

Statement of the Humanist Movement

Humanists are women and men of this century, of this time. They recognize the achievements of humanism throughout history, and find inspiration in the contributions of many cultures, not only those that today occupy center stage. They are also men and women who recognize that this century and this millennium are drawing to a close, and their project is a new world. Humanists feel that their history is very long and that their future will be even longer. As optimists who believe in freedom and social progress, they fix their gaze on the future, while striving to overcome the general crisis of today.

Humanists are internationalists, aspiring to a *universal human nation*. While understanding the world they live in as a single whole, humanists act in their immediate surroundings. Humanists seek not a uniform world but a world of multiplicity: diverse in ethnicity, languages and customs; diverse in local and regional autonomy; diverse in ideas and aspirations; diverse in beliefs, whether atheist or religious; diverse in occupations and in creativity.

Humanists do not want masters, they have no fondness for authority figures or bosses. Nor do they see themselves as representatives or bosses of anyone else. Humanists want neither a centralized State nor a Parastate in its place. Humanists want neither a police state nor armed gangs as the alternative.

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.

I. Global Capital

This is the great universal truth: Money is everything. Money is government, money is law, money is power. Money is basically sustenance, but more than this it is art, it is philosophy, it is religion. Nothing is done without money, nothing is possible without money. There are no personal relationships without money, there is no intimacy without money. Even peaceful solitude depends on money.

But our relationship with this "universal truth" is contradictory. Most people do not like this state of affairs. And so we find ourselves subject to the tyranny of money—a tyranny that is not abstract, for it has a name, representatives, agents, and well-established procedures.

Today, we are no longer dealing with feudal economies, national industries, or even regional interests. Today, the question is how the surviving economic forms will accommodate to the new dictates of international finance capital. Nothing escapes, as capital worldwide continues to concentrate in ever fewer hands—until even the nation state depends for its survival on credit and loans. All must beg for investment and provide guarantees that give the banking system the ultimate say in decisions. The time is fast approaching when even companies themselves, when every rural area as well as every city, will all be the undisputed property of the banking system. The time of the parastate is coming, a time in which the old order will be swept away.

At the same time, the traditional bonds of solidarity that once joined people together are fast dissolving. We are witnessing the disintegration of the social fabric, and in its place find millions of isolated human beings living disconnected lives, indifferent to each other despite their common suffering. Big capital dominates not only our objectivity, through its control of the means of production, but also our subjectivity, through its control of the means of communication and information.

Under these conditions, those who control capital have the power and technology to do as they please with both our material and our human resources. They deplete irreplaceable natural resources and act with growing disregard for the human being. And just as they have drained

everything from companies, industries, and whole governments, so have they deprived even science of its meaning—reducing it to technologies used to generate poverty, destruction, and unemployment.

Humanists do not overstate their case when they contend that the world is now technologically capable of swiftly resolving the problems in employment, food, health care, housing, and education that exist today across vast regions of the planet. If this possibility is not being realized, it is simply because it is prevented by the monstrous speculation of big capital.

By now big capital has exhausted the stage of market economies, and has begun to discipline society to accept the chaos it has itself produced. Yet in the presence of this growing irrationality, it is not the voices of reason that we hear raised in dialectical opposition. Rather, it is the darkest forms of racism, fundamentalism, and fanaticism that are on the rise. And if groups and whole regions are increasingly guided by this new irrationalism, then the space for constructive action by progressive forces will diminish day by day.

On the other hand, millions of working people have already come to recognize that the centralized state is as much a sham as capitalist democracy. And just as working people are standing up against corrupt union bosses, more than ever citizens are questioning their governments and political parties. But it is necessary to give a constructive orientation to these phenomena, which will otherwise stagnate and remain nothing more than spontaneous protests that lead nowhere. For something new to happen, a dialogue about the fundamental factors of our economy must begin in the heart of the community.

For humanists, labor and capital are the principal factors in economic production, while speculation and usury are extraneous. In the present economic circumstances, humanists struggle to totally transform the absurd relationship that has existed between these factors. Until now we have been told that capital receives the profits while workers receive wages, an inequity that has always been justified by the “risk” that capital assumes in investing—as though working people do not risk both their present and their future amid the uncertainties of unemployment and economic crisis.

Another factor in play is management and decision-making in the operation of each company. Earnings not set aside for reinvestment in the enterprise, not used for expansion or diversification, are increasingly diverted into financial speculation, as are profits not used to create new sources of work.

The struggle of working people must therefore be to require maximum productive return from capital. But this cannot happen unless management and directorships are cooperatively shared. How else will it be possible to avoid massive layoffs, business closures, and even the loss of entire industries? For the greatest harm comes from under-investment, fraudulent bankruptcies, forced acquisition of debt, and capital flight—not from profits realized through increased productivity. And if some persist in calling for workers to take possession of the means of production following nineteenth-century teachings, they will have to seriously consider the recent failures of real socialism.

As for the argument that treating capital the same way work is treated will only speed its flight to more advantageous areas, it must be pointed out that this cannot go on much longer because the irrationality of the present economic system is leading to saturation and crisis worldwide. Moreover, this argument, apart from embracing a radical immorality, ignores the historical process in which capital is steadily being transferred to the banking system. As a result, employers and business people are being reduced to the status of employees, stripped of decision-making power in a lengthening chain of command in which they maintain only the appearance of autonomy. And as the recession continues to deepen, these same business people will begin to consider these points more seriously.

Humanists feel the need to act not only on employment issues, but also politically to prevent the State from being solely an instrument of international capital, to ensure a just relationship among the factors of production, and to restore to society its stolen autonomy.

II. Real Democracy Versus Formal Democracy

The edifice of democracy has fallen into ruin as its foundations—the separation of powers, representative government, and respect for minorities—have been eroded.

The theoretical separation of powers has become nonsense. Even a cursory examination of the practices surrounding the origin and composition of the different powers reveals the intimate relationships that link them to each other. And things could hardly be otherwise, for they all form part of one same system. In nation after nation we see one branch gaining supremacy over the others, functions being usurped, corruption and irregularities surfacing—all corresponding to the changing global economic and political situation of each country.

As for representative government, since the extension of universal suffrage people have believed that only a single act is involved when they elect their representative and their representative carries out the mandate received. But as time has passed, people have come to see clearly that there are in fact two acts: a first in which the many elect the few, and a second in which those few betray the many, representing interests foreign to the mandate they received. And this corruption is fed within the political parties, now reduced to little more than a handful of leaders who are totally out of touch with the needs of the people. Through the party machinery, powerful interests finance candidates and then dictate the policies they must follow. This state of affairs reveals a profound crisis in the contemporary conception and implementation of representative democracy.

Humanists struggle to transform the practice of representative government, giving the highest priority to consulting the people directly through referenda, plebiscites, and direct election of candidates. However, in many countries there are still laws that subordinate independent candidates to political parties, or rather to political maneuvering and financial restrictions that prevent them from even reaching the ballot and the free expression of the will of the people.

Every constitution or law that prevents the full possibility of every citizen to elect and to be elected makes a mockery of real democracy, which is above all such legal restrictions. And in order for there to be true equality of opportunity, during elections the news media must be placed at the service of the people, providing all candidates with exactly the same opportunities to communicate with the people.

To address the problem that elected officials regularly fail to carry out their campaign promises, there is also a need to enact *laws of political responsibility* that will subject such officials to censure, revocation of powers, recall from office, and loss of immunity. The current alternative, under which parties or individuals who do not fulfill their campaign promises risk defeat in future elections, in practice does not hinder in the least the politicians' second act—betraying the people they represent.

As for directly consulting the people on the most urgent issues, every day the possibilities to do so increase through the use of technology. This does not mean simply giving greater importance to easily manipulated opinion polls and surveys. What it does mean is to facilitate real participation and direct voting by means of today's advanced computational and communications technologies.

In real democracy, all minorities must be provided with the protections that correspond to their right to representation, as well as all measures needed to advance in practice their full inclusion, participation, and development.

Today, minorities the world over who are the targets of xenophobia and discrimination make anguished pleas for recognition. It is the responsibility of humanists everywhere to bring this issue to the fore, leading the struggle to overcome such neo-fascism, whether overt or covert. In short, to struggle for the rights of minorities is to struggle for the rights of all human beings.

Under the coercion of centralized states—today no more than the unfeeling instruments of big capital—many countries with diverse populations subject entire provinces, regions, or autonomous groups to this same kind of discrimination. This must end through the adoption of federal forms of organization, through which real political power will return to the hands of these historical and cultural entities.

In sum, to give highest priority to the issues of capital and labor, real democracy, and decentralization of the apparatus of the State, is to set the political struggle on the path toward creating a new kind of society—a flexible society constantly changing in harmony with the changing needs of the people, who are now suffocated more each day by their dependence on an inhuman system.

III. The Humanist Position

Humanist action does not draw its inspiration from imaginative theories about God, nature, society, or history. Rather, it begins with life's necessities, which consist most elementally of avoiding pain and moving toward pleasure. Yet human life entails the additional need to foresee future necessities, based on past experience and the intention to improve the present situation.

Human experience is not simply the product of natural physiological accumulation or selection, as happens in all species. It is social experience and personal experience directed toward overcoming pain in the present and avoiding it in the future. Human work, accumulated in the productions of society, is passed on and transformed from one generation to the next in a continuous struggle to improve the existing or natural conditions, even those of the human body itself. Human beings must therefore be defined as historical beings whose mode of social behavior is capable of transforming both the world and their own nature.

Each time that individuals or human groups violently impose themselves on others, they succeed in detaining history, turning their victims into "natural" objects. Nature does not have intentions, and thus to negate the freedom and intentions of others is to convert them into natural objects without intentions, objects to be used.

Human progress in its slow ascent now needs to transform both nature and society, eliminating the violent animal appropriation of some human beings by others. When this happens, we will pass from pre-history into a fully human history. In the meantime, we can begin with no other central value than the human being, fully realized and completely free. Humanists therefore declare, "Nothing above the human being, and no human being beneath any other."

If God, the State, money, or any other entity is placed as the central value, this subordinates the human being and creates the condition for the subsequent control or sacrifice of other human beings. Humanists have this point very clear. Whether atheists or religious, humanists do not start with their atheism or their faith as the basis for their view of the world and their actions. They start with the human being and the immediate needs of human beings. And if, in their struggle for a better world, they believe they discover an intention that moves history in a progressive direction, they place this faith or this discovery at the service of the human being.

Humanists address the fundamental problem: to know if one wants to live, and to decide on the conditions in which to do so.

All forms of violence—physical, economic, racial, religious, sexual, ideological, and others—that have been used to block human progress are repugnant to humanists. For humanists, every form of discrimination, whether subtle or overt, is something to be denounced.

Humanists are not violent, but above all they are not cowards, and because their actions have meaning they are unafraid of facing violence. Humanists connect their personal lives with the life of society. They do not pose such false dichotomies as viewing their own lives as separate from the lives of those around them, and in this lies their coherence.

These issues, then, mark a clear dividing line between humanism and anti-humanism: humanism puts labor before big capital, real democracy before formal democracy, decentralization before centralization, anti-discrimination before discrimination, freedom before oppression, and meaning in life before resignation, complicity, and the absurd. Because humanism is based on freedom of choice, it offers the only valid ethic of the present time. And because humanism believes in intention and freedom, it distinguishes between error and bad faith, between one who is mistaken and one who is a traitor.

IV. From Naïve Humanism to Conscious Humanism

It is at the base of society, in the places where people work and where they live, that humanism must convert what are now only simple isolated protests into a conscious force oriented toward transforming the economic structures.

The struggles of spirited activists in labor unions and progressive political parties will become more coherent as they transform the leadership of these entities, giving their organizations a new orientation that, above short-range grievances, gives the highest priority to the basic proposals advocated by humanism.

Vast numbers of students and teachers, already sensitive to injustice, are becoming conscious of their will to change as the general crisis touches them. And certainly, members of the press in contact with so much daily tragedy are today in favorable positions to act in a humanist direction, as are those intellectuals whose creations are at odds with the standards promoted by this inhuman system.

In the face of so much human suffering, many positions and organizations today encourage people to unselfishly help the dispossessed and those who suffer discrimination. Associations, volunteer groups, and large numbers of individuals are on occasion moved to make positive contributions. Without doubt, one of their contributions is to generate denunciations of these wrongs. However, such groups do not focus their actions on transforming the underlying structures that give rise to the problems. Their approaches are more closely related to humanitarianism than to conscious humanism, although among these efforts are many conscientious protests and actions that can be extended and deepened.

V. The Anti-Humanist Camp

As the people continue to be suffocated by the forces of big capital, incoherent proposals arise that gain strength by exploiting people's discontent, focusing it on various scapegoats. At the root of all such neo-fascism is a profound negation of human values. Similarly, there are certain deviant environmental currents that view nature as more important than human beings. No longer do they preach that an environmental catastrophe is a disaster because it endangers humanity—instead to them the only problem is that human beings have damaged nature.

According to certain of these theories, the human being is somehow contaminated, and thus contaminates nature. It would have been better, they contend, had medicine never succeeded in its fight against disease or in prolonging human life. "Earth first!" some cry hysterically, recalling Nazi slogans. It is but a short step from this position to begin discriminating against cultures seen to contaminate or against "impure" foreigners. These currents of thought may be considered anti-

humanist because at bottom they hold the human being in contempt, and in keeping with the nihilistic and suicidal tendencies so fashionable today, their mentors reflect this self-hatred.

There is, however, a significant segment of society made up of perceptive people who consider themselves environmentalists because they understand the gravity of the abuses that environmentalism exposes and condemns. And if this environmentalism attains the humanist character that corresponds, it will direct the struggle against those who are actually generating the catastrophes—big capital and its chain of destructive industries and businesses, so closely intertwined with the military-industrial complex.

Before worrying about seals, they will concern themselves with overcoming hunger, overcrowding, infant mortality, disease, and the lack of even minimal standards of housing and sanitation in many parts of the world. They will focus on the unemployment, exploitation, racism, discrimination, and intolerance in a world that is so technologically advanced, yet still generates serious environmental imbalances in the name of ever more irrational growth.

One need not look far to see how the right wing functions as a political instrument of anti-humanism. Dishonesty and bad faith reach such extremes that some exponents periodically present themselves as representatives of “humanism.” Take, for example, those cunning clerics who claim to theorize on the basis of a ridiculous “theocentric humanism.” These people, who invented religious wars and inquisitions, who put to death the very founders of western humanism, are now attempting to appropriate the virtues of their victims. They have recently gone so far as to “forgive the errors” of those historical humanists, and so shameless is their semantic banditry that these representatives of anti-humanism even try to cloak themselves with the term “humanist.”

It would of course be impossible to list the full range of resources, tools, instruments, forms, and expressions that anti-humanism has at its disposal. But having shed light on some of their more deceptive practices should help unsuspecting humanists and those newly realizing they are humanists as they re-think their ideas and the significance of their social practice.

VI. Humanist Action Fronts

With the intention of becoming a broad-based social movement, the vital force of humanism is organizing action fronts in the workplace, neighborhoods, unions, and among social action, political, environmental, and cultural organizations. Such collective action makes it possible for varied progressive forces, groups, and individuals to have greater presence and influence, without losing their own identities or special characteristics. The objective of this movement is to promote a union of forces increasingly able to influence broad strata of the population, orienting the current social transformation.

Humanists are neither naive nor enamored of declarations that belong to more romantic eras, and in this sense they do not view their proposals as the most advanced expression of social consciousness or think of their organization in an unquestioning way. Nor do they claim to represent the majority. Humanists simply act according to their best judgment, focusing on the changes they believe are most suitable and possible for these times in which they happen to live.

This Statement of the Humanist Movement gives greater definition of certain aspects of contemporary humanism, and in the next letter we will go on to consider other matters.