

MORMON LIBERALS

A Liberal Mormon View of Workers and Zion

posted by [WARNER WOODWORTH](#) ...April 29, 2014...2 comments

<http://www.mormonpress.com/a-liberal-mormon-view-of-workers-and-zion>



By Warner Woodworth, BYU Professor Emeritus

Today's currents of economic malaise have long been the concerns of who seek a healthy economy and social justice. The LDS standard works are filled with admonishments to empower the downtrodden and remember that "the labourer is worthy of his reward" ([1 Tim.5:17](#)). Recent battles such as the Occupy Wall Street movement,[1] Mitt Romney's denigration of the 47 percent,[2] the uproar over inequality,[3] and low minimum wages[4] illustrate these issues. Other damages against workers include corporate downsizing, exorbitant CEO pay, decline of middle class jobs, offshore manufacturing, flat wage structures, high unemployment rates, and so forth.

Mormonism addresses each of these concerns. Our alliance with society's have-nots should begin with appreciation of the fact that Jesus Himself was a blue-collar worker, a low-paid carpenter engaged in manual labor. In today's vernacular, we would say he'd be a trade union member and card-carrying member of the Democratic Party. In other words, he would probably be a Liberal.

Gospel teachings emphasize a better society, one that parallels the rise of worker democracy and United Order practices. Below are brief citations from church leaders through the ages: Joseph

Smith sought equality for all, declaring “it is not given that one man should [possess](#) that which is above another, wherefore the [world](#) lieth in [sin](#) (D&C 49:20); Pres. George Q. Cannon thundered that “The time has come when the talents of the men of business shall be used to benefit the whole people...not for individual benefit alone, nor for individual aggrandizement alone, but for the benefit of the whole people, to uplift the masses”;^[5] John Taylor preached we should become “co-adjutors and co-laborers” with God and men.^[6]

What if we could wave a magic wand and transform the world of America’s current workplace realities to be more consistent with what Mormon leaders have taught? If one were to address the problems of today’s workers, most of the answers can be found in the social teachings of scriptures and Mormonism’s leaders of the restoration. As evidenced from management research and ethical business practices, one may observe solutions to the problems at the outset of this post:

- We would design worker-owned firms and they would demonstrate the advantages of such systems by being more productive and profitable than capitalist firms, whether ESOPs or co-ops, as evidenced by such successes as Mondragon, the Basque economic system that gives workers lifetime employment and 100 percent shared ownership of over a hundred firms;
- CEOs would be less greedy by having their compensation ratio at perhaps 20:1 instead of today’s 350:1 difference between highest and lowest paid workers;
- If business leaders practiced what John Taylor sought (jobs for all), the nation’s unemployment rate would be under 4 percent (which is considered statistically to be full employment);
- The push in the streets today for a “living wage” would be adopted by executives as they seek more motivated workers, long term retention, and thereby enjoy the reduced costs of frequent turnover;
- Ethics training and Mormon values of caring for others would be the foundation of business practices, leading to less public distrust and fewer corporate fines and/or executives becoming criminals;
- Occupiers would thus reduce their grievances against selfish big businesses and their abuse of power;

- Putting workers on corporate boards, a system known as co-determination which is practiced in most of Europe, would allow labor oversight and reduce management manipulations and/or accounting tricks;
- If entrepreneurs and top management held the values Apostle Cannon called for, new start-ups and older firms alike would highly value their employees as real human resources, human capital to be cared for, not ignored or discarded, illustrated by long-term successful companies Lincoln Electric, Google, etc.;
- An emphasis on worker participation and sharing of shopfloor power, as is illustrated in the Israeli *kibbutzim*, would yield higher productivity, more egalitarian company cultures, and greater employee commitment to doing quality work.

One can only wish there were many Mormon examples of CEOs and firms that would be committed to not just talking their LDS talk, but actually walking their LDS walk.[7]

Notes:

1. <http://www.businessinsider.com/what-wall-street-protesters-are-so-angry-about-2011-10#thats-about-60-of-the-net-worth-of-the-country-held-by-the-top-5-left-chart-22>
2. <http://www.mormonliberals.org/blessed-are-the-53/>
3. http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/04/02/the-wealth-gap-is-growing-too/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0
4. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/battle-over-the-minimum-wage/>
5. <http://journalofdiscourses.com/23/31>
6. <http://jod.mrm.org/15/167>
7. See more on LDS business practices at *Working Toward Zion: Principles of the United Order for the Modern World*. Salt Lake City, UT: Aspen Books (revised, updated, and reprinted) 1999, 484 pp. (with J. Lucas).

For an academic perspective see LERA Symposium by the U.S. Labor & Employment Relations Association entitled “Mormonism, Work, & Labor Relations,” by Warner P. Woodworth in the journal *Perspectives on Work*, pp. 46-48, 2009.



Tim

May 5, 2014 at 2:21 pm # Edit

REPLY

I enjoyed reading this article – thanks for posting! I especially like how you address such a weighty topic in a very concise and well-structured manner.

I think I'd like to see more fundamental argument to support your position. Appealing to citations from LDS leaders is certainly a great start, as is appealing to the idea of widespread prosperity and security, but my hunger for logical argument seems unfulfilled. I imagine you didn't intend to present a comprehensive treatise on this social philosophy, but rather to raise the questions of whether Christianity and Mormonism would better align with a more socialist form of government, and you did a great job at that. If you intend to write more concerning the matter, I look forward to seeing what you produce.



Jesse @ Building Zion.org

June 1, 2014 at 1:42 pm # Edit

REPLY

Brother Woodworth,

Here's another for your list of solutions:

"Follow President John Taylor's example and establish boards of trade manned by experienced businessmen who have the wisdom to create cooperatives and successfully launch them."

President Taylor saw the cooperatives as a means of preparing the Saints for a third run at the United Orders. His Zion's Central Board of Trade (google it) was a great success and "gaining momentum".

I argue here that we have all we need to create and benefit from Zion Boards of Trade today: <http://buildingzion.org/why-wait-whos-game/>

Actually, I have been pitching the idea to three local successful businessmen as well as my High Priests group and Stake President. It didn't occur to me until now that you would make a great addition to our founding board.