

**AMERICAN BAPTIST
RESOLUTION ON ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR THE UNITED STATES**

In the Bible story the Hebrew people celebrate the "good land." "You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord for the good land" (Deut. 8:10). The land is for the sustenance of all the people. There will be "no one in need among you, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land . . . if only you will obey" (Deut. 15:4f).

Biblical instructions say share the sustenance of earth equitably. "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land" (Deut. 15:11). In Acts 4:32 Luke tells us "all the believers were one in mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had." This is the core meaning of justice in the social order. Laws and institutions should be designed to protect the vulnerable.

God has given us a wonderful earth with the means to provide for all people. Among God's gifts to us are sea, sky, land and human energy. Human beings apply labor, skill and technology to make resources of the gifts that God provides. The system whereby people work together for sustenance constitutes an economic order. An economic order that seeks to preserve and enhance all life constitutes economic justice. Because of human sinfulness and abuse of these gifts, economic justice has not been achieved.

Many signs indicate that we live in a time of economic injustice. While certain segments of society are isolated from this injustice, too many people are subject to economic injustices such as sweat shops, hazardous working conditions, "disappearing" pensions, inadequate wages, and no benefits. These injustices result in homelessness, chronic unemployment, and forced choices among such essentials as food, clothing, housing, and medical coverage. Even those employed are forced to accept reduced benefits and are required to absorb the increasing costs of health care and other benefits which had been employer paid.

It has been said that after World War II the United States held itself up as the model of development. We claimed our kind of industry and technology would overcome the "backwardness" of "underdeveloped" nations. But development, as we have applied it, has disrupted the subsistence economies of these developing nations and made many millions landless and unemployed. Our international economic policies have contributed to making few super-rich and many miserably poor. The effects of these policies are also experienced in the United States where over 36 million people live below the official poverty line. For them, our economic order fails in its essential purpose of preserving and enhancing life.

The present system contradicts the capacity of the earth and the economic order to thrive indefinitely. The health of our economy depends on unnecessary, wasteful and harmful consumption, injurious to the environment and to persons. The jobs of millions depend on the demand for more and more things by people who have no concept of "enough."

Economic stability and environmental sustainability will be achieved and poverty overcome only when human labor and resources are justly used. Therefore we must seriously reconsider reassessing economic assumptions and restructuring our lives.

The General Board of the American Baptists Churches, USA, calls on our members and churches to:

1. Understand and constructively criticize the existing economic system especially as it affects all people.
2. Study the effects of poverty on women children, and the elderly.
3. Live more simply and frugally, find fulfillment in community rather than consumption, share freely and give generously.
4. Act politically for full employment, equitable taxation, implementation of training programs, environmental protection, resource conservation, incentives for the kinds of production that address real needs and other measures in behalf of economic justice.
5. Support participatory, community-based, need-oriented, environment-enhancing development in the U.S.A. and Two Thirds World countries by advocating projects that empower the people to make better use of their own resources for their own needs.
6. Participate in the movement to conceptualize, envision, and move toward an economic system geared to need, supportive of community, conducive to local self-reliance, and structured around useful and fulfilling work for all.
7. Find meaning, adventure and joy in trustful, hopeful, expectant involvement, participating in the Creator-Redeemer's liberation and fulfillment of the earth and God's people.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - December 1992
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1998
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 2006
105 For, 28 Against, 11 Abstentions
(General Board Reference #8199:6/92)

POLICY BASE

Policy Statement on Ecology - December 1988

Policy Statement on Employment - September 1981

Policy Statement on Human Rights - December 1976

SUPPORTING POSITIONS

Resolution on Unemployment in the Nineties - June 1983

Resolution on Fragmented Society - September 1981