

European Anti-Poverty Network

Charles Miceli – A Life Dedicated to the Poor and Disempowered

His life can be described as one long journey that in the past few years culminated with his setting up of the strategy group *Alleanza Kontra l-Faqar* to give a stronger voice to the marginalized and the poorest.

Very early in life he embraced the philosophy of championing the poor by following the teachings of the theologian of liberation Gustavo Gutierrez reflected in the phrase ‘a Preferential Option of the Poor’. This means creating the conditions for marginalized voices to be heard, defending the defenseless, assessing lifestyles, policies and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. Being an avid reader he delved deep in whatever was related to the subject. Incidentally, it was Gutierrez’s seminal book, among others, that Charles was reading, on that fateful Friday which started out as a perfectly normal day. It was later found in the bag he carried with him everywhere.

Charles had a great sense of social justice which became ingrained in him in early childhood as he saw his parents struggling to make ends meet and especially when his father lost his job and remained unemployed for two years. Charles, who was a sensitive person, felt he did not have many options, so he dropped out of school to go into a printing job apprenticeship. The little money he earned was enough to see him through his teenage years and to help his family. Years later he talked about how humiliating it must have been for his father to accept half of his meager stipend.

Charles never forgot where he came from, what it means to live in a cramped space which allowed little room for privacy, the lack of sanitary facilities, or simply the feeling of exclusion. Being in the print media and journalism kept him up to date with what was happening around him, politics, new ideas and ideals. He contributed opinion pieces on the human condition with special focus on the rights of the workers and the downtrodden. He wrote profusely and going through the yellowed copies of his articles one can see the thread of social justice throughout.

After many years in journalism he decided to quit his job and go into the voluntary sector, first with children in residential care. He joined Caritas and worked in the various drug rehabilitation programmes, the last one being the Prisoners Inmate Programme, where prisoners with drug related offenses could go during the last two years of their prison sentence. The programme facilitates the reintegration of prisoners in society.

Charles remained loyal to his ideals till the very end. He volunteered his services for the setting up of Dar Papa Frangisku, the first drop-in and shelter for the homeless. He never let feelings of helplessness plunge him into depression and never gave up the fight for change.

Over the years he realized that some people can never become independent or live what we call a normal life. He accepted them as they were and supported them in the best possible

way. This was one of the reasons why he went so far as to distribute parcels of food to those who would otherwise remain hungry or resort to stealing. Those who had nothing to lose and nobody to turn to confided in him. He was aware that some of them welcomed their term in prison and considered it as a kind of respite from the harsh reality of life outside. There at least they found a roof over their heads and food on their plate. He believed that nobody should feel constrained to consider prison as a sort of secure home. His positive unconditional regard for the poor and disempowered was something remarkable.

He wrote and lobbied tirelessly and these past few years focused on campaigns to raise the minimum wage, for the setting up of shelters for the homeless, and for rent reform. Unfortunately he did not live to see the realization of his dream on just and affordable housing.

‘I don’t have the energy to campaign much more, but I cannot turn away when I see people suffering. I don’t know why but I feel like I am a magnet for these people. Perhaps this is because from earlier on in my life I decided to embrace the option to dedicate my life for the poor’, wrote Charles in his regular column for the last time in the week he died.

Pauline Miceli – 22nd May 2018
