



A Human Future

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L'Arche Canada offers this "thought sheet" as a contribution to the public conversation about values and the shaping of the social ethos in which we live. Our perspective comes from two broad sources: (1) from forty years of living together in community as a diverse group of people, differently abled and from various cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds; and (2) from contemporary thinkers who are open, fresh and responsive to the human spirit and are reflecting deeply on the individual and society today.

The vision and confidence to create a healthy Canadian society lies in the nexus where humanistic thinking and spirituality cross-fertilize. Indeed, today the best spiritual thinking engages contemporary culture with a view to the good of human society and the best humanistic thinking integrates spiritual values. We believe it is possible to live consciously in the gap between an ideal society and everyday reality and to make choices that contribute to the closing of that gap. It is a hopeful view, based on human and spiritual values embodied in daily life.



Gerry Helleiner is economics professor emeritus and distinguished research fellow at the University of Toronto's Munk Centre. He has written widely on developing countries, and was a faculty member at Yale, Oxford, Sussex and the Universities of Ibadan and Dar es Salaam. He was research director of the developing countries' caucus at the IMF and World Bank, and board chair of the North-South Institute, the International Food Policy Research Institute and International Lawyers and Economists Against Poverty. He has also advised numerous UN agencies and African governments.

The Plight of Poor Countries An Interview with Gerry Helleiner

Gerry Helleiner is enormously respected internationally for his contributions to development work and his mentoring of many others in this field. His Order of Canada citation credits him as having "enhanced Canada's reputation as a caring and compassionate nation." Gerry and his wife Georgia and their family have also done much to support the inclusion of people with disabilities in our society.

A Human Future, is a free e-publication. We invite you to read back issues or to subscribe at www.larche.ca. Beth Porter, ed.

Beth Porter: How is the global recession affecting people in developing countries, especially Africa?

Gerry Helleiner: It will be devastating. My African friends in academia, research bodies, governments and NGOs in Tanzania, Ghana and elsewhere are all telling me of their dismay. The setbacks are especially upsetting because many African countries had at last seen encouraging progress over the past 3 or 4 years. Severely worsened terms of trade and reduced financial flows mean a full stop, and probably much worse, to previous economic growth, and the certainty of increased hardship.

"People should know there has been tremendous progress..."

What can ordinary citizens here do to help?

First, simply listen and try to understand, so that those you want to help have a sense that somebody is concerned. Then may come working on their behalf or giving financial or moral support. I know from personal experi-

Jeff and Debra Moore



In 1996, Jeff and Debra and 3 friends established the Just Us! Coffee Roasters Cooperative – Canada’s first Fair Trade coffee roaster. Fair Trade, an innovative model for international trade, offers not only a fair price, but respect and empowerment for Third World producers. Just Us! was established as a Worker Co-op, to be in solidarity with the producers and provide a workplace owned by its employees. It is one of the fastest growing companies in Atlantic Canada.

Jeff describes the beginnings: We had no capital, no business experience – just a conviction that there should be a market for higher quality coffee produced in a socially and environmentally responsible way. I traveled to Mexico and ended up in Chiapas in the middle of a civil war basically being fought over who should profit from coffee production. Traditionally, small-scale indigenous farmers had to depend totally on the big coffee companies. Now, they were organizing to bypass the big companies, willing to risk their lives for a fairer price and better future for their families.

From Elements On-Line Environmental Magazine and www.justuscoffee.com. The Moores have been honoured by Nova Scotia universities. In 1982 they founded the L’Arche community in Wolfville, NS. Debra was its leader for 5 years. The Just Us! store employs a L’Arche member.



ence the isolation people working in poorer countries can feel and the difference expressions of support from home can make.

Micro level involvement can lead to acquiring the understanding needed to express political support at the macro level – for more appropriate policies on trade, investment, financial flows, migrant remittances. This is key because the effects of private transactions dwarf the impact of very worthwhile micro-level projects of NGOs and aid agencies in many poorer countries. The smallest change in the price of coffee, for instance, has a greater impact on the lives of poor coffee-producing farmers in Central America and East Africa than the efforts of a hundred NGOs.

What ignited your own passion for development work?

There was no blinding moment. I think I have always had a deep sense of unfairness about the huge differential between the lives of people in rich countries and people in poor countries. Then it really took off when we went to study and teach in Nigeria in our 20s. My wife Georgia and I developed friendships and became deeply involved in development work there, and later in Tanzania. After we left, I wanted our friends to feel there was still someone walking with them.

You founded the North–South Institute (NSI) some 30 years ago. Please speak about your purpose in this.

Back in Canada my work changed from ground level involvement to the area of international economics and the enormous impact of international events and certain Canadian policies, even if quite unintended, on poor people elsewhere. It’s terribly important that Canadians understand this. The NSI was an attempt to institutionalize and make permanent a research and a public education function on this topic – “research for a fairer world” (its motto). Its Board brought together a great variety of people from here and the rest of the world – business, labour and NGO representatives who would ordinarily not get along. All could agree that the issue was important.

Jessica Vorstermans



Today we left the shelter of the UN Conference I am attending and went to the Cocody Marché. The market is small and crowded, with many more vendors than buyers. Our white faces stick out. I wait while my friends bargain for a colourful tablecloth. In the main street a few young men and boys are trying to bring the scarce tourists into their stalls, shine their shoes or ask for spare francs. Their clothes are tattered, the boys wear shiny girls sandals. The air hangs hot and damp.

A young boy, about 9 years old, approaches and asks me for some money. He has the face of an innocent child – a juxtaposition to the harsh and skuzzy surroundings. His clothes are too tight and full of holes. He holds a shoe-shining brush in his hand. He tells me that he is thirsty. I respond that we could get a drink together at a nearby stand. He nods his approval. We walk together to the shop and get two cold bottles of water. He is quiet and does not talk much. Once again I am struck by the differences and yet our common humanity. We inhabit different worlds on the same interconnected planet.

In February 2009 Jessica Vorstermans was invited to attend and report on a human rights conference in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (West Africa) – Mobilizing Early Response to Conflict.



What led you to found International Lawyers and Economists Against Poverty (ILEAP)?

I have sat in on innumerable meetings where the representatives of the major powers “negotiate” with representatives of much smaller and poorer countries, and for many years I have been deeply concerned and upset about the imbalance in all manner of international negotiations between powerful rich actors and vulnerable poor ones. For instance, at the WTO, which sets the rules for international trading, the United States typically comes with a huge delegation of economists and officials, and another huge group of lobbyists from the States also tries to influence the outcome.

Against this kind of power, the typical African country is represented by one or two people who are usually simultaneously accredited to other institutions such as the WHO or International Red Cross, and carry many other responsibilities. The subject of these negotiations is usually complex, requiring much preparation and analytical expertise these representatives could never attain. The rules are set by the powerful and the weak eventually have to abide by them, but they had no real voice. ILEAP tries to bring some balance by providing expertise – much of it from the developing world itself – to the most vulnerable of the international players, particularly at the governmental level. We do capacity-building through training and we supply lawyers and economists who write briefs, sometimes sit beside the negotiators, and frequently write draft text that provides alternatives that make more sense for poorer countries. There's no reason why there should be such an enormous discrepancy in life expectancy and infant mortality and literacy between rich countries and poor, and between rich people and poor people within countries.

What is a realistic hope?

Eradication of poverty is everybody's long term hope, but one has to proceed by stages [see *UN Millennium Development Goals link on p. 4*]. People should know, however, that there has

been tremendous achievement in the past 60 years in matters of life expectancy, maternal and infant mortality, literacy, numeracy. There has never been anything like it in recorded human history. Sometimes people think that the world is not improving in its basic social indicators, and some development studies programs give the impression that everything is corrupt and futile. This encourages cynicism and is very damaging. There are places where it hasn't gone so well and there's enormous work still to do, but the progress in many countries, most notably China, has been extraordinary.

What about connecting human rights to aid and trade?

Human rights as people in developing countries understand them include material economic rights. The 60-year old UN Declaration of Human Rights included economic rights, the eradication of poverty for one, but the major powers have never really accepted these as human rights. We tend to fixate on civil rights, political rights, freedom of speech and religion, and I am happy with the way rights have been treated here, but my economics background leads me to be much less demanding that developing countries adopt all the systems we believe preferable.



The L'Arche movement was founded by Jean Vanier, in France in 1964. Today there are 136 communities of L'Arche on six continents, 29 in Canada. In L'Arche, people with developmental disabilities and those who come to assist them share life together.

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FOR YOUR INTEREST

“The economic meltdown has popularised a new term: deglobalisation. Some critics of capitalism seem happy about it....

Helping poorer countries catch up has long been among the benefits touted for globalisation.... Globalisation means global integration of the movement of goods, capital and jobs. Each of these processes is now in trouble. World trade has plunged....

Manifestly, popular opinion backs more state regulation. So far this has taken the form of pouring public money into banks and selected industries, notably cars.... There has been somewhat less evidence of trade protectionism.

Despite the downturn, the nations of the world have not shunned globalisation. It has been protected by the belief of firms in the efficiency of global supply chains. But like any chain, these are only as strong as their weakest link. A danger will come if firms decide that this way of organising production has had its day.”

Extracted from “Turning their backs on the world,” *The Economist*, Feb. 21-27/09, pp. 59-61. Read entire article.

Articles by Gerry Helleiner (click on websites)

- Convocation address, U of Guelph, 2009, www.uoguelph.ca
- “Careful Listening Key in Responding to Poverty” www.uoguelph.ca
- “Markets, Politics and Globalization: Can the Global Economy be Civilized?” www.unctad.org

Other resources (click on the websites)

- The North–South Institute: www.nsi-ins.ca
- Audio interviews from NSI: www.nsi-ins.ca
- ILEAP: www.ileap-jeicp.org
- International Development Research Centre (IDRC): www.idrc.ca
- Centre for Global Development, Washington: www.cgd.dev
- Overseas Development Institute, London: www.odi.org.uk
- Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC): www.ccic.ca
- On Remittances: www.economist.com
- More articles on Globalization: www.economist.com
- UN Millennium Development Goals: www.un.org
- Inclusion International: www.cacl.ca

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