

If the Dow is so high, why do people feel so low?

TOWARDS A JUST ECONOMY

A recent report by the Federal Reserve confirmed what many sense - that only the rich are getting ahead in today's economy. Median income after inflation declined 5% in the period 2010-2013. Persons without a high school diploma suffered the worst(-17%), but all categories declined except college graduates which experienced an increase of only 1%! Meanwhile, households in the top 10% saw their income rise 2%. At the national level concerns are trumpeted about 'upward mobility'. Such matters are inherent in each of the local initiatives described Below.

There are many components of the labor force which face even greater challenges. Women, minorities, immigrants, ex-offenders have borne the brunt of the economic imbalances our current system contains.

The Christ Church Community Issues Forums this fall have concentrated on presentations focused on the topic of Income Inequality. In the course of identifying specific issues and speakers, we have become aware of the wealth of activities and organizations working in this general field.

Before the end of the year, AIR, Inc. will bring together representatives of these initiatives so they can share ideas and experiences. Some have suggested we work towards something equivalent to Green Umbrella. For our part, this is just an investigative first step.

Here is the list of groups we have identified.

1. AMOS, a coalition of area congregations has launched their 'Exodus' campaign focusing on Children in Poverty. They note that a recent Annie E Casey funded study for the Children's Defense Fund[?] found that Cincinnati ranked second in highest percentage of children living in poverty. They also have a 'welcome home' initiative for ex-offenders. Troy Jackson is the coordinator.

2. Economics of Compassion Initiative [ECI] - Exploring the core concepts of our current economic structures and investigating such ideas as neighborhood base small entrepreneurship, worker owned cooperatives, creative designs for homeownership, small business financing and debt forgiveness. Key actors are Peter Block, Carolyn Reisinger, Damon Lynch III and XU professor Nancy Bertaux. They have a monthly newsletter prepared by Lynn Wise and staff assistance from Design Impact working on the neighborhood initiative. This is funded currently by the Coombe Fund and Bellarmine Chapel.
3. Wage Theft - Led by the Workers' Justice Center[Brennan Grayson], this group is seeking a local ordinance which would require fair treatment of workers on issues of overtime, job classification, tax payments and issues around immigrant labor. Temp employment agencies?
4. Wage Stagnation - A group[including Impact for Health and Urban League] led by Col Owens is considering the causes and response to the failure of wages to increase as the economy improves.
5. Living Wage - Efforts at the city level led by P. g. Sittenfeld hold the only promise for the various efforts to break through the fixation on *minimum wages*.
6. Minimum wage increase - Although the term has more than one definition it is City Councilman P.G. Sittenfeld is promoting a voluntary approach, congratulating local employers who pledge to pay employees a minimum of \$10.10. Various governmental entities [usually Federal] have various 'living wage' requirements for contractors and condition many grants with 'prevailing wage' requirements.
7. Pay equity/gender disparity - The conventional wisdom that women receive less than 80% of their male counterpart's wages is the most glaring and understood equity issue. Others are more subtle, Fed Ex independent contractor drivers, the practice in higher education institutions to use adjunct faculty for institutional budget reasons are examples of employers dodging benefits and transferring FICA responsibilities to the employee. In addition to contract employees, some major employers such as WalMart build their economic model around part time employees.
8. Skills gap - Increasingly there are reports of employers complaining because they have jobs which are unfilled because there are no workers

with the skills the position requires. Whose responsibility is it to meet those needs? Does it fall on the individual seeking employment or is the public through job training and Community colleges supposed to do the job. In the past skills were learned on the job or taught by the employer, just as they might invest in new equipment to improve productivity. One successful approach involved contractors and unions jointly training workers for various construction skills.

9. Fair Hiring - A state wide effort led by the Ohio Justice and Policy Center [Stephen JohnsonGrove, Deputy Director] is seeking state legislation to mitigate the disastrous impact that state laws impose on ex-offenders seeking employment.
10. Worker owned Cooperatives - Cincinnati Union Cooperative Initiatives [Kristen Barker] is leading the work to establish local co-ops which will need customer support.
11. Civic organization actions - The Woman' s City Club drew a group of citizens together to consider the issues surrounding establishment of a Living Wage and map a strategy for advocacy.
12. Renting Partnerships - Led by Margaret Spinney, this program seeks to transform renters into owners by setting aside a portion of rent in an account which builds equity or establishes a savings account for future down payment.
13. Interfaith Business Builders - Led by Ray West this organization has established Cooperative Janitorial Services and Community Blend, worker owned cooperative ventures.
14. Partners for a competitive work force ??
15. Financing initiatives including SLO Money, Jumpstart and possibly some variation of traditional forms such as credit unions are being explored.

airinc120714