers, and cut the number of agricultural extension

workers. Structural adjustment ushered in a legacy of neglect and lack of support for smallholder farmers in Kenya and across Africa that continues today.

We live in a world where the trade policies of the United States, the consumer choices of Europe, and the foreign direct investment trends of China all impact the lives of rural Kenyan farmers. This is globalization: not just products and brands, but the whole web of connections—political, economic, technical, cultural and even spiritual—that envelops our world.

In such an interconnected world, each of us holds a certain degree of power over each other, and responsibility as well. But this is not completely new. As Anabaptists, we have a shared history of experiencing and living our faith through our relationships within communities. Through our connections, we hold each other responsible and we are blessed by each other.

Today, the biblical call to justice and to living in right relationship with each other extends across the globe. This can feel like a heavy responsibility; after all, there are many injustices that need to be addressed. But it is also a thing of beauty and joy. It presents opportunities to learn more about the people who are influenced by us and who are influencing our lives, too. It means that when we engage as people of faith in our country's policy-making process, we represent communities and concerns much broader than ourselves. Thus, advocating for fairer trade rules and just American policies is not a matter of charity; rather, it is about acting out of responsibility, a very real and concrete responsibility that we hold in the global community. ■

BY DEBORAH SCOTT

Deborah Scott is an MCC worker in Nairobi, Kenya, serving with ACORD, a pan-African organization working for social justice and equality. Her focus is on agricultural trade policy analysis.

We live in a world where the trade policies of the U.S., the consumer choices of Europe, and the foreign investment trends of China all impact the lives of rural Kenyan farmers.

Pontus' Puddle



A Mismanaged Trust & Broken Promises

BY GABE SCHLABACH

Imagine a young married couple walking into a bank to open a college savings account for their first child. As the years pass, the couple dutifully deposits money into the account. Finally, after almost 20 years, they contact the bank to withdraw money for the first tuition payment, only to discover that the bank has lost all record of the account and of the couple's money. What's worse, this is not the only account the bank has neglected to maintain: almost half a million others were lost or mismanaged.

This story seems far-fetched, right? Unfortunately, it is not, if the bank is the U.S. government and the account holders are Native American families and tribes.

In 1887 the U.S. government implemented the Dawes Act, which seized land from Native tribes and allotted some of it to individual American Indians. Patronizing legislators assumed the government could manage the land better than Native landowners and set up a trust fund to manage revenues from their mineral, timber and oil wealth.

This arrangement was to end after 25 years. Those 25 years passed; then 50 years; then 100. Now in its 120th year, the trust arrangement continues to restrict Native landowners' access to their own assets. During the past century, many "wealthy" families were kept impoverished despite having oil wells or other material resources on their land. Additionally, the government cannot even produce accurate records of how much it owes the approximately 500,000 Native Americans who have individual trust accounts.

The class action court case *Cobell v. Kempthorne*, in which these grievances came to light, is in its twelfth year. Mediators between the Native plaintiffs and the government defendants have suggested that a settlement of \$7 billion to \$9 billion would be appropriate. The attorney general has estimated that the government's liability in *Cobell* and other Indian Trust Fund cases could reach \$200 billion.

The *Cobell* case is not entirely confined to the courtroom, however, and some in Congress have shown interest in settling the trust dispute legislatively. The Bush administration has also weighed in, offering to settle on the low end—\$7 billion—but only if the government is cleared of all liability for past actions and if the amount covers all the individual accounts *and* similar tribal accounts *and* huge administrative costs. If they take this settlement, Native individuals, families, and tribes will get only a small fraction of the money that is theirs while legally clearing the government of its responsibilities. It is important to tell your representatives in Washington to take leadership in arranging a *just* settlement in the Indian Trust Fund scandal.

Cobell v. Kempthorne also raises a larger point. Economic injustices done to Native tribes and individuals by the federal government, as well as by the 50 states, are not merely an embarrassment from the past to be remembered (though more often just glossed over) in American History textbooks. Mennonite Church USA has acknowledged this, noting that "unless an apology [for historical injustices to American Indians] goes hand in hand with restitution and a change in behavior, it is meaningless." Yet the U.S. government continues to compound Native grievances by improperly maintaining the Indian Trust Fund, by under-funding services (such as healthcare and education) guaranteed to the tribes by treaty, and by chipping away at tribal sovereignty. It is imperative that non-Natives do not forget the promises made to the original inhabitants of this land. ■

To read more about Mennonite Church USA's support for a U.S. government apology to Native Americans, see sanjose2007.org/delegates.

NEW RESOURCES

We have recently updated three of our resources, on U.S. militarism, immigration & globalization, and Colombia. They are short, readable and great for use as discussion starters in small groups or Sunday School classes. To request your copy (or multiple copies to share with others), contact us at 202-544-6564 or mccwash@mcc.org. Staff are also available to speak in churches on these topics—please let us know if you are interested.

The Long Road Home

Two years ago the world watched as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita ripped a path of destruction along the Gulf Coast. Killing more than a thousand people and displacing close to one million, the storms left a legacy of devastation both in the region and in the lives of those who lost family and homes.

The New York Times reported in May that New Orleans' population was only 56 percent that of the pre-storm total. Affordable housing remains largely unavailable to those who wish to return and government assistance programs have been woefully insufficient in providing aid. The Road Home program, an initiative funded by the federal government and administered by the state of Louisiana, has represented an exercise in frustration for many homeowners. Of the more than 100,000 applicants who applied for funds through the program, approximately 17,000 have received aid, and there are reports that the program itself is facing an estimated \$3 billion shortfall.

The inadequacy of the Road Home program is magnified by the realization that it doesn't address the losses suffered by roughly 53 percent of the New Orleans population who were not homeowners. Renters have received little aid and now face housing costs nearly three times what they paid before the storm.

Residents of public housing were hit especially hard. Although they represented the city's most vulnerable population prior to Katrina, they have been largely overlooked in the reconstruction process. Of the estimated 5,100 families living in public housing prior to the storms, only about 22 percent have returned due to obstruction from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Despite the desperate need for low-income housing in New Orleans, HUD has authorized the destruction of thousands of units—many only minimally damaged—without offering any assurances that they will be replaced.

Despite these significant obstacles to recovery, positive steps are being made towards reconstruction. Mennonite Church

USA has partnered with Churches Supporting Churches, a multi-denominational and ecumenical organization committed to rebuilding New Orleans neighborhoods from the ground up. The program provides financial and spiritual support to 36 churches in 12 different communities “to replace the structures and the support systems that make it possible for more citizens of New Orleans to return home.”

At the end of June, the Gulf Coast Housing Recovery Act (S. 1668) was introduced in the Senate. S. 1668 was crafted with input from Gulf Coast residents and reflects the needs they identified. This legislation makes positive steps towards offering a comprehensive solution to the housing crisis in the Gulf Coast by providing *everyone* displaced by the storms a path to return. Provisions include offering additional funds to fill in the gaps of the leaky Road Home program, continuing rental assistance to evacuees, and guaranteeing a “1:1” replacement of destroyed low-income public housing units in the region.

For those who lost homes in the hurricanes two years ago, the struggle to rebuild continues. Encourage your home congregation to sponsor a church in New Orleans through the Churches Supporting Churches program. Also, call or write your senators and encourage them to pass S. 1668 as a crucial first step to establishing the right of return for all those displaced from the Gulf Coast. ■

BY KATRINA ALGER

Katrina Alger served as an intern in the Washington Office through the Washington Community Scholars' Center.

To learn more, see:

Churches Supporting Churches
(cscneworleans.org)

National Low Income Housing
Coalition (nlihc.org)

WELCOME TO NEW STAFF

The Washington Office welcomed several new faces to its staff this past summer.

Tammy Alexander is the new legislative assistant for international affairs. She holds an M.A. in international development and will focus on Africa, HIV/AIDS and the environment.

Gabe Schlabach, a recent graduate of Saint John's (Minn.) University with a degree in political science, will monitor domestic issues, including civil rights, Native American issues, and conscientious objection.

Valerie Ong is a 10-month legislative fellow with a special focus on refugees. She is a Messiah College graduate and is originally from Malaysia.

Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach returns to the office after earning an M.Div. degree at Eastern Mennonite Seminary. She is the office's new director and will monitor U.S. policy related to the Middle East and militarism.



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UPCOMING EVENTS

High School Essay Contest

Essays for our ninth annual high school essay contest are due Nov. 30. Winners will be announced in Feb. 2008.

For contest guidelines and essay topics, visit mcc.org/us/washington.

Spring Seminar

Make plans now to attend next year's Spring Seminar, March 2-4, 2008 in Washington, DC.

SOUND THE TRUMPET!

ISSUE	SUMMARY	ADVOCACY NEEDED
MILITARY SPENDING	The Senate's \$647.5 billion Defense Authorization Bill (S.1547) includes \$520 billion as a base military budget and \$127 billion for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. U.S. military spending has more than doubled since Sept. 11, 2001.	Urge your senators to invest in non-violent, alternative approaches to build human and global security. For more ideas, visit mcc.org/us/washington . The Senate vote will happen sometime in September.

USEFUL ADDRESSES



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