



THE JUBILEE YEAR

Pastoral Letter from Archbishop Samuel E. Carter, S.J.

1. The poor, the majority of our people, are getting poorer. Prices of food, medicines and housing are increasing rapidly. While wages have increased, the increase for most people has been much less than the increase in prices, leaving them less well-off. At the same time, social services are deteriorating rapidly - our health care system unequipped to provide decent service, our educational system falling below previously attained standards. More and more people are unable to afford basic necessities.

2. As Christians, we have a responsibility to ask "Why is this so?" "Is it God's will that those already poor should face more hardship?" "Is it God's will that more and more people should not be able to afford basic foodstuffs, necessary medicines, decent housing?" "Is it God's will that an increasing number of children should be unable to read and write because of the deteriorating condition of our schools?"

JUBILEE YEAR

3. No reading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ could allow one to answer yes to these questions. Jesus came not to lay burdens on people, but "to set the downtrodden free" (Luke 4:18). The entire history of salvation proclaims God's desire to free the poor from every form of enslavement. Following the emancipation of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt, Hebrew Law established the Jubilee Year (every fiftieth year) to provide for the redistribution of wealth within Israel. As a concrete way to respond to Divine Will, debts were to be cancelled, persons released from pledges and liberated from slavery (Leviticus 25; Deuteronomy 15). This was not seen as a matter of charity, but rather was a way of ensuring that no one was continuously denied the means to earn a decent living. Jesus describes his own mission, "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me...to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour. (Luke 4:18). The Lord's "year of favour" is a reference to the Jubilee Year. The fact that the foreign debt has become unpayable for many countries, reducing them to continuous bondage, suggests that we examine anew some form of Jubilee Year.

4. This process of emancipation from every form of slavery did not stop with Biblical times. In our own country, our earliest heroes,

Sam Sharpe and Nanny led that struggle for emancipation from slavery. Paul Bogle and George William Gordon gave their lives in defence of those ideals. Marcus Garvey proclaimed the dignity and rights of Black People and Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley became the leaders of the Independence Movement.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

5. Our history of emancipation and independence sought to bring liberty, freedom, dignity and equal opportunity for all - values that must be present in the living of the Gospel of Jesus. But sadly, in our own times, are we not witnessing an erosion of the freedom for which our ancestors struggled, new forms of economic and political servitude, a re-enslavement through the imposition of grinding poverty on ever larger segments of the population? Must we not admit that the majority of our people, in being forced to live without the basic necessities of life, are failing to achieve the freedom and dignity for which Jesus died, for which our heroes gave their energies and some their lives?

6. Why? Why is this so? Must it be so? If we are to be faithful to the God of love and liberty, if we are to be faithful to Jesus, who gave his life for the salvation, redemption, emancipation and liberation of His people, must not the suffering of so many in our midst move our hearts to compassion and solidarity?



Can we be unmoved to respond? Do we not have some obligation to apply our God-given intelligence to understand these problems and to find solutions that would enable the poor to meet their needs more effectively? Is our faith in the love of Jesus strong enough to trust that just solutions are possible? Would Jesus ask less of us than that we apply all of our resources to responding to such pressing human needs in a way that genuinely makes a difference?

7. 1991 marks the 100 anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical "On The Condition Of The Worker" (Rerum Novarum). It also marks the 30th anniversary of Pope John XXIII's encyclical "Christianity and Social Progress" (Mater et Magistra), which sought to "set forth the Church's teaching regarding the new and serious problems of our day," providing a contemporary foundation for seeing modern social problems in the light of faith. This thrust was continued by the Roman Catholic Bishops of the Caribbean in their 1977 pastoral letter, "Justice and Peace in a New Caribbean" and

the more recent encyclical letters of Pope John Paul II "On Human Work" and "Concern For The Social Order".

OPTION FOR THE POOR

8. The purpose of this Pastoral Letter is to bring our Christian tradition to bear on our understanding of the current economic crisis facing our country. Prevailing economic theories are not a matter of Church teaching, but rather an attempt to express the best of current knowledge of economists, social scientists, business and labour leaders, who have attempted to understand these problems. If there is preference for the views of some rather than others, it is to listen first to those who consider these matters from the point of view of the poor. This preferential option for the poor, which is a principle of the social teaching of our Church, is not meant to exclude the non-poor, but rather is a call to all people to be in "special solidarity with the humble and weak,



the suffering and weeping, humiliated and left on the fringes of life and society, in order to help them realize ever more fully their own dignity as human persons and children of God." (1)

THE COST OF DEBT

9. A major cause of the current economic hardship that is being increasingly imposed on our people is the burden of our foreign debt. Jamaica owes foreign banks and governments US \$ 4.3 billion. If averaged out per person, Jamaica is one of the most heavily indebted countries in the world. In 1988 US \$702 million was paid out to service this debt. (2) We will still have to service the debt next year, and the next, without any end in sight. Because so much of our resources go to debt servicing, there is insufficient money for the importation of food, petrol, machinery, vehicles, raw materials for manufacturing - things that we must import, goods necessary for the survival of our people and the productive development of our economy. Because government must come up with money to pay the interest on the debt, it is being forced to cut back on the amount it spends on health care, education of our children, support of the elderly and infirm, housing, roads - services that society needs to remain healthy, productive and capable of development. The development potential of the country is being undermined by the service payments on the debt.

THE ORIGIN OF THE DEBT

10. There are many questions surrounding the debt. Who accumulated the debt? To whom is it owed? On whom does the greatest burden fall? Jamaica's foreign debt prior to the 1970's was small and easily manageable - in 1970 debt service took only 3% of our foreign exchange earnings. (3) In the 1970's the government

began to borrow to cover the increasing cost of imported goods, and in particular oil. The borrowing was seen to be a short term way of coping with inflation and huge oil price increases. Almost every Third World non-oil producing country borrowed, in the beginning mostly from commercial banks, who in turn wanted to loan the money they were receiving from the the oil producing countries. But oil prices didn't go down and the prices of other imported goods increased, far outstripping any increase in the prices paid to Jamaica for her products. It became necessary to borrow more money to pay the interest on the money already borrowed. By 1980 Jamaica had borrowed US \$1.9 billion. By 1989 the debt was US \$4.3 billion.

IMPACT OF DEBT

11. In 1988 debt service payments took 40% of Jamaica's foreign exchange earnings. That means that after debt service payments, only 60 cents of every dollar of foreign exchange is left to purchase oil, food, materials for manufacture, and other necessary imports. (4) In this stranglehold of debt, the needs of the lending agencies and banks are given priority over the needs of the people. The servicing of debt takes priority over the feeding of the hungry, the clothing of the naked, the healing of the sick, the care of the widow and the orphan.

12. To whom is the debt owed? At the present time, approximately 46% [US \$2 billion] of the debt is owed to governments of other countries, including the governments of the United States, Britain, Germany, and Holland. Almost 40% [US \$ 1.7 billion] of the debt is owed to banks owned or controlled by these governments, most notably the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. 14% [US \$600 million] is owed to private commercial banks. (5) In summary, 86% of Jamaica's for-

eign debt (that is US \$3.7 billion) is owed to foreign governments or to institutions that they own or control.

WHO PAYS THE DEBT?

13. Who bears the brunt of paying the debt? While the burden of debt payments impacts on all, it is the poor who are most affected by the servicing of the debt. This happens in a number of ways:

WAGE CONTROL

[1] The governments of the industrialized countries, through the IMF, tell the government of Jamaica that it must devalue our dollar in order for our exports to become more competitive. However, this also means that imported goods cost more - leading to price increases for imported food (rice, flour, cornmeal), petrol, machinery and equipment. At the same time, the IMF and the banks say that wages must be controlled, now at 12 1/2 per cent, much less than the increase in prices. With food prices higher and wages controlled, the poor will eat less, so that the foreign exchange can be saved to pay interest on the foreign debt. The same would apply to clothing, transportation, housing - anything whose price is affected by devaluation. Even the price of water increases, because of the increase price of pipe, pumps, gasoline and other imported equipment used in its supply. With wages controlled, devaluation forces people to consume less of even basic necessities, including food, clothing and shelter. While price increases affect all, both rich and poor, the rich have sufficient income so that they need not do without basic necessities. But, as the prices increase, the poor increasingly have to do without basic necessities.

HEALTH CARE

[2] The poor also suffer in the cutbacks in expenditure on health, education and social services. Visits to most hospitals and clinics, not to mention the recent typhoid outbreaks, attest to the serious deterioration in health care. In 1971, there was one doctor in the public sector for every 2,678 persons; in 1980, the situation had deteriorated to one doctor for every 3,035 persons; and by 1988 there was one doctor for every 5,240 persons. In 1975 there was one nurse for 540 persons; by 1980, one for 646 persons; and by 1985, one nurse for every 1,172 persons. Since 1979 there has been an almost uninterrupted decline in the number of beds in the public hospital system, from 6,350 in 1979 to 5,463 in 1987. Public health facilities frequently lack the most basic supplies and many are poorly staffed. (6)

The price of certain basic medicines has just increased dramatically. The Medical Association of Jamaica says this will certainly lead to death for some of those whose lives are dependent on regular medication. Payment of interest on foreign debt has become more important than the lives of the poor.

EDUCATION

[3] The effect of debt service payments on the educational system is as severe. Almost daily our newspapers tell us of the deplorable conditions of one school or another, in every part of the country. Expenditure per student

WHY DO YOU ENCOURAGE US DEVELOPING COUNTRIES TO EXPORT FOOD WHILE WE, THE POOR STARVE?



EFFICIENCY! JUST THINK OF THE WORLD AS A GIANT GLOBAL SUPER MARKET! THE FOREIGN...



MULTATIONALS ARE PRODUCERS OF THE GOODS, THE FOREIGN COUNTRIES ITS CONSUMERS!!



BUT WHAT ABOUT WE THE POOR HERE WHAT ARE WE IN THE GLOBAL SUPER MARKET?



YOU KNOW THE PEOPLE WHO CARRY GROCERIES FROM THE STORE TO THE PEOPLES CARS?...



declined from US\$ 119.3 in 1980 to US \$97 in 1987. This compares with US \$603 in Barbados and US \$579 in Trinidad and Tobago. (7) The level of illiteracy among the young is alarming. Functional illiteracy in grade 6 in 1986 was 30 per cent for male and 12 per cent for female pupils. In rural all-age schools it was 58 per cent for males and 34 per cent for females. (8)

An indication of the consequence of these cutbacks is the dramatic decline in the number of passes in GCE 'O' Level and CXC examinations between 1975 and 1988. Table I makes the point clear. Pass rates in English Language at GCE declined from 58.8% in 1975 to the low 30's in recent years. For Mathematics the pass rate fell steadily from 36.7% in 1975 to 9.9% in 1987, with a marginal recovery to 13% in 1988. (9)

An analysis of CXC exam results shows a



Now let's see you get up and move.

similar trend. Whereas in 1981 the performance of Jamaican students was among the best in the region, by 1988 it was among the worst. For example, in 1981, 41% of Jamaican results in English Language were scored in the top two grades, compared with 31% in Trinidad; 37% in St. Vincent; and 21% in Grenada. Only Barbados did substantially better with 52%. By 1988, Jamaica's performance was an abysmal 2% - the worst in the region, excepting only Guyana (11%) and Grenada (28%). In Mathematics, Jamaica scored 29% in 1988, compared to Barbados' 49%. No other country, with the exception of Guyana (17%) did as poorly as Jamaica. (6) Low teacher salaries are driving competent teachers out of the profession, so that even lower achievement may well be expected in the future.

Is it right that we sacrifice the education of our young people in order to service debt? Is it right to deny to them and Jamaica the development of their God-given talents? Is it right that the insatiable appetite of the North for wealth should demand this transfer of wealth, even to the price of undermining the future development potential of our youth and of our country? Studies by the very institutions that are demanding this sacrifice of our young people's education for the sake of servicing debt tell us that no country can develop without

sound primary school education and basic literacy. (6) Once more, it is the poor who depend on the primary schools; the better off can afford to send their children to preparatory schools.

AGRICULTURE

(4) The adjustment policies imposed by the IMF, World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank have seriously affected the agricultural sector, and in particular small farmers. Restrictions on imported food had to be removed to allow increased access for foreign foods, even to allowing the importation of "American" apples. Imported onions appear in Jamaican markets while local producers of onions cannot even recover their costs at the prices which prevail in the glutted market. (11) In the negotiations for the Agricultural Sector Adjustment Loan of 1990, both the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank required the raising of interest rates on loans made to small farmers through the Agricultural Credit Bank. (12) While the cost of fuel, fertilizer, seed, tools and other agricultural inputs has increased sharply, the prices paid to farmers for traditional crops such as banana, citrus, cocoa, and root crops has increased little.

Table 1 (6)

	RATE OF PASSES IN GCE "O" LEVEL EXAMS					
	1975	1978	1981	1984	1987	
English Language	58.8	48.5	41.1	32.1	35.0	34.8
English Literature	42.3	38.9	29.8	24.8	23.8	28.1
Mathematics	36.7	29.3	23.5	12.5	9.9	13.0
Chemistry	46.7	45.0	49.8	47.6	44.4	43.3
Physics	47.8	50.6	37.5	43.8	32.6	33.3
Biology	40.7	30.9	31.9	25.5	17.5	31.4

FOOD PRICES

(5) One of the most direct means of exploitation of the poor is the increase in the cost of food. Table II gives a comparison between the cost of feeding a family of five for one week and the minimum wage. In 1979, the minimum wage of \$26. was slightly more than the cost of weekly food for a family. By 1989, the minimum wage of \$84. came nowhere near the \$207.04 cost of the same package of food items. While in 1979 the minimum wage of one person would pay the food bill for basic necessities, in 1989 it would take two and one-half persons salaries to buy the same food. Coupled with unemployment and the decrease in social services, the poor are seeing their standard of living drop to an inhuman level.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

14. What logic or reasoning would make us believe that large numbers of our people should go hungry so that interest be paid to the lending agencies and governments in the richest countries in the world? Are we accepting the burden of the debt, even though it makes no sense, only because we are being forced to? Are there not solutions to this problem of debt that are more humane, more just, more Christian?

15. The burden of the foreign debt must not fall disproportionately on the shoulders of the poor. Without ignoring the validity of our contractual obligations, no reading of Scripture would oblige hungry people to starve themselves or their children simply to honour contractual obligations to repay rich institutions in rich countries. The primary obligation for the solution to the debt crisis lies with those who have more than what they need, not with the poor. It is this fundamental principle which should influence negotiations between poor countries and international financial institutions and governments in the choice of policies adopted for economic adjustment. Where debt-servicing is denying the poor their livelihood, as is the case in Jamaica today, a moratorium on debt service payments, or limiting them to levels that do not jeopardise the poor, would be morally responsible. Poor countries should not be made to impose conditions that shift the burden of the debt to the poor, either by decreasing government expenditure on health, education and welfare, or deregulating food prices. Steps should be taken to strengthen the efforts of debtor countries to formulate solutions that are less unfavourable to the poor.

16. We have a moral obligation to call upon our political, business and labour leaders to make economic decisions so that first priority is given to meeting the basic needs of the vast majority of our people for food, employment, housing, education and health care. While our Christian faith demands that we give priority to what will enhance the basic dignity of each person, not all accept this as the top priority. Too often profit is put before people, greed before sharing, providing luxury for the few before allowing for the basic needs of the majority. But that is not the way it has to be, not the way God wants it to be, not a solution inspired by the teachings of Jesus.

17. While it is obvious that there is no quick-fix solution to what is a complex problem, there are things that can be done, steps that can

MR. POLITICIAN, WHY DO 250,000 CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD GO BLIND EVERY YEAR...



WHEN OUR GOV'TS COULD PREVENT IT BY GIVING EACH CHILD JUST 15¢ WORTH OF VITAMIN 'A' A MONTH?



BECAUSE WE FEEL THAT OUR INVESTING IN POOR CHILDREN RIGHT NOW IS LESS IMPORTANT...



THAN OUR INVESTING IN OUR MILITARY, OUR BUREAUCRACY OR OUR INDUSTRY!!



AND I THOUGHT I WAS BLIND...



Table II: FOOD COSTS AND MINIMUM WAGE 1979-89

Period	Cost of Feeding Family of Five for 1 week J\$	Minimum Wage J\$	% of cost
June, 1979	24.27	26.00	107.1
September, 1983	65.31	30.00	45.9
December, 1983	77.00	30.00	38.0
August, 1984	110.46	40.00	36.2
July, 1985	128.43	52.00	40.5
September, 1986	148.72	52.00	35.0
June, 1987	160.49	52.00	32.4
December, 1987	165.60	52.00	31.4
March, 1988	141.73	52.00	36.7
June, 1988	142.98	72.00	50.4
September, 1988	146.98	72.00	49.0
December, 1988	160.03	72.00	45.0
March, 1989	151.87	84.00	55.3
June, 1989	165.88	84.00	50.6
September, 1989	173.30	84.00	48.5
December, 1989	207.04	84.00	40.6

SOURCE: Nutrition Department, Ministry of Health.



be taken, a process begun that can bring about change.

IMPORT LESS

[1] We must learn to be more self-reliant, less dependent on imports, especially with respect to food and drink, clothing and the many other things that are now imported but which we could produce for ourselves. Each one of us must ask ourselves how much of what we consume is imported. Could we not substitute what is locally produced? Must our shopping centres continue to stock so many imported goods? Are we so attached to imported food that we are willing to sacrifice the malnutrition of large numbers of our children? Are we so attached to imported clothes and shoes that we would let that undermine our educational system and the future development of our young people? Are we more committed to the latest fashions from Paris, Milan and New York, brought in through Miami, Panama and Curacao, than to the health and care of our elderly who depend on our public health system?

EXPORT MORE

[2] We must increase what we export and develop new products for export. We have developed the business skills to import and sell. We are master higglers, ingenious, effective and profitable. Can we not apply those same skills to market our own products locally, and to produce for export? If we can sell so effectively to ourselves (with our meagre resources) why should it be so much more difficult for us to sell to others? Can government not remove some of the bureaucratic red tape now required to export?

REDUCE DEBT

[3] A significant amount of the debt should be written off and forgiven by the creditor governments and banks. The governments of the creditor countries should assume greater responsibility for the reduction of the debt. If it was our governments that borrowed, they did so largely to cope with the economic conditions created in and by the rich countries that lent the money. Foreign creditors increased interest rates, without our consent. Their producers increased the prices of what we import from them by much more than what they paid for our exports. These two factors alone, increased interest rates and decreased benefits from trade (both factors entirely outside our

control), could account for more than half the present level of debt.⁽¹³⁾ The systematic accumulation of debt was in large part due to factors beyond the control of Jamaica and other Third World governments. It was United States Government monetary policy that led to huge increases in interest rates in the early 1980's, and United States Government deficits that have attracted the large transfer of financial resources from South to North. Why should the price for mismanagement of the United States economy be borne by the poor of other countries? Is it fair that the poor countries continuously lose ground when they trade with the rich countries?

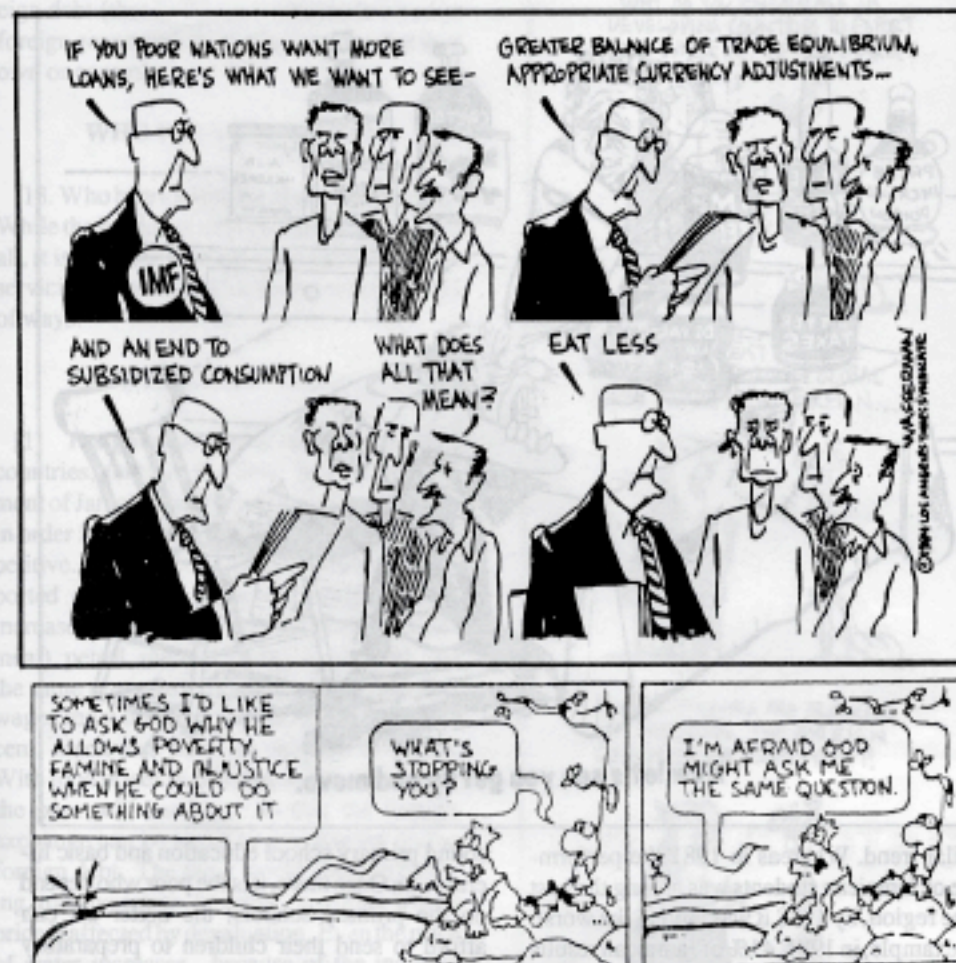
There are precedents for the writing off of debts by governments of the industrialized countries. Following the Second World War Germany's debt was largely written off. Over the past twenty years the government of the United States took financial responsibility for the bail-out of American corporations for a total of US \$276.5 billion, in order to protect the jobs, investments and economy of her own people.⁽¹⁴⁾ In the past two years the governments of France and Canada wrote off debts owed by the heavily indebted sub-Saharan African countries, and last year Canada wrote off debt owed by various countries in the English-speaking Caribbean. It can be done. The question is whether or not there is the will to do it.

The introduction in the United States of the Brady Plan for debt reduction is a welcome first step in acknowledging the responsibility of governments of the industrialized countries. But, as is pointed out by the United Nations Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean, it is insufficiently funded to be in any way effective.⁽¹⁵⁾

[4] Jamaica is not alone in facing the problem of foreign debt. Almost every country in the Caribbean, Central and South America, Africa and many in Asia are similarly burdened. Is it not the time for international cooperation? Is it not time for us to unite as Christians, as people of good will of all religious beliefs, as one people who care about our neighbour? Can we rise above the differences of class, race, and creed, to build the truly human and Christian community in which no one is robbed of dignity?

NATIONAL CONSENSUS

17. In those countries where positive steps have been taken, it is clear that for solutions to be found, there must be a broadly based national consensus. There must be common understanding and purpose by people of all sectors of society. There can be little doubt that the forces of exploitation and greed obviously know how to cooperate. Do we? In this crisis which so adversely affects the majority of our people, can we muster the resolve to work together? Can we come together, rich and poor, business and labour, merchants, higglers and farmers? Can we unite to claim the emancipation and independence so courageously struggled for by our ancestors? Do we have the desire to build the Kingdom of justice and peace for which Jesus gave his life? Do we truly believe that out of many we can be one people, serve one another, care for one another? Is our faith in the love of Jesus strong enough for us to believe that, touched by His love, we and the world in which we live can become forgiving, fair, just and loving?



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