

**Rich Get Richer**  
“Wage Repression” Cripples Americans

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When Jesus began his public ministry he announced that he had come to bring Good News to the poor. I wish our nation would listen to him and act on his message.

I'm nearly sixty years old. Over those years I've watched something happen to my nation, and I don't like it.

For the first thirty years of my life, the rest of us – the lower 90 percent – could make a good living and hope for improvement. Between 1950 and 1980 average income for 9 out of 10 Americans grew from \$17,719 to \$30,941, a 75 percent increase in income in constant 2008 dollars.

Since 1980, although the economy has grown handsomely, in spite of some setbacks, the average income of all Americans has increased just \$303 in 28 years.

Bill Moyers calls that “wage repression.”

In a remarkable speech at Boston University in November, Moyers traced how economic policies starting with trickle-down Reaganomics, have now created two Americas – a buoyant Wall Street and a doleful Main Street.

Commerce Department figures released this past November 23 showed that American companies just had their best quarter in history, while unemployment languishes at critically high levels and wages remain depressed.

For thirty years the rich have been making the rules, and the playing field of opportunity has become slanted. The money is sliding downhill, controlled by fewer and fewer people – the super-rich who earn their fortunes with overseas labor, selling to overseas consumers and managing financial transactions that have little to do with the rest of America, as Robert Frank wrote recently in the *Wall Street Journal*. Frank's article asked, “Do the Rich Need the Rest of America?” His answer: Not really.

Bill Moyers names this Plutocracy: the rule of the rich. He sees us repeating the gross materialism and political corruption of the First Gilded Age when Big Money bought the government right out from under the voters, an era when privilege controlled politics.

Our system is no longer the Capitalism of Adam Smith, Moyers says. A 30-year-long series of policy decisions about industry, trade, taxation and military spending, in which both Democrats and Republicans are complicit, has created an economy where the wealthiest 10% now earn more than the entire 90% of our population combined.

Jesus told a parable about a Rich Man who ignored poor Lazarus on his doorstep.

Today we live in a nation where extending billions of dollars of tax cuts to the wealthiest during a recession in the face of a massive deficit is a non-negotiable absolute priority for one political party. Amazing. Can anyone doubt what the prophets Amos, Isaiah, Micah, or Hosea would say? In the Name of God the prophets condemned the injustice of a nation where the elites and wealthy indulged in luxury while the people suffered.

Nearly \$4 billion was spent on the recent congressional elections. Multi-millions came from independent tax-exempt organizations that can collect unlimited amounts without revealing the sources. Public Citizen reports that just 10 groups are responsible for the bulk of the spending by independent groups. The first of two slush funds controlled by Karl Rove started with 97% of their contributions coming from four billionaires. His lobbyist had the gall to describe the group as “grassroots.”

A 5-4 Supreme Court majority has now ruled that corporations are “persons” with the right to speak during elections by flooding the airwaves with their money. Says Moyers: “Corporations are not people; they are legal fictions, creatures of the state, born not of the womb, not of flesh and blood. They’re not permitted to vote. They don’t bear arms. Yet thanks to five activist conservative judges, [corporations] have the privilege of ‘personhood’ to ‘speak’ – and not in their own voice, mind you, but as ventriloquists, through hired puppets.”

We know what Jesus thinks about gross inequality. Jesus said, “Blessed are you who are poor.... Blessed are you who are hungry.... Blessed are you who weep now.... But woe to you who are rich.... Woe to you who are full now.... Woe to you who are laughing now.” (Luke 6:20f)

Thirty years of the politics of elitism is enough. It’s time to reclaim our country from the plutocracy and the oligarchy.

I suggest these questions guide our politics and economics:

“Whose interests are served by this decision? The rich and powerful or the poor and vulnerable?”

“Whose interests are served by this politician? The rich and powerful or the poor and vulnerable?”

Then choose as God has taught us.