



Movement of Christian Workers

REVIEW

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When does the waiting end?



Thought for the day, radio 4, on Saturday 20th April by Rev Dr Rob Marshall spoke about Holy Saturday being a waiting day. He referred to the fact that most of our lives are Holy Saturdays as we are waiting for something. This holds resonance with an article by

Nathalie Marytsch a Columban lay missionary based at Fatima House in Birmingham which offers safe shelter to destitute women asylum seekers. Her article "Lent: The Waiting Game" (Vocation for Justice: Spring 2019 Vol:33; No.1) illustrates how for some waiting can be "an anguished and extended" length of time.

They wait to be recognised as asylum seekers, some as long as 18 years; they wait for official documentation; they wait to access health care; they wait for that letter in the hope it brings good news. The women at Fatima house are women of faith, Christian and Muslim, who are thankful to God for where they are and pray that they will be granted what they need.

This MCW Review focuses on how much people's lives and experiences should be important and significant, but many get lost in the maze of policy making, ideology and austerity measures that does not take into account or even begin to understand the consequences of these decisions on the lives of families, adults and children. The question posed over and over in relation

to the article on housing issues is, do peoples' experiences and realities count for anything?



Whilst Christians celebrated Easter Day and as people of faith live in hope how many others remain trapped, well and truly stuck, in the waiting of Holy Saturday, never to emerge, never to move on to the next day and the days that follow?

This waiting is echoed in the World Movement of Christian Workers' May Day message about social injustice and exploitation. How long must they wait? For some, sadly it is too late, for others, where is their hope?

Their hope may lie with us and those who can campaign, take action and raise our voices in telling, informing, raising awareness and reminding those near and far that we are all human beings and have a dignity that demands respect.



This is surely part of the Eastertide message, that we the disciples raise our voices and tell the story: what the realities of people's lives are. It is

vital we tell what life is like behind the statistics, that we hear and promote the voices of those who are suffering in so many ways. Let's show them that their lives (or deaths) do count for something.

Some lives (or deaths) just don't count by Jo Dearlove

William Beveridge identified, in the language of the day, Five Giants: 'Want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness' as realities that had an impact on people's lives. These components either helped to create a building block or stumbling block. Whilst thinking that these "5 giants" could do with a re-visit as a focus for a Review of Life an ITV Central news item motivated me to put "pen to paper". Over my lifetime housing issues have been very much part of social policy and political debate. The council estates, the high-rise blocks both so well received but didn't deliver to all; Rachmanism in the 1950s & 60s synonymous with exploitation and intimidation of tenants; the 1966 TV play "Cathy Come Home" about homelessness.



In the 1980s the 'right to buy' was welcomed by many working-class families to own their own homes. Those living in the best housing stock purchased the property at a below level market price. Today figures suggest that over 30% of these properties in London are now owned by landlords for private rental. A "Right to Buy" scheme was recently extended to Housing Associations (2018). In the 1990s councils were banned from borrowing money to build social housing. A 'pathfinder programme' (2003) meant houses and streets bull-dozed ready for new private housing. A change of government stopped this programme leaving people surrounded by empty streets and derelict ground. The consequences of these policies seem to get lost in either quick fix or ideological driven solutions. The significance of the outcome it has on people's lives gets lost; they seem not to count. Now the major political parties agree that "we need to build more houses", but what does that mean in practice?

Young adults are not able to set up home. Whilst figures indicate record numbers of people employed they can hide the experiences of low wages, kind of work, and type of contract so affordability remains the barrier. London Metropolitan University identified through research students sleeping on sofas, floors or in emergency accommodation. "None of the students had approached the university about being homeless." Newman University, Birmingham, had 5 cases of homelessness since September 2018 (The Tablet 16/03/19).

What throws this whole issue into sharp relief is the number of working families dependent on private renting. According to the Department for Communities and Local Government "renting has almost doubled from 2.5 to 4.8 million over the past ten years .. whilst the number of families with children that are privately renting has tripled to 1.5 million" (Armstrong 2017: The New Poverty). This same author reminds us that 70% of private renters "in the poorest 5th spend at least a third of their income on housing, compared with under 50% in the social rented sector and 28% for home owners". One teacher highlighted her predicament and the role of the Education Support Fund (ESF) in supporting those in dire financial circumstances: Her rent was taking up 78% of her take-home pay; the choice left for her and her children was home, food or heat. The ESF has seen an increase of 27% applying for assistance, "particularly women in their 30s with dependant children" (Education Guardian 05/03/19). Stability is a blight for those privately renting as tenancy agreements may be only for 6 months or less. Outside of fixed terms people can be evicted for any or no reason at all. Just image the implications for people's lives where the roof over their head is always and

continually at risk of the whim of the landlord. In April the government announced plans to put a stop to “no-fault evictions”, so tenants cannot be evicted at short notice and without good reason. It is oft quoted that Britain is the 5th largest economy in the world. For one of the wealthiest nations we are denying people one of the most basic rights, a safe, secure shelter with a roof over their head.



The complexity of housing issues becomes more acute and less visible when considering the number of families identified as homeless. A Shelter report in December 2018 documented that “1 in every 103 children is now homeless”. It was likely that “9,500 of these spent their Christmas in a hostel or BnB, their family in one room whilst sharing a bathroom and kitchen with others. It is not unheard of that homeless adults or families are offered “placements” elsewhere in the country. This may mean leaving whatever networks they have whether friends, family, schools or GPs. The impact of this move remains unimaginable. Do these lives count for anything? The dilemma for local councils is the continuing struggle to meet the ever increasing needs of their residents because of infrastructure cuts in the light of continued austerity. To at least find somewhere for the homeless takes precedence over the consequences it has on the person. From Freedom of Information requests what also emerged is that these homeless people were not followed up and little is known about what happened after they had moved away (Guardian 29/12/18). Some homeless are hidden; others are hidden in plain sight. Official figures indicate a rise in rough sleeping in England. Numbers cannot be accurate as they are based on a one night snapshot during October or November. Even this unsystematic count showed a rise of 165% from the figures in 2010.

The inhuman treatment of some rough sleepers has been documented. Reports of dirty water being thrown at a homeless man, a man burnt when a lit firework was put in his pocket and red paint thrown at another. Several days later this man was found dead in a local cemetery (Mirror 18/09/18). Other deaths have made headlines, not least the man who died near the Houses of Parliament. The Independent, using government figures, quoted nearly 600 homeless people dying last year in England and Wales (20/12/18). According to the same article this is apparently a 24% increase over the previous five years. What prompted this article was an investigation by ITV Central News “Life and death on the streets” (06/03/19). The reporter, Charlotte Cross, discovered that “Local Authorities do not keep records of homeless people who die in their area”. The other revelation was that no one agency, including the Coroner, collected the information about who had died whilst homeless. The West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner said “It’s deeply sad ...there’s no proper record and no proper investigation”. This means no one can know the true extent of the situation.

Many charities and faith groups help, support & feed those in need but as the Director at Shelter, Greg Beales, said “There is nothing inevitable about homelessness or about these tragic deaths which are a consequence of a housing system which fails too many people. Our crippling shortage of social housing and a threadbare safety net are at the root of this national emergency..” (May Bulman, Social Affairs Correspondent, Independent 20/12/18) It is a sad indictment to say that even at the end of their days people are still waiting to be counted, to count for something.

**World Movement of Christian Workers (WMCW)
Feast of St Joseph the Worker / International Workers Day May 1st 2019**

This message has been written by the KAB Germany on behalf of the WMCW



Work is an essential element of human dignity. That is why the dignity of women and men, given by God must be respected in the working world. Throughout the world millions of people have not got an income to feed themselves and their families. Mechanisation, automation and digitalisation must not lead millions of people to exclusion. The exploitation of resources causes irreparable damage and inhuman working conditions. The digitalisation of economy leads to precarious working conditions; around the world 60% of people are employed in the informal sector without social security, without labour rights and on low wages.

We say, with Pope Francis, *“thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. ... As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalised: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape. (Evangelii Gaudium 53)*

We demand work for everyone and decent wages in the digital world

One hundred years of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has not yet resulted in all workers receiving the social and labour rights set out in their fundamental principals and international labour standards for social justice stipulated in their regulations. Millions of workers are deprived of fundamental labour and human rights; they are prohibited from organising themselves or setting up trade unions or works' councils. The development towards peace, progress and social justice is only possible if all the countries in the world ratify these regulations.

We demand the global implementation of joint management and labour rights in accordance with the ILO

Work and labour conditions can damage health and risk death. Decent work means healthy conditions and provides a means of living. Europe needs a global regulation for a living minimum income in all its various countries. Global companies must be made to legally comply with the implementation of labour rights and minimum wage standards in their production chains.

We demand a just and sustainable minimum wage & income throughout the world

We must put an end to the exploitation of human beings and our Mother Earth. Peace, progress and social justice for all will be only possible if the sustainable development objectives are reached all over the world.

There is no peace without sustainable development and without justice

The views expressed by contributors of the MCW Review do not necessarily represent the views of the MCW

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