

The Statement of the Humanist Movement

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The Statement of the Humanist Movement, written by Silo in 1993, is the Sixth in a series of ten brief writings known as *Letters to my Friends*. The Statement provides a brief “who, what, where, when and how” of contemporary Humanism; including its foundations, specific proposals in the realms of economics and politics, and broad recommendations for action to transform society. This deceptively simple document nevertheless contains proposals with far-reaching consequences for the practice of democracy and economic life. If they were attained, we would live in a very different world.

Humanism proposes a fundamental transformation of society, a change which is simultaneously personal and social. The Statement, which recalls earlier Manifestos, provides a kind of blueprint for the social aspects of a change that will lead to a society that responds to human needs. It proposes an ethical stance in which human development and freedom, non-violence and anti-discrimination, are the central values. This vision is diametrically opposed to the current situation, in which human needs and aspirations are subverted to a system in which a small minority has appropriated the social whole to serve their own interests. In this sense, the meaning of the Statement is far from abstract and there is a clear need for contemporary Humanists to define concrete social actions.

The proposals and ethical vision of Humanism are even more relevant today than when the Statement was written in 1993. As it predicted, the systemic crisis has accelerated and reached a very dangerous point where billions of human beings are threatened with severe recession, unemployment, hunger, violent social explosions, global warming and other environmental disturbances that could displace millions, and -- most urgent of all -- the danger of nuclear war. Some of these changes, either because of their severity or their scope, have reached a level that was unthinkable only a few years ago.

At the same time, there are signs that a new, more humanist sensibility is growing, perhaps driven by a generational shift. This sensibility has found expression in recent developments in Latin America and to a certain extent in the U.S. where for the first time in history an African American has been elected President.

The Statement begins with an introduction describing Humanists as people of this time who frame the Humanist vision within a historical perspective and look to the future. Humanists are internationalists and optimists who value diversity and the contributions of all cultures, who want neither a centralized state nor a Para-state, neither armed gangs nor a police state. It ends with this exhortation: *“But a wall has arisen between humanist aspirations and the realities of today’s world. The time has come to tear down that wall. To do this, all humanists of the world must unite.”*

The Statement comprises six sections.

The first, **Global Capital**, begins by debunking the “universal truth” that money is everything. This myth underlies a “tyranny of money” in which every aspect of our lives depends on money or is subject to the dictates of money, even though most people do not like this state of affairs. This tyranny, moreover, is imposed by concrete “*representatives, agents, and well-established procedures.*”

The section points out the historical process resulting in the concentration of economic power which today reaches the scope of a Para-state. It also lays the foundations for a humanist economics, first by drawing a clear distinction between the principal components of production -- labor and productive capital -- and those that are unnecessary (even harmful) -- speculation and usury. It also affirms the need to transform the absurd relationship between labor and capital, so that workers share in profits and in *the decision-making* about issues fundamental to management, strategic direction and investment policy. The letter questions the traditional justification for the subordinate status of labor based on the risk that capital assumes in investing, as if workers were not risking their futures and those of their families.

Moreover, the profits generated by production have increasingly been diverted to speculation (in search of the highest short-term return) leading to factory closures, forced acquisition of debt, and fraudulent bankruptcies. These abuses leave workers unemployed and entire communities ravaged, when their labor has contributed in a fundamental way to producing the profits that are later diverted.

Meanwhile, the enormous concentration of mostly speculative capital within the banking system has reached the point that entire countries must beg for investment and play by the rules of the banks, surrendering the autonomy of the Nation-state to this Para-state. This has been justified by the myth of the free market, also known as neo-liberalism, a kind of religious faith which was the overriding propaganda when the Statement was written and which has now given way to centralized control. Following the recent crisis, even “true believers” are in favor of massive government bailouts, takeovers and control, in order to address the crisis fueled by massive speculative investment. And while the urgent needs of the most vulnerable for adequate health care or social assistance have been repeatedly ruled out as an unhealthy indulgence in Socialism, a bail out of enormous proportions for the richest investors has been set in motion in a matter of weeks and justified as distasteful but necessary.

The financial crisis, while exposing the corruption and lack of understanding of the decision-makers, is already having a powerful and damaging impact on the real economy, including growing unemployment, the massive loss of value in pension funds, and home foreclosures. What began as a credit problem has quickly converted to a global recession with consequences that could be devastating for hundreds of millions of people. In response, our leaders are transferring trillions of dollars to the banking

system and implementing a new system of centralized control - in the hands of the very same experts who have brought us to this predicament in the first place!

The humanist model rejects both a state monopoly and the monopoly of capital, promoting a true democracy of economic relations where those who create the wealth have the say and can guarantee real growth that lifts the living standards of everybody. And, since a main argument of neo-liberalism (and of the new private/state partnership) is that there is no other way, Humanism makes a vital contribution by showing a clear alternative that is ethical, workable and flexible.

The second section gives proposals for moving from **Formal Democracy to Real Democracy** by addressing its foundations: the separation of powers, representative democracy and respect for minorities.

Formal democracy "goes through the motions" observing (at best) certain external forms but without real democracy -- which is to say the free expression of the will of the people. In the U.S., for example, public opinion is well to the left of government policy on critical issues such as the health care system and ending the occupation of Iraq.

On the other hand, an inspiring example of real democracy is unfolding in Bolivia, where the largely indigenous majority, oppressed and discriminated against for centuries, are driving a profound *and non-violent* political, social and cultural revolution, with President Evo Morales as its leader. In an example that illuminates by contrast the hypocrisy of politics as usual, President Morales has kept all of his campaign promises, provoking vicious opposition from the U.S. backed ruling minority.

A dramatic example of the erosion of the **Separation of Powers** is the Bush Presidency, which has used its declared War on Terror to push through an unprecedented concentration of power in the Executive. This was "rubber-stamped" by the other two branches from the first moments when the Supreme Court ensured a Bush victory by blocking the Florida vote recount. Congress, especially after 9/11, lined up in virtual lock step behind the President. Even after receiving a clear mandate to end the occupation of Iraq in the 2006 elections they still have not changed course. This situation has ushered in a litany of abuses both domestically and overseas, from serious damage to fundamental civil rights (such as *habeas corpus*), to the crippling of government's regulatory oversight role, politically-motivated prosecutions, torture, kidnappings and illegal detentions, and the catastrophic invasion of Iraq based on transparent lies. It is worth considering that any other state engaging in such behavior would have been judged a "rogue state" in the harshest of terms.

As for **Representative Democracy**, the current party system (in formal democracies worldwide) ends as an absurd dance of deal-making which limits control of policy to a small group of party leaders, and excludes independent candidates. As the Statement sums it up, "*Through the party machinery, powerful interests finance candidates and then dictate the policies they must follow.*" Apart from nullifying real democratic participation, this arrangement drastically limits debate to a narrow range of

“acceptable” ideas that have become more and more divorced from reality in recent years.

To move toward real democracy, Humanism gives the highest priority to consulting the people directly through referenda, plebiscites, and direct election of candidates, using today’s computing technologies. It calls for equal access to the media for all candidates; and for *laws of political responsibility*, so politicians who betray their mandate will be subject to censure, recall from office, and other sanctions.

Finally, this section emphasizes the need to guarantee **protection and representation for minorities**. It challenges Humanists to lead the struggle to overcome growing xenophobia and neo-fascism and recognizes that the current centralized political structures, acting as instruments of big capital, subject entire regions and groups to discrimination. In turn, the Statement proposes adopting federal forms of organization, to return real political power to the hands of these human groups.

Section III, **The Humanist Position** clarifies the starting point of New Humanism which is not based on theories but on the concrete needs of human beings to overcome pain and suffering. It defines human beings as socio-historical beings without a fixed "nature" and affirms the need to overcome violence in order to pass from "pre-history" to a fully human history.

Section IV outlines the difference between **Humanitarianism** (which makes important contributions but is not revolutionary in its approach) and **Humanism** (which aims to transform the underlying economic and political structures that give rise to injustice and block human progress).

Section V points out several **Anti-humanist** camps, such as the neo-fascist scapegoating of immigrants, and certain currents of environmentalism that view humanity as destroying a perfect planet, rather than properly prioritizing environmental problems based on their impact on human beings. It also reminds readers of those Anti-humanist positions shrouded in the term "humanist" - such as so-called "theocentric humanism."

The last section outlines the objectives of the Humanist Movement, which aims to achieve a union of forces capable of orienting the current social changes through the formation of **Humanist Action Fronts** in workplaces, neighborhoods, unions and organizations. Thus, this section returns to the concrete and pressing question of how this vision is to become a reality.

More than fifteen years have passed since the Statement was written. How has the world changed and how does this reflect on the analysis and proposals set forth in the Statement?

The Statement was written in April, 1993, not long after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the first invasion of Iraq, with President Clinton newly

in office. It was before the emergence of the Zapatistas in the beginning of 1994, the first sign of "new winds" blowing in Latin America. The European Union was newly formed, China and India had not yet emerged as strong economic powers and the economic and military dominance of the US seemed to bode well for that country's imperial ambitions, if not for the rest of the world. It was a time, at least in the north, of a strong optimism, a time of arrogant pronouncements about a New World Order and The End of History.

Since 1993 the world has changed dramatically. In Latin America, a new generation of leaders has emerged to embody a very different and promising sensibility in the peoples of that region. Europe has gained economic strength and led in the process of formation of regions seen in varying degrees across the planet. The economies of China and India have grown dramatically while the US became the world's largest debtor nation and an international pariah thanks to the arrogance and catastrophic violence of the Bush government. Its imperial project lies in tatters and the deepening economic crisis (with its epicenter in the US) appears to be the harbinger of the fall of the other half of the system, the first half having fallen shortly before the Statement was written.

In short, the process of destructuring foreseen by Humanism has proceeded strongly and revealed with even greater clarity the need to transform the foundations of our economic and political relationships. The economic meltdown fueled by uncontrolled speculation vindicates the Statement's call to give workers a real voice in decision-making in order to end speculation. The positive examples of change, such as Bolivia, show that new answers are arising from the social base, from the people, inspired perhaps less by old Left-Right dialectics (which have also become destructured) than by cultural and generational movements.

Having outlined the great harm caused by Global Capital and the forces of anti-humanism, the Statement notes that social solidarity is eroding, raising the question of where is the force to counteract this destructive process. Now more than ever, it is clear that Humanism offers a valid ethics and a coherent and transformational social proposal. Its proposal is based on freeing the human being from the asphyxiating constraints of a system that no longer fits because the human being has outgrown it and unleashing the creativity needed to find new solutions for the grave problems facing humanity. It also reinforces the need for concrete and non-violent solutions in a world subject to cathartic and violent explosions, so dangerous at this time of nuclear confrontation.

Thank you very much.