

TOWARDS A CONTINUOUSLY ADVANCING CIVILIZATION

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As recently as one hundred years ago, agriculture, stock raising, and handicrafts could still be considered the primary sector of human activity. However, with the emergence of technology and industry, the number of people engaged in such activities decreased in favour of industry. This led to a progressive drop in the percentage of the active population employed in agriculture and artisan trades.

Working activity was thus displaced from a prevalently primary context (the country) to industry (the secondary sector), a development that radically transformed the social, economic, and cultural history of the last century, not to mention the structure of towns and cities. Peasants and, soon after, craftsmen also moved to the towns attracted by the higher earnings offered by industry. This move created a whole new category of people - the working class - destined to acquire great social and economic relevance in our own century.

The sense of satisfaction that the peasant or craftsman could derive from the production or creation of complete, well-made articles was replaced in the industrial worker by very different feelings: alienation, frustration, isolation, and rebellion. The organization of work in a factory has its own specific requirements: the workers must be divided into separate sections or teams to perform the automatic, repetitive and simple movements necessary to reproduce rigidly planned operating cycles, and they must work at predetermined speeds that call for constant attention if personal injury is to be avoided.

The individual is thus forced to inhibit his or her creativity and to degrade working gestures, which in former times held no secrets and had a profound cultural significance for man, to the level of mere physical and mental adaptation, nothing more than a series of unnatural automatic movements chosen by some unknown technician. This way of working gradually leads to a loss of any sense of individual responsibility and has no apparent connection with the final product.

The imbalance in production and the advent of a disorderly industrial world based exclusively on competition and profit maximization have brought enormous quantities of goods onto the market, and this has undoubtedly made life easier and more comfortable for a fortunate few. However, through the power of advertising, disproportionate desires have also been generated, and they have profoundly changed traditional cultures without creating any new countervailing values. The absence of a renewed basis for different kinds of interactions has led to a general degeneration, and the industrial world is today going through a serious crisis.

This indiscriminate system of production, or rather of overproduction, of consumer goods, generally superfluous,

leads to the strident contrast evident between the industrialized and the developing countries. The former undoubtedly possess a growing number of objects of all kinds with increasingly sophisticated refinements, but the fact remains that these goods are designed to satisfy individual and collective needs that are, to a large extent, the product of an information and advertising system which tends to mislead rather than to promote authentic education. The latter are confronted with the problems of economic growth, or they live in conditions of abject poverty. The tendency to consume for consumption's sake induced by advertising involves another very serious drawback: the plundering with no regard for the consequences of the greater part of the known sources of energy and raw materials. Their subsequent use in the worst possible manner raises the already high level of pollution through the return to the environment in the form of waste of all the by-products of processing as well as the refuse associated with these superfluous possessions, and while the goods are enjoyed only by a few, the waste is harmful to all.

Even a superficial examination of the present situation is sufficient to convince us that man must direct his course in the near future in a very different direction, towards a single goal: the unity of mankind.

The primary needs of individuals and communities are universal: nourishment, protection, education, affection, and freedom. We should also add the need to express our personal creativity and the potentialities we all have both for ourselves and the community. Similarly, the problems affecting man and every single nation on the earth are now universal: pollution, the economy, morality, health, the party system, racism, political absenteeism, energy, and justice, just to mention a few.

We must therefore focus our attention above all on the global solution of these problems, as it is only through the adoption of universal laws and actions that success can be achieved.

During the second half of the last century, a personage known to the world by the title of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í faith, proposed a new concept of history and may be considered the true pioneer of the theory of global cooperation and the universal solution of problems. Bahá'í laws and principles invite man to take a global and spiritual view of life and include in their definition of spirituality the social and moral commitment necessary to create harmony, unity among different peoples, and cooperation in the solution of problems. As Bahá'u'lláh says in his writings: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

And it is only through the application of the many teachings concerning man's total reality that a world order will eventually emerge in which it is possible to solve current social problems once and for all.

aspects of problems that may be considered purely and simply technical. Such measures must also be consistent with a particular vision of the inner life of individuals, of life in general, and of national and international collective history.

History teaches us that man has progressed along a well-defined path and that society, from its beginnings in the stone age, has risen to progressively higher levels: from the nomadic horde to the tribe, from the village to the town and, later, to the city-state, and from the free citystate to the independent nation. In our own times, we have now reached a situation in which the problems confronting us all are transnational and international.

It is therefore quite obvious that it is not through a return to political, social, and economic forms already experimented in the past that the world will be able to continue its progress without new tragedies, but only through the adoption of innovative social and spiritual doctrines that are applicable worldwide and are adequate for our future needs.

Bahá'ís consider the current confusion existing in the world and the disastrous state of human affairs a natural stage in an organic process irresistibly leading to the final unification of mankind in a single social order whose boundaries will be nothing less than those of the planet itself. The human race, which as a distinct and organic unit, has gone through stages of evolution similar to those of infancy and childhood in the life of individuals, now finds itself in the culminating period of its turbulent adolescence and is approaching the long-awaited phase of maturity.

The completion of this process, the existence of the constructive energies, and the possibility of creating unified and unifying structures are the issues that man must now address.

The first and fundamental requisite for the reorganization and administration of the world as a single country - the home of mankind - is the unconditional acceptance of the unity of the human race. And as universal agreement on this spiritual principle is indispensable for the success of any attempt to construct peace in the world, it must be proclaimed to the entire world, taught in schools, and constantly supported in all nations as a preparation for that organic change in social structures to which it leads.

The evolution of the social, economic, industrial, and spiritual relationships in society requires a continuous advance in its values and an increasing capacity for wider aggregation. Anything that is alien to these values and to this ongoing orderly progress is destined inevitably and gradually to disappear. History and all that it encompasses is ground to dust in this ever upward march. Bahá'u'lláh says that mankind was created to build a continuously progressing civilization and that we should not regard one another as strangers, but as the fruits of one tree, the

leaves of one bough, the waves of one sea..

TOWARDS A WORLD CONFEDERATION

Individual good will alone is not sufficient, however, to solve all the complex problems now facing mankind. To ensure an effective and lasting solution, it is therefore more urgent than ever that we direct our social vision beyond sectorial and individual interests and adopt a global, transnational, and international viewpoint.

Bahá'ís advocate the creation of a World Confederation in which all nations, peoples, and beliefs would be intimately and permanently united and in which the autonomy of the confederated states and personal freedom would be guaranteed once and for all. This Confederation would set up a World Government to make the laws necessary to regulate life and relationships of various kinds in such a way as to satisfy the needs of all the peoples of the world. It would be assisted by a World Executive and an International Court which would enact the decisions and apply the laws adopted by the World Assembly, guarantee the organic unity of the entire Confederation, and pronounce final and binding rulings on all disputes arising between the various units of the universal system.

This World Government would have the supreme authority over all international questions and would supervise the reorganization of the economy to establish social justice, thus ensuring a decent standard of living for all men by eliminating the present unacceptable differences.

To force the rich countries by law to share their wealth with the poorer countries is not, however, the best way to achieve a just economic and social equilibrium. The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh invoke the voluntary sharing of possessions, which is something greater than the mere levelling of riches, as a levelling must be imposed from the outside, while voluntary sharing is a free act of choice. Man achieves perfection through good deeds freely performed and not by performing good deeds imposed on him. Indeed, the use of force simply leads to upheavals and the destruction of the social order. The voluntary sharing of riches, the free spending of one's own wealth, lead instead to wellbeing and peace in society, illuminate the world, and honour mankind.

The remedy against social injustice is not to be found, therefore, in imposed laws: history has amply demonstrated the failure of systematic attempts to use power to eliminate the social causes of human suffering. The theories of individual and state capitalism, as they are applied in our society, are also proving to be equally bankrupt. Thus, while on the one hand, there are in the world a number of rich and opulent societies with advanced technologies, on the other, there is also an endangered ecosystem, and a society oppressed by drugs, alcoholism, political patronage, and racism, not to mention the fact that every

of the planet.

The time has come when the preachers of the dogmas of materialism, in both the West and the East, in both the Capitalist and the Socialist worlds, must account for the moral guidance they have claimed to exercise. Where is the new world promised by these ideologies? Where is the international peace to whose ideals they have claimed to be dedicated?

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORLD GOVERNMENT

According to the guidelines offered by the Bahá'í faith, some of the tasks entrusted to the World Government are of strategic importance for the solution of the global economic problem.

The World Government would:

- issue a code of international laws with the object of regulating life, satisfying needs, and disciplining relations between nations;

- have complete control over the world's economic resources such as primary energy sources, raw materials, and the environment; these resources would therefore come under its international authority and no longer be the property of the individual states in which they happen to be located;

- coordinate and develop markets, regulating the distribution of riches and products in a fair manner throughout a system of federal states with no customs barriers in which all men would consider themselves citizens *of* the world;

- issue a fair code of international laws that would regulate, among other things, the relations between employers and workers, at identical conditions throughout the world, thus eliminating once and for all the great current disparity in wages between different parts *of* the planet;

- create the basis for an international monetary system which would eliminate the present disparities and speculations on strong currencies;

- introduce in schools throughout the world a revolutionary educational system based on the free and independent search for the truth;

- broaden worldwide scientific research to extend the duration of life on earth, discover and exploit the ignored or unused resources of the planet, and promote any organization capable of stimulating the intellectual, moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.

In this confederal system guided by a World Government,

whose tasks will not be arbitrarily assumed but delegated by the confederated states through an international treaty which will authorize its establishment and recognition, a world language, created or chosen among those already existing, will be taught in all the schools of the world - as the auxiliary of the mother tongue - and a worldwide system of writing, a world literature, and a uniform and universal monetary system will simplify and facilitate trade and eliminate for ever the speculations favouring the economies of the stronger nations.

THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Contrary to the current situation in most of the countries of the world, the Bahá'í concept of economy places the emphasis on the local level with the revaluation of agriculture, the primary source of subsistence, and relegates industry to the role of satisfying the needs that arise naturally, and not in an artificially induced manner, in any given country.

A worldwide strategic policy based on the resolute and concrete restructuring of agriculture in all countries would rapidly solve the problems of hunger, unemployment, and the forced exodus to the cities and other countries, which is nowadays the mirage of millions of people. It would be combined with a sane policy of assistance and encouragement of artisan programmes inspired by the following fundamental principles:

- FAIR WAGES AND SHARING IN COMPANY PROFITS

Both private ^{property} and free enterprise are contemplated in Bahá'í teachings, but monopolies and the excessive accumulation of wealth are penalized. Bahá'u'lláh also states that a fair wage is not enough: employers, in full compliance with international legislation, will have to share a part of the firm's profits with their employees and give every worker, on reaching the agreed age limit, a fair pension.

In the Bahá'í view, shareholding by workers is also encouraged. In this way, we can move gradually towards a cooperativistic economic system.

- TRUSTS AND MULTINATIONALS

The economic system envisaged in the Bahá'í scriptures does not contemplate the existence of monopolies and multinationals, as they contrast with the fair distribution of wealth and, by influencing the decisions of governments, eliminate competition, monopolize the market, and change social policies to the detriment of the majority and the advantage of a few.

- INHERITANCE

The Bahá'í system renews our concept of inheritance and

extends it to the collective advantage of mankind. It is thus contemplated that part of an inheritance should be set aside to finance schools and the education of children, while another part should be given to those who contributed to the production of the wealth of the deceased. This would avoid the creation of family monopolies and the accumulation and concentration of enormous riches in the hands of a single person or family.

- COMPULSORY UNIVERSAL EDUCATION

One of the fundamental causes of the current grave disparities in the distribution of wealth among the peoples of the world is the considerable difference existing in levels of education.

According to Bahá'í principles, education should be compulsory and, if a family does not have sufficient means to ensure a dignified level of education, it must be guaranteed at the expense of the international community.

In this way, throughout the world, there will not be a single ignorant person, incapable of performing work that is useful for him or herself and for humanity as a whole. The application of this fundamental principle will allow the optimum utilization of the greatest resource available to the human race: the force of its intellect.

School curricula will be identical throughout the world and will allow a fair dissemination of culture among all peoples, highlighting their specific abilities and the benefits we all derive from the diversity of the talents of the various races and cultures, a situation that may be described as the beauty of unity in diversity, similar to the effect created by the flowers in a garden.

Culture and knowledge will cease to be instruments of oppression to the detriment of the underprivileged classes or of entire populations which, through no choice of their own, have not been able to complete a regular course of studies and have always been excluded from managerial and decisional positions.

A NEW SETUP FOR INDUSTRY

Similar to what occurred in agriculture a few decades ago, the improvement of technology and automation in industry involves an inevitable reduction in the human intervention required. This phenomenon is of course worrying for large masses of workers who see their job security threatened.

At this point, an important consideration is in order. Just as nobody would nowadays suggest we do without the assistance of machines for the heaviest agricultural tasks, so it is only to be expected that in industry too machines should perform those jobs which are the most repetitive and automatic and do not require creativity, thus leaving man free for other tasks more suited to his station.

Industry must, however, be transformed and scaled down, moving away from its present sole objective of maximum

profit and towards the production of goods of undoubted utility for all sections of the population and the welfare of mankind in general, while respecting the natural resources used, ensuring an overall ecological balance, and observing the international laws adopted by the World Government.

The use of a healthy technology must therefore be considered a social conquest and not an instrument for domination and oppression. In this context, it is therefore essential to promote and encourage the birth of individual and _{group} artisan ventures in which the work of each person, in addition to providing an opportunity for the expression of their personal potential, can also offer the creative satisfaction that derives from a complete product.

In this sense, in the Bahá'í scriptures, the scientist and the craftsman are equally important, and the social standing and contribution of these two callings, which are at present extremely distant, are consequently totally revolutionized.

BAHA'I PRINCIPLES AND THE WORKING CLASS

The application of Bahá'í principles to the worker's daily toil will involve a substantial change in the relations existing between the worker and his or her employer and also in the quality of the actual work performed.

The principle of consultation, combined with the principle of professionalism, acquired through personal effort and an adequate preparation, will allow the active participation of all workers. Also, as they will either receive a part of the profits or be considered partners in the venture itself, they will be encouraged to strive for **excellence in everything**.

But mutual rights, duties, and responsibilities will have to be established by just and impartial international laws, applicable everywhere. Violations or injustices will be resolved not through strikes, but by special courts of justice whose rulings will be accepted by both sides and will be without appeal.

The concept of professionalism linked with that of honesty and straight-dealing would also neutralize the spreading evil of political patronage which, on the one hand, frustrates the aspirations of some and, on the other, increases the power of unworthy governing classes.

The ideals of devotion, trustworthiness, truthfulness, and justice should be included among the principles governing business organizations with the aim of protecting the rights of people so that anyone becoming an employee of a government or a firm would display in all their actions the utmost rectitude and honesty, temperance and selfdiscipline, purity and sanctity, justice and equity.

THE SIZE OF BUSINESS ENTERPRISES

It is now a common experience that the working environment in a small business is much more 'human' than in a large

factory where the individual is just one of a mass, an anonymous and therefore easily replaceable pawn.

The tendency towards increasingly large business organizations - the corner shop taken over by the large supermarket, and the craftsman's workshop by the large industrial concern -, while it involves certain economic benefits is nevertheless harmful for the self-esteem and the initiative of the individuals working in these organizations.

Through an adequate restructuring in line with the directives of a worldwide law, work should become once more an expression of man's creativity and a means for his fulfillment in accordance with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Arts, crafts, and science elevate and exalt the world of being. For the life of man, knowledge is like a wing and a stairway for his ascent. It is therefore incumbent on all to acquire knowledge, but they must study those sciences that can really be of help to the peoples of the world and not those that begin and end with mere words... "It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation", as "we have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God...", but "in every art and skill, God loveth the highest perfection".

Also, "such wealth as [man] acquireth through crafts and professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom", and "the best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God".

In this context of work, it is necessary to reaffirm the principle of equal opportunities for men and women. This does not mean, obviously, identity of functions. In some cases, the qualities of women are more useful, while, in others, the abilities of men are needed. In most cases, however, the difference of sex has no relevance at all. It is, therefore, in the complementarity of functions and in cooperation that the best results may be achieved.

IMMIGRANT WORKERS

It is by now obvious to anyone that, in the next few years, the phenomenon of migration from the third world towards the high-income countries will increase.

The South of the world is advancing inexorably towards the North. And this is a reality with which we shall all be increasingly confronted. After centuries of colonialism and exploitation, the third world, now deeper than ever in debt and with no resources available in the short term, can no longer rely on any endogenous means to emerge from the condition of subservience imposed on it by the rich countries. Its people therefore seek refuge and an individual solution in the mythical world of the white man. To integrate these immigrant workers by assigning them the most humble, the most dangerous, and the heaviest jobs is not, however, a morally acceptable way to help. To remain indifferent to the fact that people of races different from

our own are now living in our country in sub-human conditions is not acceptable, and it is not educational for our children.

From the Bahá'í standpoint, only a world economic policy that manages the available resources and organizes work at the international level, with the adoption of the principle of equal pay for equal work everywhere and with the same respect for all kinds of work, can offer a solution for the problems arising from the immigration of people from other countries. It is precisely through the acceptance of a spiritual principle such as that embodied in the idea that the earth is but a single country and humanity its citizens, that we may change the present way of thinking and acting of peoples and governments.

The rich nations, together, must make efforts to improve the local economies of the poor countries with the precise object of making life in the home countries livable and acceptable, but they must not, however, try to impose their own industrial model and way of life.

This gesture, if not from an act of love, should at least spring from a sense of justice stemming from the awareness of the ruinous harm that we have caused in the past through colonialism to all those countries that today form the South of the world.

Bahá'u'lláh says: "The best beloved of all things in My sight is justice... By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of My neighbour... Be ye all flowers of the same garden, leaves of the same branch, waves of the same sea... We created you all from the same dust that no one should exalt himself over the other".