

Equitable Wages: The role of Government and Morality

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness...”¹ This is part of the Declaration of Independence that our forefathers bled and sweat to write to make our lives better. This phrase is widely known by American citizens, people who believe in freedom, people who believe in a better way of life and people who have faith in their fellow humans. It is taught in our schools, written on our buildings and held close to our hearts as Americans. This phrase is so important because it gives us hope that we will always have the opportunity and “unalienable” right to better our lives.

Political philosopher, John Locke, one of the inspirations for the framers of the Declaration of Independence, wrote about natural rights and freedom. Locke’s theories and ideas are taught in high schools, colleges and universities all over world and are considered highly logical by philosophical scholars. Not only was Locke quoted talking about natural rights and freedom, he also discussed his ideas of wealth and labor. Locke stated, “All wealth is the product of Labor.” These are very strong words coming from a teacher of wisdom whose theories were used in writing the Declaration of Independence.

Government or the concept of the “State” is around to protect its’ citizens and the people within its borders. Our Country is the greatest and most powerful country on Earth. We possess superior intellectual strength, military power and economical dominance; yet we are one of the youngest countries in the World. We have all that we have because of our right to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness; however, these rights are being jeopardized by people who seem to not understand their importance.

Since the dawn of man and the introduction of business, people all over this country have been fighting for a decent and fair wage. They have bled and sweat just like our forefathers did because they too believe in our unalienable rights to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness; however, there are people in our community of fellow humans, that for some reason, that could only be derived from greed, want to take our right to Life, Liberty and pursuit of Happiness away from working men and women. The essence that keeps working men and women believing that they have the right to freedom, the right to improve their lives and the right to live happily is the right to make a fair wage for a fair days work.

An equitable wage which is commonly referred to as “prevailing wage” gives society a way to strengthen its role to better the common good. It gives society the opportunity to stimulate the economy, improve the tax base and support a family.

“Prevailing wage laws require that construction workers on public projects be paid the wages and benefits that are found by the Department of Labor to be ‘prevailing’ for similar work in or near the locality in which the construction project is to be performed.”² These fair wages earned by hard working men and women allow them to strive to make a better life for themselves and their families.

These wages are now under attack from the very same people who are supposed to be protecting our way of life, protecting our liberty and our pursuit of Happiness. These equitable wages give families the “unalienable” rights that our forefathers passed on to us, generation by generation, giving us the opportunity to succeed and live in Happiness; however, our government that is allegedly protecting us is taking our right to happiness away.

Not only did our forefathers take into consideration our rights in developing this great country, spiritual leaders have also taken a stand on rights. One very prominent leader in the Christian/Catholic Religion, who is also a humanitarian, a philosopher, a peacekeeper, a teacher, a politician, and a mentor to all, is Pope John Paul II. As an advocate for peace and freedom, Pope John Paul II took it upon himself, a man of great influence, to protect and preach about the importance of workers rights.

On May 1, 1991, Pope John Paul II offered a “rereading” of Pope Leo’s encyclical by contributing his own beliefs in keeping with Pope Leo’s teachings. The *Centesimus Annus*, titled, “Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the Hundredth Anniversary of the Refum Novarum” was given at Saint Peter’s in Rome and detailed many of Pope John Paul II’s beliefs in referring to Pope Leo’s teachings.³

Pope John Paul II talked about many things; however there was a large emphasis on human rights. One aspect of human rights that Pope John Paul II discussed was the right to a “just wage”. It states:

“The Pope immediately adds another right which the worker has as a person. This is the right to a ‘just wage’, which cannot be left ‘free consent of the parties, so that the employer, having paid what was agreed upon, has done his part and seemingly is not called upon to do anything beyond.’ [23] It was said at the time that the State does not have the power to intervene in the terms of these contracts, expect to ensure the fulfillment of what had been explicitly agreed upon. This concept of relations between employers and employees is purely pragmatic and is inspired by a personal and necessary reality. For if work as something personal belongs to the sphere of the individual’s free use of his own abilities and energy, as something necessary, it is governed by the grave obligation of every individual to ensure ‘the preservation of life.’ ‘It necessarily follows’, the Pope concludes, ‘that every individual has a natural right to procure what is required to live; and the poor can procure that in no other way than by what they can earn through their work.’” [24]⁴

“A workman’s wage should be sufficient to enable him to support himself, his wife and his children. ‘If through necessity or fear of a worse evil the workman accepts harder conditions because an employer or contractor will afford no better, he is made the victim of force and injustice.’” [25]³

The writings and teachings of Pope John Paul II are studied by men and women all over the world that belong to various religions; however, no matter what your religion is, everyone understands the wisdom, philosophy and love for humanity that Pope John Paul II possessed and that is why his teaching are so authoritative.

The concept of equitable wages implies the idea of equality, justice and morality. Equitable wages is not just a Union issue or an individual issue, it goes far beyond that. It is what is prosperous for the advancement of the common good of society. It is what our forefathers fought for, what our preachers preach, what our teachers teach and what

keeps the people believing in their right to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. We, as a people, are focused on that small yet explicit phrase in the Declaration of Independence that so many know as the hope of nation to always have the ability to better itself. We take what we learn from our forefathers and our spiritual leaders and try to make it part of our everyday lives because we understand, that is what they labored for.

Deuteronomy 24:14-16

“You shall not defraud a poor and needy hired servant, whether he is one of your own countrymen or one of the aliens who live in your communities. You shall pay him each day’s wages before sundown on the day itself, since he is poor and looks forward to them. Otherwise he will cry to the Lord against you, and you will be held guilty.”⁴

Works Cited

¹ Jefferson, Thomas, et al. *United States Declaration of Independence*.

² Dr. Michael Kelsay, Dr. L. Randall Wray, Kelly D. Pinkham. “*The Adverse Economic Impact from Repeal of the Prevailing Wage Law in Missouri*”. The Department of Economics, University of Missouri, Kansas City. January, 2004

³ Pope John Paul II. “*Centesimus Annus*”. May 1, 1991.
<http://www.catholic.net/rcc/documents/JohnPaulIII/centesimuc.html>

⁴ New American Bible. St. Joseph Edition. Deuteronomy 24:14-16.