

CORNERED BY INEQUALITY: IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP

"Trends in income and wealth tell a clear story: the gap between the rich and poor is wider now than ever before and is still growing, with power increasingly in the hands of an elite few" (Oxfam, *Even It Up*, p. 28). If we can read or hear that without immediately reacting strongly we need to shake our head or pinch our arm to check whether we have lost all sensitivity, and/or shame.

The growth of inequality is far from those fateful decades of the 70s and 80s of last century, when the world powers imposed the conservative revolution of Thatcher and Reagan, strangling the economies of developing countries with rising interest rates on their foreign debt, demanding the reduction of social spending in health and education, the reduction of the state itself, dismantling of the "welfare state" in Europe, promoting job insecurity and worldwide marginalization of workers, and, of course, the drowning out of popular revolutions in Latin America -- all this with the conniving of the Vatican's bureaucracy in those decades, and the disqualification of liberation theology, their theologians, their bishops and the Church of the poor.

Four decades later we are reaping the harvest: humanity is mired in the greatest inequality of its history: 85 people have wealth equivalent to the assets of the poorest half of humanity. The richest 1% of the population in the year 2016, will break its own record of assets breaching the psychological barrier of having acquired 50% of the wealth in the world -- and this isn't stopping; the other half is left to be distributed among all other humanity, the 99% of the world population. One must live to believe it.

It has been an unarmed revolution, through political power, within some structures "supposedly" at the service of free trade, so that the sheep and the wolves could freely operate within a financial system designed simply for submission to an operation of accumulating money.

Gradually, we accepted governments that are only "supposedly" democratic... They engage in a "democratic sequestering" of a society in which the people choose and confide power to the plutocrats: the poor vote for the parties of the

rich... It is the “hegemony” of capital: the lack of awareness of the poor, the inhibition of the majority, the triumph of individualism, the anesthetic of consumerism. So evil a system could not be maintained, if it were not for apathy of a large part of the population, which has its conscience held captive beneath the hegemony that the system exerts over minds and hearts.

As in the climate change crisis, this issue has us on the edge of an abyss. History affirms that such rates of “extreme wealth” and inequality, are not sustainable for long. Theorists are already wondering why there has still not been a social explosion in societies so strikingly unequal and unjust.

What is it that keeps us docile, passively watching while the extremely wealthy -- the 1% -- continue expanding their portion of the global pie every year, squeezing all the rest of us -- the 99% -- into a shrinking little slice of that same global pie? To what percentage of the pie will the extremely wealthy have to shrink us, before we wake and decide to put an end to this situation unworthy of humanity, and decide to change the economic system that has brought us here? When will we assume effective awareness that we are the overwhelming majority -- the 99% !?

It’s time to wake up because it’s urgent to change the rules. Although we are in a historical time of social resurgence, those who are more awake are seeing that it’s high time to react, to open eyes and raise awareness; to develop a new hegemony, -- the hegemony of human humanity; to criticize the fundamentalism of the market; the hegemony of recovering sequestered democracy. It is time to plot a new course: that of the past three decades has already proven to be unsustainable and is leading us into social explosion and planetary crisis.

It’s a matter of the urgent task of raising awareness, critical thinking and resistance. It’s imperative to break the spell of that hegemony; to grind it down with alternate civil practices, and be coherent with a responsible, democratic, political participation. “When the poor believe in the poor, then we can sing Freedom!” we sing in “The Salvadoran Mass”. What that means today is that when, with our vote, we stop putting the most wealthy elite and their representatives into congresses and parliaments -- when we “believe in the poor and the option for the poor” and vote accordingly, then our “sequestered democracy” will be freed and we will be moving into the egalitarian and just society that both our humanity and our planet deserve. This is the Utopia worth dreaming of and struggling for.

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