

Equality through Agency

Woe unto you rich men, that will not give of your substance to the poor, for your riches will canker your souls; and this shall be your lamentation in the days of visitation, and of judgment, and of indignation: The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and my soul is not saved! Woe unto you poor men, whose hearts are not broken, whose spirits are not contrite, and whose bellies are not satisfied, and whose hands are not stayed from laying hold upon other men's goods, whose eyes are full of greediness, who will not labor with their own hands! But blessed are the poor, who are pure in heart, whose hearts are broken, and whose spirits are contrite, for they shall see the kingdom of God coming in power and great glory unto their deliverance.
—D. and C. 56:5, 6.

WE LIVE in a world which is intensely concerned about social and economic justice and equality. Frightened and sobered by a great depression with its unemployment, its bread lines, and its human suffering, the people of the United States a generation ago embarked on a program of social reform. The time was ripe, and the need was great. Legislation was enacted guaranteeing the laboring man the right to bargain with his employer through trade unions, providing through taxation some protection against the perils of old age, disability, sickness, and unemployment. Other legislation was designed to break up or prevent monopoly, to guarantee a minimum wage, to prevent the restraint of free trade. We have accepted the principle of the income tax and the inheritance tax which are based upon the individual's ability to pay, and which in practical operation break up and redistribute large estates at the death of the owner.

Other nations of the world have felt this seething unrest, and have likewise tried to solve the problems of social and economic inequality. Immediately following the last war, the people of England socialized many important industries, and provided social security to the individual from cradle to grave, with free state medicine, sick and unemployment benefits, and a paternalism which made the government responsible for many needs and wants of its citizens. Men everywhere are still concerned with the problem of how to share the wealth of the world so that no man shall lack for the necessities of life.

A BASIC PROBLEM

A basic problem of the world today is the problem of social and economic equality and justice. The races and nations and individuals who have been denied a proper share in the natural resources, the rights, the freedoms, the privileges, the wealth of the world, are stirring in revolt. They see the wealth which other men have amassed, they see others enjoying the rights and privileges of free men, and they are demanding a share in these good things for themselves. The day of empire and exploitative colonialism is over. Old citadels of privilege, of monopoly, of pride, of wealth, of exploitation, of empire have toppled never to rise again. But in spite of this, new and deceptive means of exploitation have been seized upon by ruthless, selfish, godless men, who in the name of justice and equality have fastened the fetters of slavery even more tightly upon great masses of the world's population.

Any plan which fails to take into consideration one basic fact will fail. That fact is the sacredness and inviolability of human personality, and human agency. Men have an inherent, God-given right to be free, to make their own choices, to own and control property, to exercise their stewardship over that property. There can be no stewardship unless men are free to order their own lives, to control their own property, to exercise their own agency. It is not right, it is not even natural,

that one man should be in bondage to another. Neither is it right that any man or group of men should take by force that which belongs to another.

There are social, economic, and political inequalities and injustices in the world; we might as well admit it. The nations and the men of the world are divided into the "haves" and the "have nots." When such division exists, it is inevitable that there should be envy, strife, violence, and hatred. But suppose that this leads to open revolution, warfare, or drastic compulsory legislation which takes away from the "haves" and gives everything to the "have nots." Does this solve the problem, or stop the envy and hatred, or put an end to the strife? Far from it. It only reverses the direction of the hatred. Those who once had, but now have not, begin to lay plans to gain back their rights and their property, and in due time the warfare is renewed with new violence. Or suppose that in the battle the "haves" defeat the "have nots" and push them back into their old place, maintaining the status quo. That does not solve the problem either; it only postpones the solution of it, while hatred and resentment build up to another inevitable explosion. All over the world today men are sitting on the lid of a seething volcano, trying to maintain the status quo, and thinking that as long as they can hold the lid down, they have solved the problem of social and economic reform.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY—A PROBLEM

How to achieve justice and equality in social and economic relationships without violating man's agency is a continuous problem. The laws which have been passed in the United States and in England, setting up some very much needed social and economic reforms, involve a degree of compulsion. True, these laws were passed by the representatives of the people in democratic assembly, but their object is to compel men to share the wealth. If the government, even

representative democratic government, has the right to confiscate forcibly, though lawfully, the wealth of the rich man, it also has the right to confiscate forcibly the more moderate wealth of the middle class man, or even the meager wealth of the poor man.

INEQUITY IS INIQUITY

Basically, the two words are the same, coming from the same word roots. Inequity is inequality; iniquity is failing to treat your brother as your equal, as you would like to be treated yourself. Iniquity is demanding special privilege, special treatment for yourself or your friends, your political party, your race, or your nation, at the expense of someone else. "It is not given that one man should possess that which is above another; wherefore the world lieth in sin" (Doctrine and Covenants 49:3 e, f).

A great problem before the world today is this problem of how to bring about social and economic justice and equality without doing violence to that God-given principle of free moral will and agency, the right of free self-determination and free choice which is one of the inalienable rights of man. God's way is one of equality, of equity, not of inequity, iniquity, and inequality. God is no respecter of persons. It is not his will that one man should possess far more than he needs or can possibly use, while another lacks for the necessities of life. There can be no segregation, no denial of human rights and freedoms, no needy, impoverished, starving poor; no idle, grasping rich, in the kingdom of God. Neither can there be idle, grasping, envious, covetous, lazy, *poor* men, who hope by violence to lay hold on other men's goods for which they have not labored.

EQUALITY IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The kingdom of God will be a kingdom of equality—equality of opportunity, of material wealth, of spiritual things,

but also an equality of work and responsibility. Only as men assume the obligations and responsibilities of the kingdom as well as its rights and privileges are they entitled to equality. No one can *force* any man to assume his obligations and responsibilities on an equal basis with his fellowman. This equality must come from the voluntary action of men who are free agents, whose lives have been regenerated, who have been born again, who have cleansed themselves of selfishness and pride and greed and lust for material things, who are diligent workers, who are good stewards under God of all things entrusted to their care. This leveling off into equality must be the result of an inner, not an outer compulsion.

“The poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low” does not mean that we shall simply divide up the wealth of the rich, and distribute to the poor. That would make everyone poor. Equality is not so much a matter of giving each man the same number of dollars and cents, but is a matter of seeing that each man is allowed to earn and to have as much as he needs to manage his stewardship, as much as he can manage and use profitably and successfully. If one man is handling a series of vast enterprises as a good steward, he may need a bank balance of several million to finance these operations and meet the weekly payroll. Taking away that bank balance to distribute it to the workers would only mean that there would be no pay checks the next week, and no jobs two weeks after.

The principle is that each man shall have equal claims on the means of production; and on the natural resources necessary to production; that each man is entitled to have whatever will benefit him in his stewardship and help him to produce more for the common good. But man can claim these rights only as long as he does all things in the spirit of love and brotherhood and Christian stewardship. The man who lays claim to any of God’s creation in order to hoard it for himself, ignoring his obligations to society, and his obligations as

a steward of God, is a wicked man and unprofitable servant, whether he be rich or poor.

The equality of the kingdom of God must be a *voluntary* equality; it must be desired by men and women who have felt the changing power of Christ’s love and Christ’s gospel, and who, as a result of this change within, desire to express their new attitudes in terms of material things. The spiritual fellowship of the kingdom depends on this kind of equality. The poor man who feels that he is oppressed by his neighbor, and that he is being unjustly deprived of his rights, cannot have any true spiritual fellowship with the man whom he envies and hates. The rich man who knows that he is ignoring the needs of his brother, and selfishly administering that over which God has placed him as a steward, can have no true fellowship in spiritual things with those whom he ignores in temporal things. “If ye are not equal in earthly things, ye can not be equal in obtaining heavenly things” (Doctrine and Covenants 77:1 f). “In your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly; otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld” (Doctrine and Covenants 70:3 d).

There must be some force, some compulsion behind every government, for the restraint of the willfully wicked who would appropriate the property, or destroy the lives, the peace, or the rights of others. But the kingdom of God will never come by force. The task of the church is to bring about such a change in the lives of men that they will desire, work for, and willingly accept the kind of equality we have described. The task of the church is to supply the organization and the framework within which the Christian stewardship of regenerated men may be integrated and implemented, and made effective.