

Quotations Concerning:

Friends & Economic Inequality

Compiled by Mary Klein

According to *The New York Times* on July 22, 2014, the "richest 1 percent in the United States now own more wealth than the bottom 90 percent."

In January 2015, Oxfam reported that the wealthiest 1 percent will own more than half of the global wealth by 2016.

– Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_inequality, 11/25/2018.

Fulfilling the promise of this country means building thriving communities so that families and individuals can get ahead and children have a fair shot in life. Today, we remain far from our potential with millions living on incomes too low to afford even the very basics – like adequate food and housing – even if they work. In 2014, nearly 46.7 million people in the U.S. lived below the official poverty line of \$24,008 for a family of four . . . nearly 1 in 7 people . . . Children are especially vulnerable. One in 5 children in America lives in poverty. For children younger than 5 years old, the poverty rate is nearly 24 percent . . .

Racial discrimination and poverty are intricately linked. We cannot effectively address poverty without actively recognizing and addressing racism. Research shows that in the retail industry, Black and Latino full-time workers earn 75 percent of the wages of their White peers, amounting to losses up to \$7,500 per year. Additionally, Black and Latino workers are overrepresented in the positions with the lowest pay and least stability, and are more likely to be working poor than their White colleagues . . .

The safety net is doing a lot to ensure people have food to eat and a place to sleep. Yet, these programs do more than just help struggling individuals meet basic needs. They produce long-term gains in improved health, educational achievement, employment and earnings . . . There is a lot we can do to ensure people have the tools, support, and services they need to move out of poverty . . .

The safety net serves a vital purpose, but it does not address many underlying barriers to economic mobility. [1] Adults working full-time often struggle to make ends meet. Exorbitant housing costs, low minimum wage, and gaps in tax credits mean many work several jobs or live with food or housing insecurity . . . [2] Existing policies make it unnecessarily difficult for people to find and keep jobs, especially working parents. [3] Unemployment insurance was designed for a different kind of economy, and the nature of work in America has changed dramatically over the past 80 years. A growing share of the workforce is often excluded from claiming unemployment insurance.

– Friends Committee On National Legislation,
<https://www.fcnl.org/about/policy/issues/economic-justice/income-inequality>,
11/26/2018.

At the heart of humanity's current economic, political, and ecological crises is a fundamental conflict of purpose and moral conviction between promoting private gain and serving the common good. This conflict has been a persistent feature in the market economies of Western Civilization since the Renaissance and Reformation . . .

We believe that humanity is being called to radically change its interactions with each other and Earth, and work together for changes at all levels of society to help build a new creation that is inclusive of all and that fits within the physical capacities of Earth. This will entail change from a focus on materials goods to holistic well-being; from excess to sufficiency; from exclusion to inclusion; from competition to cooperation; from pursuing privilege to serving the common good; from the pre-eminence of humanity to the reverence for all life. . .

For the preservation of our future, the global commons must be protected. This includes not only our common air, oceans, fresh water, and biota, but our cultural heritage and accumulated information. In a system where material resources become more limited, this common wealth becomes increasingly precious and needs to be preserved for the common good and not subject to rules of private ownership . . .

The goal of an economy is to ensure livelihood, not to make a profit. Resources and wealth should be distributed such that everyone can have a livelihood. Extreme wealth disparities damage both the wealthy and the poor.

- Pamela Haines, Ed Dreby, David Kane, and Charles Blanchard, *Toward a Right Relationship with Finance, Debt, Interest, Growth, and Security*, Quaker Institute for the Future, 2016, pp. 33, 124-125.

Quakers were at the heart of industrial capitalism, a system that in its early days produced some spectacular and appalling examples of social injustice . . . The work ethic of Quakers and their simplicity of speech and life quickly led to prosperity and property, and that property soon included ownership of the industrial base of factories and transport and their financial underpinnings through banking. In other words, despite the almost otherworldliness of the conscience and spiritual practices, the Quakers were instinctive capitalists . . .

In Quakernomics the existing surplus, or capital, was privately raised by Quakers, was privately invested in privately owned factories of banks, and the resulting returns privately held. There was nothing recognizably socialist in any of this. It was classical capitalism. So where was the economic justice in it? Where is the ethics in it? . . .

The history of economic development is that of this mass movement from self-reliant control over one's immediate means of production to the indebted reliance on the factory or land owner. The ethics of this are clear: once it is impossible for a family to own their immediate means of production, the owners of such means have various ethical obligations to their workers. The history of Quaker businesses demonstrates the keen sense of that obligation.

- Mike King, *Quakernomics: An Ethical Capitalism*, Anthem Press, 2014, pp. 6-7.

Industrial capitalism, regardless of how many goods it produces, and what general human flourishing it engenders, also engenders specific ills. I have summed these up in my four evils of industrial capitalism [unemployment, low wages at the bottom, industrial hazards, and environmental harms]. . . We have seen that low wages at the bottom of the scale drive individuals and families into despair, while those at the top are so able to isolate themselves from the poor that they effectively live a fantasy. . .

An ethical capitalism is therefore quite simply a capitalism that takes these evils seriously, and strives to avoid them. An unethical capitalism either fails to acknowledge these evils; recognizes them but declares them inevitable; or recognizes them and celebrates them as necessary for the proper working of capitalism.

Quakernomics was an ethical capitalism, But it was religious, voluntarist, and paternalistic. Such a capitalism no longer fits the modern world, though contemporary philanthropists whose outlook is similar have an important role to play in the moderation of industrial capitalism. Instead we have seen that the . . . rise of the corporation means the advent of big capitalism; only big government is a player of sufficient means to keep the evils of big capitalism in check, while allowing for its delivery of wealth and human flourishing. On this argument we can see that the advocates of small government are, perhaps unwittingly, the advocates of unethical capitalism.

The key insight offered by Quakernomics is that an ethical capitalism does not have to be a peripheral phenomenon in a dynamic economy . . . Quakernomics was at the center of the dramatic rise in industry and finance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and, far from being a brake on development, was at its dynamic core. . . [The] specific ethical capitalism of Quakernomics has no place in the modern world . . . Religion is now quite properly a matter for the private sphere . . . We have to forge a new [ethical capitalism], appropriate to our era, inspired by this real historical example.

– Mike King, *Quakernomics: An Ethical Capitalism*, Anthem Press, 2014, pp. 254-255.

[Many] there are, I believe, who in their setting out in life may be rightly directed in their choice of business – by which to obtain a comfortable livelihood for themselves and families – and at which time, they neither thought of nor coveted more. But through the corrupt custom and course of trade and business among men in their fallen state, some increase their worldly possessions in such a rapid way – they soon obtain and amass together much more than they either desired or expected in their first setting out. And for want of keeping a single eye to their Divine Director, who if rightly attended to, would as clearly have showed them where to stop as he showed them where to begin. But for want of this right attention, they have continued on. By which means, their desires after more have increased with the increase of their possessions – that finally they lose all right sense of what is right for them. And by grasping after more in their own dark wisdom, [some of them] plunge themselves and families into irretrievable poverty and disgrace – while some others are permitted to proceed on until their minds are wholly swallowed up in their abundance, the care of which becomes such a load and burden that they have no rest. And it eventually terminates in utter ruin of themselves and families as it respects their eternal condition.

– Elias Hicks (1822), *Dear Friend: Letters & Essays of Elias Hicks*, Inner Light Books, 2011, pp. 152-153.

Wealth desired for its own sake obstructs the increase of virtue, and large possessions in the hands of selfish men have a bad tendency, for by their means too small a number of people are employed in things useful . . .

Rents set on lands are often so high that persons who have but small subsistence . . . often find occasion to labor harder than was intended by our gracious Creator. . .

The Creator of the earth is the owner of it. He gave us being thereon, and our nature requires nourishment which is the produce of it. As he is kind and merciful, we as his creatures, while we live answerable to the design of our creation, we are so far entitled to a convenient subsistence that no man may justly deprive us of it. By the agreements and contracts of our fathers and predecessor, and by doings and proceedings of our own, some claim a much greater share of this world than others; and whilst those possessions are faithfully improved to the good of the whole, it consists with equity. But he who with a view to self-exaltation causeth some . . . to labor immoderately, and with the moneys arising to him therefrom employs others in the luxuries of life, acts contrary to the gracious design of him who is the true owner of the earth . . .

Though the poor occupy our estates by a bargain to which they in their poor circumstances agreed . . . if our views are to lay up riches or to live in conformity to customs which have not their foundation in the Truth, and our demands are such as requires greater toil or application to business in them than is consistent with pure love, we invade their rights as inhabitants of that world of which a good and gracious God is proprietor, under whom we are tenants.

– John Woolman (circa 1764), “A Plea for the Poor,” *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, Friends United Press, 1971, pp. 238-239.

After that riches increase take heed of setting your hearts upon them, lest they become a curse and a plague to you. For when ye were faithful at the first, the world would refrain from you and not have commerce with you; but after, when they saw ye were faithful and just in things, and righteous and honest in your tradings and dealings, then they came to have commerce and trade with you the more, because they know ye will not cozen them, not cheat them; then ye came to have greater trading, double than ever ye had, and more than the world. But there is the danger and temptation to you of drawing your minds into your business and clogging them with it; so that ye can hardly do anything to the service of God, but thee will be crying, my business, my business, and your minds will go into the things and not over the things. . . . Then that mind that is cumbered will fret, being out of the power of God.

– George Fox (1656), “*Epistle 131*,” *A Collection of Many Select and Christian Epistles, Letters and Testimonies by George Fox, Volume One*, Marcus T.C. Gould and Isaac T. Hopper, publishers, 1831, p. 126.

[There was a man who, before going on a long journey,] called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more."

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

The man with two bags of gold also came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more."

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. "Master," he said, "I knew that you are a hard man, . . . So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you."

His master replied, "You wicked, lazy servant! . . . [You] should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest."

- Matthew 25: 14-27

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God.

- Leviticus 19: 9-10