

8th Day Center for Justice



CENTERINGS

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE 8TH DAY CENTER FOR JUSTICE



**“The greatest challenge of the day is:
how to bring about a revolution of the heart.”**

- Dorothy Day, Radical Catholic Activist (1897-1980)

Radical Privatization and Catching Hope

BY: BOB BOSSIE, SCJ

It's happening more and more every day. Private corporations are taking over activities once owned and operated by government, including schools, roads, transportation, hospitals, electricity generation, water supplies, prisons and even warfare. This radical "privatization" is based upon the belief that corporations can run these enterprises more efficiently and effectively.

The corollary belief is that the best government is the one that governs least, imposes the lowest taxes and concerns itself solely with defense issues, that is, providing a secure environment for business, both domestically and internationally.

This extreme economic model originated with the rise of 19th century capitalism. Then it was called "liberal" or "laissez-faire" capitalism and emphasized the "invisible hand" or the rules of the marketplace as the best arbiter of economic activity. The record shows that early capitalism resulted in great disparities of wealth, extreme poverty and desperation, dangerous and oppressive working conditions, and the destruction of family life and the environment. The labor movement, Catholic Social Teaching, socialism and other such efforts emerged to temper this violence and oppression.

MODEL CALLED NEO-LIBERALISM OR "NEW" LIBERALISM

Today this model is called "neo-liberalism" or "new" liberalism because it attempts to "market" the old model with new images and language. Regrettably, many have bought into this deception, with its push for the corporate control of our most essential institutions. Driven by the primary goal of maximum profit, unfettered by

8th DAY CENTER FOR JUSTICE

205 W. Monroe Street
Chicago IL 60606-5062
Phone: 312-641-5151
Fax: 312-641-1250
Email: 8thday@clarenet.org
Web: www.8thdaycenter.org

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Stephanie Dernek; Kathleen Desautels, SP;
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government regulation and operating with little, if any, transparency and public accountability, these corporations are spreading, on a global scale, the scourge of their predecessors but with a new viciousness.

Enron corporation, which destroyed the lives of thousands of

people, is a stark example. Before going bankrupt in 2001, Enron employed 22,000 people and was one of the world's leading electricity, natural gas, pulp and paper, and communications companies with claimed revenues of \$111 billion in 2000. In 2001, it achieved infamy when it was revealed that its reported financial condition was sustained mostly by institutionalized, systematic and creatively planned accounting fraud. Enron has since become a popular symbol of willful corporate fraud and corruption.

Today, we are witnessing the impact of the collapse of sub prime mortgages, due to predatory lending practices, and the devastation this is having on communities across the country.

EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF THE EARTH COMMUNITY

In the light of this devastation of the earth community, 8th Day Center is committed to a variety of broad-based efforts with local, national and international coalitions to expose the deception and oppose the impact of neo-liberalism and radical privatization especially on those who are most vulnerable, including the earth herself. These efforts flow from the Center's values of nonviolence, consensual decision making, partnership and right relations with all creation.

Within this issue of Centerings, we highlight some of the struggles against radical privatization in the areas of poverty and education, agriculture and trade policies, health care and sustainable development.

A story from Native wisdom seems fitting here:

A grandfather was telling his grandson that there are two wolves fighting terribly inside us. One is radical privatization and the other is the earth community.

The grandson paused in deep reflection because of what his grandfather had just said. Then he finally cried out; "Oyee! Grandfather, which wolf will win?"

The elder Cherokee replied, "The wolf that we feed."

As we begin this new year, we invite you to renew your commitment to feed the earth community. In this commitment we catch hope from one another. □

Bob Bossie, has represented the Priests of the Sacred Heart at the Center since 1980.

Poverty in the United States - The Rest of the Story

BY: DOROTHY PAGOSA, SSJ-TOSF

The US Census Bureau has released its current poverty estimates for 2006. Overall the poverty level has dropped from 12.6% in 2005 to 12.3% in 2006.¹ This, at first blush, might seem like good news. It certainly is better than a rise in the percentage. What I will attempt to do in this article is to give you a rundown of the rest of the story. What is happening in the US around issues of poverty?

Since these figures mentioned above have come out, we have heard of the sub prime mortgage crisis and the risks of huge numbers of foreclosures in the country. The numbers on Wall Street have been going down. The value of the dollar has gone down dramatically, making imports more expensive and our exports cheaper. The de-industrialization of our country over the past several decades has left us in the lurch as to products to export. Are we in as good a shape as the 2006 figures might indicate?

In the summer of 2006, I was part of the National Truth Commission on Poverty in the US. We heard testimony from 52 different individuals throughout the US. Their testimony seemed in stark contrast to what the Census Bureau reports for the same year. I will be referring to some of this testimony throughout this article.

POVERTY

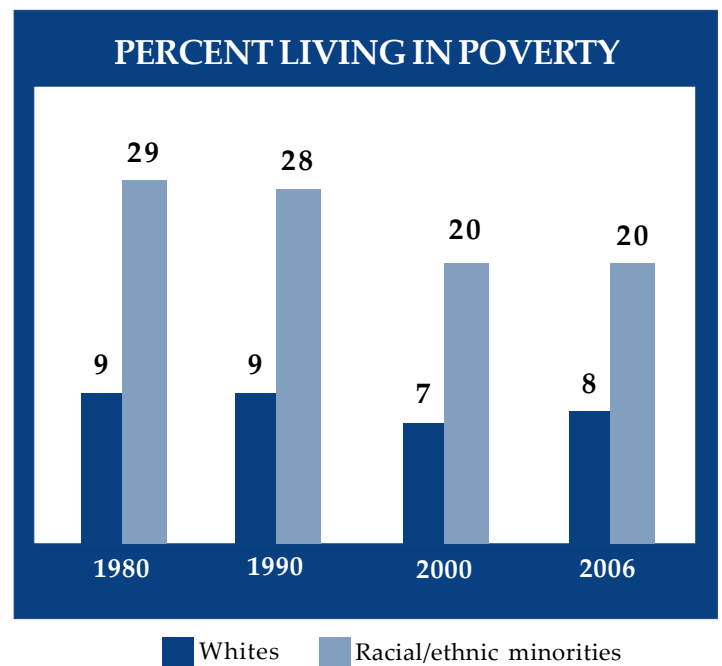
Even though the overall percentage of poverty has gone down by .3% in 2006, the results for children under 18 and people aged 18 to 64 have remained unchanged. The number of those in poverty decreased for people age 65 and older. In looking at the numbers, it could be that the older members of the US have social security and Medicare to help with their overall needs. These are government programs that are not yet privatized.

The poverty level for a family of three in 2006 was \$16,079; that averages \$1,340 per month. In 2005, the average monthly rent was \$717.²

“The government **HAS** the power. It is the government’s responsibility to uphold the US Constitution and Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that states, ‘Everyone, has the **RIGHT** to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of [him/herself] and of [his/her] family, includ-

ing medical care and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond [his/her] control.’” (Testimony of Vernetta King, UNITE HERE, Cleveland, OH)

In 1996, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) replaced the Welfare Program in the US. Some states have chosen to privatize the TANF program and other social services. There is a potential for \$30 billion in new contracts to private firms. There is a myth that the privatization of social services will provide efficiency and cost less. The truth of the matter is that privatization often requires increased bureaucracy because of the need for bids on the contracts. There are often less accountability requirements for privatized contracts. Sometimes the contracts are based on patronage systems more so than on low bids. AFSCME and SEIU unions have both been following the impact of privatization of welfare contracts and have been raising these concerns. Their union members are the ones facing unemployment as private groups replace them.³



Graph information credited to the Population Reference Bureau.

HUNGER

In 2006, nearly 35 million people, including 13 million children in the US were hungry or living on the edge of hunger. That is 11% of all US households. For people of color the percentage was much worse. 22.4% of Black non-Hispanic households were food insecure; Hispanic households, 17.4%.⁴

Food stamps are a major force in trying to end hunger. Food stamps have averaged \$1 per meal since 1979. This year Congress might actually increase the amount being allotted to the Food Stamp Program, but it requires help. Your representative needs to hear from you to make sure that the bill is passed with the increases to the Food Stamp Program left intact.

“Nevertheless, with an income of less than \$600 a month, I have a difficult time making ends meet. I go to charitable free food programs to get the food that I need....I have multiple sclerosis, but do not have adequate funds to pay for my necessary medications for this problem, so I go without my medications.” (Testimony of Brenda Pitts, Organize! Ohio, Cleveland, Ohio)

On Nov. 15, 2007, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty along with the National Coalition for the Homeless released a report entitled Feeding Intolerance: Prohibitions on Sharing Food with People Experiencing Homelessness. This report reviews ordinances and policies that restrict groups from sharing food with poor and homeless people throughout the US. These ordinances are sometimes couched as banning eating, sitting or sleeping in public. Instead of dealing with the underlying causes of poverty, laws are being passed to push homelessness even further underground. If we don't see it, it doesn't exist.⁵

HOMELESSNESS

“It was when ‘The Warming Place’ came to its last day on Mother’s Day of 2004 that I realized that Article 25 (of the Declaration of Human Rights) was a nice thing, but no more reality than Star Wars or the Care Bears. With the closing of ‘The Warming Place’ many homeless were left to make their bed in doorways and on park benches.” (Testimony of Christina Dinsmore, ARISE for Social Justice, Springfield, MA)

Homelessness is hard to quantify. People who are homeless tend to hide out. The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty states that approximately 3.5 million people, 1.35 million of them children, are likely to experience poverty in a given year. For some, homelessness is a temporary condition. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, it is impossible to measure homelessness with 100% accuracy. What can be measured is our progress at ending homelessness.⁶

In some cities, like Chicago, public housing has been demolished. It has been replaced with Section 8 vouchers. There is often a waiting list of over a year. Section 8 allows a landlord to rent his/her apartment for 1/3 of the person’s income and the government will pay the difference for market value. The effect of this is to depend on the private sector housing to provide housing as a last resort. It also depends on landlords willing to accept Section 8 vouchers. While we have been told

of the problems of public housing, we have not been told of the communities developed there. Those who can find housing often find themselves in a predominantly impoverished area of the city and split from the communities they know.

Another situation increasing homelessness is the early prepayment of HUD mortgages. Some developers have used HUD (Housing and Urban Development) grants to build large apartment complexes. One of the requirements is that a certain percentage of the housing be set aside for low-income housing. It was hoped that this use of privatization would help to decrease homelessness. Once the mortgage is paid off, they no longer are required to provide low-income apartments and can refuse to renew the lease. Private developers have received cheap mortgages and now can get market value rent.

Rep. Julia Carson (D-IN) introduced the Bringing America Home Act (HR 4347) in Congress last year. This is a comprehensive bill designed to end homelessness in the US. It includes housing, health, and economic and civil rights components. It would establish a national goal of ending homelessness by fulfilling the human need of shelter, provide a National Housing Trust Fund, provide 1,500,000 Section 8 vouchers over 10 years, etc.⁷

CONCLUSION

We have the capacity to end poverty in our country and help to end extreme poverty throughout the world. What we need is the will to do it. We need to start listening to those most impacted. Privatization of services has not helped in Iraq – it will not help here. The US needs to develop a sense of accountability to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The US also needs a sense of moral outrage to the continuation of poverty in our country, especially among our future generations. Those over 65 may be doing a little better. What do we say to those 64 and under?□

Dorothy Pagosa is a Sister of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis. She has been on the staff of the 8th Day Center for 21 years.

NOTES:

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Housing and Economic Statistics Division. www.census.gov

² Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. www.cbpp.org

³ American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. www.afscme.org

⁴ Food Research and Action Center. www.frac.org

⁵ National Coalition for the Homeless www.nationalhomeless.org

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Bringing America Home Act. www.bringingamericahome.org

From Local to Global:

THE WAY THE US DOES BUSINESS IMPACTS US ALL —
FROM THE US FARM BILL TO INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS

BY: STEPHANIE DERNEK

The way the US does business impacts us all. Who it affects and how varies worldwide. For many it inhibits their ability to maintain their livelihood and moves them further into a life of poverty. For those of us who are led by faith and conscience this is problematic.

International trade agreements and negotiations of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are not decided by democratic processes. A whole host of other issues are of concern when the Farm Bill is added to the mix, including human rights violations, labor rights violations, the destruction of ecological resources, increases in toxins, breakdown of traditional/indigenous culture and community, exploitation from people to the planet for the profit of the few. Any of the above are of concern for people of faith and conscience. *For more on what 8th Day Center for Justice would like to see in an international trade agreement check out our statements section at www.8thdaycenter.org.*

FARM BILL

The Farm Bill is a large piece of legislation with many parts covering control crop subsidy, land stewardship, public nutrition, exports, agricultural research, and biofuels programs. One of the great myths of the Bill is that it helps small farmers with subsidies; however, the interests that are lobbying to maintain the Bill “as is” are large agribusinesses. Farmers must grow one of the subsidized grain crops and yield enough of that crop. Small farmers do not meet this goal and/or do not grow the right crop (no subsidies for any fruits, vegetables or organic products). The setup of yield as to how subsidies are allotted benefits agribusiness. At the time of this printing there has not been a final draft of the Farm Bill for 2007.¹ It is likely that there will be an increase in food stamps, an inclusion of other produce and organics and more biofuel subsidies.

The Farm Bill affects us at home. It results in urbanization and sprawl by forcing small farmers to sell to agribusiness. Farmers leave rural areas for urban jobs. It results in the deterioration of rural culture and family farming and has not supported organic and local markets. The Bill supports the corn product industry that dumps high fructose corn syrup in (virtually) every food that is processed, and prioritizes biofuels over food for people who are economically poor in both the US and worldwide. And the Bill has continued to pitifully fund food stamps, nutrition programs and conservation all of which impact people who are poor in the US.

The poverty promoted by the US Farm Bill continues to benefit big business and is mirrored around the world. “Through-

out the 1990s, in developing countries the proportion of economically active women in the agricultural sector was over 60 percent and close to 80 percent in the least developed countries (LDCs)...in LDCs women’s participation will remain at over 70 percent.”² Because women represent a greater percentage of agricultural workers they deserve to have a voice in the creation of economic and agricultural policies.

The question of who benefits and who suffers is not typically the primary concern when the US considers how it will be in relationship economically, agriculturally, with other people around the world. Instead the constant imperative is profit that continues a cycle of *us vs. them* and *North vs. South*. The profit never makes it back to the ones in the fields, such as the women discussed above who bear the brunt of the physical manual farming labor. Profit is not maintained and circulated in the product’s country rather to “first world” headquarters where the multinational corporation (MNC) is located.

Food security must be named as an emerging global issue that could have devastating effects on people who are economically poor and marginalized. We must link food security along with the future of access to clean and drinkable water. The policies that are enacted today lay the groundwork for what the future will bring. The international movement of farmer and peasant associations called *La Via Campesina* elaborated on the concept of food sovereignty in 2003 with a statement delineating the right for all communities to have food security. (www.dakardeclaration.org).

FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS

Free trade agreements (FTAs) are the US’s manifestation of trade agreements. After the collapse of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) with much pressure from civil society, the US moved toward bilateral agreements (US and individual or grouping of countries). These agreements bypass WTO and in-country standards, such as minimum wages or pollution controls. FTAs open up markets for trade or liberalization, claiming to level the playing field, but, in fact, do not.

NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) was the great experiment between Mexico, US and Canada. NAFTA involved “cutting tariffs and lifting quotas to set the terms of trade in goods *between* countries. But NAFTA contained 900 pages of one-size-fits-all rules to which each nation was required to conform all of its *domestic* laws, regardless of whether voters and their democratically-elected representatives had previously rejected the very same policies in Congress, state legislatures or city councils.”³

One of the most obvious outcomes of this agreement has been its impact on the poorest of the NAFTA countries, Mexico. In a classic example, a subsistence farmer has been pushed further into poverty because of NAFTA. "In many parts of the global South, poor and subsistence farmers are losing their land, or are abandoning it to search for income in the cities, with negative consequences for local food security, rural development, the environment and peoples' livelihoods."⁴

IMPACT OF CAFTA

Dominican Republic CAFTA (DR-CAFTA), as it was originally intended, was to be a Central American-US trade agreement between El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic. CAFTA has not improved human rights, labor rights, protection for some of the most biodiverse regions in the world, or even job security. "The agreement is not leading to increased prosperity among the region's poor and middle classes, the levels of foreign investment and job creation have been disappointing and migration continues to serve as a primary (escape) valve from poverty."⁵

After nearly two years the results of CAFTA are similar to those of NAFTA. In El Salvador there has been an increase in corn price of 81.6% from the period between Jan. and July, 2007. In Nicaragua, "According to economist Adolfo Acevedo, a CAFTA specialist, the effect of the importing of rice is very clear. It costs a farmer in the United States \$9.40 to produce 100 pounds of rice. In the Sébaco Valley of Nicaragua, it costs a farmer US \$8.45 to produce the same 100 pounds of rice...due to the subsidies received by the US farmer, these 100 pounds of rice enter Nicaragua with the lower price of US \$7.65."⁶ In the worldwide game of race to the bottom, there have been 22 textile companies that have left the region⁷ as a whole." The jobs are moving and MNCs are finding cheaper workers in India or China, which shifts the poverty and lowers the standards.

The impact of FTAs reaches beyond the quantifiable; therefore FTAs are often ignored by heads of state and MNCs. For example, "Indigenous women face particular challenges as one of the most oppressed and impoverished sectors of society. As custodians of traditional knowledge, indigenous women have a critical relationship with natural resources, the land, water, and food security. Yet they face particular disadvantages as a group that is excluded from the assumptions and policies created under the dominant economic growth models."⁸ Much like the breakdown of rural, small town America because of agribusiness and "Walmart-i-zation," are similar patterns in countries around the world. Our communities enter survival mode, growing cash crops rather than growing in traditional ways, or separating community members to find work in cities far from home or forcing migration northward.

The overall impact of FTAs is an increase in the export of US goods. The severity of the impact depends on the status of the



Image from www.agobservatory.org.

receiving country at the pre-FTA status. The less infrastructure, or less exploitable labor or environment, the more likely and the higher degree of severity the negative impact will be. For a complete list, see www.bilateral.org.

In Congress with the recent passage of the Peru-US FTA, and other FTAs with Colombia and South Korea being introduced, and the Farm Bill still pending (which even if it is passed, is not just legislation) we need to be active in our work to stop these. The impact on the rest of the world people and planet needs to be of central concern when the US does business. □

Stephanie Dernek is in her sixth year at 8th Day. She represents the Divine Word Missionaries.

NOTES:

¹ Other farm bill resources include: www.oxfamamerica.org, www.tradeobservatory.org, www.agobservatory.org,

² www.publiccitizen.org

³ Alexandra Spieldoch "Roe to Hoe: The Gender Impact on Trade Liberalization on our Food System, Agricultural Markets and Women's Human Rights."

⁴ DR-CAFTA Year Two: Trends and Impacts, www.stopcafta.org

⁵ Tamang, Stella. "Indigenous Women, Ten Years After Beijing and Challenges." Speech given at the South Asia Women's Indigenous Forum, 2005.

⁶ DR-CAFTA Year Two: Trends and Impact, www.stopcafta.org

⁷ Homero Fuentes, representative from Grupo Iniciativa Regional y Responsabilidad

⁸ Tamang, Stella. "Indigenous Women, Ten Years After Beijing and Challenges." Speech given at the South Asia Women's Indigenous Forum, 2005.

Education has Entered the Market Place

BY: ELIZABETH DELIGIO



"We're trying to make everybody alike, but not everybody learns the same way, at the same point. And that is the thing. It feels like everybody is being shoved into a mold. Everything is becoming prescribed. You have to stay with the curriculum so everybody is doing the same thing. It takes the creativity out of teaching, and that's a sad thing because we are not in an exact science. Not every kid is alike, and not every teacher is alike." — Marie Smavely, high school teacher — Rhame, ND, commenting on the No Child Left Behind Act

In Jan. of 2002, Pres. George Bush signed into law one of the most comprehensive overhauls of the American education system since the 1960s, the now infamous No Child Left Behind Act. This Act attempts to reform the school system with four main strategies: enforced accountability through testing; emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven through "scientific research"; expanded parental options; and expanded local control and flexibility. It also encourages privatization as a long-term solution where public control has "failed."

These strategies were put into place due to research which revealed that American students routinely perform at lower levels than their international counterparts, in particular in the realm of science and math. Also, many students within the US have reading and math skills several grade levels lower than the grade they are in currently. Hence the need for comprehensive and tough reforms of No Child Left Behind or were low test scores the reason for No Child Left Behind? What most education statistics consistently state is that so much controversy surrounds testing students' performance levels that little consensus on the actual status of American children can be had. While it is clear that school systems are overburdened and underfunded and that student performance is not as "high" as it should be, the exact cause of this depends on with whom you talk.

In the crafting of No Child Left Behind whom did the White House talk to? A group Bush named "education leaders" was dominated by Fortune 500 CEOs, including Lou Gerstner, chairperson of IBM. Lou wrote in an education reform document entitled *Reinventing Education: Entrepreneurship in America's Public School*, that children are "human capital";

teachers are "sellers" in a market place; and the public school system is a "monopoly." From this viewpoint the policies of No Child Left Behind read more like a business plan than an attempt at education reform. We are no longer trying to run a public school system; we are managing an unpredictable business which requires strict controls to ensure that the input or capital is not "wasted" in the sadly hard-to-predict product of young children's minds.

Education has entered into the marketplace, a globalized market place which is driven by principles of competition, profit, and, oh yes, profit. What exactly business could teach school systems is hard to imagine. Surely the unique process of teaching children not only life skills but about themselves and their world is not an easily translatable field? Education while certainly benefiting from dialoging with other *related* professions like psychology certainly couldn't just be slated into a business model removing widgets and inserting third graders?

William Tabb of the College and Grad Center at City University of New York (CUNY) Queens, NY writes, "Today we are often told that education must be made more efficient by being forced into the market model, moving away from the traditional concept of education as a publicly provided social good." Tabb goes on to note that three main ideas drive the neoliberal model of education: cost efficiency by commodifying the product, measurable results through standardized tests, and a focus on marketable skills. This is exactly what is outlined in No Child Left Behind, but what does it end up looking like in the classroom? Does the business model provide an approach that bears fruit?

Bill Moyers in a recent interview with different professionals in education from across the country asked how No Child Left Behind was working in the actual classroom. On all four of the broad points of the document educators found deep short comings.

ACCOUNTABILITY

On the first point of accountability educators overwhelming support accountability for schools. The question isn't should schools be responsible for their "output" but instead how can output be measured effectively? Standardized tests provide one form of information on a student's progress but do not give a whole picture. The Center on Education Policy notes that in actuality the way in which No Child Left Behind sets up the tests makes it *harder* to get good solid data on students' performances because instead of assessing the broad base of a student's skills it is a hunt and peck method for specific data that is simply not reflective of how a student learns.

TEACHING METHODS BASED ON SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

On the second point of “an emphasis on teaching methods based on scientific research” we could again ask: Who would not agree to the need for sound teaching methods? Educators say the problem comes with the methods that are endorsed: for example, teaching reading through phonics. Written into the Bill is the provision that schools receive more funding when they agree to use “scientifically proven” methods for improvement. The National Reading Panel, a group established by Congress in the late 1990s to establish the efficacy of different approaches to teaching reading, endorsed phonics as a “scientifically proven” method for teaching. This conclusion in the report is stated to have come from more than 100,000 studies of reading methods and forced schools into buying phonics materials because this is what the funding allowed them. One slight problem is that when the report from the National Reading Group is examined more closely, it was discovered they did not perform more than 100,000 studies, but, in actuality, 38. And the majority of teachers find that phonics, while a good approach, cannot be applied like a cookie cutter to every student. Phonics treats the complex illiteracy problem, which is linked to a diversity of justice issues, as if all that was needed was a new set of textbooks. But when funding is linked to one method, regardless of whether it works, teachers are forced to apply that method to get resources for the classroom.

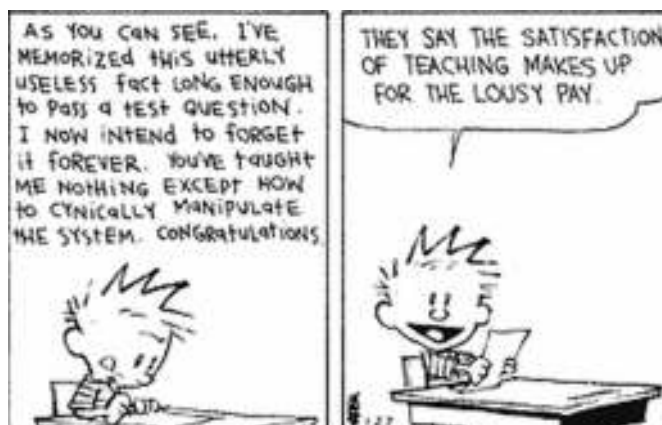
EXPANDED PARENTAL OPTIONS

Educators found the implementation of this guideline more hurtful than helpful. The notion of “expanded parental options” states that if parents are dissatisfied with their child’s education they have the right to move the child into another school and the district must support the parent in that move. This sounds good, but educators find that it turns schools from being centers of the community with community members invested in the well being of the school for all students, into a consumer market competing against other schools. This approach creates a cycle where the few “good schools” in a district quickly become overwhelmed with more students than they can handle, as the “bad” schools lose their “consumers.” In order to receive a good education, should children be made to compete instead of being guaranteed an education as a human right?

EXPANDED LOCAL CONTROL AND FLEXIBILITY

Educators feel expanded local control and flexibility would be great, but to give them control and flexibility funding cannot be tied to specific methods and testing. It is contradictory to say we grant you control and flexibility, just do it this way or no funding.

No Child Left Behind was largely based on the data of student’s test scores. This ignores huge areas that also impact education like funding, poverty, culture, learning disabilities,



special needs, family problems, language barriers and the list goes on. For educators facing a diverse list of challenges to receive a piece of legislation that tells them they have only one problem and that is test scores what do you do? Tell all the kids with other needs that right now they cannot have that problem because the market model is only allowing one variable? Local control and flexibility cannot be just words on paper, they must be realized on the ground as each school struggles with its unique population and needs.

A final anecdote from *Nation* magazine reveals the difficulty of solving the education problems of our country through a business model heavy on privatization. Only days after the 2000 election the executive of NCS Pearson, a publishing firm who crafts tests, on hearing about George Bush’s call for state testing and school by school “report” cards said, “This almost reads like our business plan!” to a ballroom full of CEOs in New York City. The National Association of State Boards of Education estimate that it will cost \$7 billion dollars to properly fund the required testing. All of that \$7 billion is up for grabs by private firms that would compete for the testing contracts. How does the profit margin of NCS Pearson connect with fourth graders reading like fourth graders and not first graders? The truth is, it doesn’t. Private firms that are “helping” get schools on track have no commitment past the sale of the product. Why should they? The accountability question does not lie with companies but with schools who do not have the power of millions of dollars to lobby for their needs. Other problems like poverty, racism, school violence and unequal funding are simply not a concern of the privatized market model. To become a concern it would help a lot if these other problems had a product and a sales plan and a CEO who might just have been a neighbor of George W. growing up. And the children that are left behind, well the market has a place for them too and we have seen it – in our prisons and minimum wage job market that is not as concerned with reading, writing, or arithmetic. □

Liz Deligio is staff for the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, La Crosse, WI at 8th Day.

Health Care Grows in Disparity Between Poor and Comfortable

BY: KATE WARD

POVERTY AND ACCESS TO CARE

Health care, like so many measures of well-being in the US, is growing in disparity between the poor and the comfortable. The availability of employer-sponsored health insurance has decreased since 2001 and has not been met with corresponding increases in public coverage such as Medicaid. As a result, in 2006, 46.5 million Americans lacked health insurance. Low-income Americans are hit the hardest by the coverage gap—it costs over \$12,000 on average to cover a family of four in 2007. For too many who can't find coverage through a job or through public aid, purchasing private insurance is an unattainable luxury.

The consequences of living without insurance are far more serious than missing the occasional doctor's visit—those without insurance routinely forgo preventative care until problems are serious enough to demand hospitalization. This cycle increases the toll on a patient's health and the ultimate cost of providing care. In a stark example, an estimated 18,000 preventable deaths occur per year due to lack of insurance.¹

In 2007, a family of four is below the federal poverty level and eligible for Medicaid with an income of less than \$20,650. An income of twice or three times the federal poverty level would still force many families to choose between groceries and medication or a co-pay—assuming they were fortunate enough to have insurance at all. Patients in our current health care system need not only insurance but also some financial freedom to receive all the care they need.

CORPORATIONS MAKE THINGS WORSE

In theory, non-profit health care corporations should help close the care gap for the uninsured. Eighty-five percent of US hospitals are non-profit and draw an estimated \$8.5 billion from our communities in the form of tax breaks.² Lawmakers believe that the value returned to the community in the form of charity care—a badly needed safety net for uninsured Americans—is far short of the amount hospitals receive in tax exemptions. Why is this?

With fewer Americans insured and able to pay for care, even non-profit hospitals compete using the aggressive tactics of big business. This includes skyrocketing executive compensation—according to *Modern Healthcare*, total cash payouts for CEOs of health systems increased by 4.9% last year to an average of \$758,400. CEOs of large health systems, with net revenues of over \$1 billion, enjoyed the largest pay hikes of all, with an average 7.9% pay increase to just under \$1.1 million.³ Health care executives reap outrageous rewards for cutting costs and increasing profits, not for removing barriers to equal care.

SIGNS OF HOPE

Americans have largely awakened to the fact that our health care system's flaws harm and shorten the lives of our sisters

and brothers. Voters' insistence on the importance of health care reform has led every presidential candidate to provide a detailed proposal. However, some candidate plans which purport to lead to universal health care coverage do not provide for expansion of public aid, a shortsighted view that will continue to leave behind the millions of Americans who fall into the gap between Medicaid coverage and private insurance.

We need to choose the leader with the right plan and keep public opinion loud and clear if we want to see all Americans have access to health care. (Compare candidate proposals at www.health08.org.)

Universal coverage alone won't stop the march of corporations through our clinics and hospitals. Large corporations aren't by definition harmful to health care consumers, but patients—especially the poor—will surely suffer if the power of aggressive health care executives grows unchecked.

UNIONIZATION: AN IMPORTANT STEP

Unionization of health care workers—ensuring caregivers have a say in decisions made in their hospitals and clinics—is one important step in redressing that balance of power. For example, employees at Resurrection Health Care, the largest Catholic health care system in Chicago, are attempting to unionize in order to improve their lives and have a voice in staffing and patient care decisions. Resurrection nurses have succeeded in drawing attention to their concerns about safe staffing in the state legislature, where they are supporting statewide ratios to ensure safer patient care. Chicago religious leaders who support the workers' efforts have called on Resurrection to follow its Catholic mission in providing safe, accessible care to the poor and under served.

As people of good will join together to make sure health care workers have a voice in their hospitals, we create a significant grassroots community stake in health care quality and concern for persons who are vulnerable.□

Kate Ward is a student in the Masters of Divinity program at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, who does research in the health care field.

NOTES:

¹ All data from Kaiser Family Foundation, www.kff.org

² Prof. John Colombo, Testimony to House Ways and Means Committee 5/26/05.

³ "Competition still driving compensation," Melanie Evans, 6/30/2007

Associates in Action

BY: KATIE VARATTA

In November of this past year, 8th Day hosted its second open house gathering with the theme, **“We get by with a little HOPE from our friends...”** This theme speaks to the belief that justice-making efforts of organizing, educating, advocating and analyzing are first and foremost communal. The more we learn about any issue of injustice the bigger and more complex the situation becomes. Hence the more we need to find friends, coalitions, and organizations to address them together.

Here at 8th Day many people contribute to the work that comes out of the Center, one of whom is Peg O’Herron, a volunteer who has made many things possible with her ongoing volunteer commitment, participation on Center committees and generous financial support. Peg, a long time volunteer with 8th Day, was first introduced to the Center because she was friends with staff member, Dolores Brooks. When asked about a favorite “8th Day” story Peg comments on a Good Friday Walk for Justice in which Dolores wanted to participate, but was using a walker at the time and could not keep up with the crowded procession. So Peg’s husband decided to drive Dolores from station to station so she was able participate. The police stopped them at first since they had to double-park on the street to get close enough to hear the prayers. As soon as the police recognized the two as members of the 8th Day community they began helping them find places to park so they could easily access the stations.

Peg contributes in innumerable ways to 8th Day’s work. She has “womanned” a table at Call to Action for 8th Day the past two years, explaining to those passing by the work of the Center. Peg has been involved with the Development Committee, where she helps staff and other community members



Peg O’Herron (left) talks with Bob Bossie and Yaa Phelps at 8th Day’s open house in 2006. Peg has greeted people at the door for the past two years at 8th Day’s open house.

strategize events and opportunities of communication to the congregations and general public. Also, she has been a member of our welcoming team at the open house for the past two years, giving warm greetings to all who come.

We invite you to become more involved in the workings of the 8th Day Center for Justice. In this issue of *Centerings* members of 8th Day’s community provide articles to reflect on and analyze local and national issues of poverty, education, trade and health care that are linked directly to structural injustices of our time. It makes sense that we seek out solutions to structures of injustice in a communal and social model. If you would like to find out more of how you can volunteer or give to the 8th Day Center please feel free to call 312.641.5151.

Become an Associate of the 8th Day Center for Justice

By making a donation to 8th Day you’ll receive *Centerings*, our quarterly magazine, urgent action bulletins, our e-zine (environment focused email alerts) and be able to use our extensive book and video libraries. And know that you are a critical piece to the work of the 8th Day Center for Justice.

Checks can be made out to 8th Day Center for Justice, or donate online at our website, <http://www.8thdaycenter.org>.

- Much Peace, 8th Day Center Staff

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DOVETALES

FRANZ JAGERSTATTER BEATIFIED

Catholic conscientious objector Franz Jagerstatter was beatified Oct. 26, 2007 in Linz, Austria. His wife Franziska, 94, was present. In June, Pope Benedict XVI declared Franz's martyrdom Aug 9, 1943 for refusing to collaborate with the Nazis. A husband and father of three, Jagerstatter refused to join the Nazi Army. His witness, fed by his reading of Scripture and the Sacraments, came before the Church recognized conscientious objection as a Catholic option. Franz's beatification clears the way for his eventual canonization.

OCCUPATION PROJECT

Last February Voices for Creative Nonviolence launched the "Occupation Project", a campaign of sustained non-violent civil disobedience aimed at ending funding for the U.S. war in and occupation of Iraq. Members of 8th Day's staff and friends of the Center have occupied both Senator Durbin's and Obama's offices asking both Senators to cease funding for the war in Iraq. To learn more about the Occupation Project please visit <http://vcnv.org/project/the-occupation-project>. We ask for your prayers for an end to the war.

SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS WATCH – NOV. 16 –19, 2007 (18TH GATHERING AT FORT BENNING, GA)

Gentle. Imagine that "gentle" is the word to describe the 25,000 (11,000 according to the police) people who assembled. The gathering was a mix of races, cultures, and ages-with definite increase of youth. It was a gentle crowd, many of whom had nonviolence training before coming as well as many who sought it out on the weekend.

Eleven persons crossed on to the Ft. Benning property to put action into their cry to close the SOA-WHINESC. Their trials are scheduled for Jan. 28th, 2008 in Columbus, GA. In addition, two young men and a young woman from GA who were arrested for challenging Columbus police on their screening the size of crosses allowed into the gathering, will

RUFINA AMAYA PRESENTE!



The puppet above was made to represent Rufina Amaya, the sole survivor of the El Mozote massacre of over 900 men, women and children in El Salvador. Later, 19 of the 26 people found responsible for the massacre were trained at the School of the Americas. She told the story of the massacre and worked for justice until her death of a heart illness earlier this year. The real Rufina Amaya pictured below.

have a day in court contesting the screening. 8th Day was represented by 10 staff members and volunteers, several Assembly representatives and members of constituent groups. Three sisters of the Christian Charity, Western Province were part of the dancing roles in the large Puppetista Pagent (see picture above). May gentleness continue: "Democracy can never be taught through the barrel of a gun." See www.soaw.org for pictures and films.



SOCIAL ANALYSIS DAY



A day of social analysis on human rights and globalization was held at 8th Day in Nov. bringing together Assembly members and staff. Pictured are (l to r) Joellen Sbrissa, CSJ, Kathy Nolan, OP, Tom Long, CSV, and Brian McLaughlin, SVD.

{ 28th ANNUAL }

Good Friday Walk for Justice



March 21st 2008, 12 – 3:00 pm

Takes place in downtown Chicago,
and is sponsored by the 8th Day Center for Justice.

For more information visit http://www.8thdaycenter.org/action/c_projects.html, or call 312.641.5151.

*Call your local Social Action office to see if a
Good Friday Walk is taking place in your city.*

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Divine Word Missionaries, North America
Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration
Priests of the Sacred Heart
Sisters of Charity, BVM
Sisters of Providence, St. Mary-of-the-Woods, IN
Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis

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Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa, WI
Dominican Sisters of Springfield, IL
Franciscan Sisters, Rochester, MN
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