



The United Church of Canada General Council

GC30 The Church and the Economic Crisis (1984E116)

True Document Date

August 16, 1984

WHEREAS the world church has been called to develop Christian, social and political ethics based on the vision of a "just, participatory and sustainable" society as the foundation of a wise stewardship of all the resources with which we have been blessed by God; and

WHEREAS the United Church at its 29th General Council adopted policies which apply this vision to energy and environmental questions; and

WHEREAS the Division of Mission in Canada has encouraged the church to consider the vision of the kingdom, announced in the ministry of Jesus, and realized in just and right relations among humankind; and

WHEREAS the state of the present Canadian and world economy represents a state of moral crisis, in which capital, rather than labour, property rather than people, are asserted as the dominant principle of economic and social life, and inequality and injustice increase rather than get reduced; and

WHEREAS, as the United Church has repeatedly pointed out in study documents, our economic predicament in Canada is significantly due to our dependency on global markets dominated by large, often foreign-controlled corporations; and

WHEREAS in a global, economic crisis, the needs of the poorest must be put ahead of the priorities of a market dominated by the power of the rich; and

WHEREAS the income share of the bottom 20 per cent of Canadians is only 4.1 per cent and that of the top 20 per cent is 42.5 per cent of the total (1980 figures Statistics Canada), and the share of the bottom 20 per cent actually dropped from 4.4 per cent (1951) to 4.1 per cent (1980); and

WHEREAS the social assistance allowances in all provinces are below the Statistics Canada poverty line, in some areas have fallen behind cost of living increases by as much as 25 per cent, and in many cases are not indexed; and

WHEREAS the present economic crisis has caused massive layoffs, large numbers of farm and business bankruptcies, more than 11 per cent of our labour force unemployed, and a cost to our economy from unemployment alone of a minimum of \$50 billion (estimate for 1982, Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto); and

WHEREAS there flows from prolonged unemployment extreme human hardship, despair and degradation, with severe consequences of increased crime, alcohol and drug abuse, family break-down, loss of self-worth, depression and even suicide; and

WHEREAS many provincial governments have taken action which restricts universal accessibility to fundamental social services, and have cut back staff, funding and services in a wide variety of socially supportive projects and programs; and

WHEREAS many governments in Canada have legislated cutbacks, enforced wage settlements and back to work laws, and have increasingly moved to hire non-unionized, temporary contract workers, thus putting at risk the basic right of workers to participate in trade unions and to free collective bargaining; and

WHEREAS, despite the fact that war/defence industries offer less employment opportunities per dollar invested than comparable civilian production, the Canadian government is increasing defense spending at a rate of 10 to 18 per cent per year; and

WHEREAS the United Church has affirmed its support of a guaranteed annual adequate income as a foundation for fundamental dignity and security for each Canadian; and

WHEREAS full employment in Canada is the primary single road toward social equity and well-being for Canadians; and

WHEREAS a significant need for economically-accessible housing remains in Canada, and housing ranks high as a generator of employment in a variety of industries and regions; and

WHEREAS the United Church at its 29th General Council called for policies and funds to develop new energy resources with a major shift toward soft energy options, including conservation, and such a policy would provide many more jobs than current policies which emphasize mega-projects and nuclear development; and

WHEREAS fundamental aspects of our social system, including income support for the poor, public participation in investment decisions, trade union rights and universally accessible social services are under vociferous attack from those who put the rights and liberties of property above those of people; and

WHEREAS the church has already demonstrated an ability and potential to act on its own right or in coalitions for social and economic justice and on behalf of the poor and those who seek to organize themselves for economic justice:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

1. THAT the 30th General Council affirm:
 - a. AS a proper framework for Christian reflection and action on the economy, the priority of justice, participation and sustainability as proclaimed by the World Council of Churches;
 - b. THAT the kingdom of God manifests itself in our history, through the pursuit of justice and right relations among people;
 - c. THAT the way our society treats the poor and oppressed is, for us, a test of God's redeeming presence and of human justice, and that therefore, the poor must have priority;
 - d. OUR dedication to working for social and economic relationships in Canada and the world in which the test of success is justice;

- e. THAT the needs of the poor have priority over the wants of the rich, the freedom of the dominated must have priority over the liberty of the powerful, and that the participation of the marginalized must take priority over the preservation of an order that excludes them;
 - f. THE words of the Report on the Environment of the 27th General Council that "in order to love each other, we have to love the garden; in order to love the garden, we have to love each other;"
 - g. THAT peace is the fruit of love in action, and that we seek a human economy in which that peace is its objective;
 - h. THAT the above series of affirmations be commended to the church as a guide for its own life and the life of its members;
 - i. THAT as responsible members of the Canadian society and of The United Church of Canada, we confess our greed, our own quest for affluence, and our complicity in the economic system which causes severe injustice and inequity.
2. THAT the 30th General Council, in immediate action regarding the economic crisis:
- A. EXPRESS its support for:
 - i. the increase of minimum social assistance rates to ensure that support is:
 - a. no lower than the Statistics Canada poverty line,
 - b. indexed to the cost of living
 - ii. the introduction of a guaranteed adequate annual income for Canadians;
 - iii. a national program for full employment in Canada, through:
 - a. onversion of war/defence industries to civilian production in such fields as transportation and energy equipment,
 - b. development of soft-path energy alternatives, including increased support for community conservation and development of renewable fuel resources,
 - c. a national program to construct energy-efficient housing accessible to low- and medium-income groups,
 - d. recovery of tax write-offs and allowances (over \$30 billion annually) for funding of long-term employment in such areas as reforestation, restoration of housing, ecology, transportation, child care, care of the elderly, culture, recreation and community services,

- e. expansion of processing, manufacturing and service industries, to reduce dependency on the export of raw resources,
 - f. new models of ownership and control including private, government, joint venture, employee and community owned, supported where necessary with public funds and with the express purpose of providing meaningful employment;
- iv. the reform of the income tax system to eliminate tax avoidance, restoration of higher rates of taxation on high incomes, and placing a greater share of the tax load on corporations;
 - v. the reduction of interest rates to levels close to the rate of inflation;
 - vi. more effective guarantees from corporations against sudden closures and shut-downs and assistance in transition for communities thus affected.

B. CONVEY, through the Secretary of General Council, its support of these policies, to the federal and provincial governments, and opposition parties, and request the conferences and divisions to undertake appropriate and persistent follow-up action.

3. THAT the 30th General Council approve as guidelines for the church in continuing action on the economy:

A. SUPPORT of policies which:

- i. place the needs for employment and well-being of people and sustainability of communities ahead of the free movement of capital;
- ii. move society in the direction of greater equality and increased security of income for the poor;
- iii. are environmentally sound, and account for costs and impacts to the environment in calculating their feasibility and worth, enable governments to control the rate of use of non-renewable natural resources, and sustain the rate of production of renewable resources;
- iv. emphasize Canadian self-reliance and reduce our dependence, while encouraging self-reliance and development abroad;
- v. provide equal compensation for work of equal value;
- vi. place priority on reducing unemployment, and not only on reducing inflation, through federal monetary and federal and provincial fiscal means;
- vii. convert research and production for war/defence into research and production for peace;

- viii. expedite methods of consultation, mediation and arbitration between employees and employers in seeking to avoid strike action in the settlement of disputes;
- ix. increase public planning and democratic participation in investment decisions, ownership and control in Canada.

B. OPPOSING policies which:

- i. penalize the poor and recipients of social programs;
- ii. endanger or limit universal free access to fundamental social programs including health care, education, legal services;
- iii. attack or reduce participation in trade unions and free collective bargaining;
- iv. reduce or weaken public participation in social policy, economic development or environmental control;
- v. weaken the defences of the environment, postponing or reducing the priority of conservation and soft-path energy development.

4. THAT the 30th General Council request the conferences and the church, with the support of the Division of Mission in Canada, to:

A. INITIATE a study, discussion and dialogue about the economic crisis and economic alternatives, in Church and community, in which:

- i. those most seriously affected are sought out and engaged;
- ii. policies and structures which cause or increase poverty, unemployment and economic injustice can be identified and analyzed;
- iii. fundamental biblical imperatives of love and justice be explored, and signs of the kingdom sought;
- iv. emerging aspects of the crisis can be more fully understood, for example:
 - changing understandings of work;
 - new technology as threat and promise;
 - the threat of militarization and alternatives;
- v. lines of action and involvement can be developed.

B. SPEAK OUT about the crisis, and challenge policies and structures from a faith perspective.

C. DEVELOP their ministry with those who suffer the consequences of economic hardship:

- i. through cooperative projects with other denominations and agencies;

- ii. through counselling and referral, job-listing in congregations and hospitality;
 - iii. through free meeting rooms and in-kind support to self-help and advocacy organizations;
 - iv. through cooperation in coalitions for policy change, public education and building alternatives.
- D. SEEK opportunities for joint study and action with other denomination and community organizations, in coalition to:
- i. clarify community and societal problems;
 - ii. develop alternative policies and projects;
 - iii. act, through political pressure, community development and network-building to create a broader base of public support for social justice.
- E. CONSIDER the commitment of increased priority to staff time at the conference and presbytery levels to address this urgent issue.
5. THAT the 30th General Council authorize and encourage the Division of Mission in Canada to carry out additional research and study, particularly examining the implication of:
- a. rapidly changing technology;
 - b. changing concepts of the meaning of "work";
 - c. remuneration for a variety of kinds of "work", such as home-making and child rearing;
 - d. challenging traditional economic theories and assumptions which are presently accepted as unchangeable and recognize that "political and public will" are key to achieving new economic goals, and that the church has a key role in creating effective "public will;"
 - e. changes for the middle class, with particular reference to predominantly middle class institutions, such as The United Church of Canada.

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