

# ECONOMIC (IN)JUSTICE

## FACTSHEET - EXPLAINER

Name	Professor Robert Beckford
Details, area of experience	Professor of Theology at the Queen's Ecumenical Foundation in Birmingham and Vrije University in Amsterdam, broadcaster with TV and radio (BBC World Service), and a consultant on anti-racism in the workplace.
Interview date	November 2020
Issues addressed	Social and economic justice; morality and extreme wealth; austerity as a political choice; the pay gap between workers; the gig economy and exploitation; and colonialism and economic justice.
Injustice category (linked to economic injustice)	ability <input type="checkbox"/> age <input type="checkbox"/> class <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> faith <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> gender <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> neuro-diversity <input type="checkbox"/> race <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sexuality <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Key words	Justice Fair share Living wage Pay caps Gig economy Workers' rights Welfare Exploitation Colonialism Neoliberal economics

Brief summary (key points)	Professor Robert Beckford explains what an economically just society looks like and explores some of the root causes of social
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and economic justice in Britain today. He also explores the morality of extreme wealth and, in our podcast series, the legacy of colonialism.

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### **Economic Justice and morality**

Justice, as a model in the Old Testament, is about people having what they deserve – not in a moral sense of people deserving more than others, but everyone deserving a fair share of the resources, i.e. enough to live on, to feed their families with and to have the opportunity to dream about their best future. This is only possible in society if the hoarding of resources by a few is prevented. A just society, therefore, is one where everybody has enough and has their fair share.

### **History and economic injustice**

Causes of economic injustice in Britain today are all historic:

- 1) The shift in economic policy from a mixed economy of government owned and privately owned industry. This changed in the late 1970s-early 80s with the introduction of neoliberal economics that weakened workers' rights and removed caps on the wages of the highest earner.
- 2) Change to the promise of social mobility education once afforded. Education was once a way to have the opportunity for a new life, but now people who go to university come away with high levels of debt that will be with them through the early years of their working life.
- 3) Austerity as a political choice has, since 2008, cut services and thinned out the State's role in society, which means that there is less protection for people. Changes to welfare and the introduction of Universal Credit have pushed people into poverty rather than making society more just.

### **Different political perspectives**

The political Left and Right have different ways of imagining the way society should be structured in order to have a just world. From the Left (i.e. the Labour Party) the way to create a just society is to change the law and have a government that intervenes within the social, economic and education of the people to ensure, or legislate, for more justice. From the Right (i.e. the Conservative Party) your approach is less government and less red tape and instead more opportunity for individuals to take personal responsibility for themselves and their families. There are economies in Europe that have a really strong mixture of the two and they are often the most equal societies (i.e. Holland).

### **Gig economy and worker's rights**

The gig economy, the relaxation of workers' rights and pay caps. The gig economy is based on the belief that private individuals do better, financially, when there is less government and security.

	<p>This belief has led to working practices that are insecure and dangerous employment, which has been dubbed ‘gig’ working – a term that is usually applied to work which is more creative and artistic and might lead to something more stable.</p> <p><b>Colonialism and Britain’s wealth</b>  CARICOM Reparations Commission addresses economic injustice from an historical point of view. It does so through recognising that over the last 500 years Britain’s economic wealth has been built on the exploitation of people during the transatlantic slave trade.</p>
Stand-out quotations	<p>“A society that is economically just means that people have enough to live on, enough to feed their families, enough to support their aspirations for the future.”</p> <p>“A just society is one where everybody, no matter where they come from, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, has enough and has their fair share.”</p> <p>“A society that is just is one that is fair.”</p> <p>“The gig economy is the product of a history of increasing exploitation of the work force.”</p> <p>“My view on extreme wealth is that it is obscene and that it is morally abhorrent.”</p> <p>“We actually need a socio-economic revolution to transform the plight of the poor within Britain.”</p> <p>“Poverty is not a choice, it is a system, a structure that makes people poor.”</p> <p>“Hope. You can’t do any kind of campaigning without a vision for what can be accomplished and how the world should function better.”</p>
Main themes for learners	<p>Definitions of justice and its application to society.</p> <p><b>What are the causes of economic injustice in contemporary Britain?</b> (Prof. Beckford lays out three: neoliberal economics, changes to paying for education, and the policy of austerity).</p> <p>How does society become more economically just and what role does political ideology (or political viewpoints of Left and Right) have on the structure of a just society?</p> <p>Reframing the gig economy and the history of workers’ rights.</p> <p>The morality of extreme wealth and billionaires.</p> <p>Colonialism and economic justice.</p>

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