

Award Acceptance Speech

By Howard Richards

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Commitment Award

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Linda or Evelin or somebody had a good idea when they named this a LIFETIME award. The word LIFETIME led me to remember the unsuccessful beginning of my peacemaking career. When I was seven years old, in 1945, I was already trying to stop my parents from quarreling. My brother and I would bang pots and pans trying to drown out their voices with noise, trying to make them stop talking and be quiet. We failed.

Howard Richards

One day when I was ten, in 1948, at 5 o`clock in the morning my mother sneaked herself and us two little boys out of the house and we started a new life without my father. He never sent us any money. He couldn` t. He was always unemployed.

My mother tried to eke out a living as an assistant schoolteacher with no degree and no credential. In tears, she asked me to manage the household budget when I was eleven. Pricing the foods on sale, I found that our best bet was to live on cabbage, potatoes, and dark bread with one egg a week each. Later she put us in a foster home that the state paid for while she studied and became a qualified elementary school teacher.

My mother was obsessed by the fear that growing up without a father I might turn out to be gay. She

pulled strings to be sure that my teachers would all be men so that I would have male role models.

So, as it turned out, all my male role models were schoolteachers. And all of them were veterans of World War II. Like my mother`s brother, my Uncle Jack, they were Four Freedoms Boys who fought in Europe to save civilization from the Nazis and the Fascists. Unlike Uncle Jack, they came home.

Fast forwarding to 2021, now when the civilization that my male role models fought to defend is disintegrating, I would like to leave you with just one idea, namely Structural Humiliation, or you might call it two ideas, Structural Humiliation and Dignified Livelihoods that do not Depend on Sales, regarding the two ideas as problem and solution, two sides of the same coin.

Structural humiliation is the inevitable consequence of a labor market that depends on sales to fund employment.

Think globally. Picture economic migrants walking on foot from Central America to the US Border. Picture them piling onto leaky boats to cross the Mediterranean or the English Channel.

Remember Immanuel Wallerstein`s thesis: Today there is only one modern world system and we are all in it. In this system the people who need to sell something to get money vastly outnumber the people who find it profitable to hire labor and sell what they make. Generalizing, the people who need to sell something to get money vastly outnumber those who are willing and able to buy whatever the would-be sellers have to sell.

Structural humiliation happens all the time. It happens whenever people fail to sell whatever they have to sell at a price high enough to be accepted as a respectable member of the community, complying with normal expectations, like dressing nicely, paying your bills, and supporting your children.

Historically, economies counting mainly on for-profit enterprises to create employment have never achieved sustainable full employment at adequate wages. Mathematically, it is an impossibility. It is not a question of whether there will be humiliation. It is a question of *who* will suffer humiliation and who will escape it.

One of the great lessons of the 20th century was that its social democratic welfare states were not sustainable. My male role models thought they were. They thought that the Four Freedoms Boys had

defeated the Nazis and the Fascists once and for all. Instead, history has confirmed some major predictions of Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek. Although Friedman and von Hayek did not phrase their arguments in these terms, what happened was that competing in global markets has forced every nation to join the race to the bottom. The American New Deal petered out. The Swedish Model was not, after all, in the vanguard, anticipating the future of the rest of the world. It has been forced to retreat in Sweden itself. Now, at the worst of all possible historical moments, when the human species in a race against the calendar to reinvent itself to live in ways compatible with physical reality before it is too late and the biosphere is irrevocably destroyed, insanity is winning over rationality; polarization is winning over cooperation.

Why? What went wrong?

Howard Richards

I am suggesting an answer. What went wrong was that the inevitable happened. Namely, structural humiliation. I am recommending as a key unlocking many doors: create dignified livelihoods that do not depend on sales.

An example of how to do it: If, on reviewing your budget, you do not have enough discretionary income to fund a livelihood that does not depend on sales, you can donate regularly to a nonprofit. Your donation complemented by donations from others will fund a meaningful job for somebody.

I suggest starting at ground level, doing what you and I can do here and now. Here is an example from my neighborhood: pool resources to hire someone who likes dogs to round up the stray dogs, give them a loving home, and get them vaccinated. (The local vet will do it for free.)

At a massive level, a leading candidate for funding dignified livelihoods that do not depend on sales is moving income from natural resources to the public purse; and from the public purse to paying people specifically to reforest after fires, and in general to work to save humanity from ecological disaster. There are innumerable other candidates.

I am suggesting a way to focus on the problem. The problem is depending too much on sales to create employment.

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