



August 2019
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Chomsky on US Economy



Foster on Caravans



Z MAGAZINE *August 2019*

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Z MAGAZINE is an independent magazine of critical thinking on political, cultural, social, and economic life in the U.S. Z Magazine (ISSN: 1056-5507) is currently published bi-monthly Copyright 2018 by The Institute for Social and Cultural Communications; Periodical postage paid at Hull, MA and additional mail offices.

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We welcome unsolicited submissions. Due dates are the 25th of each month. We also welcome zap listings of events, listings, news releases, etc. Ads are free at our discretion.

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Our staff collective (there are no bosses, executive directors, or hierarchical job assignments) includes Lydia Sargent, Eric Sargent, and Michael Albert.

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Dedham MA, 02026
eric.sargent@zmag.org

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image by Kathleen Foster

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An Honorable Course in Iran: End Sanctions, Resume Dialogue

By Kathy Kelly

Recently, Elham Pourtaher, an Iranian graduate student at the State University of New York in Albany, wrote about how U.S. policies cause suffering and trauma far beyond U.S. borders. Her diabetic father, for example, is in danger of losing access to medicines because sanctions against Iranian banks make it nearly impossible to pay for imported goods, including medicine and food. Shortages could lead to thousands of deaths. Pourtaher described “the collective sense of fear caused by the increased sanctions.”

President Trump expressed concern that 150 people could be killed if U.S. airstrikes against Iran had been carried out. We must ask how many people could die because of economic warfare against Iran.

The economic war cripples Iran’s economy and afflicts the most vulnerable Iranian people—the sick, the poor, the elderly and the children.

In more than 70 visits to Iraq from 1991 to 2003, Voices in the Wilderness, a team of peace

activists I was part of, reported on deteriorating conditions as people struggled to find desperately needed goods, including medicines and medical relief supplies. By 1996, UN officials reported that the economic sanctions directly contributed to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of children.

Wasting away from curable diseases, thousands of children who entered pediatrics wards never left. In Baghdad, Mosul, Babylon, Amara, Nasiriyah, and Basra, we visited wards that became death row for infants. Those children were by no means criminal. They couldn’t possibly have been held accountable for the actions of Saddam Hussein and the ruthless dictatorship ruling Iraq. Their plight seldom appeared in U.S. news reports about Iraq. But they were brutally and lethally punished, ostensibly because Iraq might possess weapons of mass destruction.

By the end of 2002, most Iraqis I knew dreaded a new round of military attacks and invasion. People I’d regarded as having nerves of steel said, “Believe

me, Kathy, I am so scared,” or asked, “How can I possibly protect my children?”

On February 5, 2003, colleagues and I huddled over a shortwave radio on the balcony of Baghdad’s Al-Fanar hotel, straining to hear Colin Powell as he presented evidence that he said proved beyond a doubt that Iraq harbored weapons of mass destruction. After the 2003 bombing and invasion, evidence of Colin Powell’s allegations simply couldn’t be found. Now, Iraq is a broken, battered, and traumatized country.

Why Should the United States now be Punishing Iran?

In its last quarterly report, issued May 31, the International Atomic Energy Agency again verified Iran’s compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the so-called nuke deal, even though the United States has reneged on it. Noted analyst Juan Cole emphasizes that Iran’s theocratic government adheres to Islamic teachings, which for-



By Mike Mareen/Shutterstock.com

bid stockpiling or use of weapons that afflict mass casualties on civilian populations. This surely includes nuclear weapons.

The greatest outlier in terms of possessing nuclear weapons is the United States, which in an alarming new development has granted seven permits for the transfer of sensitive nuclear information by U.S. businesses to the Saudi government. So far, the Saudi government has not shown readiness to abide by safeguards which would prevent it from diverting or misusing nuclear materials to assemble nuclear weapons. Saudi Arabia already has sophisticated ballistic missile delivery systems. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman stated on national television that if Iran acquires a nuclear weapon, so will Saudi Arabia.

In 2016, the United States signed a Memorandum of Understanding to provide Israel with \$38 billion in military assistance over a ten-year period. Even though the official Israeli position is neither to confirm nor deny the existence of its nuclear weapons program, it is now estimated that Israel has a nuclear arsenal of at least 80 warheads. However, Israel still is not a state party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The double standards in foreign policy maintained by the United States—one standard for U.S. allies Israel and Saudi Arabia and a different standard for Iran—undermine any progress in ending wars and the potential for new wars in the Middle East.

Rather than punish Iran, the

United States should immediately return to the Iran nuclear agreement and support proposals regularly advanced at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation treaty conferences for a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in the Middle East.

The U.S. government claims it is threatened by Iran. Yet, according to David Stockman writing in *Antiwar.com*, the United States surrounds Iran with 45 U.S. bases, and Iran's defense budget of less than \$15 billion amounts to just seven days of money spent by the Pentagon.

The United States, which claims Iran is supporting terrorism, continues to enable Saudi Arabia's aerial terrorism as it regularly bombs civilians in Yemen. On June 24, a ship bound for Saudi Arabia departed from Wilmington, North Carolina, carrying bombs, grenades, cartridges and defense-related aircraft. The United States also supplies weapons to Bahrain, the UAE, Sudan and other countries which actively participate in the Saudi-led Coalition making war against Yemen. The Saudi government directly supports the military government in Sudan, which recently killed at least 100 peaceful protesters who were part of Sudan's Democratic Uprising.

Rather than planning cyberattacks and new means of aggression, the United States should heed calls for dialogue and negotiation, relying on Albert Camus's conclusion to his profound anti-war essay following World War II: "The only hon-

orable course will be to stake everything on the formidable gamble, that words are more powerful than munitions." Z

A version of this article first appeared in *The Progressive* at www.progressive.org.

Kathy Kelly (kathy@vcnv.org) co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence (www.vcnv.org).

Connecting the Dots: Insane Trade and Climate Chaos

By Sean Keller

Imagine a world where food routinely gets shipped thousands of miles away to be processed, then shipped back to be sold right where it started. Imagine cows from Mexico being fed corn imported from the United States, then being exported to the United States for butchering, and the resulting meat being shipped back to Mexico, one last time, to be sold. Imagine a world in which, in most years since 2005, China has somehow managed to import more goods from itself than from the U.S., one of its largest trading partners.

This may sound like the premise of some darkly comic, faintly dystopian film—albeit one

geared towards policy wonks. But it's no joke—in fact, it is the daily reality of the global economy.

The above examples are all instances of “re-importation”—that is, countries shipping their own goods overseas only to ship them back again at a later stage in the production chain. And these are far from the only instances of this head-scratching phenomenon. In the waters off the coast of Norway, cod arrive every year after an impressive migratory journey, having swum thousands of miles around the Arctic Circle in search of spawning grounds. Yet this migration pales in comparison to the one the fish undertake after being caught: they're sent to China to be fileted before returning to supermarkets in Scandinavia to be sold. This globalization of the seafood supply chain extends to the U.S. as well; more than half of the seafood caught in Alaska is processed in China, and much of it gets sent right back to American grocery store shelves.

Compounding the insanity of re-importation is the equally baffling phenomenon of redundant trade. This is a common practice whereby countries both import and export huge quantities of identical products in a given year. To take a particularly striking example, in 2007, Britain imported 15,000 tons of chocolate-covered waffles, while exporting 14,000 tons. In 2017, the U.S. both imported and exported nearly 1.5 million tons of beef, and nearly half a million tons of potatoes. In 2016, 213,000 tons of



By Travel mania/Shutterstock.com

liquid milk arrived in the UK—a windfall, had not 545,000 tons of milk also left the UK over the course of that same year.

On the face of it, this kind of trade makes no economic sense. Why would it be worth the immense cost—in money as well as fuel—of sending perfectly good food abroad only to bring it right back again?

The answer lies in the way the global economy is structured. “Free trade” agreements allow transnational corporations to access labor and resources almost anywhere, enabling them to take advantage of tax loopholes and national differences in labor and environmental standards. Meanwhile, direct and indirect subsidies for fossil fuels, on the order of \$5 trillion per year worldwide, allow the costs of shipping to be largely borne by taxpayers and the environment instead of the businesses that actually engage in it. In combination, these structural forces lead to insane levels of international transport that serve no purpose other than

boosting corporate profits.

The consequences of this bad behavior are already severe, and set to become worse in the coming decades. Small farmers, particularly in the global South, have seen their livelihoods undermined by influxes of cheap food from abroad; meanwhile, their climate-resilient agricultural practices are actively discouraged by the WTO and “free trade” agreements. And food processing and packaging—both critical for food that's going to be shipped a long way from where it was produced—account for a significant proportion of the global food system's greenhouse gas emissions.

Food is not the only product that accrues unnecessary miles of shipping. The components of a typical smartphone, for example, have traveled a collective half-million miles—touching down on three continents—before landing in your pocket. This kind of excessive trade is why carbon emissions from international transport

are growing nearly three times faster than emissions from other sources. At current rates of growth, international trade by sea and air will, by 2050, emit about as much CO₂ as the entire European Union does today.

The link between liberalized trade policies and carbon emissions is clear and straightforward. A recent study from Japan's Kyushu University found

ing. There are plenty of ways to fix this—for example, emissions from trade could be assigned to countries on the basis of where goods start out, where they end up, or where the ships and planes transporting them are registered. All that countries would have to do is agree on a standard. But at the moment no country is assigned responsibility for these floating emissions.



By Travel mania/Shutterstock.com

that when countries reduce or eliminate their tariffs—particularly on resource-intensive industries like mining and manufacturing—they see corresponding increases in the amount of carbon emissions associated with imported goods.

What this means is that if we're going to effectively combat the climate crisis, we'll have to pay attention to trade policy. Specifically, we'll need to change it so that unrestricted, unlimited "free trade" is no longer an option. But policymakers currently have little incentive to reduce international trade because, bizarrely, emissions from global trade do not appear in any nation's carbon account-

The result is a situation in which policymakers promise to reduce carbon emissions while simultaneously working to expand global trade—even though these two goals are wholly incompatible.

If policymakers continue to drag their feet, the impetus for real change in the way we conduct global trade will have to come from peoples' movements working together to make their voices heard. We must call for an end to the deregulatory "free trade" and tax policies that make practices like re-importation and redundant trade profitable. One of the most critical steps towards sanity would be the removal of subsidies for fossil fuels. When

taxpayers stop paying part of the cost of global transport, transnational corporations will have to radically reconsider the way they operate.

These changes will be vigorously opposed by big global businesses, which means that generating momentum for trade policies that promote community health and ecological stability won't happen overnight. But the first step is raising awareness of trade as a climate issue, and overcoming the unwillingness of most major media outlets, politicians, and think tanks to discuss it critically.

To that end, Local Futures has released a new fact sheet and tongue-in-cheek short film on "insane trade" and its consequences. We hope they can help draw attention to the absurdity of the current system, point to healthier alternatives, and make the issue of global trade approachable and understandable for a wide audience. So please, share them with people you know, and start a conversation around this critical topic. **Z**

Climate Tipping Points and the Poor People's Campaign

By Ted Glick

I returned home recently from three days at a Beyond Ex-



Protestors with banners at a youth strike for climate march in central London, by Ink Drop/Shutterstock.com

treme Energy leadership retreat and two days at the Poor Peoples Campaign Moral Action Congress, both held in Washington, DC. My first task was to go through all the email that had piled up over that time. One of them contained an extremely sobering news story from Reuters, the headline: “Scientists amazed as Canadian permafrost thaws 70 years early.”

The story begins with this sentence: “Permafrost at outposts in the Canadian Arctic is thawing 70 years earlier than predicted, an expedition has discovered, in the latest sign that the global climate crisis is accelerating even faster than scientists had feared.” It goes on to say, “With scientists warning that sharply higher temperatures would devastate the global south and threaten the viability of industrial civilization in the northern hemisphere, campaigners said the new paper reinforced the imperative to cut emissions.

“Thawing permafrost is one of the tipping points for climate breakdown and it’s happening before our very eyes,” said Jennifer Morgan, Executive Director of Greenpeace International.”

Tipping points. Are there more than one that are relevant to our dire condition? I believe there are two others: technological tipping points and political tipping points.

This latest permafrost melt story is scientific evidence that, as Morgan says, we could be at the beginning of a climate tipping point right now.

Are we at a technological tipping point? I think so. Between the technological viability of wind, solar, electric vehicles and electric heat (and cooling) pumps, and the already-low prices on wind and solar and the coming-down prices for electric vehicles and heat pumps, as well as other emerging technologies, we have the tools we need right

now to engage in the World War Two-type of mobilization and economic transformation in a short period of time that we absolutely, critically need.

But what about a political tipping point? Could that be about to happen, too, or are we in the beginning of one already?

I believe we could well be. The Poor Peoples Campaign (PPC) event was one of the reasons I think this, others being the 2018 election results, the emergence in massive numbers of the youth-based and youth-led Sunrise Movement and international Youth Climate Strike, the explosion onto the political scene of the Green New Deal and the continually building support for it, the competition going on among the many Democratic Presidential candidates as to who has the best plan to address the climate crisis, and a decidedly more progressive orientation by most of those candidates.

What was it about the PPC

event that makes it one of those pieces of evidence?

One is the power of the gathering. About 1,000 people attended, from almost every state. It was a very multi-cultural event, with significant leadership from people of color, particularly in the person of Reverend William Barber II. It is so right that he is the leader of the PPC since he is without question in the tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr., the originator of the first Poor People's Campaign in 1968.

One morning, Reverend Barber presented to the Congress "14 Steps to Moral Fusion Organizing." It was the best speech I have ever heard laying out in very concrete detail what is necessary in order to build a multi-issue, multi-cultural, independent, progressive, spiritually-grounded, national united front with grassroots working people of all colors and cultures in leadership. He made it clear that the objective of the PPC is "not just about the next election," as important as that is, and not just about Trump, as retrograde and reactionary as he and the Republicans are, but about a multi-issue progressive agenda which must be won through organizing, actions, including nonviolent direct action, and relating to elections.

How do the co-chairs of the PPC, Reverend Barber and Reverend Dr. Liz Theoharis, articulate the PPC mission? It is to "build a broad and deep national moral movement—rooted in the leadership of poor people—to unite our country from the bottom up. There are 140 million

poor and low-wealth people in the richest country in the world. We're bringing together tens of thousands of people across the country to challenge the evils of systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, ecological devastation and the nation's distorted morality."

"Ecological devastation," the climate emergency in particular, is not the central issue of the PPC, but it is one of the major articulated issues. For the PPC to understand that this is a major issue and that it must be included as one of their top priorities is very important, an example for other non-climate-focused groups to emulate, I would humbly suggest.

Through the PPC's work and campaigns over the last

and Harris. All spoke for 4 minutes and were then asked questions by Barber, Theoharis and a number of PPC members for about 25 minutes each. There were about a dozen TV cameras there.

Without a doubt, the issue of poverty, of 140 million Americans poor or of low-wealth, was significantly propelled into the Presidential campaign. We will see which of the candidates pick up and run in a substantive way with it, but given who some of them are, it sure seems likely some will do so.

How are we going to address poverty? One major way, the most critical way, is via the Green New Deal route and the conscious creation of millions of decent-paying jobs as we rapid-



Belgian students demand urgent measures to combat climate change, by Alexandros Michailidis/Shutterstock.com

two years it has developed the credibility such that nine of the candidates running for the Democratic Party's Presidential nomination came to the first day of the Congress: Biden, Yang, Bennet, Williamson, Warren, Swalwell, Messam, Sanders

ly get off fossil fuels and create a truly green economy. The PPC gets and supports this.

But the PPC also gets political mobilization. It's what this "new unsettling force" did in the spring of last year, when "thousands of people in 40 states, for

6 consecutive weeks, gathered in state capitols across the country and in Washington, DC for nonviolent moral fusion direct action, weekly mass meetings, teach ins and cultural events. The result was 239 actions in 40 days with over 5,000 people presenting themselves for non-violent civil disobedience and tens of thousands witnessing—the largest and most expansive wave of nonviolent civil disobedience in 21st century America.”

To make the next two years the political tipping point that they absolutely must be, we need: 1) a multi-cultural, multi-issue, grassroots-based, people of color-led (with others) national movement, 2) a massive turn-out on November 3, 2020, of women, people of color, young people, progressives and everyone else who understands that a second Trump term would be a catastrophe for the country and the world, 3) strategic nonviolent direct action, particularly at proposed new fossil fuel infrastructure locations as well as at other locations, that “keeps the pot boiling” and helps win some victories, 4) other mass demonstrations and events that make visual the determination and breadth of our movement of movements and, as a result, 5) a first 100 days of action by whoever replaces Trump, along with a Democrat-controlled House and Senate, under massive pressure from below, which makes clear we ain’t playing, we’re serious about government of the people, by the people and for the people and the planet.

With such a result, we have

a fighting chance of preventing full-out climate meltdown and bequeathing to those coming after us a world grounded in justice and love, one worth living in and fighting for. **Z**

Ted Glick has been a progressive activist, organizer and writer since 1968. Past writings and other information can be found at <https://tedglick.com>, and he can be followed on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/jtglick>.

U.S. vs. China: From Tariff War to Eco- nomic War

By Jack Rasmus

On June 29, 2019, Trump and the president of China, Xi, met again at the G20 in Japan in the midst of a potential further escalating trade war. But the outcome looks eerily similar to that of the prior G20 meeting in Buenos Aires on December 2, 2018, when Trump and Xi also met.

Once more, the same post-G20 “spin is in”: Trump declares publicly he has a great relationship with Xi and there’s a great trade deal soon forthcoming between the two countries. U.S. and China trade teams will now begin to thrash out the details on the remaining 10 percent or so of U.S.-China trade differences. In the interim, once again, Trump

announced he will withhold imposing more tariffs (this time on an additional \$325 billion of China imports to the U.S.). In other words, coming out of the latest G20, it’s almost an exact déjà vu all over again.

Will it be different this time? Will there be an agreement? Or will Trump once again just be buying time—i.e. until just before the 2020 elections? Until he sees China’s economy softening further and he raises U.S. demands further again? Or maybe Trump and his neocon trade advisers—Lighthizer, Navarro, Bolton who are now driving U.S. trade (and most of U.S. foreign) policy—don’t want to compromise and will accept nothing less than China’s capitulation on the nextgen technology issue that was at the core of the blow up of negotiations in May 2019?

It’s probably becoming increasingly clear to the Chinese that the U.S. did not just launch a “tariff war” back in March 2018. U.S. policy is driving toward a bonafide economic war between the U.S. and China longer-term.

In the nearer-term, the current differences may well transform the “tariff” war into a “currency war” that will spread contagion and reverberate globally across other economies—at a time when the global capitalist economy is slowing fast and approaching a new financial instability. All China has to do is allow its currency, the Yuan-Renminbi, to devalue naturally in response to U.S. policy and the slowing global economy. That devaluation would more than offset



By Desmon William Maradona/Shutterstock.com

U.S. tariffs. Thus far, China has intervened in global money exchange markets to prevent this. But all it needs to do is allow it to occur according to prevailing economic and market forces and just not intervene further in global money markets to prop up the Yuan. That will become inevitable as the China, U.S., and global economies weaken further in coming months. China doesn't have to manipulate its currency. It only has to allow global market forces, unleashed in large part by Trump policies, to naturally devalue the Yuan.

Then there's China's \$1.3 trillion of U.S. assets, mostly U.S. Treasuries. It could slow its purchase of new U.S. government debt, which it appears it may now be doing. Should the tariff-currency war intensify, if necessary, it could stop or even sell off its dollar hoard of U.S.

Treasuries. It's been moving toward that since September 2018, as its purchases of U.S. securities first slowed and then declined in March 2019. That reduction of purchases, if not offset by other economies buying more, would drive up long-term interest rates in the U.S. and in turn the value of the U.S. dollar still more—all of which further slows global growth.

Rising U.S. rates and the dollar will likely precipitate another U.S. stock and junk bond sell-off, similar to that which occurred in late 2018. And we know Trump doesn't like stock market declines.

There are numerous other "actions" the Chinese could take in response to U.S. neocons intensifying or prolonging the U.S.-China tariff-trade war, further driving the differences into a broader economic war,

including various bureaucratic obstacles to U.S. corporations' majority ownership of operations in China, "buy China" not America in China movements, and restricting the sale of what's called "rare earths"—minerals key to technology and military production—would likely be imposed. Even if U.S. neocons don't understand this, or don't care, widespread business and banking interests do and could intervene more forcefully should Trump's drift toward economic war continue.

Economic Slowdown & Recession "Wild Card"

And there's a wild card in the trade-war deck that may check the neocons influence: the current softening of the U.S. and China economies, which could force both sides to an agreement. Trump may grab the major concessions on China purchases and U.S. majority ownership rights in China and announce a big victory—just before the 2020 U.S. elections.

China's economy is clearly slowing, growing likely no more than 4-5 percent, not the official 6.5 percent. But so too is the U.S. economy, which will start to become more obvious once the data for the 2nd quarter U.S. GDP start to come in by late July.

The U.S. 1st Quarter GDP numbers were propped up by temporary factors associated with inventory over-investment and net exports, both of which are fading rapidly this quarter.

Moreover, U.S. household consumer spending is barely growing, most recently at less than 1 percent, the housing sector has slowed for the past 17 months, manufacturing orders and production is now stagnant and business investment has turned negative. Lagging indicators, like jobs, are now beginning to turn down as well. The U.S. Central bank's lowering of interest rates in the second half of 2019, which is helping to drive the massive \$1.5 trillion in stock buybacks and dividend payouts scheduled for this year, may succeed in putting a temporary floor under stock markets. But the real side of the U.S. economy is being driven to slow down, or even worse, by year end. More bank research departments, big finance capitalists, and even some economists—a notoriously conservative and timid forecasting lot—have begun to predict recession by year-end 2019.

A more rapidly slowing U.S. economy, may change the trade negotiations dynamic, forcing both sides to some kind of a deal. And if the U.S. slips into recession by winter 2019-20, (which this writer has also been predicting the past year) the pressure to cut a deal will grow.

Trump may yet be convinced to take the China concessions already on the table—and temporarily suspend the U.S. demand for China's capitulation on the technology issue. Trump could then take what's been offered by China—i.e. to buy \$1 trillion more U.S. farm goods and allow U.S. corporations ma-

jority ownership of operations in China—and declare a major victory in the trade negotiations in 2020 just before the elections. The nextgen tech-military confrontation—the real core of the U.S.-China dispute—could then be revisited later. Because for Trump, a “deal is never a deal,” but subject to reopening whenever he chooses.

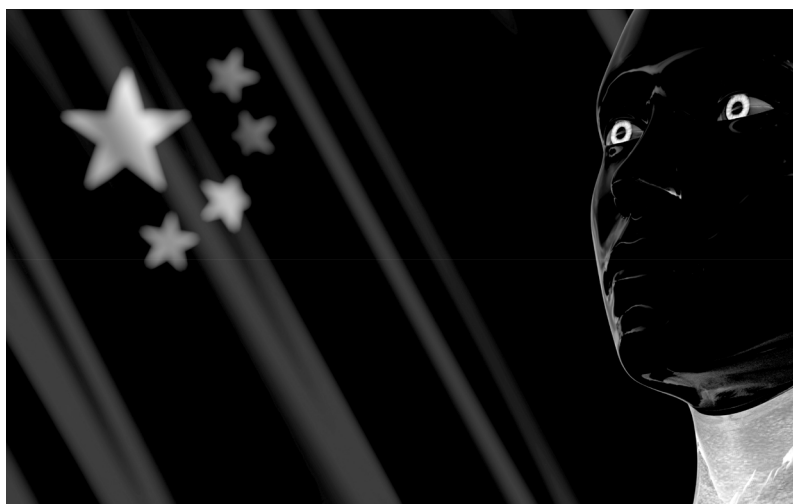
Breaking an agreement is standard practice for Trump. Just ask the Mexicans, where Trump recently threatened to levy 25 percent more tariffs even after the U.S. concluded a new NAFTA 2.0 deal last year. Or ask the Iranians, who thought they had an agreement with the U.S. Or the Europeans who thought they had a Climate deal. For Trump, negotiations are a continuing process, punctuated by happy-talk events stroking foreign leaders, followed by more threats of sanctions, and personal insults and intimidations, to force a reopening of deals once thought concluded by trading partners—allied and

challengers alike.

In other words, even if a China-U.S. trade deal is done, the trade war with China will not be over. It will have just begun, as it evolves toward a broader “economic” war after the 2020 elections, perhaps even before.

The key to a China trade deal occurring sooner rather than later, is whether Trump and U.S. big bankers and multinational capitalists can convince the neocons and the military industrial complex to agree to a short-term deal with China now that provides only token nextgen technology concessions—backed by the Trump-Neocon assurance that the U.S. will re-open the technology offensive after the 2020 elections once again.

For the U.S. economic and political elites are in basic agreement with the neocons and won't allow China to challenge U.S. global hegemony in the next decade by leveraging nextgen technologies that are the key to both economic and military hegemony. It's just a question



Nextgen technology development is at the core of the restructuring and restoration of U.S. hegemony, by boscorelli/Shutterstock.com

of timing. Take two bites of the bargaining apple from the Chinese, and come back later for the big bite: the fight over nextgen technology. Either that or Trump and the Neocons will continue to insist on three bites all at once.

This writer's guess and prediction is that the now-slipping U.S. and global economy will result in the former, and the U.S. will reopen any deal reached and renew its technology demands after the 2020 elections.

Historical Precedents

Just as European and American imperialists jockeyed and maneuvered in the years leading up to 1914 and the first world war, with their focus on disputes over markets and global natural resource control, in the 21st century the jockeying and maneuvering has similarly begun—albeit this time with a different focus on nextgen technologies, over who controls global money flows, whose currency will continue to dominate, over who calls the shots in global institutions like the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and so on.

The 2020s decade ahead will prove a highly dangerous period. The global capitalist economy is slowing, as has always done periodically. A new restructuring of global capitalism is on the agenda, as it was in the late 1970s, in the mid-1940s, and during the years immediately leading up to 1914.

Trump's trade wars and other policies should be understood as part of a broad reordering of U.S. economic and political pol-

icies, and relations with other nation states, allied and adversary alike, to ensure the continuation of U.S. global economic and military hegemony for the coming decade. Nextgen technology development is at the core of that restructuring and restoration of U.S. hegemony. Trump is just the appearance, the historic vehicle, behind the deeper global capitalist transformation in progress. **Z**

Jack Rasmus is the author of the forthcoming book, *The Scourge of Neoliberalism: US Policy from Reagan to Trump*, Clarity Press, September 2019; and the recently published *Alexander Hamilton and the Origins of the Fed*, Lexington books, March 2019. He blogs at jack-



Jared Kushner, by Everett Collection/Shutterstock.com

rasmus.com and his website is www.kyklosproductions.com. Dr. Rasmus tweets at @drjackrasmus and hosts the Alternative Visions radio show on the Progressive Radio Network.

Kushner as a Colonial Administrator: Let's Talk About the "Israeli Model"

By Ramzy Baroud

In a television interview on June 2, on the news docu-series "Axios" on HBO, Jared Kushner opened up regarding many issues, in which his "Deal of the Century" was a prime focus.

The major revelation made by Kushner, President Donald Trump's adviser and son-in-law, was the least surprising. Kushner believes that Palestinians are not capable of governing themselves.

Not surprising, because Kushner thinks he is capable of arranging the future of the Palestinian people without the inclusion of the Palestinian leadership. He has been pushing his so-called Deal of the Century relentlessly, while including in his various meetings and conferences countries such as Poland, Brazil and Croatia, but not Palestine.

Indeed, this is what transpired at the Warsaw conference on “peace and security” in the Middle East. The same charade, also led by Kushner, is expected to be rebooted in Bahrain on June 25.

Much has been said about the subtle racism in Kushner’s words, reeking with the stench of old colonial discourses where the natives were seen as lesser, incapable of rational thinking, beings who needed the civilized “whites” of the western hemisphere to help them cope with their backwardness and inherent incompetence.

Kushner, whose credentials are merely based on his familial connections to Trump and family friendship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is now poised to be the colonial administrator of old, making and enforcing the law while the hapless natives have no other option but to either accommodate or receive their due punishment.

This is not an exaggeration. In fact, according to leaked information concerning Kushner’s Deal of the Century, and published in the Israeli daily newspaper, *Israel Hayom*, if Palestinian groups refuse to accept the U.S.-Israeli diktats, “the US will cancel all financial support to the Palestinians and ensure that no country transfers funds to them.”

In the HBO interview, Kushner offered the Palestinians a lifeline. They could be considered capable of governing themselves should they manage to achieve the following: “a fair judicial system ... freedom of the press, freedom of expression, tolerance for all religions.”

The fact that Palestine is an occupied country, subject in every possible way to Israel’s military law, and that Israel has never been held accountable for its 52-year occupation seems to be of no relevance whatsoever, as far as Kushner is concerned.

On the contrary, the subtext in all of what Kushner has said in the interview is that Israel is the antithesis to the unquestionable Palestinian failure. Unlike Palestine, Israel needs to do little to demonstrate its ability to be a worthy peace partner.

While the term “US bias towards Israel” is as old as the state of Israel itself, what is hardly discussed are the specifics of that bias, the decidedly condescending, patronizing and, often, racist view that U.S. political classes have of Palestinians—and all Arabs and Muslims, for that matter; and the utter infatuation with Israel, which is often cited as a model for democracy, judicial transparency and successful “anti-terror” tactics.

According to Kushner a “fair judicial system” is a *conditio sine qua non* to determine a country’s ability to govern itself. But is the Israeli judicial system “fair” and “democratic”?

Israel does not have a single judicial system, but two. This duality has, in fact, defined Israeli courts from the very inception of Israel in 1948. This de facto apartheid system openly differentiates between Jews and Arabs, a fact that is true in both civil and criminal law.

“Criminal law is applied separately and unequally in the West

Bank, based on nationality alone (Israeli versus Palestinian), inventively weaving its way around the contours of international law in order to preserve and develop its ‘(illegal Jewish) settlement enterprise’,” Israeli scholar, Emily Omer-Man, explained in her essay “Separate and Unequal.”

In practice, Palestinians and Israelis who commit the exact same crime will be judged according to two different systems, with two different procedures: “The settler will be processed according to the Israeli Penal Code (while) the Palestinian will be processed according to military order.”

This unfairness is constituent of a massively unjust judicial apparatus that has defined the Israeli legal system from the onset. Take the measure of administrative detention as an example. Palestinians can be held without trial and without any stated legal justification. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been subjected to this undemocratic “law” and hundreds of them are currently held in Israeli jails.

It is ironic that Kushner raised the issue of freedom of the press, in particular, as Israel is being derided for its dismal record in that regard. Israel has reportedly committed 811 violations against Palestinian journalists since the start of the “March of Return” in Gaza in March 2018. Two journalists—Yaser Murtaja and Ahmed Abu Hussein—were killed and 155 were wounded by Israeli snipers.

Like the imbalanced Israe-

li judicial system, targeting the press is also a part of a protracted pattern. According to a press release issued by the Palestinian Journalists Union last May, Israel has killed 102 Palestinian journalists since 1972.

The fact that Palestinian intellectuals, poets and activists have been imprisoned for Facebook and other social media posts should tell us volumes about the limits of Israel's freedom of press and expression.

It is also worth mentioning that in June 2018, the Israeli Knesset voted for a bill that prohibits the filming of Israeli soldiers as a way to mask their crimes and shelter them from any future legal accountability.

As for freedom of religion, despite its many shortcomings, the Palestinian Authority hardly discriminates against religious minorities. The same cannot be said about Israel.

Although discrimination against non-Jews in Israel has

been the *raison d'être* of the very idea of Israel, the Nation-State Law of July 2018 further cemented the superiority of the Jews and inferior status of everyone else.

According to the new Basic Law, Israel is "the national home of the Jewish people" only and "the right to exercise national self-determination is unique to the Jewish people."

Palestinians do not need to be lectured on how to meet Israeli and American expectations, nor should they ever aspire to imitate the undemocratic Israeli model. What they urgently need, instead, is international solidarity to help them win the fight against Israeli occupation, racism and apartheid. **Z**

Ramzy Baroud is a journalist, author and editor of *Palestine Chronicle*. His latest book is *The Last Earth: A Palestinian Story* (Pluto Press, 2018). He earned a Ph.D. in Palestine Studies from

the University of Exeter, and is a former Non-Resident Scholar at Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies, UCSB.

Fearless Cities: A Guide to The Global Municipalist Movement

By Steve Early

Four years ago, Barcelona voters made international news when they chose Ada Colau, a young feminist and housing rights activist, to be mayor of Spain's second largest city. Colau was backed by Barcelona En Comu, a social movement coalition opposed to gentrification, eviction of tenants, privatization of city services, and growing inequality between neighborhoods.

Colau recently lost her re-election fight by just a few thousand votes to a candidate backed by Catalan separatists. But En Comu held on to its ten city council seats and will remain a force in local politics. And, thanks to the recent publication of *Fearless Cities: A Guide to the Global Municipalist Movement* (New Internationalist Publications, 2019), the organizational model and radical platform of En Comu will continue to be a source of cross-border inspiration.



West Bank, Israel - Protest against Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, by Edward Crawford/Shutterstock.com

Compiled by Colau, En Comu and Debbie Bookchin, the *Guide* describes municipal reform campaigns in 50 cities and 19 countries. Its contributors include activists and elected officials in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, England, Chile, Argentina, Serbia, Germany, Kurdish-controlled northern Syria, Canada, and the U.S. It contains a series of “organizing tool-kits,” which offer practical advice about rooting out political corruption, reducing pollution, protecting tenants and immigrants, and creating opportunities for citizen engagement like “participatory budgeting.”

In their contribution to the *Guide*, researcher Manuela Zechner, Kate Shea Baird from En Comu, and Claudio Delso, a leader of Marea Atlantica in the Spanish city of A Coruna, stress the importance of using a “transparent, horizontal, and democratic process” when “building municipalist platforms.” By that, they mean that organizers should develop a political program, responsive to local needs and aspirations, before recruiting candidates and doing electoral campaigning that will inevitably end up focusing on individual personalities.

“The best way to engage people,” they argue, “particularly, those with no previous interest in electoral politics, is to go and ask them what they think about their neighborhood, about how they would change it. Focusing on shared goals, rather than potentially divisive negotiations over who should stand as a candidate, is also a good way

to bring people from diverse backgrounds and from different organizations together and to create a sense of common purpose.”

The City We Want

In Belo Horizonte, a city of 2.5 million in Brazil, social movement activists prepared to field a first-time slate of candidates for city council in 2016 by canvassing in parks, squares, schools, and other public spaces. There, they collected “ideas from residents about city issues, from pollution to urban violence.” The resulting “Manifesto for the City We Want” became the basis for a coordinated electoral campaign by a 12-member slate that included many women, people of color, and youth, plus Belo Horizonte’s first indigenous and transsexual candidates. Their slogan: “A vote for one is a vote for all.”

Aided by a “vital internet presence” and a volunteer army, that included artists, musicians, and “biketivists” equipped with loudspeakers, who cycled

around the city spreading the message of *Muitas pela Cidade que Queremos*, two *Muitas* candidates won municipal council seats. One of them, Aurea Carolina, received more votes for that position than anyone in city history.

Fearless Cities features many case studies of other “municipalist organizations” and their experience contesting for power in urban settings, both large- and smaller-scale. Among the groups mentioned are the Richmond Progressive Alliance from Richmond California and Cooperation Jackson from Jackson, Mississippi. Both sent representatives to a “Fearless Cities” conference hosted by Mayor Colau two years ago.

Since that gathering of 700 people, Barcelona En Comu has not only helped to govern a city of 1.6 million, but continued to forge solidarity relationships with like-minded activists in other countries who are also trying “to imagine alternatives for their own city or town.” In a further expression of this international spirit, Colau supporters



Ada Colau gives a press conference during re-election campaign, by davide bonaldo/Shutterstock.com

welcomed 100 campaign volunteers from other parts of Spain and overseas recently, invoking “the proud history of defenders of democracy coming to Barcelona to fight racism during the Spanish Civil War.” The mission of this new “BrigAda,” was “building community and sharing the message to people in Barcelona that voting for Ada Colau and Barcelona en Comu is important not only for this city, but also for Europe and the world.”

New Forms of Political Action

In the epilogue to her book, Colau recalls that “we began our adventure [in Barcelona] having been inspired by struggles, following the economic crisis, against the dismantling of the education system, against the cuts to healthcare and the public sector in general.” As a result of successful electoral campaigns, people, like herself, “who had never governed a city, who had done politics from social movements, NGOs, or neighborhood associations,” found themselves “inside municipal institutions.” En Comu, in particular, has tried to “build bridges between municipal politics and new forms of political action by citizens, from different walks of life to defy the established order that is profoundly unjust.”

In the U.S., would-be “Fearless cities” find themselves on the front lines of resistance to Trump and are faced with bi-partisan efforts to limit pro-

gressive policymaking through state “preemption.” In states where conservative Republican governors or legislators are dominant, they’ve tried to impose legal curbs on local minimum wage hikes or mandated paid family leave or sick days. Meanwhile, in Democrat-run California, the state legislature last year bowed to Big Soda and voted to prevent Richmond and other revenue-starved cities from enacting new soda taxes (for the next 12 years).

In red or blue states, the task of building durable political organization, at the local level, involves a lot more than just running left-leaning candidates, on a progressive platform, every two or four years. For them to succeed in office—and remain accountable to the constituencies that elected them—these office-holders need to be part of broader municipal reform groups or socialist organizations that are membership based

and continuously engaged in multi-issue, non-electoral organizing. And they must be ready to fend off corporate counter-attacks like the current Seattle business community campaign to prevent socialist City Council member Kshama Sawant from being re-elected.

Anyone involved in municipal politics and related community organizing will find *Fearless Cities* to be a very useful guide to winning office, holding onto it, and making change in the process. **Z**

Steve Early is a member of East Bay DSA and the Richmond Progressive Alliance. A longtime labor activist, he is the author, most recently, of *Refinery Town: Big Oil, Big Money, and the Remaking of an American City*. He can be reached at Lsupport@aol.com.



Belo Horizonte, Brazil, by Elena Frago/ Shutterstock.com

Liberate Medicine from the Profiteers

By Mark Harris

Health care in the United States continues to be defined by multiple system failures, despite the promised improvements of the Affordable Care Act. Driven by corporate profiteering at the expense of the sick and suffering, the system, despite its vast resources, just doesn't work very well. This isn't just hyperbole. As a 2018 Harvard study concluded, the U.S. health system spends almost twice as much on medical care than other high-income nations, but offers less access to care and poorer outcomes.

Then again, if you're a privileged health industry "leader," everything is just fine. According to *Business Insider*, the nation's largest U.S. health insurer, UnitedHealthGroup, which also runs clinics and other health programs, paid its CEO \$18,107,356 last year. The CEO of Molina Healthcare received compensation worth \$15,219,770. Anthem, seller of Blue Cross/Blue Shield insurance, paid its CEO \$14,184,276 in compensation. And so it goes.

If any wealthy health care CEO actually had a conscience, they might forgo their bloated salaries to make a statement on behalf of health care equity and justice for the millions who can't afford the costs of care. Or maybe they could pour millions

of their dollars into the GoFundMe accounts of America's most desperate families, raising funds for their ill or injured relatives?

A demonstrative statement along these lines might at least show that they believe their own corporate marketing hype about serving the needs of their "customers." Could they get by on a more modest low six-figure salary? Unfortunately, under the present system, it's unlikely we'll ever know. The outsized wealth of health industry executives is made possible by the costly premiums, copays, co-insurance, and high deductibles Americans are forced to pay for their overly complex, inferior insurance products.

Challenge to Industry Status Quo

If there is a counterweight to this dismal reality, it's to be found in the widespread public support for a single-payer, or Medicare for All, health system. In fact, a 2018 Reuters poll found that 70 percent of Americans support a government-sponsored Medicare for All system. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), support for single-payer has been slowly growing for nearly two decades. While poll results will vary—KFF reports a majority 56 percent of the public now in support of such proposals—single-payer has remained consistently popular with most Americans.

There's also traction for Medicare for All in Congress. With several public health plan reform bills now before Con-

gress, the most far-reaching are the comprehensive single-payer bills sponsored by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Representative Pramila Jayapal (D-WA). The latter's House bill now has 108 co-sponsors. It's testament to single-payer's gathering momentum that the vested profiteers of the health care status quo are now organizing to discredit Medicare for All. As *The New York Times* and other media reported earlier this year, industry groups such as the Federation of American Hospitals, America's Health Insurance Plans, Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America and other lobbyists are partnering to wage a public campaign against any single-payer legislative initiatives.

Enter the Partnership for America's Health Care Future

Under the leadership of executive director Lauren Crawford Shaver, a former advisor to Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign, the group's disinformation campaign seeks to frighten the public into believing that they'll be paying more under Medicare for All than they already are. In return, they offer bland reassurances that most Americans already have affordable health care, and that whatever problems exist are nothing a few tweaks to the existing for-profit system can't fix.

It's hard to take such propaganda seriously. As groups like Physicians for a National

Health Program (PNHP) have long argued, eliminating all individual premiums, copays, and coinsurance under a single-payer system will drastically improve access and affordability for the overwhelming majority of Americans. Indeed, a recent RAND study in New York State found that single-payer legislation would dramatically lower health costs for most people, with only individuals earning above \$134,000 (or a family of 4 earning \$276,000) paying more than current costs.

Even if higher income taxes were associated with Medicare for All, Americans would still be getting more for their health care dollar. But the assumption that tax increases on working-class Americans would be necessary can be challenged. After all, this is the country with the richest rich people and the richest corporations in the world. Certainly new taxes on the 1 percent and corporate wealth alone could ensure ordinary Americans don't pay more for better health care. If not, there's always the \$718 billion in Pentagon military budget waiting to fund something actually useful like health care.

More Services, Better Healthcare

It is also important not to forget a key word in the Medicare for All proposals—improved. The campaign for single-payer is an opportunity not only to improve access to affordable care, but also enhance the quality of care available to every person.

This is recognized in the

Sanders and Jayapal bills, which promote extending coverage for a full range of reproductive care services, including abortion services, as well as vision, dental, and prescription drug benefits. With the renewed assault on women's reproductive rights in Alabama and other states imposing de facto bans on abortion under so-called "heartbeat" laws, it's especially vital now that the Medicare for All movement clearly stand in defense of abortion as a legitimate medical procedure.

As a May 16 PNHP twitter statement declared, "We need to urgently reverse course and expand access to reproductive health care, including abortion. That means guaranteed coverage, access to providers in all communities, and zero cost sharing."

Likewise, to safeguard quality and patient safety, the Sanders bill would also mandate limits on nurse-patient ratios and staffing levels for physicians and other providers, based on input from the National Nurses United union and others. Notably, the Sanders bill also designates the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to determine which "complementary and integrative" medical services are included in the new public system.

This is important. Nearly 40 percent of U.S. adults use some form of complementary or integrative care. While some of what falls under this category includes products or services better categorized as self-care outside of a professional health care setting,

medical treatment by licensed professionals for acupuncture, chiropractic, naturopathic care, and related services deserve to be included in the single-payer roster of covered benefits.

In fact, there is a credible evidence base for inclusion of many complementary and integrated care services. In 2017, an Australian study found evidence for acupuncture's effectiveness for 122 treatments comprising 14 clinical areas. Another meta-analysis of 39 clinical trials involving over 20,827 patients published in the *Journal of Pain* (May, 2018) found acupuncture to be an effective treatment for chronic pain. As an American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) report noted, the benefits of acupuncture were found to persist over time and could not be explained simply as a consequence of the placebo effect.

With an ongoing opioid public health crisis, the use of effective non-pharmacologic treatment options such as acupuncture and other interventions has acquired a new urgency. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), more than 700,000 people died from a drug overdose from 1999 to 2017. In 2017, about 68 percent of the more than 70,000 drug overdose deaths involved an opioid. The number of overdose deaths in 2017 involving opioids (including both legal and illegal) was six times higher than in 1999.

These figures describe a mounting public health crisis, one with roots in the corrosive

influence of Big Pharma on medicine. “The human toll of opioid overprescription now represents one of the largest iatrogenic epidemics in history,” write Scott Poldosky, MD, and colleagues in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM). It is a “story of unconscionable corporate (and individual) profit at the expense of the public’s health.”

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), pharmaceutical and biotechnology sales revenue increased from \$534 billion to \$775 billion between 2006 and 2015. Notably, the GAO also reports 67 percent of drug companies increased their annual profit margins during these years, with the 25 largest companies reporting an annual average profit margin somewhere in the 15 to 20 percent range. To put this in perspective, the GAO notes the average annual profit margin globally for the 500 largest non-drug companies varies between 4 and 9 percent.

More than ever, health care providers need alternatives to opioids, both safer pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic treatment options. Notably, the Joint Commission, the accrediting body for many health-care organizations, now requires accredited hospital organizations to provide such non-pharmacological treatment options such as acupuncture to meet pain management standards.

Holistic Care Model



San Francisco, CA, by Sundry Photography/Shutterstock.com

If the United States eventually adopts a single-payer health system, expanding coverage for essential health services will underscore the need for a more encompassing or holistic model of care. This is a point made by Margaret Chan, MD, former director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO) in her 2016 keynote address at the International Conference on the Modernization of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

As Chan observes, as health systems expand essential medical services, not only do expectations for care rise, but also necessary costs. “Faced with this dilemma, and most especially the costs of treating lifestyle-related chronic diseases, many experts see a need to shift the model for health service delivery away from a strictly biomedical model, focused on individual diseases, towards a more holistic approach,” says Chan. “This is an approach that stresses prevention as well as cure, offers integrated services that address the multiple determinants of health, and asks people

to take more responsibility for their own health.”

As such, acupuncture and herbal medicine can play a positive role within the larger health system, suggests Chan. There are variants of such practice already existing in some modern health systems, such as in Japan where herbal prescriptions (“Kampo medicine”) are integrated into physician practice under the national health insurance system.

Further, in our modern society where not only stress, but traumatic stress, is common, therapies that address the psychophysiology of illness can more fully serve the well-being of communities. This includes not only different types of psychotherapy, but mindfulness practices, yoga, acupuncture and related bodywork therapies. Interestingly, Bessel van der Kolk, MD, psychiatrist and author of *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (Penguin Books, 2015) recounts how in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001, he participated in expert panels in New York

City organized by the National Institutes of Health and other organizations to recommend treatments for people traumatized by the attacks on the World Trade Center.

After much discussion, the experts only recommended psychoanalysis and cognitive behavioral therapy. As it turned out, few New Yorkers took advantage of these publicly sponsored services. Later, van der Kolk told *The New York Times*, data gathered on mental health care for more than 10,000 survivors of 9/11 found acupuncture the most popular service used to overcome the effects of the experience, followed by yoga, massage, and EMDR therapy (a form of psychotherapy).

This anecdote speaks to the need for more integrative approaches to health care, in response to the pervasive psycho-social burdens and traumas modern society imposes on individuals. Certainly health care justice starts with accessible and affordable care. But health care also means elevating the human touch in medicine, normalizing connection and compassion as markers of a health system that truly serves every individual in need. Health care is social solidarity at the most direct level.

In this sense, humane medicine involves more than parsing results from randomized controlled trials to establish what is “scientific medicine” and thus legitimate practice. After all, medicine is an applied science, an evolving body of knowledge that draws upon multiple sources of research, clinical observa-

tion, and judgment, and patient input to find effective paths to healing and well-being.

Now, in an age where cruelty reigns in politics, where the hardened, vision of the far right threatens violence all over the globe, where racism and misogyny, poverty, and exploitation rear up like a monstrous hydra of inhumanity, the vision of a just, humane health care system might appear to be little more than a wistful dream. It is not. In fact, the struggle for health care justice in the United States is inseparable from the larger political and social challenges involved in defeating the slide into barbarism that now confronts humanity.

From Big Pharma to the insurance industry, medical devices manufacturers, investor-owned hospital systems and more, corporate capitalism distorts medicine from what should be a humane mission into just another profit stream. Defeating corporate health care and its profiteers is possible, but it will take more than passively placing our hopes in Congressional Democrats, many of whom are

afflicted with the tendency to embrace progressive demands like single-payer only when such demands have little chance of implementation.

The widespread popular support for Medicare for All represents a potentially unstoppable popular movement. But if we want a just, equitable public health care system, the people have to speak out, rally, and get politically organized. If we want to liberate medicine from the profiteers, a mass grassroots organizing campaign is the path to change. **Z**

Mark Harris is a Portland, Oregon-based writer and commentator. He is a past contributor to *Common Dreams*, *Dissent*, *Utne*, *Z magazine*, and other newssites and publications. He is a featured contributor to *The Flexible Writer*, fourth edition, by Susanna Rich (Allyn & Bacon/Longman, 2003); and *Guide to College Reading*, sixth edition, by Kathleen McWhorter (Addison-Wesley, 2003). Email: MarkHarris.media@gmail.org. Website: www.HarrisMedia.org.



By Alexander Oganezov/Shutterstock.com

People in Cages on the Border on July 4th

By Ted Glick

Thanks to a lot of people who are working, day after day, to address the humanitarian crisis on the U.S. southern border caused by Mafioso Don and those shamefully doing his bidding, the truth about the abysmal, sub-human conditions both children and adult migrants are experiencing has exploded, again, into public view. The pictures that have come out of the severe overcrowding in rooms

and cages are infuriating, even more so when the Racist One tweets: “If Illegal Immigrants are unhappy with the conditions in the quickly built or re-fitted detentions centers, just tell them not to come. All problems solved!”

His game plan is clear: send a message to desperate, brown-skinned, Spanish-speaking people that your living conditions will be even worse if you dare to come north seeking a better life.

It’s not like all of this is completely new, but the lengths to which Trump is willing to take his vile racism is new.

How can those of us who support immigrant rights but whose personal priorities are on other things, other issues, or just on

making a living and raising a family—how can we do more? How can we help to raise such a massive cry that the anti-immigrant racists are forced to change their policies?

One answer is what the group Never Again: Jews Against Ice did several days ago at the immigrant detention center in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Thirty-six people were arrested as they blocked the entrance to the facility.

It would be a very good thing if the groups giving leadership on the immigration crisis, or those who appreciated the importance of the tactic of nonviolent direct action, called and organized similar actions. Better yet would be if they organized



By Rena Schild/Shutterstock.com



Protesting President Trump's separation of immigrant families, by Rena Schild/Shutterstock.com

national days or a week of action and called upon those of us not primarily in this movement to get involved.

Another option would be hunger strikes outside detention centers where immigrants seeking asylum are concentrated under despicable conditions, which sure seems to earn them a “concentration camp” label to me.

Of course, the less dramatic and legal forms of action are also important. I plan to take part in a local vigil part of a Lights for Liberty Vigil to End Human Concentration Camps.

Flooding Congress with phone calls, tweets and letters is

always a good thing.

And what about a massive march on Washington this summer, maybe a month from now? I don't know that they are, but I would expect that this tactic is being considered by some of the activists giving leadership on this issue. I hope they will decide to pull the trigger soon. A national mobilization can help to keep the focus on the issue in the lead-up to the event, keep the political pressure on, generate continuing press coverage and take the movement to another level.

It's easy for me to throw out all these ideas because my primary work is the climate emer-

gency, which is a very serious issue. But it's not the only one, and today all of us whose heart is working the way it's supposed to, who refuse to be “good Germans” letting evil overwhelm us and suppress our humanity, need to do whatever we can, for as long as necessary, until these vile camps are shut down.

Ted Glick has been a progressive activist, organizer and writer since 1968. Past writings and other information can be found at <https://tedglick.com>, and he can be followed on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/jtglick>.

Feature



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“Economic Boom” a Sham

C.J. Polychroniou interviews Noam Chomsky

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, I want to start by asking you to reflect on Trump’s political posturing and leadership style and explain to us how this apparently “irrational” president continues to enjoy unquestionable support among nearly half of all voters and has managed to turn the GOP into his own fiefdom.

Noam Chomsky: Whatever one thinks of Trump, he is a highly skilled politician, with a good sense of how to gain popular approval, even virtual

worship in some circles. His job approval just passed 50 percent for the first time, according to the latest Zogby poll.

He certainly has taken control of the GOP, to quite a remarkable extent. He’s been very successful with his two constituencies: the primary one, wealth and corporate power; and the voting base, relatively affluent fairly generally, including a large bloc of Christian evangelicals, rural whites, farmers, workers who have faith in his promises to bring back jobs, and a collection of



By Ink Drop/Shutterstock.com

others, some not too admirable.

It's clear why the primary constituency is mostly delighted. Corporate profits are booming. Wealth continues to be concentrated in very few hands. Trump's administration is lavishing them with gifts, including the tax bill, the main legislative achievement, across-the-board deregulation, and rapidly increasing fossil fuel production. He and McConnell—in many ways the evil genius of the administration—are packing the judiciary with reactionaries, guaranteeing the interests of the corporate sector and private wealth even after these “glory days” are past. They don't like his trade wars, which are causing disruption of global supply chains, but so far at least that's outweighed by his dedicated service to their welfare.

To keep the rest in line is sometimes easy, among them the Christian right, white supremacists, ultranationalists and xenophobes, and those in terror of “hordes” of immigrants. It is easy to throw them occasional chunks of red meat. But sometimes maintaining their allegiance takes the kind of demagoguery at which he is expert. Thus many who are understandably aggrieved by the economic policies of the neoliberal years still seem to feel that he's the one person standing up

for them by shaking his fist at those they blame for taking away their jobs: immigrants and “the scheming Chinese,” primarily.

Numerous press reports reveal how the scam works. Thus, in *The New York Times*, Patricia Cohen investigates the attitude of owners of large farms to Trump's trade wars, which sharply cut their exports to China and cause severe financial hardships. In general, she finds, they continue to support the president. “I get why he's doing it,” her major informant says: “America has been bullied” by China. And if the trade war persists through the 2020 election, “I would be OK with that.” He's sure that Trump will do everything possible to help. Furthermore, “It makes me feel really good to hear Trump say farmers are important to this country. That's what makes me want to stick with the president.”

Shaking a fist at the “Yellow Peril” and a little sweet talk carry the day, helped by \$16 billion to compensate for export losses.

The gift is largely paid by a new hidden tax on the general public. Tariffs are in effect a tax on consumers (contrary to Trump's pretenses about China paying for them). The New York Fed estimates the cost to consumers at \$1.6 billion an-

nually, a tax of \$831 for the average American household. Hence Trump's tariffs tax the general public to maintain the loyalty of a prime constituency.

With regard to immigrants, while there may be some cases where they take jobs from U.S. citizens, in general that is not the case (and decent wages for all wouldn't exactly hurt). On the contrary, many studies indicate that immigrants improve the economy, and they commonly take jobs that U.S. citizens don't want.

The case of China is more interesting. It's quite true that huge numbers of jobs have fled to China, but who is responsible for that? China? Is China holding a gun to the heads of Apple, GM, IBM, GE... and forcing them to ship jobs to China? One can't even say that it's the fault of the managers of the corporations. Their responsibility, in fact legal obligation, is to make profits for shareholders, and that purpose is served by shifting jobs to China, Mexico, Vietnam, Bangladesh.... Those who object to these practices should be demanding that such decisions should not be in the hands of management and the board of directors, but rather in the hands of those who actually do the work of the enterprise, as democratic principle might suggest. Perhaps along the lines of a 19th century writer whose initials are K.M. But somehow one doesn't see this interesting idea explored in mainstream commentary. Passing strange.

Trump is taking all credit for the current state of the economy, which includes a historically low rate of unemployment. First, exactly what sort of economic policies has Trump implemented since coming to office that can explain the present economic boom, and, second, how really sound is the current state of the economy?

To begin with, there is reason for caution about the low rate of unemployment. In the (very good) economics journal *Challenge*, relying on Bureau of Labor Statistics figures, economist John Komlos estimates that, "...the real unemployment

rate in the fall of 2018 was closer to 7.4 percent of the labor force. Among those without a high school diploma, it was twice as high," reaching 28 percent unemployed among African Americans. The prime reason for the discrepancy in figures—all from the same government sources—is the significant decline in labor force participation. Many have dropped out of the labor force in their prime years. The high actual unemployment rate, Komlos plausibly suggests, is part of the reason why "there is so much despair in the society."

Gallup polls regularly measure stress, worry and anger. The U.S. ranks high by these measures, reaching new highs in 2018, by now even higher than during the great recession. In reported stress levels, the U.S. has "one of the highest rates out of the 143 countries studied and it beat the global average (35 percent) by a full 20 percentage points." The U.S. is even above Venezuela in its current distress.

The dire emotional state of Americans is illustrated dramatically by the "deaths of despair" (death by suicide, drugs and alcohol) documented by Anne Case and Angus Deaton among working-class whites; tellingly, those "who would have entered the market starting in the early 1980s," when the neoliberal assault took off. The deaths of despair are estimated at 150,000 a year, contributing to the decline in life expectancy in the U.S. for the past two years, the first time since World War I and the 1918 flu pandemic—a phenomenon unprecedented in developed societies.

All of this is happening in the most powerful state in world history, with extraordinary advantages not approached anywhere. Worth contemplating.

"The alleged full employment," Komlos writes, "is a statistical mirage designed to hide the real pain in the labor market," exacerbated by wage stagnation for 40 years and actual decline: "Real median household incomes have been declining for every educational group since the turn of the twenty-first century," for those with-

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out a college degree by 17 percent, continuing the stagnation or decline in real hourly wages since the 1980s. Add to this Alan Greenspan's "greater worker insecurity," the foundation of his success in economic management as he boasted to Congress, and we get a more realistic picture than what is in the headlines, and an explanation for the general despair. Much the same is true throughout the regions afflicted by the neoliberal/austerity plague, though deaths of despair seem to be an American phenomenon.

The "economic boom" is a continuation of the slow recovery that began under Obama. The McConnell-Ryan Congress restricted a needed government stimulus during the Obama years, wailing about deficits, but as usual, when they took office it turned out that, "Reagan taught us that deficits don't matter" (Dick Cheney), when Republicans create them. Trump's one legislative achievement, the tax giveaway to the rich and corporate sector, provided a stimulus to the economy (without the promised investment). A Brookings Institution study by Robert Barro and Jason Furman (conservative, liberal) estimated that the boost of Trump's tax cut law to short-term GDP growth was 1.1 percent for the first quarter of 2019, accounting for the increase from the consensus expectation of 2 percent. The tax cut, of course, exploded the deficit, which can now provide a pretext for cutting social spending. The continuing increase in employment has led to a slight increase in wages, with opportunities for those at the lower end of the income scale, but it doesn't come close to making up what has been lost during the period of stagnation from the early 1980s.

Recent data indicates that the counties that voted for Donald Trump have experienced more job growth than the counties that voted for Hillary Clinton. What can explain this discrepancy?

There's a good analysis in *Bloomberg* news. Jobs are growing slightly faster in Trump-supporting rural and exurban counties than in the urban, mostly Clinton, counties. At the same time, real wages declined slightly in Trump counties and increased slightly in Clinton counties, in both cases a decline from the Obama years. Their

analysis, which doesn't include the effect of his recent trade wars, attributes the growth mainly to expansion of energy production, manufacturing (in part energy-related), and truck driving.

Trump's tariff wars against China are escalating, even though U.S. economic interests may suffer more than those of China. What is really behind Trump's trade wars with China and even with the EU, which the "tariff man" has called "a brutal trading partner"? Is it the vision of MAGA, or pure politics?

Both national economies will suffer, very likely the weaker party (China) more so. But, as always, the framework of national conflict obscures a good deal. The estimated \$6 trillion cost of the "war on terror" re-declared by President Bush in 2001 (renewing Reagan's war on terror of 20 years earlier) is borne in varying ways among the population, and the same is true of the trade wars. One illustration has already been mentioned: higher taxes to keep Trump's constituency in line.

It's of considerable interest to explore the justification for the trade war, to inquire into just how "naïve America has been bullied by China." I've already discussed China's responsibility for job loss. Other complaints have to do with their unfair economic practices, such as targeting funds to specific industries—something we'd never dream of doing, and would not have stooped to in earlier years. That aside, why is this a complaint, rather than a cry of joy? Ultranationalist True Believers should be celebrating China's stupidity, which, according to received free market doctrine should be harming their economy, hence contributing to U.S. economic power.

As an aside, it should be noted that U.S. economic power is in fact astonishing. In recent articles and an important forthcoming book titled *American Power Globalized: Rethinking National Power in the Age of Globalization*, international economist Sean Kenji Starrs argues persuasively that in the recent years of globalization, national accounts mean much less than they used to. A more realistic estimate of economic power is the share of global wealth owned by nationally based multinational corporations. For the

U.S., that comes to the staggering figure of about half of world wealth, more than U.S. national economic power at its height after World War II. How this will be affected by Trump's wrecking ball, with its possibly complex effects on global supply chains, remains to be seen. Again, this colossal wealth, of course, does not devolve to the population.

Another charge is that China steals U.S. technology by forcing firms to hand over secrets as a condition on investment (already dealt with) and by violating World Trade Organization rules on intellectual property (TRIPS). Again, other questions arise, discussed particularly by economist Dean Baker for many years. Putting aside the legitimacy of these highly protectionist devices, which raise patent protection far beyond the historical norm, we can ask who gains and who loses if, say, China uses discoveries in U.S. research labs to produce cheaper drugs than the corporations that have gained the patents, or to develop a better alternative to the Windows operating system? American consumers gain, while Big Pharma's huge profits are somewhat reduced and Bill Gates might decline slightly in the ranks of richest men in the world.

More generally, one might ask, what right does the U.S. have to try to impede Chinese development, as generally assumed without argument? Or even to impose sanctions? That the Chinese state is harsh, brutal and oppressive is not in doubt. China's "re-education camps" for perhaps a million Uyghurs, which may well be the largest mass incarceration of a racial or religious group since the Holocaust, is surely a major crime, meriting harsh condemnation. Is it a worse crime than the imprisonment of 2 million Palestinians in "the world's largest open-air prison" in Gaza, Israel's favorite punching bag, which is soon to become unlivable, international monitors estimate? Why then does the former merit U.S. sanctions, while the latter is lavishly

funded by Washington?

A rhetorical question of course, but one worth raising nevertheless.

It seems that more and more Democrats may be warming up to the idea of an impeachment. Is this a good idea? My personal view is that such a course of action will only serve to increase Trump's popularity among his base, and maybe even beyond.

I agree. Charges of impeachment go to the Senate for trial. Trump's lock on the Republican majority should be enough to clear him of any charges. The effect will then be much like that of the Mueller investigation. He will claim to have been proven innocent of the charges, which he will depict as a malicious and underhanded effort by

the Democrats and the Deep State to silence the Tribune of the People, behavior that may even be treasonous, as he is now intimating with regard to the Mueller investigation. His base will be energized, if not infuriated, by what these "traitors" are trying to do to their defender. It's a losing effort for the Democrats, I think, just as their laser-like focus on Mueller and "Russiagate" has proven to be—not a great surprise. **Z**

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. He is a regular contributor to Truthout as well as a member of Truthout's Public Intellectual Project. He is the author of *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change*, an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at Truthout and collected by Haymarket Books.

The Publication of Origin for this article is Truthout.

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Feature



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The Farms of the Future

By Isabel Marlens

Hou Xueying, a mother from Shanghai, was tired of food safety scares and of a city life disconnected from the land. So she moved her family to the country to learn about sustainable farming. Her parents disapproved; they had struggled to give her a comfortable life in the city—they could not understand why she would throw it away. When she got to the country, she found that the older generation of farmers

could only tell her how to grow as they did, using chemical fertilizers, toxic insecticides.

Still, Hou Xueying persisted, and today she runs a diversified organic farm that is, in her words, a “self-reliant ecosystem,” raising a wide variety of animals and crops, making use of ingenious techniques—like allowing ducks into the rice paddies—to fertilize plants and eliminate pests without using chemicals. She’s also turned her farm into a

place of learning, teaching children from the city where their food comes from. Through all of this, Hou Xueying has found a community that shares her values for the first time. She believes that the importance of the farming way of life extends far beyond putting good food on the table. As she explains in the short film, *Farmed with Love*, “Only conscious foodies can save the world.”

Many of us have heard some version of this statistic: the average age of farmers worldwide hovers around 60 years old. In the U.S., farmers over 65 outnumber farmers under 35 by a margin of 6 to one. People like Hou Xueying are going against the tide which has been tugging young people from the land for a long time, leaving older people alone on farms, with no one to take their place once they’re gone (except, increasingly, robots). So truly, as this older generation of farmers retires—a generation that widely embraced large-scale industrial farming—the question grows more pressing: Who will grow the food of the future and what will their farms look like?

Every person on earth needs food every day. Every day, food is tended, harvested, transported, stored, and served up on our tables. In a very real sense, food cannot be separated from life itself. And so it has been said that changing the way we grow and eat food is one of the most powerful tools we have for changing our economies and society as a whole.

So when we ask, What will the farms of the future look like? We should really be asking, What do we want the future to look like? And then answers may begin to emerge.

Though many are enamored of technological solutions, others have pointed to tech’s inescapable environmental impacts, to the way it strengthens corporate monopolies, and to the already evident, and as yet unforeseen, effects that it has on society, including on human health and happiness. When I look at the young people I know, at the issues that concern them most, four points of focus rise to the surface. These can be rather broadly categorized as: climate and the environment, diversity in its myriad forms, economic inequality, and a lack of community, loneli-

ness. Young people don’t want to work the land if that means working long hours for low pay, using dangerous chemicals, while the fruits of their labor are borne away to profit corporate executives they will never meet. But that doesn’t mean a future in which we don’t work the land at all. In fact, it means quite the opposite.

Climate change and agriculture are inextricably intertwined.

As I’m sure many of us know by now, our globalized industrial food system is a major contributor to anthropogenic climate change. The machinery and chemicals involved in industrial farming rely heavily on fossil fuels. So does packaging and refrigeration, not to mention the transport of food around the world by truck, ship, and plane. Many countries import and export nearly identical quantities of the same products. All of this creates economic activity, which adds to indicators of “progress” like GDP; not reflected in these numbers are the environmental costs of all the fossil fuels burned in the process. At the same time, more and more of the forests, grasslands, and wetlands that helped maintain the nearly perfect balance of the carbon cycle until the start of the industrial revolution are being cleared to make way for livestock or annual crops, which do not play the same role in sequestering carbon. This wreaks more havoc with the earth’s natural climate-stabilizing systems.

On the other side of the coin, the changing climate is threatening agriculture as we know it. Increasingly extreme temperatures and weather events harm food crops. Studies show that the parts of the global South where people are already food insecure are being hit hardest. Many of these regions are less industrialized, less “developed” parts of the world, and so contributed little to the creation of this crisis—and yet, they are suffering the most.

In short, industrial monocultures—those big farms you see with acres and acres of corn or soy, not to mention those giant cattle feedlots—are systems that degenerate, they die, over time. They produce more carbon emissions than they sequester. Their pesticides kill insects, including pollinators, a trend which may soon initiate

“the collapse of nature.” Every year, they suck the nutrients from the soil, and replace them with toxic chemicals. They draw water from local watersheds, pollute it, and let it run off into gutters, or evaporate when hot weather comes, rather than employing management techniques that would allow it to sink back down to replenish local aquifers. Eventually, land treated this way becomes barren, eroding away to create dead zones in rivers and oceans or being lifted up by the wind to join the particulate matter in the air, poisoning the lungs of human beings (it’s telling that a recent report showed that Fresno and Bakersfield, in the heart of California’s industrial farm-filled Central Valley, have the worst particulate pollution in the U.S.). The air is truly brown in such places. The crops grown on these farms are sent off by truck or ship to factories where they’re processed and packaged—using more resources—and finally delivered to our homes, often in a form that’s as bad for our bodies as the dust is for our lungs.



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This is what agriculture looks like in a globalized corporate economy, where, like the nutrients from the soil, the livelihood is sucked from farming communities and siphoned up into the coffers of a few giant corporations.

But as I’m sure many of us know by now, this is not what agriculture has to look like, by any means. Farms can be regenerative, living systems,

that produce a bounty but no waste. They can supply the needs of a local community—if that community is willing to embrace the idea of eating a mostly seasonal, locally adapted diet—with no need for long-distance transport by trucks, ships, or planes. Farms do not have to be net carbon emitters—plants absorb CO₂ when they photosynthesize, and only emit it very slowly, through respiration and decomposition; studies show that, if managed correctly, farms, orchards, and even animal grazing systems can become places that sink and sequester CO₂.

Not only that, but these are the same kinds of diversified farming systems that make people most resilient in the face of climate change. If we grow one kind of bean, for example, as a cash crop, and then the summer is too hot for that variety, we lose absolutely everything—all of our profits, which we would have used to buy food throughout the year. If we grow a diverse variety of crops, however, all with slightly different climatic limitations, then not

only will a heat wave fail to do us in, but we can feed ourselves, right from our own backyards, no matter what happens. In fact, there are many points in favor of small diversified farms. Even minimal diversification has been shown to increase crop yields, while intensive permaculture systems—which have only recently been recognized by science—have the potential to completely transform our concept of productivity, and of what a “farm” is.

But that’s only the beginning.

When we talk about “diversified farms,” we usually mean crop diversity. But there is also wild biodiversity, human diversity, cultural diversity, language diversity, diversity in ways of thinking and being—all of which oppose the corporate consumer human monoculture which is so swiftly, insidiously spreading. Researchers

have correlated biodiversity with language diversity, while others have found that certain regions function as “bio-cultural refugia,” harboring “place specific social memories related to food security and stewardship of biodiversity.” It’s easy to see these ideas brought to life in the context of a local food culture—crop varieties, local species and geography, language, and other aspects of culture like food preparation, celebrations, ways of passing knowledge on to the next generation, are all intimately connected. Lose any one element and the whole system is threatened. Colonizers have long removed indigenous people from their land knowing that this in turn will deprive them of their food culture, and so make them dependent on the colonizer’s economy—creating widening ripples of destruction.

In the same way that a colonizing culture hopes to put the world to work for a single purpose (usually, creating wealth for a specific set of colonizing elites), vast industrial farms destroy diverse ecosystems and replace them with a single species, like corn. This has been a driving force behind the sixth mass extinction which is urgently threatening all life on earth. But human beings are animal species too, after all, who could be playing supportive roles in diverse ecosystems, rather than acting as agents of destruction. In fact, corn now has a bad reputation in many parts of the world, but corn, and the humans who first helped it to evolve thousands of years ago, are not to blame. There are few things more beautiful than the gem-like kernels of the heirloom corn varieties which long provided the basis of a healthy, vibrant, balanced diet for people throughout what is now Mexico and the United States—and which still does so for some today. These varieties are adapted to be drought-resistant, to withstand extremes of heat or cold, and are integral to many aspects of the cultures that rely upon them for survival.

This brings us back to the idea of a changing climate, of extremes. Over all the years that people have been planting seeds, they have been participating in a process of evolutionary adaptation: they’ve been selecting the seeds that thrived in their particular soil, with their particular weather conditions, their particular light. Seeds banks are great—especially those that save only indig-

enous, non-corporate patented varieties; but they are not enough. We need living seed banks, seeds planted every year—eased into an uncertain future—if we want a real hope for survival.

Not only that, but farmers who grow a single crop for export instead of growing for their local community are at the mercy of another force as volatile as the weather: the global economy. Many of us remember *The Grapes of Wrath*, the image of men dousing oranges with kerosene, throwing potatoes into the river and guarding them with guns, while the children of the migrant laborers looked on, starving. Modern versions of this still happen. Millions of people are hungry, and yet the amount of food we waste every day is absolutely staggering.

As John Steinbeck wrote, back in 1939, in a passage that still captures the essence of the global food system today: “There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange.”

Of course, the global economy in general is vastly unequal. This relates to the food system in different ways in different parts of the world. In wealthy, industrially developed countries, fresh, local, organic foods are generally thought of as being accessible only to high-income people (and to a great extent this is true), while organic farming is thought of as an occupation accessible only to people with privilege (also true, in some cases). Meanwhile, in the less “developed” world, locally grown and adapted foods, along with farming, are often stigmatized as backward, while the fat and sugar-filled processed foods that have wreaked havoc with the health of the developed world are held up as symbols of the future.

I believe that it’s generally wrong to tell anyone what they should or should not be eating, but it is important to question these kinds of assumptions. At the moment, high quality, local, organic food is a symbol of privilege in developed countries. But this is due to a rigged economic system—in which tax laws, trade agreements, gov-

ernment subsidies, and absolutely outrageous advertising budgets for things like sugary drinks and processed foods, systematically bolster multinational corporations—and not because of any quality inherent to the food itself. Once, not so long ago, it was the less economically privileged people who grew fresh, heirloom organic produce—of a quality that many of us can only dream about today—in backyards, on farms, in empty lots. Today, we think of processed and fast foods as being the cheapest options. But this, again, is because governments are doling out subsidies to corn and soy farmers, raising insurance and loan rates on fruit and veggie farmers, and handing ever more power to big business. We think of growing one's own food as something that is only accessible to those with privilege, and to a great extent this is true as well. Land is prohibitively expensive, and time, under capitalism, is the most scarce, the most precious resource of all. The typical CEO is paid 162 times what his low-level employees make per year, and so many must work multiple jobs and 80-hour weeks if they want to feed their families. Of course, the poor quality of affordable foods contributes to health problems that take up more time and increase financial burdens.

These are horrible structural injustices, and the structures that perpetrate them have to be dismantled. Yet, while the food system is a great place to start, we must not forget that many of the people who have been responsible for growing food over the last several hundred years have done so in the context of slavery, or of exploitative tenant or migrant farming, leaving legacies of trauma connected to land and food that cannot, and should not, be easily forgotten.

However, despite these absolutely undeniable wrongs, many are beginning to agree that without food sovereignty (defined on The United States Food Sovereignty Alliance website as, “The right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their

own food and agriculture systems,”) we cannot have meaningful control over our lives, or our futures. As Leah Penniman, of Soul Fire Farm in Albany, New York, points out, there is a lot of racism built into the food system—food apartheid, as she describes it—and the separation of certain people from land and good food has not been an accident. Penniman is one of many at the forefront of a movement that is reconnecting systemically marginalized people to land and to food. This



By Senya and Ksusha/Shutterstock.com

can be as simple as growing fresh food in vacant lots, on rooftops, on the grounds of community buildings like libraries, schools, churches. “Crop swaps,” or movements like #FoodIsFree—ways of trading produce for low or no cost—are amazing solutions that not only equalize the local food game, but also bring people together, building real community.

Meanwhile, in the global South, some are rejecting the idea that leaving the land for polluted, overpopulated cities is a sign of progress. One's income might be higher working in an urban sweatshop than it would be in a rural village, but that increased income does not necessarily reflect an increased quality of life. In villages where people own their own land and live as they have for generations—using clean water, eating local foods, making clothes and other goods from locally sourced materials, relying on community support for things like child care—a comfortable life can cost almost nothing. (This is why corporate

land grabs, for purposes like mining, logging, oil drilling and factory farming, are among the most pressing human rights issues of our time.) In confirmation of this, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN has declared that small family farming is the only way to feed a growing population, while the economic powers that be have confirmed it by creating a climate in which those who fight for land rights must fear for their lives.

In the end, you could say it comes down to this: if we all divest our time, energy and money from the corporations that fill megastores and supermarkets, and invest instead in ourselves, in local farmers and small local businesses, then we can keep money and precious resources circulating

in our communities. When we do so, the creation of local food economies can play a meaningful role in equalizing society as a whole. And there are added benefits. When people and local governments reclaim their resources, it weakens the economic power of corporations, and strengthens democracy. Not only that, but societies that don't leave people desperate are societies where people are less likely to turn against each other. There is the potential for a decline in xenophobia and conflict, and for diverse communities to unite, instead, against the real enemies: those who profit enormously off a system of gross injustice, and inequality.

Nashira is an urban ecovillage near the Colombian city of Cali. It is run entirely by women, most from low-income families, and many of whom were left as single mothers by decades of civil conflict. Other women living at Nashira are survivors of domestic or sexual abuse. All are looking for a safe place to raise children, and a way to put food on the table.

Nashira can provide them with both—and more. It is a self-sustaining ecovillage, with a matriarchal democratic system of governance, that is built and operates on strict ecological principles. The fact that Nashira residents grow their own

food as a community, as well as producing and selling sustainable food for income, has given a lot of these women and their families true safety, freedom, and stability for the first time in their lives.

Around the world, ecovillages more or less like Nashira are emerging. They are home to every kind of person, and yet they tend to share one thing in common: a focus on the importance

of growing food as a community for sustainability, economic independence, health, and happiness.

There has been a lot of discussion about how best to name our time in history—the “Technological Age,” perhaps?—but George Monbiot has declared that it can most accurately be

The farms of the future should be regenerative, diverse, accessible, community-oriented, places of celebration

described as “The Age of Loneliness.” Our mental health statistics are grim—including, notably, the suicide statistics for farmers struggling in the industrial food system. We work long hours and are dependent on a few corporations for all of our basic needs (looking at you, Amazon), while technology is allowing for ever fewer human interactions (many people I know have their groceries delivered while they're at work, and never see the inside of a store at all). While online communities have emerged that do serve beneficial purposes, it's simply not enough. Human beings are social animals. We're evolved to rely upon each other—for everything. We're calmed by interdependent, mutually beneficial relationships, by support and sharing. We're also calmed, strengthened, and satisfied by working with living plants and animals, especially when, by doing so, we're securely able to feed our families. Around the world, growing food has proven beneficial for prisoners, school children, youth in foster care, unhoused peoples and trauma survivors.

And, of course, we all know that there's nothing better than food for bringing people together. Whether it's organizing a work party to pick berries, planning produce-trading parties, preparing potlucks for celebration, or simply running into friends at a local market during daily shopping,

the interactions we have in the context of a local food culture make the world a less lonely place.

Okay, so the farms of the future should be regenerative, diverse, accessible, community-oriented, places of celebration. But for many of us—in particular those who are interested in actually becoming farmers—there are still a lot of barriers in the way of getting started.

The cost of land is the biggest. In the U.S., between 1992 and 2012, three acres of farmland were lost to development every minute. Particularly near urban centers—where organic farmers find their largest markets—real estate developers are able to pay so much more than farmers can afford (banks are nervous about lending to farmers under the best of circumstances, and for young farmers starting out with student debt the prospects are even worse). At the moment, with real estate developers making bank on new developments, GDP rising when food is transported across national borders, and the fossil fuel industry still benefiting from long distances between growers and consumers—as bizarre as that sounds in our burning world—there remains little incentive for those in power to change this system. Fortunately, a number of organizations and local governments have taken on the difficult work of exploring alternative models of land ownership, setting up farmland trusts, and giving low or no interest loans to beginning farmers. Models like Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), in which community members pay for food shares at the start of a growing season, provide farmers with critical financial safety nets that help them stay afloat.

Gaining rights to water and finding land not contaminated by industry can present further obstacles. So can overcoming expectations like, “I’m entitled to eat fresh strawberries in winter no matter where I live”—when in fact, eating seasonal, locally adapted produce is likely to lead to a higher quality overall diet, especially for those willing to take it on as a creative challenge. The same goes for countering statements like “organic agriculture is less productive,” or “small farms cannot feed the world.” While the first may sometimes appear to be true if you’re comparing organic versus conventional large-scale production

of the same crop, the statistics are usually cherry-picked to support corporate interests, and the whole conversation shifts if you expand your discussion to include different agricultural models—like highly diversified, integrated systems. When it comes to comparing large versus small farms, a lot of data is already in: small or medium family farms produce over 80 percent of the world’s food, using only 12 percent of the agricultural land. A huge problem lies in the fact that, to a very alarming extent, big agribusiness funds agricultural research in universities.

Then there are the challenges of obtaining local farming knowledge, particularly in regions where most people left the land long ago. Finally, there is the difficulty of overcoming stigmas, as Hou Xueying had to do, against working the land—fighting the idea that a farming life is “backward” and not modern—following these ideas to their source and cutting them off at the roots. We can only hope that as new food cultures take shape, and old ones evolve the world over, this process is able to spread and grow of its own accord.

Fortunately, this growth has already begun. People around the world are hard at work creating diverse, living versions of the farms of the future. As a way of life, it would be nice to think that it could really catch on, and one day be accessible to most of us. We’ll just need to continue fighting for access, giving one another support, unearthing the solid, tangible proof that a local food future is real, and not some fantasy we’ll soon abandon, a vague dream of what might have been, that we talk about in bitter tones while the robots get on with the planting. **Z**

For more local food inspiration, see Local Futures’ curated collection of short films on food and farming.

Isabel Marlens is a Special Projects Coordinator for Local Futures. She studied Ecology and English Literature at Bennington College, has a Permaculture Design Certificate from Quail Springs Permaculture, and has done native plant conservation and education, forest ecology research, and research and writing for various documentary films and online publications in the areas of social and environmental justice.

Feature



Tijuana border wall, by Kathleen Foster

Caravan: Workers Who Want to Work

By Kathleen Foster

In a corner of a patio, Angelica and her four-year-old son have made a temporary home beneath a tarpaulin. The mother and child store all their worldly possessions here: a small red backpack; two plastic cups, one pink, one orange; a bottle of water; and a toy train. For the young

mother this makeshift shelter in Tijuana, Mexico, is the latest stop on a perilous journey to hoped-for sanctuary in the U.S., from her home in Honduras and a life of inequality, injustice, and oppression.

After her abusive husband threatened to have her killed by local gang members, Angelica and

her youngest child joined a caravan of asylum seekers traveling north. When they arrived at the Tijuana-San Diego border last December, Customs and Border Protection agents prevented them from crossing over into the U.S. to apply for asylum. Instead, Angelica, along with hundreds of others, had to line up for a number and the chance to cross when it was called. Only 10 to 15 numbers are taken each day, so the wait can stretch to weeks or even months. Meanwhile, refugees sleep in shelters, on the streets, or, like Angelica, in a relatively safe space in the garden of a warm-hearted local family.

I met Angelica in January when my husband, Jose, and I volunteered with the clinic run by the New Sanctuary Coalition in Tijuana. The NSC's mission was to provide support for people arriving in the caravan, and its slogans—"Abolish Borders," "Abolish ICE"—had attracted hundreds of activists from around the country who are concerned about the rise of anti-immigrant racism. Our tasks as volunteers varied daily: we briefed nervous refugees on what to expect when they finally entered a processing center; stood in line with them for a number; accompanied them to the border, or to a free health center, or to the pro bono legal clinic run by *Al Otro Lado*. On most days we served meals to between 50 and 150 hungry people with food provided by local restaurants and caring individuals.

Volunteers and refugees bonded easily. One evening a young Nicaraguan played the guitar and sang Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" in Spanish. Then we all joined older Nicaraguans in singing the songs of the bard of Sandinismo, Carlos Mejía Godoy. Jose, a refugee who came from Central America in 1981, felt a special affinity with the recent arrivals. "They are," he said, "workers who just want to work," and conditions for Central America's working class are desperate.

Guatemalans, Hondurans, Salvadorans, and Nicaraguans have been fleeing Central America since the 1970s when civil wars erupted throughout the region as insurgents attempted to overthrow repressive governments that were financially and militarily supported by the U.S. government. These early refugees traveled alone or in small family groups, secretly crossing at unguarded

borders, but in the past two years Central Americans have begun to travel openly and boldly in vast caravans like the one, seven thousand strong, that left last December. Caravans start small with a group of people who decide they have to leave. WhatsApp quickly spreads the word that one is forming, and people join as the caravan makes its way from country to country. On the journey north, decisions—for example, determining the best route to take—are made collectively at public forums. Through social media the caravaneros get out messages to the press: that they are refugees who want their legal rights to seek political asylum respected; and that they speak not as individuals but as a class of dispossessed people. Some carry handwritten signs declaring "Asylum Is a Right, No Al Fronteras."

Immigrants, Once "Undocumented Workers," Now "Criminals"

As a photojournalist during the war years, I interviewed campesinos who had been bombed out of their homes during the Salvadoran army's counterinsurgency sweeps. I have searing memories of grandmothers nursing the babies of mothers who had been killed, or had joined the guerrillas, or had fled to the U.S. In Guatemala, I photographed indigenous peasants who had been displaced from the highlands and herded into prison-like encampments by the military dictator General Ríos Montt after his soldiers had destroyed their villages. Back in the States, I volunteered in legal clinics helping those who had escaped the poverty and violence that followed when "peace" was declared. I knew their stories and aided their efforts to navigate the hostile U.S. immigration system and legalize their status. It was a difficult and scary process. But none of this had prepared me for what I saw and heard in Tijuana.

From the heavy militarization of the border to immigrants being brutally and inhumanely treated—detained for weeks, sometimes months, in intolerable conditions; children separated from mothers; children dying in custody; lack of medical care; blocked entry to borders—the situation has turned dramatically worse. Immigrants have

gone from being classified as “undocumented workers” to being categorized as “criminals.” Asylum applications, once dealt with by the Department of Labor, are now under the jurisdiction of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), set up after 9/11 as part of the Homeland Security Administration.

The Conditions That Force Millions to Flee

Angelica came to the clinic first for information about the border crossing and, as time went on, for meals. She had exhausted her meager savings on the journey north, when she’d had to pay for food and the occasional bus ride. Ever resourceful, she had sold candy on the streets of Tijuana until someone tried to rob her. She quickly discovered that refugees had to be constantly alert to their surroundings. Another day, locals intervened when kidnappers tried to snatch her son. But most of all, Angelica and all the refugees feared being caught by members of gangs, who would hold them hostage to extort fees from their

families back home.

Angelica’s story is heartbreakingly similar to those of so many other women in Central America—a region with the highest femicide rates per capita in the world; in 2018 a woman was murdered every 24 hours. Domestic violence and sexual exploitation of women, children, and LGBTQ people are tactics used by armed gangs to control their territories. Unemployment figures for women are even higher than those for men, and women’s wages are significantly lower. At home, Angelica was only able to find work picking coffee beans, seasonal labor that paid poorly. She had one option left: joining the caravan with the hope of finding a better life in the U.S. (*Refworld*, “El Salvador: Information Gathering Mission Report, Part 2: The Situation of Women Victims of Violence and of Sexual Minorities in El Salvador.”)

Every day we listened as refugees—some exhausted from lack of sleep and fearful of the future, others defiant and determined to fight for their rights—repeated the same reasons for being there: fear and the need for work that pays a living wage. Young men face a harrowing choice: to



Man looking out to sea, by Kathleen Foster

leave or to join a gang. Everyone knew someone who had been killed for defying a gang or government. Three men traveling together talked about their struggle for better working conditions, how they had been photographed at an antigovernment demonstration and feared for their safety. “We knew so many workers like us who had been arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and killed,” one said. “We had to leave.”

In 2017, a Social Watch report noted that violence and repression of workers is on the rise worldwide. Corporations employ gangs to threaten, intimidate, and even kidnap and kill workers who organize for better conditions. In 2016, two internationally known activists were killed: Brenda Marleni Estrada Tambiento of the Union Sindical de Trabajadores de Guatemala; and Berta Isabel Caceres Flores, indigenous leader of the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (ITUC Global Rights Index).

In the 1980s, the Salvadoran poet and revolutionary Roque Dalton wrote, “the president of the United States is more president of my country than the president of my country.” Forty years later, the U.S. dollar is the official currency of El Salvador, and the president of the United States is the de facto president. The Federal Reserve Bank decides the country’s interest rates and fiscal poli-

cies. Today, 60 percent of the Salvadoran population is underemployed, unemployed, or working in the informal sector, and El Salvador is one of the poorest countries in the region.

One day, an older couple from El Salvador, arrived at the NSC clinic. They were exhausted and very hungry. The man reminded me of a small farmer I had met in the early 2000s. Gesturing at his pocket-sized plot of infertile land, he opened his palm to show me a handful of seeds. The local landowner had increased his rent, and the cost of seeds and fertilizer had become unaffordable. “How can I feed my family on this?” he asked angrily.

U.S. imperialism, with its long history of supporting brutal dictatorships in the region, continues to exploit the Central American working class, helping to create the conditions that force millions to flee. The North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994 allowed U.S. and Canadian multi-nationals and local capitalists to take over land and resources from small farmers for mining and growing cash crops for export. Corporations like Fruit of the Loom, Hanes, Gildan Activewear, Nike, and Adidas, operate in free-trade zones where they pay no state or local taxes and their workers receive barely subsistence wages.



Man at Tijuana beach border wall, by Kathleen Foster

Once I photographed inside a clothing factory in San Salvador. Women in tightly packed rows sat before loud, fast-moving sewing machines while an armed guard watched over a pile of blue jeans the women had produced. Not one worker looked up. The guard's menacing stance, his weapon at the ready, dictated the speed at which they were forced to work. So much as a glance away from the racing needles could mean an injury to fingers or hands, and also losing one's livelihood.

Remaining in Mexico

Angelica's number came up after we left Tijuana, and she crossed over the border into a detention camp. Then President Trump announced a new policy, the "Remain In Mexico" program. All applicants for asylum would be returned to Mexico to wait for their interviews. Angelica was sent back to Tijuana with a new interview date for four weeks later. Trapped indefinitely in Tijuana, Angelica rejoined the homeless population—around 1,800, according to the city's public safety ministry, with thousands more camping out in shacks, often without running water or electricity, and exposed to crime and police harassment. The caravan arrivals, together with migrants from Mexico's southern states and the thousands of un-

documented immigrants deported by ICE in recent years, have strained the city's municipal and church shelters and soup kitchens.

On Sundays, families visit the U.S.-Mexican border wall that runs down the beach in Tijuana to the Pacific Ocean. They peer through the 20-foot steel posts, hoping for a glimpse of loved ones on the San Diego side. But all they see is an empty, wide no-man's land patrolled by border agents in SUVs—President Trump's latest addition to the militarization of the border. Political artwork covers the wall with messages of unity in English and Spanish. People come from all over the world to help paint the brightly colored names that transform the wall into a monument to loved ones—those who have died attempting to cross the border, missing family members, and those separated by harsh immigration laws.

Goods Can Cross Borders, Why Can't People?

Meanwhile, it's business as usual at the Tijuana-San Diego border crossing as trucks transporting merchandise produced in Tijuana's thriving industrial valley stream through without inspection. This is the busiest land border in the world, with around 50,000 vehicles and 25,000



Names of the disappeared, by Kathleen Foster

pedestrians crossing every day into the U.S. More than two million people work in the maquiladoras on the Mexico side of the border. Here, U.S. manufacturers produce goods for pesos, and sell them in the U.S. for dollars.

A few days after we returned from Tijuana, 70,000 workers in 40 factories producing auto parts (including General Motors and Ford plants) went on strike in the industrial city of Matamoros, across the border from Brownsville, Texas. The settlement won by these workers, many of whom earned as little as \$9 a day, included a 20 percent increase in wages and a one-time bonus of about \$1,700. Their actions encouraged the diverse workforce in other maquiladoras along the border—Mexican nationals (particularly migrants from the country's impoverished southern states); refugees from Central America, Haiti, the Caribbean, and even Africa; and Mexicans taken to the U.S. as children and deported by the Obama and Trump administrations—to fight for and win pay increases.

At the end of May, Trump announced that he would impose 5 percent tariffs on all goods imported from these factories—on food, medical devices, cars, clothing, machinery valued at nearly \$360 billion in 2018, according to the *Wall Street Journal* (May 31, 2019)—until the Mexican government took action to stem the flow of so-called

illegal aliens across the southern border. This policy, notes Ravi Ragbir, executive director of the New Sanctuary Coalition, would have resulted in “higher prices for food and everyday goods, which will hurt the average person on both sides of the border.” Trump, he argues, “is once again using the hot issue of immigrants as a threat to national security to rally his base and support his presidential aspirations.” He abandoned his plan when the Mexican government agreed to stop refugees on its southern border and to aid in effecting his Remain In Mexico policy.

The Wall Built to Divide Has Become a Bridge

Angelica's interview date was again delayed for another two months. A new report from the Department of Homeland Security revealed that severe overcrowding at one immigration facility posed an immediate risk to the health of detained migrant children. Ragbir warns, “We are close to witnessing a repeat of Nazi Germany when detention centers [the camps] couldn't house the thousands of people detained.”

Rumors abound in the refugee community that there will be mass deportations back to countries of origin and no one will be allowed to cross the



Clamor Por Los Que No Lograron El Sueno, by Asylum Seeker



Clamor Por Los Que No Lograron El Sueno, by Asylum Seeker

border. The Mexican government continues to comply with the bargain they made with Trump: the police and National Guard pick up people on the slightest pretext.

Men also roam the streets offering to help people cross. One man tried to strike a deal with Angelica: he'd smuggle her to California in exchange for her moving in with him. "I'm desperate," she told us, "but not that desperate." She is resilient, determined, and at the moment relatively safe. She has become a leader in a small community of refugees, migrants, volunteers, and concerned Tijuana neighbors who share living space and resources and welcome new arrivals. Angelica and hundreds of others are still waiting in Tijuana more than six months after arriving at the border. In reality, Angelica's journey is just beginning and her future uncertain. I listen to her and wonder if she realizes how long it will be before she sees her other son and family again.

One of the NSC volunteers in Tijuana, Jason Wu, described the network of asylum seekers, migrants, and volunteers on the border as people "linked in a common struggle." Recalling a time when the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barred Chinese workers from entry into the United States, Wu commented: "If I don't stand up for these refugees now, it will be me in the future." To

which Ragbir adds: "Trump is hell-bent on ethnic cleansing. He will expand anti-immigrant policies to include blacks and browns, and other citizens."

In early July, activists, locals, and, with commendable courage, asylum seekers held a vigil that went on into the night at the Tijuana beach wall. They were there to memorialize the Salvadoran man and his daughter and the young boy from Syria, all of whom had drowned while trying to cross the border.

The indisputable irony is that a wall built to divide instead serves to connect people from different backgrounds and continents. In the tradition of the Underground Railroad, anti-racist solidarity is propelling many to take action to free the refugees.

Z

Kathleen Foster is a photojournalist and filmmaker best known for producing socially engaged art to support grass-roots movements for change. Her photography has documented the war years in Central America. Her award-winning documentaries include *Afghan Women: A History of Struggle*; *Coal Wars: The Battle in Rum Creek*; *Nicaragua: Reclaiming the Revolution*; and most recently, *PROFILED*—a Paul Robeson Award recipient at the 2018 Newark Black Film Festival.

Feature



Joe Biden, by Matt Smith Photographer/Shutterstock.com

Corporate Team of Rivals

By Norman Solomon

The odds are now very strong that Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, Elizabeth Warren or Bernie Sanders will be the Democratic presidential nominee. New polling averages say they account

for almost 70 percent of support nationwide, while no other candidate is anywhere near. For progressives who want to affect the news instead of just consume it, active engagement will be essential.

Biden is the most regressive Democrat with a real chance to head the ticket. After amassing a five-decade record littered with odious actions and statements, he now insists that the 2020 campaign “shouldn’t be about the past”—an evasive and ridiculous plea, coming from someone who proclaims himself to be “an Obama-Biden Democrat” and goes to absurd lengths to fasten himself onto Obama’s coattails, while also boasting of his past ability to get legislation through Congress.

As he campaigns, Biden persists with disingenuous denials. During the June 27 debate, he flatly—and falsely—declared: “I did not oppose busing in America.” On July 6, speaking to a mostly black audience in South Carolina, he said: “I didn’t support more money to build state prisons. I was against it.” But under the headline “Fact Check: Joe Biden Falsely Claims He Opposed Spending More Money to Build State Prisons,” CNN reported that “he was misrepresenting his own record.”

Biden used the Fourth of July weekend to dig himself deeper into a centrist, status quo trench for his war on the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. During a repeatedly cringeworthy interview, Biden told CNN that what can’t be done includes Medicare for All, tuition-free public college and student debt cancellation. Bernie Sanders

quickly responded with a tweet calling Medicare for All, debt-free college and a Green New Deal “the agenda American needs—and that will energize voters to defeat Donald Trump.”

No one has summed up Biden’s political stance better than Elizabeth Warren, who told the California Democratic Party convention five weeks ago: “Some Democrats in Washington believe the only changes we can get are tweaks and nudges. If they dream, they dream small. Some say if we all just calm down, the Republicans will come to their senses.” She added: “When a candidate tells you about all the things that aren’t possible, about how political calculations come first . . . they’re telling you something very important—they are telling you that they will not fight for you.”

Being preferable to Joe Biden is a low bar, and Kamala Harris clears it. But, like Biden, she stands to lose potential support from many self-described liberals and progressives to the extent they learn more about her actual record.

Overall, Harris’s work as San Francisco’s DA and the California attorney general was not progressive. Lara Bazelon, former director of the LA-based Loyola Law School Project for the Innocent, wrote in a *New York Times* column early this year: “Time after time, when progressives urged her to embrace criminal justice reforms as



Kamala Harris, by Kim Wilson/Shutterstock.com

a district attorney and then the state's attorney general, Ms. Harris opposed them or stayed silent. Most troubling, Ms. Harris fought tooth and nail to uphold wrongful convictions that had been secured through official misconduct that included evidence tampering, false testimony and the suppression of crucial information by prosecutors."

Bazelon also said: "Kamala Harris claims to be a champion of criminal justice reform. But as a prosecutor . . . she was anything but. She needs to make the case to the voters that her change of heart is genuine. Crucial to that case is reckoning with her past."

That past needs scrutiny, especially since Harris has refused to acknowledge there was anything wrong with it.

"As the top law enforcement official" of San Francisco and then California, *The New York Times* reported in a February news article, "she developed a reputation for caution, protecting the status quo and shrinking from decisions on contentious issues." Reporter Kate Zernike wrote:

- "Years before ending mass incarceration became a bipartisan cause, she started pro-

grams to steer low-level drug offenders away from prison and into school and jobs. At the same time, she touted her success in increasing conviction rates, and as attorney general remained largely on the sidelines as California scrambled to meet a federal court order to reduce its swollen prison populations. She also repeatedly sided with prosecutors accused of misconduct, challenging judges who ruled against them."

- When Harris first ran statewide, for California attorney general in 2010, "she had campaigned to the right of her Republican opponent on the question of easing the state's tough three-strikes law. Once in office, she declined to take positions on ultimately successful ballot initiatives intended to reduce prison populations—one expanding opportunities for parole, the other reducing many nonviolent felonies to misdemeanors."
- "After the Supreme Court upheld the judges' overcrowding order, the state promised to 'promptly' release a significant number of nonviolent prisoners, giving credit for time served. A delay in meeting that promise



Elizabeth Warren, by Albert H. Teich/Shutterstock.com

drew a judicial scolding in 2014. The state's response proved embarrassing, and unsuccessful: Reducing the prison population, Ms. Harris's office maintained, would hurt California's ability to fight wildfires by shrinking the pool of forced labor."

- "Ms. Harris won praise for releasing statewide data in a way that informed rather than inflamed the brutality debate: It included numbers on the use of police force but also on use of force against officers. She instituted body cameras for police agents who worked in her office, and offered implicit-bias training for police statewide. But she declined to support statewide regulations for the use of body cameras, agreeing with local departments that they should set their own standards. And she did not support a bill that would have required the attorney general to investigate police shootings."
- Early in this decade, responding to the house foreclosure crisis, "the banks agreed to \$18 billion in debt reduction that Ms. Harris said would allow California homeowners to stay in their homes, and the national agreement

included \$2.5 billion for a fund to provide educational counseling and other services for those in danger of foreclosure. But critics, especially on the left, have long said that the settlement was no grand bargain. It did not require banks to pay much out of pocket; \$4.7 billion of the \$18 billion in relief came from forgiving second mortgages, many of which the banks would have written off anyway because they were so severely underwater, and \$9 billion came from homeowners selling their homes for less than the value of their mortgages, meaning that homeowners did not stay in their homes."

The *New Republic* recently summed up: "From her role in a California prison labor debate to her prosecutions of sex workers," Kamala Harris "has a past of her own to defend."

It's sometimes difficult to gauge what Harris really believes in, especially in light of her tactical backsliding and flip-flops. Longtime observers had no reason to be surprised when she walked back her forceful debate position that the federal government shouldn't leave it to localities to assist school desegregation with busing. "Harris



Bernie Sanders, by Juli Hansen/Shutterstock.com

muddied the waters,” the Associated Press reported, when “she told reporters she too did not support federally mandated busing and supported it only as an option for local governments.”

On foreign policy, the little that Harris has to say is often hazy while conforming with mainstream Democratic Party militarism. In the Senate, she has voted for six of eight major military spending bills.

Harris—who cosponsored a bill to withhold U.S. dues to the United Nations because of a UN Security Council resolution that condemned illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank—pandered to AIPAC while delivering 2017 and 2018 speeches to the Israel-can-do-no-wrong organization. While acquiescing to requests from MoveOn and other groups that presidential candidates not speak to AIPAC’s 2019 conference in late March, she pulled off a smooth maneuver, as Mondo-weiss pointed out: “Harris is a very pragmatic politician, and the conference came to her yesterday! She met leading AIPAC officials at her office and then tweeted her devoted support to Israel.”

Harris’s tweet shared the news: “Great to meet today in my office with California AIPAC leaders to discuss the need for a strong U.S.-Israel alliance, the right of Israel to defend itself, and my commitment to combat anti-Semitism in our country and around the world.” But progressive journalist Ben Norton did not share in the upbeat mood as he tweeted: “Far-right Israeli PM Netanyahu just formed an alliance with a literal fascist party, and is bombing people trapped in the Gaza concentration camp right now, but fake ‘progressive’ Kamala Harris is meeting with AIPAC and praising the apartheid regime.”

Yet Harris does not adhere completely to AIPAC positions. She cosponsored the Yemen war powers bill introduced by Bernie Sanders. And she has expressed support for the Iran nuclear deal negotiated by President Obama that was canceled by President Trump.

The military-industrial complex might prefer Biden to Harris. But from all indications, that complex would be quite comfortable with a President Harris, and vice versa. The same goes for Wall Street and other big corporate sectors. No wonder they’re pouring many millions of dol-

lars into the Biden and Harris campaign coffers.

However tense and testy the current relations between Biden and Harris might be, their falling out is likely to be temporary. “I adore Joe Biden,” she proclaimed in mid-spring when he was on the verge of announcing his campaign. Anyone who doubts the prospect of a rapprochement—and even a shared ticket—is forgetting how easily campaign-trail conflicts can be jettisoned a little bit down the road. In 1980, George H.W. Bush fought Ronald Reagan for the GOP presidential nomination all the way to the convention, even after losing the vast majority of primaries, and tensions were raw; then came the Reagan-Bush ticket.

Among the Democratic presidential candidates, the viable alternatives to the Biden and Harris corporatist duo are the progressive candidate Elizabeth Warren and the more progressive candidate Bernie Sanders. While Warren is impressive in many ways, I continue to actively support Sanders. As an eloquent essay by Shaun King recently underscored, Sanders—like no other member of the Senate or candidate for president—has boldly participated in progressive movements for his entire adult life. That orientation toward social movements is crucial in a time of profound needs for fundamental change, in an era of multiple and concentric crises—from record-breaking economic inequality to extreme corporate greed to racist xenophobia to the climate emergency to rampant militarism and so much more. No matter how distasteful or repugnant, the electoral process is an opening for progressive forces to be influential and potentially decisive. **Z**

Norman Solomon is cofounder and national coordinator of RootsAction.org. He was a Bernie Sanders delegate from California to the 2016 Democratic National Convention and is currently a coordinator of the relaunched independent Bernie Delegates Network. Solomon is the author of a dozen books including *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*.



PROFILED

a film by
Kathleen Foster

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