

## INEQUALITY TRUMPS POLITICS

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The election of Donald Trump as President of the USA has shocked the world. The analysis and commentary will continue for months, if not years. So much can be said, but I want to draw your attention to one issue that has been critical to his election and, I suggest, to the Brexit vote a couple of months ago: inequality.

The one pundit who called a Trump victory was documentary maker Michael Moore. You may have seen the story about this in The Canberra Times. Moore recognised early that Trump only needed to win four rust belt states that in the past would have voted Democrat — Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin — to become President. These four states were the old industrial heartland of the US and they suffered harshly under globalisation as manufacturing jobs went off shore. Unemployed white males came out and voted against the political elite and the political parties that had ignored them and took the punt with the outsider, Trump.

The people who had lost out to globalisation voted for a new way, any new way, just as people in Britain had voted to reject the bureaucracy of the European Union in Brexit.

But the issue is not globalisation, per se. We all benefit from a global communication system that has brought the world closer together and enabled us to act in our collective interest, as is the case on climate change. The issue is a global economic system that cannot deliver equity; a system that cannot share the benefits of economic growth.

As a recent report from OXFAM pointed out “extreme inequality — the gap between the rich and the poor — is rising and threatening to undo the progress made in tackling poverty over the past 20 years. In 2015, just 62 individuals had the same wealth as 3.6 billion people — the poorer half of humanity. As recently as 2010, it was 388 individuals with the same wealth as those 3.6 billion. In Australia, the richest 1% are as rich as the poorest 60% of Australians.”

This concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few robs the poorest people of the support they need to improve their lives, and means that their voices go unheard. This apparently motivated many unemployed Americans to vote for a candidate who has never served in public office. It is also a factor driving millions of young Africans to make the hazardous journey across the Mediterranean in overloaded boats to seek a better life in Europe.

The violent riots in the streets of Jakarta last week were more about the eviction of slum dwellers from inner city areas by the Jakarta Mayor than his ethnicity or religious convictions. Inequality breeds discontent but, as we know from history, often a scapegoat is blamed: a minority group, refugees or migrants, a religious group, even women and so the list goes on. The reality is that these groups are commonly the victims of our increasingly unfair world, not the beneficiaries.

But inequality is not inevitable and as Christians we should be in the vanguard of the movement to demand more equitable sharing of the world's resources and the benefits of the economic development. The lesson that I draw from the Trump victory, is that we must stop growing international inequality.

The Christian faith is based on concepts of sharing, justice and compassion with and for all. All are made in the image of God. We are called to serve the least of our brothers and

sisters as we would serve the Lord. In Acts, we read how the early church shared all in common and grew rapidly.

Millions of people, especially young people, around the world who see no future in our global economy must be our focus for prayer and action. As citizens, we must convince our Governments to change the 'rules' so they work for the many, not the few. How else can we be faithful to the Gospel and have a realistic hope for peace in our world.

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