



I Want to Believe... that Economic Justice is Out There

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Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. – James 5:4 (New Revised Standard Version)
God gave us one day of rest. Unions gave us two. – Anonymous
When I was 13, Friday nights were for watching *The X-Files* with friends. We would hunker down at 9:00pm to scare ourselves silly or embrace the mysteries of whether we're alone in the universe. My fandom grew, and I faithfully collected DVD box sets of each season as the show ended its run. For me, stars David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson are always Special Agents Mulder and Scully.

Fast forward to today, and what were once programs no longer air, but “stream.” Music and movies aren't physically purchased so much as made accessible via subscriber “platforms.” We're awash in “content” curated by computers for consumption on-demand.

Times change: to be expected and very often embraced (cc: churches)! But in media and technology, the seismic shift sketched above has eroded appreciation not just for multiple forms of artistry and labor, but for the people who make it possible. There is an existential threat to real human livelihoods and well-being.

This is the message being dispatched by almost 200,000 writers and actors. On the heels of Labor Day, the Writers Guild of America (WGA) and the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) have now been on strike for four and two months, respectively.

For WGA and SAG-AFTRA, many issues are at stake, but a basic summation is that labor autonomy, wage guarantees, and human rights like health care have been depreciated to unsustainable levels in the

industry, and if studio executives get their way, this decline will become catastrophic. Movie and television stars are associated with glamour and wealth, but the truth is that the overwhelming majority of working writers (92%) and actors (87%) don't make enough annually (\$41K/26K) to qualify for industry health care. Residuals (pay for work that continues to be shown for profit) have been gutted by platforms like Netflix and Disney+, who hide their streaming data while padding their revenue streams upwards of billions of dollars. Executives hoard grotesque amounts of wealth with company profits. These are profound justice issues. Great news! More unions have or are considering disrupting "business-as-usual" across other industries. New unions are fighting to form nationwide. Unfortunately, unions have also experienced a calamitous, decades-long decline in the United States due to government and private-sector pushback on worker rights and well-being. Those attacks continue today.

As people of faith who find strength in community, we understand the human need for solidarity and collective thriving. As those who proclaim a living God who calls for economies rooted in jubilee (debt relief), abundance for all, and reparations, we are commissioned to be active partners with movements seeking the full measure of human flourishing. Speaking of solidarity, I was intrigued all summer to see which more famous Hollywood stars joined the picket lines with their union comrades. Imagine my great delight when I saw David Duchovny and his "SAG-AFTRA ON STRIKE" sign, customized with an X-Files-themed message: "The Residuals Are Out There," and a doodle of a UFO.

We church folks possess a great deal of wealth, influence, shoe leather, and righteous motivation to help achieve these equity movements. In Jesus Christ we claim membership in a story of radical solidarity with the dispossessed and impoverished. The time for an equity revolution is now, and the opportunities to manifest just economies are anywhere money changes hands.

Labor Day isn't just the unofficial start of autumn. Labor Day is every day until all are housed, fed, rested, and made whole. It's past time to take back and redistribute pilfered wealth with the power we hold. "The residuals are out there," and God is keeping receipts. Churches and workers of the world: Unite!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Seth Wispelwey (he/him) is the Minister for Economic Justice for the United Church of Christ, and he would like to burn you a mix CD.

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