

2892 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1967

States to eliminate the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty in this Nation by opening to everyone the opportunity for education and training, the opportunity to work, and the opportunity to live in decency and dignity."

Against this background, and in recognition of the fact that even these promising developments in economic life and public policy contain the seeds of new ethical problems, the General Board of the National Council of Churches seeks in this statement to clarify certain specific issues and affirm some principles relevant to the current war against poverty in the U.S.A.

POVERTY AS A MORAL AND SPIRITUAL ISSUE

The alleviation of poverty and its attendant sufferings and deprivations is both a public and private responsibility at all times and under all circumstances. In an economy which has developed the capacity to abolish poverty no lesser goal than its total abolition can satisfy the moral demands of the Christian faith.

In calling for the elimination of poverty, the Church must recognize that economic poverty is generally accompanied by numerous related evils such as cultural, psychic and spiritual deprivation. Although a steady and adequate flow of income to the poor is essential to the elimination of their poverty, the Church must work for the restoration of selfhood and dignity and meaning to the lives of those whose economic poverty has damaged or destroyed these essential elements of an abundant life. It should challenge all other anti-poverty forces and agencies to join in this work.

THE CAUSES OF POVERTY

The causes of economic poverty are highly complex and deeply rooted. Full analysis of these causes would take us far beyond the scope of this statement.

We are impelled, however, to call attention to the fact that the predominant and overwhelming mass of contemporary poverty results from socio-economic defects, dislocations and maladjustments. Most obvious among these are: inadequate economic growth; recessions and depressions including local and regional depressions; lack of adequate educational and training opportunities at all levels (children, youth and adult) including absence of consumer education and training in money management; inadequate wage and income levels for many partially and fully employed persons; discrimination on the basis of race, religion, ethnic background and sex; social conditions which seem to lock some people into perpetual poverty; and inadequate income maintenance provisions for the nonearning segments of the population such as the very young, the aged, the incompetent and incapacitated and the unemployed.

In addition to these more obvious factors in accounting for the persistence of massive poverty, we recognize and acknowledge the influence of unrestricted economic individualism, developed during the era of scarcity, which hampers the creation of adequate mechanisms for income distribution and income maintenance in an affluent society.

The importance of personal attitudes, motivations and efforts as factors in determining the economic level of individual persons cannot be denied. Many individuals have risen out of poverty in the face of great socio-economic odds. Some of the poor live lives of spiritual wealth and sacrificial love for their fellow men. Such examples, however, provide us neither a solution for underlying socio-economic problems nor an excuse for inaction. The churches should assume their full share of responsibility along with other economic, educational and welfare agencies of society in tackling the tough roots of poverty.

MAGNITUDE AND COMPLEXITY OF THE TASK

Even though our national economy possesses the capacity to eliminate poverty immediately, at least at present officially defined levels, the complexity of the problem convinces us that the war against poverty will be a long one.

Without implying endorsement of all Federal anti-poverty activities, we welcome the leadership which the Federal Government is giving in this effort and especially its expressed determination to get at the root causes of poverty. We know, however, that the Federal Government alone cannot solve the problem. The combined and coordinated efforts of private enterprises, voluntary agencies, community organizations of the poor themselves, as well as all levels of government