

Study of the Bahá'í Writings on Economics



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At the outset it has to be mentioned that, for the sake of simplicity, we are studying these Bahá'í Writings on economics briefly without going too deeply into their importance and implications. Volumes can be written on each of these Writings and each could be the subject of immense research. As time goes by we will realize their importance and how they can and will bring us towards a totally different economic system. Future economists will write books on how these Sacred Writings changed our spiritual, social and economic lives. So please bear in mind that the simplicity of the language and my feeble attempts to share my understanding of them does not do them justice. There are many Writings that could be mentioned here but I chose these on purpose because they cover many areas related to economics.

DIVINE ECONOMY

What makes the “divine economy” different from all the economic systems of the world is its approach to the source of the economic problems and their solutions. In this way it differentiates itself from all the past and present economic theories and thoughts.

“The secrets of the whole economic question are Divine in nature, and are concerned with the world of the heart and spirit. In the Baha’i Teachings this is most completely explained, and without the consideration of the Baha’i Teachings, it is impossible to bring about a better state.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, The Baha’i World, Volume 1V, p. 448

“... By the statement ‘the economic solution is Divine in nature’ is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man’s nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature.” - From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 26, 1935, Lights of Guidance, p.551

These Writings clearly explain the difference between the present economic system and the divine economy which will characterize the future for mankind. The assumption that the economists made in the past and are still making is that man must maximize his satisfaction. That is, he wants the best for himself and does not care for the interest or welfare of others. Basically man is depicted as a selfish person and the economic systems catered to this assumption. It is no surprise that it has led us to so many crises. But the Baha’i Writings explain that the whole question of economics is divine or spiritual in nature and that is a better foundation than selfishness or greediness. With this approach, man has a divine destiny and is not ruled just by man-made laws and regulations. It is fundamentally different because the Baha’i economic system is based on man’s heart; it is founded solidly on the human spirit.

BAHÁ’I ECONOMIC SYSTEM

"There are practically no technical teachings on economics in the Cause, such as banking, the price system, and others. The Cause is not an economic system, nor can its Founders be considered as having been technical economists. The contribution of the Faith to this subject is essentially indirect, as it consists in the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic system. Bahá'u'lláh has given us a few basic principles which should guide future Bahá'í economists in establishing such institutions which will adjust the economic relationships of the world."-From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, January 25, 1936, Lights of Guidance, p. 551

We do not have a Baha'i economic system at this time because we do not have the spiritual requirements for such a system, a system which would be divine in nature. We do not have the spiritual maturity to imagine such a system. But there will be a world commonwealth and we know that future economists in consultation with the Universal House of Justice will bring this into being. We can only prepare for this system by developing our spiritual capacity and contributing by our actions towards laying a foundation for that system.

THE STATION OF MAN

"Lofty is the station of man, were he to hold fast to righteousness and truth and to remain firm and steadfast in the Cause... His is the loftiest station, and his influence educateth the world of being." Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p.220

"If, on the contrary, the spiritual nature of the soul has been so strengthened that it holds the material side in subjection, then does man approach the Divine; his humanity becomes so glorified that the virtues of the Celestial Assembly are manifested in him; he radiates the Mercy of God, he stimulates the spiritual progress of mankind, for he becomes a lamp to show light on their path." - Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p.65-66

God has told us that He created man in His image. Man's station is very high and he has a great spiritual destiny. But in the world of economics this is not recognized. Man is a labourer, a manager, or a consumer, and his contribution is limited to that. The system does not recognize that his spiritual aspirations need to be the goal for an economic system, a system that enables him and provides him with tools so that he can work towards his spiritual destiny and spiritual goals, to become a spiritual being who has a human experience, rather than a human being who has a spiritual experience.

MATERIAL CIVILIZATION AND SPIRITUAL CIVILIZATION

"Material civilization has reached an advanced plane but now there is need of spiritual civilization. Material civilization alone will not satisfy; it cannot meet the conditions and requirements of the present age; its benefits are limited to the world of matter. There is no

limitation to the spirit of man, for spirit in itself is progressive, and if the divine civilization be established, the spirit of man will advance.” - Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 101

“As heretofore material civilization has been extended, the divine civilization must now be promulgated. Until the two agree, real happiness among mankind will be unknown. By mere intellectual development and power of reason, man cannot attain to his fullest degree - that is to say, by means of intellect alone he cannot accomplish the progress effected by religion.” - Ibid, p. 170

The history of mankind has demonstrated that man hasn’t realized that he has two natures – one is his material nature and the other is his spiritual nature. History has demonstrated man’s development in terms of inventions, scientific knowledge, a higher standard of living and generally material progress. Man is satisfied that he has made great improvements and he can calculate yearly his gains. But the sad point is that his spiritual progress has not kept up with his material progress. Man’s ignorance about his nature, his spiritual nature, has made him basically one-sided – all his energies are spent on material gain. He does not know that he has a spiritual side and that his material progress depends on his spiritual progress, because all decisions made, if not made on a spiritual basis, will not be beneficial for his soul and his being. The perfect harmony is that in which material civilization and spiritual civilization go hand in hand. At present there is a great imbalance between the two civilizations.

THE NATURE OF THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM

“Although the body politic is one family yet because of lack of harmonious relations some members are comfortable and some in direst misery, some members are satisfied and some are hungry, some members are clothed in most costly garments and some families are in need of food and shelter. Why? Because this family lacks the necessary reciprocity and symmetry. This household is not well arranged. This household is not living under a perfect law. All the laws which are legislated do not ensure happiness. They do not provide comfort. - Abdu’l-Bahá, Foundation of World Unity, p.38

“Economic plans of reconstruction have been carefully devised, and meticulously executed. And yet crisis has succeeded crisis, and the rapidity with which a perilously unstable world is declining has been correspondingly accelerated. A yawning gulf threatens to involve in one common disaster both the satisfied and dissatisfied nations, democracies and dictatorships, capitalists and wage-earners, Europeans and Asiatic, Jew and Gentile, white and coloured.”- Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, p.190

Man’s inability to see that we as members of the human race are family, his dependence on his intellect, and his disregard for the moral/spiritual laws that must govern life, has led us to this state of crisis. Man has failed to understand that the welfare of the whole depends on his welfare and his welfare depends on the welfare of the whole. This selfish tendency of every man for

himself has created the problems that we have at the moment. It does not matter how many laws we make, as long as man's lower nature is not controlled, there will be chaos. What man needs is to understand that other human beings are part of him. Humanity can be compared to the human body. Just as the human body is connected and what happens to one part of the body affects the rest, so, too, we cannot ignore one part of humanity because it affects the whole. There was a time that people did not think beyond their own backyard. But with the development of technology and the arrival of the age of information, our backyard has been extended to the whole world and all of human kind. We cannot be indifferent and ignore what is going on in other parts of the world because directly or indirectly our lives are affected. An example would be stock markets in different parts of the world. If the stock market in China changes, the stock market in New York also changes. So we have to recognize that we are all in it together and we need to help each other in order to have a better spiritual and material life.

THE ECONOMIC COST OF WARFARE

“Peace is the pretext, and night and day they are all straining every nerve to pile up more weapons of war, and to pay for this their wretched people must sacrifice most of whatever they are able to earn by their sweat and toil. How many thousands have given up their work in useful industries and are labouring day and night to produce new and deadlier weapons which would spill out the blood of the race more copiously than before.

Each day they invent a new bomb or explosive and then the governments must abandon their obsolete arms and begin producing the new, since the old weapons cannot hold their own against the new...” - Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 61

“Observe that if such a happy situation be forthcoming, no government would need continually to pile up the weapons of war, nor feel itself obliged to produce ever new military weapons with which to conquer the human race. A small force for the purposes of internal security, the correction of criminal and disorderly elements and the prevention of local disturbances, would be required - no more. In this way the entire population would, first of all, be relieved of the crushing burden of expenditure currently imposed for military purposes, and secondly, great numbers of people would cease to devote their time to the continual devising of new weapons of destruction.” - Ibid, p. 65-66

We can readily calculate the allocation of a national budget for military forces and weapons and, at the same time, calculate the cost of eradicating malaria, providing clean drinking water or educating one child. When you compare how much the money used for warfare could benefit the sick and needy, it is not difficult to understand how much we have wasted and continue to waste and how harmful it is. But the statistics do not tell the picture of the human lives that have been lost unnecessarily and the human suffering experienced. This suffering could have been avoided and could still be avoided. Imagine a world in which there is only one military for the whole world and one police force to ensure its security, so that costs are reduced and monies channeled into humanitarian pursuits.

CO-OPERATION vs. COMPETITION

“In the world of nature we behold the living organisms in a ceaseless struggle for existence. Everywhere we are confronted by the evidences of the physical survival of the fittest. This is the very source of error and misapprehension in the opinions and the theories of man who fail to realize that the world of nature is inherently defective in cause and outcome and that the defects therein must be removed by education.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.400

“In nature there is the law of the survival of the fittest. Even if man be not educated, then according to the natural institutes this natural law will demand of man supremacy. The purpose and object of schools, colleges and universities is to educate man and thereby rescue and redeem him from the exigencies and defects of nature and to awaken within him the capability of controlling and appropriating nature’s bounties.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.353

Man began his existence during the Stone Age and survival of the fittest was the rule of the land. He had to compete with the elements and hunt for food for his survival. But unfortunately as man’s intellect developed and his economic circumstances improved, he still continued to behave in the same manner. Now the scenario has changed. Instead of hunting and fighting for territory, the firms fight and compete. The big fish eats the small fish and this is considered success. But it is time for the fish to live together. We have to educate ourselves to get rid of this remnant of Stone Age behavior which has no place in a modern society. If we want to compete, it should be in the spiritual realm; we should strive to be the most generous person, to be the most kind. That is real competition.

CAPITALISM

There is a strong belief in the world that capitalism is a solution to all economic problems. But we know that no system is perfect, whether it be capitalism or communism, if the foundation is not built on divine principles.

“There is nothing in the teachings against some kind of capitalism; its present form, though, would require adjustments to be made.” - Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p. 19

There is a perception that capitalism is based on freedom and ideally is a perfect system. But the reality is, as the Baha’i Writings tell us, it is not divine and it is not founded on divine principles. In its present form corruption, greed, and selfishness are manifest and it has led to many economic disasters. Many who dislike a communist system believe that capitalism is the solution. But this is not true because no system is perfect if it is not built on divine principles. So capitalism has many merits but in the present form it is not going to be the future economic

system of the world.

THE GOLDEN RULE

“...’All economic problems may be solved by the application of the Science of the Love of God’. That is to say: If the Rule called golden ... were actually applied to the world’s economic problems, which if not solved bid fair to destroy us, and the love of God, the sort of love which makes a home life happy, were used as a scientific measurement to regulate our international and national affairs; to settle all relations between labour and capital, between rich and poor, to regulate all coinage and commerce, can there be any doubt that the results would be far more conducive to human welfare than our present policies have produced? - Abdu’l-Bahá, Portals to Freedom, p.156

The cause of most of the problems in the world is a lack of empathy in that people are unable to put themselves in the place of others and can’t imagine, for example, how it feels to be poor or how it feels to be jobless. When we don’t have empathy, we become numb to the sufferings of others and don’t understand the implications of our actions and words and their consequences.

If the owner of a factory would understand the struggles of the working class, what they experience and how they juggle to manage their incomes and pay their bills, he would ensure that they receive fair wages and the workers would know that their employer understands their situation. In the same way, if the workers or employees have empathy, they would understand what a difficult job it is to run a factory. Both the employer and employee would be aware of each other’s struggles and realize that decisions made are for the benefit of both. Then we wouldn’t experience so many disruptions in economic activities such as strikes and “work to rule”.

Below are some Writings from different religions on this subject. After reading them, you may realize that different religions are in agreement and derive their inspiration from the same Source.

“We are as much alive as we keep the Earth alive.”

-Chief Dan George

“One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated.”

- Mahavira, Suttrakritanga (Jainism)

“I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all.” –

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1299 (Sikhism)

“Regard your neighbor’s gain as your own gain and your neighbor’s loss as your own loss.”

– T’ai Shang Kan Ying P’ien, 213-218 (Taoism)

“Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.”

- Muhammad, Hadith (Islam)

“Lay not on any soul a load which ye would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things ye would not desire for yourself.”

– Baha’u’llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah, p.128 (Baha’i Faith)

“Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself.”

- Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29 (Zoroastrianism)

“Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.”

– The Buddha, Udana-Varga 5.18 (Buddhism)

“This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you . . .

– Mahabharata 5:1517 (Hinduism)

“In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you.”

– Jesus, Matthew 7:12 (Christianity)

“One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct . . . loving kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself.”

– Confucius, Analects 15.23

“What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary.”

- Hillel, Talmud, Shabbath 31a (Judaism)

WEALTH

“O SON OF BEING!

Busy not thyself with this world, for with fire We test the gold, and with gold We test Our servants.” - Bah’áu’lláh, Hidden Words, Arabic, #55

“ ... Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor.”- Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, #.24

“O SON OF MAN!

Thou dost wish for gold and I desire thy freedom from it. Thou thinkest thyself rich in its possession, and I recognize thy wealth in thy sanctity therefrom. By My life! This is my knowledge, and that is thy fancy; how can My way accord with thine?” - Baha'u'llah, The Hidden Words, Persian, #5

People tend to believe that wealth is good and always a relief. The Baha'i Teachings do not agree. There is nothing against getting rich as long as we are aware of the dangers that it can bring. There is no doubt that material possessions and wealth can be wonderful tools but they can be extremely harmful too. Studies have shown that quality of life does not necessarily increase with an increase in wealth. In many cases, it has been the reverse. Winning a lottery is not necessarily a blessing if we don't have the capacity to handle material wealth. Also, often people who have won a lottery or gained a fortune find themselves very isolated and lonely because they cannot trust other people to befriend them just for themselves; instead people want to be close to them in order to gain some of their wealth. Many who gain wealth have more problems than they did before and it often changes their character. Money is a test and some pass, using it for charity and good causes but some do not pass, spending it on harmful and excessive behavior. Money does not guarantee happiness. We have to possess the spiritual capacity to handle the test.

MODERATION

“... In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil...” - Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p.69

“Fear ye God, and take heed not to outstrip the bounds of moderation, and be numbered among the extravagant.” - Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p.251

We live in an age of excess and everything seems to be out of proportion. People don't seem to understand the concept of moderation in this materialistic society. The popular belief is that more is better and bigger is better. Excess causes a lifestyle of consumerism in which people spend money for things that they really don't need while their fellow human beings are dying of starvation. If people spent some of their money on the poor instead of engaging in excessive spending, it would help to lessen the gap between the rich and poor. Materialism feeds our egos and has therefore caused so much harm to our souls. Moderation is in itself a blessing if one can practice it.

VOLUNTARY SHARING

“Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him. And sharing is a personally chosen righteous act: that is, the rich should extend assistance to the poor, they should expend their substance for the poor, but of their own free will, and not because the poor have gained this end by force. For the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order. On the other hand voluntary sharing, the freely-chosen expending of one's substance, leadeth to society's comfort and peace.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 115

The concept of sharing is quite foreign in modern-day societies because there is a sense of entitlement – “I’ve earned this. I’ve got it and it’s mine. Why should I share it?” Many systems have been introduced, notably communism, which promoted equality and sharing. But it was a sharing by force, rather than voluntarily and it didn’t work. But when man reaches a higher level of spirituality, he will realize the pleasure of sharing voluntarily. We are only beginning to see glimpses of this in our society. I believe in the future this will become common as people discover the pleasure and satisfaction in sharing and being generous, rather than hoarding something for only their use.

EQUALITY

“Social inequality is the inevitable outcome of the natural inequality of man. Human beings are different in ability and should, therefore, be different in their social and economic standing. Extremes of wealth and poverty should, however, be abolished.” - Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p.20

“For the community needs financier, farmer, merchant and labourer just as an army must be composed of commander, officers and privates. All cannot be commanders; all cannot be officers or privates. Each in his station in the social fabric must be competent - each in his function according to ability but with justness of opportunity for all.”- Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 216

Equality does not mean that everybody is paid the same amount or that everyone does the same thing (as in communism) because by creation we are not equal. Every person is unique with his own talents. But extremes of wealth need to be limited so that everyone is given the opportunity to live a comfortable life. In society all cannot be engineers, all cannot be farmers, all cannot be army personnel, all cannot be teachers. There are different roles for everyone and everyone is equal in terms of opportunities, not necessarily salaries.

WOMEN’S EQUAL RIGHTS

“... there must be an equality of rights between men and women. Women shall receive an equal privilege of education. This will enable them to qualify and progress in all degrees of occupation and accomplishment. For the world of humanity possesses two wings: man and woman. If one wing remains incapable and defective, it will restrict the power of the other, and full flight will be impossible. Therefore, the completeness and perfection of the human world is dependent upon the equal development of these two wings.” - Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 318

It is sad to observe that still mankind is flying with one wing and great talents and human qualities have deprived the world. In many societies in the world women are not even allowed to work so that a section of society is not contributing to the economy, the welfare, the happiness, and quality of life. A whole society loses out in this scenario. Imagine when man and woman are equal in rights and are able to work together to create prosperity and happiness in the world.

BENEVOLENCE

“ ... In the Teachings of Baha’u’llah benevolence (is enjoined) and this is greater than equality. Equality is attained through force, but benevolence is a voluntary act (or is a matter of choice). Man’s perfection is achieved through good deeds done voluntarily, not by good deeds done through compulsion, and benevolence is a good deed performed voluntarily. That means that the rich should be benevolent towards the poor - that is, give to the poor, but by their own free will and desire - not that the poor should compel the rich to do so. For compulsion breeds discord, and disrupts the order in human affairs. For benevolence, which is voluntary benefaction, engenders peacefulness in the world of humanity, and it brings illumination to the realm of man.” - Abdu’l-Bahá, World Order Magazine, January 1949

In recent years some multi-billionaires have begun donating most of their money to charitable organizations. This is benevolence. This is the sign of the new race of men, defined by man reaching such a spiritual understanding that he finds pleasure and happiness in giving away his earnings rather than hoarding them for himself. This is the stage that mankind has to reach, wherein everyone realizes that money is a tool, not the goal of his life, and that he can use this tool to make a difference and to make life easier for others. That realization is a sign of spiritual maturity. Benevolence is not just for the rich; it is a sense of giving that anyone can practice regardless of their material status.

JUSTICE

“We ask God to endow human souls with justice so that they may be fair, and may strive to provide for the comfort of all, that each member of humanity may pass his life in the utmost comfort and welfare. Then this material world will become the very paradise of the Kingdom, this elemental earth will be in a heavenly state and all the servants of God will live in the utmost joy, happiness and gladness.” – Abdu’l-Bahá, Foundation of World Unity,

“Among the results of the manifestation of spiritual forces will be that the human world will adapt itself to a new social form, the Justice of God will become manifest throughout human affairs, and human equality will be universally established.

The essence of the matter is divine justice will become manifest in human conditions and affairs, and all mankind will find comfort and enjoyment in life.” – Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.132

The kingdom of God on earth will be realized when injustice has been eradicated. Everyone is at the moment fighting for some kind of justice, either racial, political, economic or sexual, and this is the beginning. It will be a long journey for mankind to reach the point of understanding that justice is essential for all aspects of life.

AGRICULTURE - THE FARMER

“... we must begin with the farmer, there will we lay a foundation for system and order because the peasant class and the agriculture class exceed other classes in the importance of their service.” - Abdu’l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p.39

“The question of economics must commence with the farmer and then be extended to the other classes, inasmuch as the number of farmers is greater than all other classes, many many times greater. Therefore it is fitting that the economic problem be first solved with the farmer, for the farmer is the first active agent in the body politic. In brief, from among the wise men in every village a board should be organized and the affairs of that village should be under the control of that board.” - Abdu’l-Bahá, Extract from a Tablet to an individual believer, October 4, 1912, translation corrected in the World Centre, December 1985; cited in Lights of Guidance, p. 547

The basis of the economic system of the future will be on a local level and will start with the farmer. The role of the farmer is extremely important because the actions of the food industry at the present time are affecting the health and survival of mankind. People are questioning the quality of the food we put in our bodies. The methods of production of vegetables, meat, grains etc, are questionable to say the least. The greed in this industry and the short cuts taken in production have been linked to a higher incidence of life-threatening diseases. New research is pointing to the importance of organic food and herbs as a cure for many sicknesses. If the future of medicine is in the prevention of disease through nutrition, then farmers are vital not only for providing us with food but also giving us health.

WORK AND PROFESSION

“ ... Every individual, no matter how handicapped and limited he may be, is under the obligation of engaging in some work or profession, for work, specially when performed in the spirit of service, is according to Baha’u’llah a form of worship. It has not only a utilitarian purpose, but has a value in itself, because it draws us nearer to God, and enables us to better grasp His purpose for us in this world. It is obvious, therefore, that the inheritance of wealth cannot make anyone immune from daily work.” - From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the United States and Canada, March 22, 1937; cited in Lights of Guidance, p. 624

“... Whatever the progress of the machinery may be, man will have always to toil in order to earn his living. Effort is an inseparable part of man’s life. It may take different forms with the changing conditions of the world, but it will be always present as a necessary element in our earthly existence. Life is after all a struggle. Progress is attained through struggle, and without such a struggle life ceases to have a meaning; it becomes even extinct. The progress of machinery has not made effort unnecessary. It has given it a new form, a new outlet.” - Shoghi Effendi, Letter written to an individual believer, dated December 26, 1935, Lights of Guidance, p.551

“ ... Share your time with God. Spend half of the day in search of livelihood, guaranteeing your material life and dignified appearance, and dedicate the other half in the acquisition of moral virtues and service at the threshold of God...” - Abdu’l-Bahá, Áhang-i-Badí’, volume 31, number 339, p.83. (pilgrim's note)

Everyone can make a contribution to society through their work. It doesn’t have to be physical work but there is no room for idleness. There’s a satisfaction in working, especially if you are doing work with a sense of service and then it becomes our daily worship. And by engaging in work or a profession, we are contributing to the progress of society and an ever-advancing civilization. Acquiring virtues is the goal and earning a livelihood is the means.

WAGES

“... The Master has definitely stated that wages should be unequal, simply because that men are unequal in their ability, and hence should receive wages that would correspond to their varying capacities and resources. This view seems to contradict the opinion of some modern economists. But the friends should have full confidence in the words of the Master, and should give preference to His statements over those voiced by our so-called modern thinkers.” -Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p.551

“The workers could either be granted a wage that adequately meets their daily needs, as well as a right to a share in the revenues of the factory when they are injured, incapacitated, or unable to work, or else a wage could be set that allows the workers to both satisfy their daily needs and save a little for times of weakness and incapacity.” - Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, revised edition (2014), p.317

“Now I want to tell you about the law of God. According to the Divine law, employees

should not be paid merely by wages. Nay, rather they should be partners in every work.”

- Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'u'llah and New Era, p.160

As we have discussed previously, absolute equality of wages is impossible because every man has different capacities and talents. But everyone has to be paid enough to live a comfortable life, one that is acceptable from all points of view so that a workman feels that he has been appreciated for his work. His wages should be enough to cover his expenses, provide for the education of his children, and to enable him to accumulate some savings. That is fair wages. Also, if workers are paid a portion of the profit of a factory or firm, they will have a sense of ownership and they will work harder because they understand the benefits. The owners will need to supervise less because they know that the workers are partners in the business and they can relax and have peace of mind.

TAXATION

“We see you adding every year unto your expenditures and laying the burden thereof on the people whom ye rule; this verily is naught but grievous injustice. Fear the sighs and tears of this Wronged One, and burden not your peoples beyond that which they can endure.” - Bahá'u'lláh, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p.40

“Each person in the community whose need is equal to his individual producing capacity shall be exempt from taxation. But if his income is greater than his needs, he must pay a tax until an adjustment is effected. That is to say, man's capacity for production and his needs will be equalized and reconciled through taxation. If his production exceeds, he will pay a tax; if his necessities exceed his production he shall receive an amount sufficient to equalize or adjust. Therefore taxation will be proportionate to capacity and production, and there will be no poor in the community.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.217

Taxation is one of the fundamental principles of any economic system. Abdu'l-Baha has proposed graduated taxes which means that the more one makes, the more taxes he pays. Taxes have to be fair and they are levied only after someone has paid all of his expenses and has money left over. This method doesn't compromise with the quality of life of the individual and monies collected from the taxes are spent on the poor and underprivileged, reducing the number of those who are in need in the community.

HUQÚQU'LLÁH (Right of God)

“The minimum amount subject to Huqúqu'lláh is reached when one's possessions are worth the number of Vahid (19); that is, whenever one owneth 19 mithqals of gold, or acquireth possessions attaining this value, after having deducted therefrom the yearly expenses, the Huqúq becometh applicable and its payment is obligatory.”- Bahá'u'lláh, The

In addition to taxation, Baha'u'llah has devised another means to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. It is the Right of God which is given voluntarily when an individual earns more than all his needs. At that point he gives a voluntary set percentage of his assets. It is important to note that taxes collected, added to money given to charity, as well as giving to the Baha'i fund with money given as the Right of God can really bridge the gap between the two extremes.

RATE OF INTEREST

“Therefore as a token of favor towards men We have prescribed that interest on money should be treated like other business transactions that are current amongst men. Thus, now that this lucid commandment hath descended from the heaven of the Will of God, it is lawful and proper to charge interest on money, that the people of the world may, in a spirit of amity and fellowship and with joy and gladness, devotedly engage themselves in magnifying the Name of Him Who is the Well-Beloved of all mankind. Verily, He ordaineth according to His Own choosing. He hath now made interest on money lawful, even as He had made it unlawful in the past.” - Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp.133-134

In this quotation “the past” refers to Islam in which interest was forbidden. It is very difficult to run a banking system without interest. But in many societies, the rate of interest is extremely high, on credit cards and student loans, for example. A high interest on a student loan is unfair because students charged with this interest do not have jobs to pay the loan or the interest and need to keep paying it for many years once they enter the workforce. That puts a heavy burden on the economic life of the individual which, in turn, diminishes his quality of life. Baha'u'llah emphasized the concept of a good loan, meaning that the rate of interest had to be such that it did not burden the borrower and that it benefited everyone. The person or firm lending the money gets an adequate amount of interest and the person borrowing is happy because he can afford to pay it. A good loan is basically a rate of interest that is fair and reasonable, using the principle of moderation.

ECONOMIC RESOURCES

“... The economic resources of the world will be organised, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be coordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated.

“... The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical

health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race...” - Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha’u’llah, p. 204

The economic resources of the world belong to every human being on this planet. It does not matter where the oil fields or the uranium mines are located. Every human being is entitled to them. Once humanity has reached this spiritual understanding, there will be a better utilization of resources. They will be distributed in a fair and just way for the betterment of mankind and the advancement of science and technology, rather than making them the means of destruction such as the atom bomb and nuclear weapons.

ECONOMIC BARRIERS

“That a narrow and brutal nationalism, which the postwar theory of self-determination has served to reinforce, has been chiefly responsible for the policy of high and prohibitive tariffs, so injurious to the healthy flow of international trade and to the mechanism of international finance, is a fact which few would venture to dispute.” - Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha’u’llah, p. 35

“A world community in which all economic barriers will have been ... demolished ...” - Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha’u’llah, p.41

Every economic barrier created by narrow-minded nationalism is a hindrance toward achieving the oneness of mankind. When economic barriers such as tariffs, and import-export taxes are removed, and the employment of different currencies and weights and measures around the world unified, we will move closer to a world commonwealth, a system for all nations.

STRIKES

“You have asked about strikes. Great difficulties have arisen and will continue to arise from this issue. The origin of these difficulties is twofold: One is the excessive greed and rapacity of the factory owners, and the other is the gratuitous demands, the greed, and the intransigence of the workers. One must therefore seek to address both.

Now, the root cause of these difficulties lies in the law of nature that governs present-day civilization, for it results in a handful of people accumulating vast fortunes that far exceed their needs, while the greater number remain naked, destitute, and helpless. This is at once contrary to justice, to humanity, and to fairness; it is the very height of inequity and runs counter to the good-pleasure of the All-Merciful.

This disparity is confined to the human race: Among other creatures, that is, among the animals, a certain kind of justice and equality prevails. Thus there is equality within a shepherd's flock, or within a herd of deer in the wilderness, or among the songbirds that dwell in the mountains, plains, and orchards. The animals of every species enjoy a measure of equality and do not differ greatly from one another in their means of existence, and thus they live in perfect peace and joy.

It is quite otherwise with the human race, where the greatest oppression and injustice are to be found. Thus you can observe, on the one hand, a single person who has amassed a fortune, made an entire country his personal dominion, acquired immense wealth, and secured an unceasing flow of gains and profits, and, on the other, a hundred thousand helpless souls—weak, powerless, and wanting even a mouthful of bread. There is neither equality here nor benevolence. Observe how, as a result, general peace and happiness have become so wanting, and the welfare of humanity so undermined, that the lives of a vast multitude have been rendered fruitless! For all the wealth, power, commerce, and industry are concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, while all others toil under the burden of endless hardships and difficulties, are bereft of advantages and benefits, and remain deprived of comfort and peace. One must therefore enact such laws and regulations as will moderate the excessive fortunes of the few and meet the basic needs of the myriad millions of the poor, that a degree of moderation may be achieved.

However, absolute equality is just as untenable, for complete equality in wealth, power, commerce, agriculture, and industry would result in chaos and disorder, disrupt livelihoods, provoke universal discontent, and undermine the orderly conduct of the affairs of the community. For unjustified equality is also fraught with peril. It is preferable, then, that some measure of moderation be achieved, and by moderation is meant the enactment of such laws and regulations as would prevent the unwarranted concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and satisfy the essential needs of the many. For instance, the factory owners reap a fortune every day, but the wage the poor workers are paid cannot even meet their daily needs: This is most unfair, and assuredly no just man can accept it. Therefore, laws and regulations should be enacted which would grant the workers both a daily wage and a share in a fourth or fifth of the profits of the factory in accordance with its means, or which would have the workers equitably share in some other way in the profits with the owners. For the capital and the management come from the latter and the toil and labour from the former. The workers could either be granted a wage that adequately meets their daily needs, as well as a right to a share in the revenues of the factory when they are injured, incapacitated, or unable to work, or else a wage could be set that allows the workers to both satisfy their daily needs and save a little for times of weakness and incapacity.

If matters were so arranged, neither would the factory owners amass each day a fortune which is absolutely of no use to them—for should one's fortune increase beyond measure, one would come under a most heavy burden, become subject to exceeding hardships and troubles, and find the administration of such an excessive fortune to be most difficult and to exhaust one's natural powers—nor would the workers endure such toil and hardship as to become incapacitated and to fall victim, at the end of their lives, to the direst need.

It is therefore clearly established that the appropriation of excessive wealth by a few individuals, notwithstanding the needs of the masses, is unfair and unjust, and that, conversely, absolute equality would also disrupt the existence, welfare, comfort, peace, and orderly life of the human race. Such being the case, the best course is therefore to seek moderation, which is for the wealthy to recognize the advantages of moderation in the acquisition of profits and to show regard for the welfare of the poor and the needy, that is, to fix a daily wage for the workers and also to allot them a share of the total profits of the factory.

In brief, insofar as the mutual rights of the factory owners and the workers are concerned, laws must be enacted that would enable the former to make reasonable profits and the latter to be provided with their present necessities and their future needs, so that if they become incapacitated, grow old, or die and leave behind small children, they or their children will not be overcome by dire poverty but will receive a modest pension from the revenues of the factory itself.

For their part, the workers should not make excessive demands, be recalcitrant, ask for more than they deserve, or go on strike. They should obey and comply and make no demands for exorbitant wages. Rather, the mutual and equitable rights of both parties should be officially fixed and established according to the laws of justice and compassion, and any party that violates them should be condemned after a fair hearing and be subject to a definitive verdict enforced by the executive branch, so that all affairs may be appropriately ordered and all problems adequately resolved.

The intervention of the government and the courts in the problems arising between owners and workers is fully warranted, since these are not such particular matters as are ordinary transactions between two individuals, which do not concern the public and in which the government should have no right to interfere. For problems between owners and workers, though they may appear to be a private matter, are detrimental to the common good, since the commercial, industrial, and agricultural affairs, and even the general business of the nation, are all intimately linked together: An impairment to one is a loss to all. And since the problems between owners and workers are detrimental to the common good, the government and the courts have therefore the right to intervene.

Even in the case of differences that arise between two individuals with regard to particular rights, a third party, namely the government, is needed to resolve the dispute. How, then, can the problem of strikes, which entirely disrupt the country—whether they arise from the inordinate demands of the workers or the excessive greed of the factory owners—remain neglected?

Gracious God! How can one see one's fellow men hungry, destitute, and deprived, and yet live in peace and comfort in one's splendid mansion? How can one see others in the greatest need and yet take delight in one's fortune? That is why it has been decreed in the divine religions that the wealthy should offer up each year a portion of their wealth for the sustenance of the poor and the assistance of the needy. This is one of the foundations of the religion of God and is an injunction binding upon all. And since in this regard one is not outwardly compelled or obliged by the government, but rather aids the poor at the

prompting of one's own heart and in a spirit of joy and radiance, such a deed is most commendable, approved, and pleasing.

This is the meaning of the righteous deeds mentioned in the heavenly Books and Scriptures.” -Abdu'l-Baha. Some Answered Questions, p.315-320

“Today the method of demand is the strike and resort to force, which is manifestly wrong and destructive of human foundations. Rightful privilege and demand must be set forth in laws and regulations.” -Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 238

This topic is explained in such detail by Abdu'l-Baha that any commentary is unnecessary. Beside the economic loss due to strikes, there is a spiritual price that it causes. So much disunity it creates, so much hatred, so much mistrust. Those bad feelings do far more damage in a society than the economic ones.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

“Science cannot create amity and fellowship in human hearts.” -Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 171

“The development and progress of a nation is according to the measure and degree of that nation's scientific attainments. Through this means its greatness is continually increased, and day by day the welfare and prosperity of its people are assured.” -Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 49

“A scientific man is a true index and representative of humanity, for through processes of inductive reasoning and research he is informed of all that appertains to humanity, its status, conditions and happenings. He studies the human body politic, understands social problems and weaves the web and texture of civilization. In fact, science may be likened to a mirror wherein the infinite forms and images of existing things are revealed and reflected. It is the very foundation of all individual and national development. Without this basis of investigation, development is impossible.”-Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.50

One of the fundamental principles of the Baha'i Faith is the harmony between science and religion. Science is a very important tool for creating unity. How can mankind achieve unity in the world without communication devices such as internet and the telephone? They have an important role but they are also not the masters of the situation. They are tools that, used properly, will contribute to the achievement of world unity. But we also need religion. Science cannot prove the existence of religion as yet but it doesn't mean that it is contrary to religion. As science and technology develop, they can prove the benefits of religion rather than overlooking its worth.

THE POOR AND NEEDY

“Know ye that the poor are the trust of God in your midst. Watch that ye betray not His trust, that ye deal not unjustly with them and that ye walk not in the ways of the treacherous. Ye will most certainly be called upon to answer for His trust on the day when the Balance of Justice shall be set, the day when unto every one shall be rendered his due, when the doings of all men, be they rich or poor, shall be weighed.” -Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 251

“O SON OF MAN!

Bestow My wealth upon My poor, that in heaven thou mayest draw from stores of unfading splendor and treasures of imperishable glory. But by My life! To offer up thy soul is a more glorious thing couldst thou but see with Mine eye.” - Bahá'u'lláh The Arabic Hidden Words, #57

“O CHILDREN OF DUST!

Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.” - Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words, #49

“O people of wealth and riches! If you see a poor man suffering from any calamity, do not run away from him but sit with him and ask him about the things heaped upon him from the seas of determination and predestination.” -Abdu'l-Bahá, The Baha'i World, Vol. IV, p. 453

As we become more spiritually aware, we realize that we have a very important responsibility and duty to look after the poor and needy, to make sure that they are cared for and live happily. This is a God-given duty. They have been entrusted to us and by caring for them we take a step towards the unity of mankind and a society in which there are no poor.

WORLD CURRENCY

“... a uniform and universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify and facilitate intercourse and understanding among the nations and races of mankind ...” - Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p.203

In order to achieve the oneness of mankind, a uniform and universal currency and means of weights and measures is necessary. Those who have travelled understand the difficulty of going from one country to another and having to exchange currencies and figure out different weights

and measures. Once this uniformity is achieved, travelling to different countries will be like travelling from one city to another in one's own country. So much time and energy will be saved in a world with one currency and one method of weights and measures. In Europe some of the countries adopted one currency (Euro) and although it has had its problems, it definitely is a step in the right direction.

WORLD COMMONWEALTH

“From every standpoint the world of humanity is undergoing a reformation ... scientific ideas and theories are developing and advancing to meet a new range of phenomena; invention and discovery are penetrating hitherto unknown fields, revealing new wonders and hidden secrets of the material universe; industries have vastly wider scope and production; everywhere the world of mankind is in the throes of evolutionary activity indicating the passing of the old conditions and advent of the new age of reformation.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.439

“The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System - the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.” - Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 85

“It is the superstructure of that self-same Order, attaining its full stature through the emergence of the Baha'i World Commonwealth - the Kingdom of God on earth - which the Golden Age of that same Dispensation must, in the fullness of time, ultimately witness.” - Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 26

“ ... the precautionary and defensive measures to be devised, coordinated, and carried out to counteract the full force of the inescapable attacks which the organized efforts of ecclesiastical organizations of various denominations will progressively launch and relentlessly pursue; and, last but not least, the multitudinous issues that must be faced, the obstacles that must be overcome, and the responsibilities that must be assumed, to enable a sore-trying Faith to pass through the successive stages of unmitigated obscurity, of active repression, and of complete emancipation, leading in turn to its being acknowledged as an independent Faith, enjoying the status of full equality with its sister religions, to be followed by its establishment and recognition as a State religion, which in turn must give way to its assumption of the rights and prerogatives associated with the Baha'i state, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, a stage which must ultimately culminate in the emergence of the world-wide Baha'i Commonwealth, animated wholly by the spirit, and operating solely in direct conformity with the laws and principles of Baha'u'llah.” - Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 14-15

“This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire

resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve center of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate.” - Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 203

World unity is the highest aspiration of mankind and a world commonwealth is a goal for humanity. Once it is established, for the first time in human history, the whole world will be one country. We cannot comprehend it but perhaps the future world can be compared to one country and the provinces or states of that country will be like the present countries of the world. Every country will keep its own language and culture, and, at the same time, be part of the world commonwealth. The world commonwealth will be a government for the whole world and there will be a universal language for the whole world, one currency, one political system, one education system and one economic system.