

The Wealthy and The Miserable: Replacing Global Capitalism. “The Highest Duty is to Think of Others”. Victor Hugo

By [Dr. Robert Rennebohm](#)

Global Research, July 05, 2019

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

Victor Hugo was one of the greatest Social Clinicians who ever lived. He provided accurate diagnosis; he sought root cause; and he offered brilliant remedy—“create vast fields of Public Activity.”

Hugo believed in the imperishability of Human Goodness and the grandeur of the Human Soul. At a time of current global tension, confusion, and despondency, Hugo’s clarity of thought and uplifting message are more important and timely than ever.

Below are excerpts from Hugo’s 1862 novel, *Les Miserables*. They suggest that the current illness afflicting civilization could be treated by replacing the current prevailing economic model (global capitalism) with an international network of Public Economies.

“When one looks at the selfish (the wealthy) and the miserable (the poor), the ideal (of Social Beauty) seems lost in the depths—shining, but isolated and imperceptible. In the selfish one sees the prejudices, the darkness of the education of wealth, appetite increasing through intoxication, a stupefaction of prosperity which deafens, a dread of suffering which, with some, is carried even to an aversion for sufferers, an implacable satisfaction, the me so puffed up that it closes the soul. In the miserable one sees hearts of gloom, sadness, want, fatality, ignorance impure and simple, and, with some, covetousness, envy, and hatred. And, yet, this ideal, seemingly so lost, is in no more danger than a star in the jaws of a cloud.”

For, “beneath the mortality of society we feel the imperishability of humanity. Just because a volcano breaks and throws out pus, the globe does not die. Similarly, the diseases of people do not kill man.”

“Auscultation of civilization is encouraging. Progress is the mode of man. The general life of the human race is called Progress. He who despairs is wrong. Grief everywhere is only an occasion for good always.

“The study of social deformities and infirmities, and their indication in order to cure them, is not a work in which choice is permissible. We seek for the cause. We must ponder over social questions: wages, education, misery, production, and distribution. We must create vast fields of Public Activity, to have a hundred hands to stretch out to the exhausted and feeble, to employ the collective power in the great duty of opening workshops for all arms, schools for all aptitudes, and laboratories for all intelligence. To destroy abuses is not enough; habits must change.

“We must create wise wealth and distribute it equitably—not equal distribution, but equitable distribution. If liberty is the summit, equality is the

base. Equality, though, is not all vegetation on a level—a society of big spears of grass and little oak trees. We should proportion enjoyment to effort and gratification to need. Encourage emulation. Balance the ought and the have. The highest equality is equity. We must also understand that if labour is to be law, it must also be a right.”

“The highest duty is to think of others; the highest justice is conscience.”

“Progress is the aim; the ideal is the model.”

But, do humans have sufficient capacity for such progress and goodness?

“The mind’s eye can nowhere find anything more dazzling, nor more dark, than in man; it can fix itself on nothing which is more awful, more complex, more mysterious, or more infinite. There is one spectacle greater than the sea, that is the sky; there is one spectacle grander than the sky, that is the interior of the soul.”

“An awakening of conscience is greatness of soul.”

“People who are petrified in dogma or demoralized by lucre are unfit to lead Civilization. Genuflexion before the idol or the dollar atrophies the muscle which walks and the will which goes. Hierarchic or mercantile absorption diminishes the radiance of a people, lowers its horizon by lowering its level, and deprives it of the intelligence of the universal aim.”

“But what about a compromise? There does exist an entire political school called the compromise school. Between cold water and warm water there is tepid water. This school with its pretended depth, wholly superficial, which dissects effect without going back to causes, from the height of half science, chides those who agitate for change. These almost people content themselves with their almost wisdom.”

“Ideas! Knowledge! Light! Equality! Fraternity! The amount of civilization is measured by the amount of imagination.”

“Change should be civilized. No abrupt fall is necessary. Neither despotism nor terrorism should be tolerated. The healers must remain innocent. Progress with gentle slope is desirable.”

“Some day we will be astounded. There is no more a backward flow of ideas than a backward flow of a river.”

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Robert Rennebohm, MD is a pediatrician who encourages all to participate in the Social Clinic. He lives in Port Townsend, Washington (USA) and can be reached at:
rmrennebohm@gmail.com

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