



UUJEC Winter Newsletter 2016

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[UUJEC Website: New Look, New Resources.](#)

If you haven't had a chance to scroll through our website lately, you've missed a lot of useful resources. We've been working diligently to ensure our members and allies have a wide array of material to assist in their economic justice work. In addition to our Escalating Inequality CSAI resources, there's articles and guidance on corporate personhood and tax reform, living wage campaigns, the trade debate and healthcare initiatives.

We also have a collection of book reviews, guidance for corporate and campaign finance research and congressional outreach. Our home page lists current economic justice events and action calls, including conferences and summits sponsored by UUJEC.

You can join or renew your membership with UUJEC on our website too. It's easy to register online and you'll be contributing to important work our organization is committed to. Plus, just this year, everyone who becomes a member can receive a 1-year subscription to *Yes!* Magazine, compliments of our friends at Yes!

Spend some time on our site, tell us what you think. And if you'd like to share the great work your justice group is doing, let us know at uujec@uujec.com.



[Rachel Bennett Steury, Membership and Communications Committee Co-Chair]

[Zimbabwe Artists Project](#)

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ames, Iowa is hosting an art exhibit from Zimbabwe Artists Project (ZAP). ZAP partners with Weya artists in strengthening self-sufficiency, building cultural understanding and creating educational opportunities. "We work with women artists (and a few men) from rural Weya in Eastern Zimbabwe, buying art directly from them and selling it to people in the U.S. who are looking for beautiful and meaningful art and who want to support their artistic talents." ZAP was created by the artists themselves and Dick Adams, a member of the First Unitarian Church of Portland many years ago.

These art exhibits are very manageable for many congregations to support. The prices are reasonable--the highest item being \$90 or so. Proceeds from the sales help artists in Zimbabwe. Please support their work: www.zimbabweartistsproject.org
Terry Lowman, UUJEC Co-Chair]



[2016 GA Program Proposals](#)

Title: "A Provocative Interfaith Workshop on Economic Justice for the 2016 GA from UUJEC"

Text: The theme of the 2016 General Assembly in Columbus, Ohio, has provoked some creative thinking among UU workshop organizers. *The theme is "Heartland: Where Faiths Connect"*. We're about economic justice, so to get some interfaith energy going, why not invite some leaders for social and economic justice from other denominations to share with us at our GA? They'll bring deep experience and useful tips for organizing among faiths and advocacy groups, locally, regionally, and nationally.

Continued on page 3...

Get to know your board: Jane Bannor



Jane Bannor was elected to the UUJEC Board in 2014. She served on the planning committee for the February, 2015 UUJEC conference “Escalating Inequality or Opportunity for All?” and is currently Finance Chair and Co-Treasurer . A member of the Unitarian Church of Evanston, Illinois, Jane has taken a leadership role on the Peace and Justice Committee, and currently serves on the Chicago Area UUSJ Peace and Economic Justice / Homelessness task forces. Her efforts have centered on raising the minimum wage and on protecting state “safety net” programs, while responding to growing budgetary issues. Working in local political campaigns and in community action efforts, Jane has seen the impact growing income inequality has had on our major cities. She hopes our denomination’s study of the issue will increase our commitment to finding a way to distribute our nation’s wealth more equitably.

Jane has guided her church’s efforts to implement the Peacemaking Study / Action Issue, and has been leading workshops on the 2014 – 2017 Escalating Inequality CSAI there. Currently Jane is focused on the Good Food Campaign, working to get healthy food produced by workers who earn a fair wage into the marketplace and purchased by our public bodies, like school systems and hospitals. Her hope is to get a pilot Good Food program up and running in the Chicago Park District. Jane also is working on anti-racism efforts with the congregation in addition to advocating for a progressive income tax in her state. To share your work on economic justice or ask questions of Jane, you can reach her at jbannor@sbcglobal.net

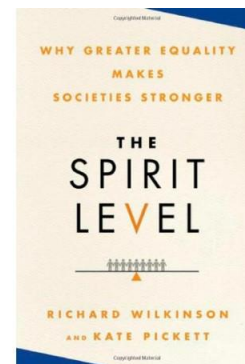
Book Reviews: Have you read a book on economic justice you’d like to review and share with UUJEC membership? Contact uujec@uujec.com for more information.

The Spirit Level

Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger

by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, 2009.

The book demonstrates that, quite aside from absolute levels of poverty, relative inequality has pernicious effects on societies: eroding trust, increasing anxiety and illness, and encouraging excessive consumption. The common factor that links the healthiest and happiest societies – whether each society as a whole is rich or poor -- is the degree of equality among its members. Further, more unequal societies are bad for all their members – the rich and middle-class as well as the poor.



This book examines the effect of greater inequality within a society on 11 different health and social problems: physical health, mental health, drug abuse, educational achievement, trust in community life, obesity, social mobility, imprisonment, violence, child welfare, teen-age pregnancies. Outcomes are clearly worse in more unequal societies.

[Bob Beekman, UUJEC member and Economic Inequality editor for NWuuJN]

[GA Proposal continued from page 1...](#)

So for our first workshop proposal, we invited Bishop Douglas Miles, a senior African American Baptist pastor from Baltimore, renowned for both his speaking and interfaith work for racial and economic justice in the inner city neighborhoods of Baltimore. We know from the protests surrounding the death of Freddie Gray last April that uptown Baltimore is still suffering from “40 years of benign neglect”, according to Bishop Miles, despite 40 years of social action by the BUILD Coalition he headed. Bishop Miles has spearheaded some very practical programs, things like living wages, jobs, insurance, and redevelopment, so why does he say that “young people no longer feel they have a stake in the city’s future”?

A second speaker for this workshop is Dr. Edith Rasell, Minister of Economic Justice for the United Church of Christ, based at their Cleveland headquarters. She spent 12 years at the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, DC. Dr. Rasell knows the sorry national context all too well – the politics and economics of resurgent oligarchy and inequality, of corporatocracy and Wall Street greed – that has led to the rebellions in Baltimore and across the country.

But the problem is not just “The New Jim Crow” – the white lower middle class has also taken an equally hard body blow. A startling new discovery is that middle aged whites with meager education have lost 20% of their earning power in the last 15 years. And get this: their death rate is rising - due to suicides, addictions, and other effects of economic inequality. This death rate is not falling like all other groups; it’s even twice that of Hispanics. This explains the energy behind the Tea Party rebellion, Donald Trump, and the politics of divide and conquer.

This workshop “Connecting Across Faiths for Economic and Racial Justice” has now been accepted by the GA Program Development Group. It will feature extensive interfaith dialogue among the speakers and workshop participants.

Two other good proposals by UUJEC board members and allies were not accepted. Most professional organizations find some way to include almost everyone, with a variety of program formats. This illustrates how over the last decade many good proposals from many groups on deep issues of justice have been shunted aside. This is past the point where the GA has lost some of the cutting edge vitality of prior decades. Shouldn’t the UUA be really out there, propelling a deep and broad movement, not just organizational support for a loosely knit collection of congregations and a narrow focus on identity? The aging of our congregations is in sharp contrast to the youthful energy and discontent that Bernie Sanders has tapped into.

One proposal that was not accepted combined two key areas of UU activism: Citizens United and climate change. This proposal drew on Pope Francis’s “Laudato Si” encyclical, in addition to inviting panelists from the Lutheran and African American Episcopal churches. It would have examined the role of certain corporations and billionaires both in corrupting US politics by dark money and in promoting greenhouse gas emissions and climate change denial. A key question was how to develop a larger interfaith initiative on democracy and climate.

Another second proposal that was not accepted was about how to lead or support a living wage campaign in your community. UUJEC board members in both Colorado and North Carolina have been leaders in successful coalitions, with support from Interfaith Worker Justice. Both programs feature employer certification by which the employer commits to a decent level of wages and benefits in return for interfaith community patronage.

So tell the UUA Board, why not draw the circle wider – to include, not exclude – our huge diversity of passions for religious commitment to justice.

[Dick Burkhardt, UUJEC Co-Chair]

2016 MICHIGAN WINTER SPEAKER SERIES

The Escalating Inequality Task Force of Beacon UU, Birmingham Unitarian Church, First UU Church of Detroit, Northwest UU Church, and UU Church of Farmington is hosting a Winter Speaker Series on Escalating Inequality. Speakers include Chuck Collins, Marilyn Kelly, Peter J. Hammer. For more information about this collaboration you can find the flyer here: <http://goo.gl/WxXoBI> [Terry Lowman, UUJEC Co-Chair]

The Carried Interest Loophole

PATRIOTIC MILLIONAIRES

Condensed email from Patriotic Millionaires
(patrioticmillionaires.org)

Mike Sommers' Very Big New Job could cost our country \$180 billion over the next ten years. Mike Sommers is the former Chief of Staff to former Speaker of the House John Boehner. Last year, and for more than two decades before that, Mike Sommers was the "go-to" guy for some of the most powerful people in Washington when it came to getting things done in the House of Representatives. He was at the center of every tax fight, budget fight, and government shutdown. He knows all the important people in Washington, a lot of whom owe him a favor or two.

Just now, Mike Sommers became the president of the Private Equity Growth Capital Council (PEGCC), an organization dedicated to defending the carried interest loophole, one of the most indefensible tax loopholes in the American tax code, on behalf of Wall Street millionaires.

Criticized by politicians from Donald Trump and Gov. Jeb Bush to Senator Bernie Sanders and Sec. Hillary Clinton, the carried interest loophole allows investment managers to pay the capital gains rate rather than the ordinary income tax rate on income they earn managing other people's money, despite them having none of their own capital at risk.

The loophole is based on 16th century shipping law meant to protect captains against the loss of their boats.

That's right, after decades working at the highest level of government, Mike Sommers is now in charge of defending a loophole that allows hedge fund billionaires to pay lower tax rates than dental hygienists, zookeepers, and the guy who valets cars at the fancy restaurant where hedge fund managers tip the maître d' to let them skip the line ahead of everybody else (so they will look cool and feel important).

Apparently, hedge fund managers believe that sitting behind their computer screens is as perilous as navigating the high seas on a wooden boat 400 years ago. Ahoy.

Because of the PEGCC and Mike Sommers, this year hedge fund managers will pocket \$1.8 billion they don't deserve (the Treasury estimate). Looking more closely at the data, a NY Times reporter estimated the number to be \$18 billion. In November, several Patriotic Millionaires met with members of Congress to urge them to close this indefensible loophole immediately by passing the "Carried Interest Fairness Act" introduced by Senator Tammy Baldwin and Representative Sandor Levin.

Almost every member we met with, Democrat and Republican, said the same thing. "Of course" they support closing the carried interest loophole, "However" it was "very important" to "address" the issue as part of "comprehensive tax reform."

So apparently to many members of congress, it makes complete sense to not vote on the one thing everyone agrees on, and instead to wait and talk about it in conjunction with a whole litany of other issues that very few agree on.

In Washington, we call that a punt.

"Comprehensive tax reform" will likely be on the docket in 2017 when the next Congress is called to order.

Who will be at the negotiation table? You guessed it - Mike Sommers.

That's part of his big new job.

The one that's going to cost our country \$180 billion to protect their tax breaks.