



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

The Archbishop has written in today's [Yorkshire Post](#) at the start of [Living Wage Week](#). His article follows in full

It is comforting to know that periods of great hardship often precede periods of great social advances and moral consciousness. The precedents of people like William Temple, who, during the darkest hours of the Second World War, dreamed of what the post-war civilisation might look like, and was one of the chief proponents of the post-war consensus that gave birth to a welfare state, gives me hope that we too can build back a better, more inclusive, compassionate, and fairer society post-Covid.

We have grown so accustomed to hearing slogans and buzzwords – so many promises to “build back better”, to “level up”, to be “stronger together” that they risk losing their meaning. But there is a reason that world leaders, both at home and beyond, have chosen these slogans and the practical meaning behind them. Beyond just being an excellent alliterative phrase, “build back better” encapsulates the emotion that keeps our spirits kindled in difficult times, that drives us forwards through our shared struggles: hope. Hope that our next society can be better, stronger, fairer and healthier than our current one.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, we have all had an opportunity to re-evaluate the social ‘truths’ which underpin our society, reaching a universal consensus that we simply can, and must, do better. The true upholders of our communities – our NHS staff, our delivery drivers, our care workers, our shelf stackers – have finally been given the spotlight they deserve. So too have the dire conditions in which they are forced to operate. 1.7 million key workers earned below the Living Wage in April 2020. Key workers experienced a £1.6bn living wage gap during the pandemic and would be, on average, over £900 better off had they been paid the real Living Wage in this period.

Beyond our key workers, however, this initial illumination has since broadened to expose some of the unacceptable hardships that all our low-paid workers must endure. A fifth of all UK workers are working in insecure and precarious work; while two-thirds of those already in low-paid work have found their pay being reduced during the pandemic. This is simply not good enough.

Thankfully, there are some who are already laying the foundations for improving communities. Off the back of our Thursday evening applause for the NHS, we saw an increase in volunteering at food banks, communal NHS programmes, and taking up jobs stacking shelves. While this individual action is to be admired, I hope to see this compassion on an individual level be adopted throughout our economy and society.

One organisation which has been leading the way in this regard is the Living Wage Foundation. This Living Wage Week, the Foundation has announced the new rates that cover what we all need to earn to get by. Their movement will see almost 9,000 businesses elect to give their 300,000 workers not only what they need to survive, but to thrive as well. The principle behind the campaign for better pay and secure working

conditions ought to be a pillar of our new society, and one I hope will be adopted by even more forward-thinking businesses as we look ahead to 2022.

As one of my predecessors as Archbishop of York, William Temple said, 'My worth is what I am worth to God; and that is a marvellous great deal, for Christ died for me. Thus, incidentally, what gives to each of us His highest worth gives the same worth to everyone; in all that matters most are we equal.' None of us can operate in isolation. And, as we come out from our own period of darkness and hardship, it is crucial that we do not take the individual compassion and hopeful sentiments we have witnessed throughout this pandemic for granted, but use them as seeds for building up communities. For they flow directly from the loving sacrificial example of Jesus Christ who through his death and resurrection, gave us hope and purpose to build a better society for ourselves, and brought us into a community of giving and receiving love.

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