



April 2020

Sun on Making the Change You Want



Rasmus on Economic Recovery

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Z Magazine Update

Thank you to everyone who donated to *Z Magazine*. Unfortunately, the fundraiser did not raise enough funds to allow the magazine to continue as a print magazine. For now, *Z Magazine* will be online only. Hopefully, we will be able to run a print version of some kind in the future, but for at least the next few months, *Z Magazine* will be digital only.

The good news is that without substantial printing and shipping costs, *Z Magazine* can run more issues more frequently and make each issue longer than the print version.

For example, two mini issues on the election and the coronavirus crisis are now available to view or download at your account page. Since there was a lot of great material, I plan on uploading another issue shortly after the April issue to make sure subscribers can get as much information as possible. The April issue was also uploaded a week early to keep everyone informed.

I would like to see if Letters to the Editor can become part of the magazine again, so please email eric.sargent@zmag.org if you want to re-

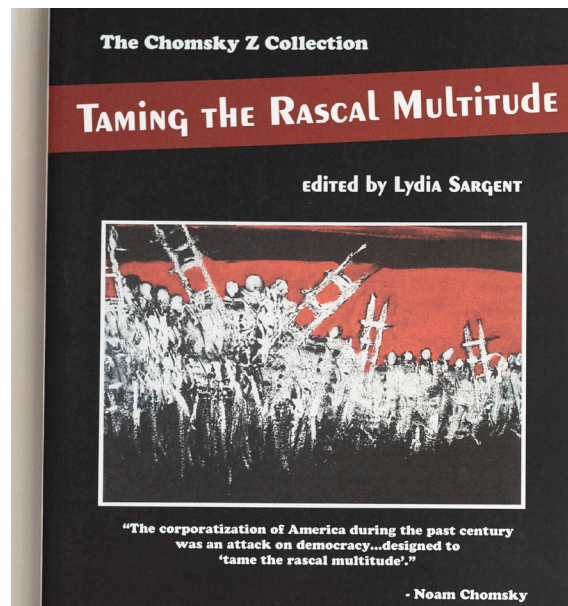
spond to articles on the coronavirus, or how you, your friends and your family are handling the crisis. Any pictures you may have would also be welcome. I will try to get some of them into the next issue, a bi-monthly issue (maybe sooner). All letters, on any topic, however, are appreciated.

Other changes include color photos with different layouts for graphics and longer issues. Hopefully an animated version with links and videos will be possible soon. Other ideas include, a daily article emailed to your inbox, a weekly summary issue, increased activism coverage, and making it bi-monthly. Please send any ideas, requests or comments on any changes you may or may not

like.

If anyone needs additional reading, we have two Noam Chomsky books edited by Lydia Sargent for sale: *Taming the Rascal Multitude* (274 pages) and *The Chomsky Z Sessions* (88 pages). *Taming* is a collection from past *Z Magazine* articles, while *Z Sessions* has Michael Albert interviewing Noam Chomsky on a variety of topics. (We will have more titles available soon. Please email eric.sargent@zmag.org if you want more information on other titles.) To order, go to the sales page located at: <https://simplecirc.com/shop/z-magazine> or email eric.sargent@zmag.org and I will email a direct link.

Thank you for being a *Z Magazine* supporter. **Z**



Saudi's Brave Women Pull Back the Curtain on Crown Prince MBS

By Medea Benjamin
and Ariel Gold

Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MBS), Saudi Arabia's 34-year-old de facto ruler, has been on a tear recently. He arrested members of his own royal family and initiated an oil price war with Russia that has sent the price of oil—and the world's stock markets—plummeting. Behind the headlines, however, another critical event will take

The imprisonment of these peaceful women activists exposes the brutal nature of MBS's regime and the duplicity of the Western democracies that continue to support him

place in Saudi Arabia starting March 18: women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul, who was arrested almost two years ago for advocating the right to drive, is due in court. The diabolical MBS wants the world to believe he is the Arab world's liberal reformer and takes credit for eventually granting women the right

to drive, but he is also the one who had al-Hathloul and nine other women thrown in prison, charging them as foreign agents and spies. The imprisonment of these peaceful women activists exposes the brutal nature of MBS's regime and the duplicity of the Western democracies that continue to support him.

Loujain al-Hathloul gained notoriety in 2013 for campaigning against the driving ban when she posted videos of herself driving as an act of civil disobedience. She was first arrested in December 2014 when she attempted to drive from the United Arab Emirates to Saudi Arabia and spent 73 days in prison at that time. Al-Hathloul has also been an outspoken advocate for an end to the male guardianship system that treats women as no more than children throughout their entire



Photo by Johnny Silvercloud/Shutterstock.com

The fact that MBS lifted the driving ban and simultaneously put in prison those who had campaigned and suffered for such reforms makes clear his actual motive: to silence dissent and prevent these women's voices from being heard

lives.

On May 15, 2018, a group of armed men from the state security agency raided Loujain's family's house and arrested her. For the first three months of her detention, she was held incommunicado with no access to her family or a lawyer. According to the communication she was later able to have with her family, during those three months, she was beaten, waterboarded, given electric shocks, sexually harassed, and threatened with rape and murder.

Loujain languished in a Saudi prison for almost a year before the public prosecutor's office finally announced that it had concluded its investigation and alleged that Loujain was involved in activities that "aim to undermine the Kingdom's security, stability, and national unity." She was accused of contacting "enemy groups"—a reference to cooperation with the United Nations and human rights groups such as Amnesty International.

Loujain's initial hearing was in March 2019, but she was not allowed access to a lawyer or to hear the charges prior to the hearing. Her family members were permitted to attend, but the court was closed to both diplomats and journalists.

According to her family, in August 2019, al-Hathloul was offered her freedom in exchange for denying, on video, that she was subjected to torture. She refused. For her incredible bravery and determination to fight for women's rights, eight members of U.S. Congress have nominated al-Hathloul for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The case of al-Hathloul and the other women's rights activists on trial in Saudi Arabia is a tremendous embarrassment for MBS, who has been putting an enormous effort into convincing his Western allies that he is a reformer and that Saudi Arabia is becoming more liberal. But behind the facade of new musical concerts and theme

parks, the Crown Prince has overseen a vast crackdown on all forms of opposition and dissent. In November 2018, the CIA concluded that MBS was the one who ordered the gruesome assassination of *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi. MBS is also responsible for dragging Saudi Arabia into an internal conflict in Yemen, where constant Saudi bombings have decimated what was already a poor country.

The fact that MBS lifted the driving ban and simultaneously put in prison those who had campaigned and suffered for such reforms makes clear his actual motive: to silence dissent and prevent these women's voices from being heard. Loujain's sister Lina al-Hathloul says that the regime arrested these women's rights activists "so that they make the [Saudi] people understand that change only comes top down. And the people should not even try to make the changes." This sentiment was echoed by

Suzanne Nossel, the head of PEN America. “These gutsy women have challenged one of the world’s most notoriously misogynist governments, inspiring the world with their demand to drive, to govern their own lives, and to liberate all Saudi women from a form of medieval bondage that has no place in the 21st century,” she said.

“The very existence of this sham trial pulls the veil off of the authorities’ so-called push for reforms in the Kingdom,” said Lynn Maalouf, Amnesty International’s Middle East research director. “How can they initiate change in the country when the very women who fought for these reforms are still being punished for it?”

The bogus trial against Lou-jain al-Hathloul should compel governments around the

world to put more pressure on the Saudis and demand al-Hathloul’s immediate and unconditional release. Her imprisonment—as well as MBS’s arrest of royal family members and Saudi Arabia’s brutal war in Yemen—should be particularly embarrassing to the world community in light of the G20 meeting scheduled to take place in Saudi Arabia in November. How can the world’s leaders pretend that it is acceptable to meet in a country that imprisons and tortures peaceful women activists and bombs civilians in Yemen? It isn’t. **Z**

This article was produced by Local Peace Economy, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

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Millions of Women in Mexico Join “Day Without Us” Strike to Protest Gender-Based Violence

By Jessica Corbett

Millions of women across Mexico took



Photo by Maria A. Rodriguez/Shutterstock.com



Guadalajara, Jalisco / Mexico - March 8 2020: Water at Guadalajara's Minerva monument has been dyed red for International Women's Day, to protest the country's high rate of femicides

Photo by NickyRedl/Shutterstock.com

part in “Un Día Sin Nosotras” or “A Day Without Us” strike, staying home from work and school to protest the country’s high rates of femicide and other forms of gender-based violence just a day after an estimated 80,000 people marched in Mexico City to mark International Women’s Day.

“In Mexico it’s like we’re in a state of war; we’re in a humanitarian crisis because of the quantity of women that have disappeared or been killed,” National Citizen’s Observatory of Femicide coordinator María de la Luz Estrada told the Associated

Press.

The AP reported that “government data say 3,825 women met violent deaths last year, 7% more than in 2018. That works out to about 10 women slain each day in Mexico. Thousands more have gone missing without a trace in recent years. Authorities seem incapable of preventing or properly investigating the crimes, very few of which result in convictions.”

Sandra Reyes, a 33-year-old biologist at the National Cancer Institute, told the *Guardian* that Monday’s strike sent a clear message to Mexican society. “In some ways, it’s a

taunt: if you do not want us out here in the streets, we’ll disappear,” she said.

The Mexican business group Concanaco Servytur estimated that the strike could have cost the country’s economy up to \$1.37 billion.

Despite the cost, some businesses gave women paid leave for the day in solidarity while others shut down entirely. According to the AP:

“[The strike] is about showing, socially... how valuable we women are, our contribution, and what would happen if one day we were not around. In all aspects: as homemakers, as workers,

as consumers,” said Lluvia Flores Gómez, 40, who was sipping coffee and reading a book on the couch at home in the historic downtown instead of going to work.

Flores shuttered her bakery in observation of the strike, though she said her employees—all women—would be paid for the day. She said the business would take an economic hit, but it was important to call attention to all the ways women are under attack in Mexico—not only murder, disappearance, and rape, but also home and workplace discrimination and lack of equal opportunity.

“The point is for there to really be a loss, that is, for this day to happen without us. ...It had to be something like this, radical and cutting, so that

the loss for everyone would be seen,” she said, “or rather the absence, the lack of our presence.”

Participants and supporters of the nationwide 24-hour work stoppage, also dubbed “A Day Without Women,” posted updates on social media with the hashtags #UnDiaSinMujeres, #UnDiaSinNosotras, and #UnDiaSinEllas. They shared photos of closed shops and restaurants as well as empty desks and subway cars.

“Our government urgently needs to take action. We hope the strike opens their eyes,” Marisela Villapando, who drives Uber part-time, told VICE. Villapando, who said she knows four women who were murdered or disappeared in the past year, added

that “we live in fear.”

Elsa Arista González, a 40-year-old law student and coffee shop employee, echoed that sentiment in comments to the *Guardian*.

“We used to be able to walk home from school alone, and leave open the door to your house. Not anymore,” said González. “We’ve become used to living in fear.”

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on Monday delivered conflicting messages about the strike—both claiming that the government is working every day to address gender-based violence and also suggesting that some of the anger directed at his administration over the issue “is conservatism disguised as feminism.”

“This movement has var-



Guadalajara / Mexico - March 8 2020: “In Mexico it’s like we’re in a state of war; we’re in a humanitarian crisis because of the quantity of women that have disappeared or been killed”

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George Lakey's new book, *How We Win: A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning*, has new insights even about the most familiar and often-discussed nonviolent actions of the past

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ious aspects,” AMLO, as the president is known, said during a morning news conference. “It’s a movement of women who legitimately fight for their rights and against violence, against femicides. But there is another part that is against us, and what they want is for the government to fail.”

AMLO’s comments angered Mexican journalist Guadalupe Loaeza, according to the *Washington Post*.

“The president has been provoking us with his indifference, with his comments,” Loaeza said. “He does not grasp that this is about feminism. He misrepresents it, distorts it by saying that it is conservatism.”

The Publication of Origin for this article is *Common Dreams*.

Nonviolent Action for Peace

By David Swanson

George Lakey’s new book is called *How We Win: A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning*. On its cover is a drawing of a hand holding up two fingers in what is more often considered a peace sign than a vic-

tory sign, but I suppose it is meant as both.

Perhaps nobody is better qualified to write such a book, and it’s hard to imagine one better written. Lakey co-wrote a similar book in the 1960s and has been studying the matter ever since. He doesn’t just draw lessons from the Civil Rights movement, wasn’t just there at the time, but was applying lessons from earlier actions to training activists at the time. His new book provides—at least for me—new insights even about the very most familiar and often discussed nonviolent actions of the past (as well as lots of new rarely discussed actions). I’d recommend that anyone interested in a better world get this

Can we come up with actions that make clear to observers our goals and the case for them, that reveal secrets and expose myths, that target those who can make changes, that endure and escalate and appeal to wider participation, that are both global or national and local

book immediately.

However, out of the countless examples of past actions explored in this book, there are—as is absolutely typical—very few passing references to anything related to war and peace. There's the usual complaint that marches have been tried when an (unspecified) targeted and escalating and enduring nonviolent action campaign might have had a better impact. There are two sentences praising the 12-year-long successful encampment at Greenham Common opposing a U.S. nuclear base in England. There are three sentences suggesting that a campaign that has protested Lockheed Martin's manufacture of nuclear weapons for four decades has not known how to attract enough participants. There's a portion of a sentence recommending the film *The Boys Who Said NO!* And that's about it.

But can we read this wonderful book, and tease out

some lessons that might apply to the work of ending war? Can we come up with actions that make clear to observers our goals and the case for them, that reveal secrets and expose myths, that target those who can make changes, that endure and escalate and appeal to wider participation, that are both global or national and local?

World BEYOND War has been working toward a war abolition movement using campaigns aimed at divestment from weapons (with some success) and at closing bases (without much success yet in closing bases, but success in educating and recruiting), but World BEYOND War has also made part of its work the exposure of the myths that war can be inevitable, necessary, beneficial, or just. Can we combine these things?

A few ideas come to mind. What if people in the United States and Russia were able

to vote in huge numbers in an independently created referendum on disarmament or ending sanctions or ending hostile and slanderous rhetoric? What if a group of Iranians and representatives of the United States and numerous other nations were to agree on a peace treaty of our own creation ending sanctions and threats, or on the 2015 agreement? What if U.S. cities and states were pressured to answer to the public and defy sanctions?

What if large numbers of U.S. people, representing and communicating with localities back home, were to go to Iraq or the Philippines to join with the people and governments of those places in asking the U.S. troops to depart? What if exchanges, including student exchanges, were set up between the U.S. and the places where bases are protested, with the big message being, for example, "South Korea Welcomes Unarmed

Americans!”

What if localities were brought to formally adopt holidays celebrating wars that didn't happen, prominently remembering all the rhetoric that had declared those wars necessary and inevitable? What if each locality around the world and around the United States where al Qaeda planned anything prior to 9/11 were to formally sign an apology to Afghanistan for the U.S. government's refusal to put bin Laden on trial in a third country?

What if local campaigns developed economic conversion studies (what all the economic benefits would be locally of conversion from war to peace industries, and from a local military base to a preferable use for that land), recruited

employees of local bases and weapons dealers, recruited those concerned about environmental impact, recruited those concerned about the militarization of police, recruited non-war employers to offer jobs to war-industry employees?

What if elaborately outfitted actors portraying such recipients of U.S. weapons, U.S. military training, and U.S. military funding as King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain, or His Majesty Paduka Seri Baginda Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah of Brunei, or President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt, or President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea (there are dozens; you could have a new brutal dictator

every week or month) were to show up at local branches of U.S. weapons companies, or at their alma maters where they were trained in brutality (the General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas, the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the United Kingdom, the United States Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, etc.) and demand that the corporation or the school NOT endorse Congressperson Ilhan Omar's Stop Arming Human Rights Abusers Act?

Are there ways, in other words, in which an antiwar effort that's already dedicated to nonviolence and teamwork and sacrifice and education and broad appeal can succeed at being both global and local, at aiming for a world at peace



Demonstrators took to the streets at Times Square in New York City to protest war against Iran & Iraq on January 4, 2020

Photo by Ryan Rahman/Shutterstock.com

Tragically, in its “forever wars” the United States consistently denounces authoritarianism and religiosity among the world’s poorest, but only as an excuse to violently drive the people of those countries even further from security, democracy, and peace

but also at short-term achievable changes? I encourage reading George Lakey’s book with these questions in mind and reporting back here on your answers: <https://world-beyondwar.org/howwewin>

The Publication of Origin for this article is *World Beyond War*.

A Difficult Peace

By Sean Reynolds

Nearly 1,000 of us were gathered in Chicago beneath the alarming edifice of Chicago’s “Trump Tower.” Iran’s General Qassem Soleimani had been brutally murdered the day before in Iraq, with several of his associates;

and the welcome surprise of Iran’s relatively measured response was yet a few days off. A region-wide conflagration seemed just on the verge of engulfing perhaps millions of lives, and consuming, as well, much of the species’ remaining time and attention needed to face our direst threats: with the new war we could fear continued paralysis in the face of an unfolding climate collapse, a terrifying new Cold War (now with hypersonic missiles), and a global far-right resurgence driven by shocking inequality and violence.

I’d been to Iran a year before with Voices’ Sarah Ball on a CODEPINK delegation and, addressing the crowd, I thought of how little attention Trump’s worst crimes, his war crimes, now receive from his critics in both parties. I wondered aloud if the right-wing trend that had made Trump commander-in-chief was not,

as is often argued, a backlash by the poorest Americans against the same kind of contemptuous disregard that American power also shows for the dignity and safety of the people of Iran.

Tragically, in its “forever wars,” the United States consistently denounces authoritarianism and religiosity among the world’s poorest, but only as an excuse to violently drive the people of those countries even further from security, democracy, and peace. The U.S. condemns the global poor it claims so ardently to wish to protect, too frequently as a shallow pretext for military and economic subjugation. Americans, correct to denounce Iran’s theocratic regime, ignore what Iranians are quick to recognize, that Iran’s worst enemy remains not its own government, but that of the United States.

On our first day in Tehran,

reformist foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif met with us and quipped that Iran veers rightwards whenever the war-hawk John Bolton is anywhere near the levers of U.S. power. Today the White House would seem to have moved to the right of its stance under Bolton, while Trump's enemies in both parties alarmingly hail Bolton as an ally in their quest to encircle Russia—Iran's largest ally. Predictably, if tragically, religious hardliners swept Iran's parliamentary elections, with help from a Tehran regime secure as never before in the knowledge that, with U.S. hardliners rampant, Iranians have nowhere else to turn. Iran's brave dissidents generally rush to reject all expressions of support from U.S. leaders, hastening to agree on one point only with the many Iranians who support the theocracy: that the United States (along with its Saudi and Israeli catpaws) remains the worst threat that Iranians must face.

There is no reason for U.S. voters to suppose that their government's hostility towards Iran is aimed at realizing anyone's human rights. Staunch U.S. support for the brutal Saudi dictatorship puts the lie to any such claim. Iran's military support for its regional allies is massively dwarfed in destructive impact

by the Saudi role, directly and through proxies, in bloodily destabilizing the region. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 remains the century's worst human rights violation (if the Saudis' U.S.-backed, famine-assisted war in Yemen doesn't catch it up). An untold number of Iranians facing dire economic hardship were recently gunned down

protesting the greed (perhaps more than the strict religion) of Iran's clerical oligarchs; but the U.S. had, through its crushing sanctions, imposed this hardship deliberately and with the stated intent of callously forcing Iranians to topple the regime for them.

The idea that a U.S.-driven regime change, either through sanctions or through war,



The U.S. 2003 invasion of Iraq remains the century's worst human rights violation

Photo by John Gomez/Shutterstock.com



Photo by Johnny Silvercloud/Shutterstock.com

might somehow democratize Iran is popular in the U.S., but it's a prospect for which few Iranians would ever want to vote. Social scientists place Iran among Earth's most nationalistic countries, with many in Iran acutely aware of the U.S.-driven coup which crushed Iran's stubborn bid for secular democracy in 1953. The Islamism which revolutionary Iran adopted in 1979 was widely considered an anti-colonialist necessity, a "return to ourselves" required to resist further U.S. cooptation and violence. Today, Iranians well note that U.S. leaders' regime-change plans tend

to involve installing, as Iran's "democratic" rulers, Iran's most feared terror group, the "Mojahedin-e Khalq". In 1988, during the Iran-Iraq war, the cultlike "MEK" actually invaded Iran, on Iraq's behalf, from Iraqi soil, and with air cover from Iraq's Saddam Hussein. Outside Tehran I visited the chief graveyard of that war, resting place for hundreds of thousands. It's an odd definition of "democracy" under which we hope to impose, through war, the would-be leaders Iranians fear most.

We gathered at a terrible moment this winter beneath

the unsightly bulk of Chicago's Trump Tower, but far more ominous threats loom on our horizon, whether a U.S. war on Iran can be averted or not. Our forever wars, nightmarish enough in themselves, should terrify us for the truly existential crises they prevent us from addressing. Trump's worst crimes are his war crimes, and both of the political parties of the U.S. seem focused on urging Trump towards more war, not less. No mere election but a grassroots movement of never-before-witnessed scope would seem needed to turn our government, in this late

hour, away from empire and towards the goal of human survival. But to succeed, that movement will need to involve and empower the bases of both parties, including many of Trump's voters who should not simply be dismissed and denounced.

When the U.S. settles for condemning Iran, it drives Iran and the world even further towards dictatorship and annihilatory violence. The most urgent threats facing our species aren't enemies, like a country or a political party, that we can simply defeat, at however unacceptable a cost, but existential deadlines implicit in our nation's own wealth and frightening arrogance, deadlines we can't meet without our "enemies"

freely offered assistance. The path we must follow within the U.S. seems also to be the sole survivable path the U.S. has left that it can follow abroad—to somehow redress those of our neighbors' real grievances to which their undeniable failings should never have blinded us; to build a movement for species survival which no one will join if we won't share our wealth and our power; and to empower those who, like Iran, we're most inclined to condemn—in the desperate hope of forging a difficult peace. **Z**

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Witnessing the Hell That a Migrant Can Face

By Vijay Prashad

At Obock, Djibouti, 2,000 migrants gather each day along the waters of the Gulf of Aden; they look for boats to get them to Yemen. Over the past two years, more migrants from Africa have used the "Eastern Route" rather



Distributing relief to those affected and displaced by the war in Yemen

By anasalhajj/Shutterstock.com

Roughly 11,500 people got on boats at places like Obock and Bosasso, Somalia, to go into Yemen, and then overland to Saudi Arabia, where they hope to get employment

than go across the Mediterranean Sea; according to the UN's migration agency—International Organization for Migration—this Eastern Route is now the “busiest maritime migration path on earth.” Roughly 11,500 people got on boats at places like Obock and Bosasso, Somalia, to go into Yemen, and then overland to Saudi Arabia, where they hope to get employment.

Ethiopia

Outside the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is typically thought of as a country of distress due to the 1983-1985 famine that wracked the country. But over the past few years, according to World Bank numbers, Ethiopia has been one of the fastest growing countries in the world (after Myanmar and China). On July 18, 2019, the director of

the International Monetary Fund's African Department Abebe Aemro Selassie gave a presentation at the Ethiopian Economics Association. In his presentation, Selassie said that the key reasons Ethiopia has seen such high growth have been improvements in the productivity of labor and increased investment in capital stock (factories, infrastructure). To make these gains, Ethiopia had to borrow, which has now put it in a position of debt vulnerability.

If you just look at the numbers, Ethiopia is doing great. But not people in the rural districts, where agrarian distress remains a fact of life. Of those who use the Eastern Route to migrate, over 90 percent come from Ethiopia, and most of them from the rural districts of Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray. The World Food Program and the Ethiopian government's data shows us that these districts face terri-

ble food insecurity and that there is a high level of food energy deficiency per adult in rural Ethiopia, with Amhara and Tigray leading the way. There has been barely any relief from the long-term crisis of agriculture in Ethiopia, whose lands are now increasingly threatened by corporations from India and Saudi Arabia and by shifts in the climate.

Neoliberal policies have enabled Ethiopia to grow quickly, but this growth has not been pro-people, certainly not the people of the rural districts of Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray, from where the main migration has been taking place.

Djibouti

Djibouti, at the tip of the Horn of Africa, with in sight of Yemen, is one of the smallest countries in the

world. But it is located at a strategic vantage point, at the entrance to the Red Sea. That is the reason it has been home to a very large United States military base—at Camp Lemonnier. But the U.S. base is no longer the only one; there are substantial bases for the militaries of China, France, Italy, and Japan.

For years, there was concern about the rise of piracy in the waters off the Horn of Africa, with pirates from Somalia being seen as a major threat to global shipping. But over the past decade, piracy here has decreased in these waters as it has worldwide. It is clear that none of these bases are in Djibouti to deter piracy, which is their stated goal. They are there because of the geopolitical tensions around the Gulf region.

India and Saudi Arabia are building their own bases in Djibouti, with the Saudis even looking at Obock for land. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is prosecuting the war in Yemen with Saudi Arabia, already has military bases in Eritrea, Somaliland, and Somalia.

Despite the presence of these forces in such a small country, there is no effective way to prevent the migration of thousands of Ethiopians through Djibouti to Yemen. Neither the ports nor the waters are barriers to this human

exodus.

Yemen

The Saudi-UAE war on Yemen has been going on for five years. On February 23, the parties to the conflict met in Jordan to agree on a prisoner exchange; this fulfills some of the commitments made in the Stockholm Agreement of 2018. A medical air bridge has allowed a handful of critically ill patients to be taken out of Yemen's capital of Sana'a, while the port of Hudaydah is largely left free for necessary humanitarian goods to enter the country. Almost all of Yemen's people are reliant upon these humanitarian goods for basic survival.

Despite this relatively good news, violence has escalated in certain key districts of Yemen over the past two weeks. Since January, 35,000 Yemenis have been displaced from their homes, an indicator of the dangerous situation in the country.

It is into this cauldron that the Ethiopian migrants arrive. Crossing the Red Sea is not easy, since the boats are insufficient and overcrowded; migrants who make it to Yemen report that they have seen people leap off the boats to certain death because of the terrible situation that they face. In March

2017, a UAE-Saudi helicopter fired at a boat carrying Somali migrants—killing at least 42 people; there are additional reports of this kind of activity along the Yemeni shoreline.

In Yemen, the migrants are held in detention camps, where they are abused by human traffickers and by other gangsters. Migrants in these camps, including in Aden, face extortion—if they cannot pay the guards, they are beaten, raped, and held indefinitely. When the spotlight is shone on any one of these camps, it closes and another opens elsewhere.

Saudi Arabia

If the migrants somehow make it to Saudi Arabia, the terror continues. Smugglers take the migrants into Saudi Arabia's Jizan Province; often the migrants are made to carry qat (a stimulant grown in Eastern Africa) across the border. They are frequently shot at by Saudi border guards and, if caught, are either ransomed or held in places such as Jizan Central Prison (which might as well be a detention camp).

Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia have a strangely symbiotic relationship. Saudi Arabia relies upon at least 400,000 Ethiopian workers, who come to do a variety of jobs in the

kingdom. But, every few years, Saudi Arabia deports these very same workers. In 2013, the Saudi government removed 100,000 Ethiopian workers; they were deemed to be “illegal,” arrested, and removed in chartered flights. Then, slowly, Ethiopian workers returned, now with lower wages and almost no rights. In March 2017, Saudi Arabia deported 260,000 Ethiopians. These deportations are a disciplinary mechanism, a way to keep the Ethiopian migrants on their toes.

Ethiopia conducted agreements with Saudi Arabia (2017) and the UAE (2018) to ensure protections for their citizens, but there is little evidence that this is helping. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been putting billions of dollars into the National Bank of Ethiopia and

into its government, part of the foreign direct investment (FDI) that has heated up the Ethiopian economy. Given this money, it is impossible to imagine the government of Ethiopia standing up for its citizens in the Gulf.

The boats from Obock, Djibouti, will continue to ply their trade; Ethiopians will continue to travel the Eastern Route into Saudi Arabia. No plans are afoot inside Ethiopia to be able to generate employment to hold the population in place, and there are certainly no plans in Saudi Arabia to improve the conditions of its workers.

There is a demonstration of values here: when workers come to Saudi Arabia, they have to travel by the dangerous waters and through war-torn Yemen; when they get deported, they are flown

home by aircraft. **Z**

This article was produced by Globetrotter, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, journalist, commentator and a Marxist intellectual. He is the Executive Director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and the Chief Editor of LeftWord Books.

Civil Disobedience in the Time of Climate Crisis

By H. Patricia Hynes

On March 27, 2018, a Massachusetts judge found 13 protestors who ob-



KYIV, UKRAINE - Climate march in Kyiv for
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structed construction of a high-pressure fracked gas pipeline in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, not responsible for their crime of trespassing and disturbing the peace. The judge ruled that the potential environmental and public health impacts of the pipeline—including the risk of climate change—had made civil disobedience legally necessary.

On February 27 2020, a Portland, Oregon, jury refused to convict the so-called Zenith Five—activists fighting for a “habitable future”—for blockading a train track used by Zenith Energy Corporation to transport crude oil. Their blockade consisted of building a garden over the rail line, making it impassable for the transport train. Their defense: they were justified in breaking the law on behalf of the planetary climate crisis. Five of six jurors voted to acquit them.

The next day, 16 members of the Wendell State Forest Alliance (and supporters) gathered in Orange, Massachusetts Municipal Court to present closing arguments on why their trespassing to prevent state-supported logging in the Wendell state forest was necessary and justifiable. The judge will likely render his decision in May. “Social change happens by people who...make sacrifices

to bring critical issues to the attention of a larger public,” explained their lawyer.

Thanks to citizens who practiced civil disobedience throughout the past 250 years, we are not only an independent country but also a more democratic, inclusive and moral country.

Think of the Boston Tea Party: On December 16, 1773, colonists dumped 342 chests of tea belonging to the British East India Company into Boston Harbor to protest a British tax (taxation without representation) and monopoly on tea. Our history books lionize their act of civil disobedience as a catalyst of the American Revolution.

Think of Henry David Thoreau of Concord, Massachusetts: He was arrested in July of 1846 for refusing to pay his taxes in protest of slavery and the U.S. violent occupation of Mexican territory (later Texas) for the sake of expanding slavery. Today Thoreau is an icon, a model of acting in accordance with one’s conscience in the face of government wrongdoing and for laying an ethical foundation for civil disobedience in his pamphlet *Civil Disobedience*.

Think of Harriet Tubman: She escaped slavery and, then, at extreme risk to her own life, became a conductor on the Underground Railway, leading African slaves

to freedom in defiance of the Fugitive Slave Act. Today, Tubman is a nationally revered symbol of living by conscience; and our country is more democratic for her actions.

Think of the suffragists: Their picketing, relentless lobbying, creative civil disobedience and nonviolent confrontation compelled a reluctant President Wilson to support a federal women’s suffrage amendment, ratified as the 19th Amendment in 1920. Their successful dissent gave one-half of the population of this country the freedom to vote and the goal of equal rights for women.

Think of Rosa Parks: In Montgomery, Alabama, “the mother of the civil rights movement” was jailed for refusing to give her seat on a public bus to a white man, in violation of the city’s racial segregation laws. Her historic challenge to Montgomery’s racist bus laws sparked the successful Montgomery bus boycott, organized by Martin Luther King, Jr. When Rosa Parks died in October 2005, the U.S. Congress honored her by having her body lie in state in the Capitol rotunda.

Think of decades of protest and civil disobedience by hundreds of disability rights activists: In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act became the most sweeping dis-

ability rights legislation in American history.

Thousands of climate scientists are warning governments, with an existential sense of urgency, that we are doomed within decades if we do not act immediately to slow the climate crisis.

- October 2019: 400 scientists state that civil disobedience to slow the climate crisis is necessary and justified.
- Same month: 11,000 scientists worldwide declare a climate emergency.
- November 2019: UN reports that devastating impacts of climate crisis are imminent. Drastic action is needed.

- Same month: Scientists warn that our earth is approaching tipping points, which will cause a cascade of irreversible climate impacts.
- Tipping point is reached in January 2020 forest and bush fires in Australia. The ecosystem will never return to forest and bush.

What we—citizens, corporations, courts and government—do about the climate crisis will determine life on earth within the next few decades. It is a paramount ethical issue of our day—as were gaining independence from the British Empire, abolishing slavery, winning

women's right to vote, and achieving civil rights for African Americans and the disabled. These historic protesters were judged criminals by the courts of their day. In time they were regarded as people of conscience who held their country to a higher moral standard against unjust laws, policy and practices—that is, their crimes were justified in order to prevent greater harm. And we are the better for it. **Z**

Pat Hynes, a former Professor of Environmental Health at Boston University, directs the Traprock Center for Peace and Justice.



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Rising for a global feminist future with the movement to elect Bernie Sanders

By Jodie Evans

We are a coalition of feminists contending with both our differences and our commonality in age, race, class, religion, labor, and sexual orientation. We meet at the intersection of our fluid identities. Though our experiences are different, we share a vision of a feminist future.

We urgently call on our

friends, families, and comrades to unite with us in the broad passionate movement supporting Senator Bernie Sanders's campaign, and to work to heal the relationships necessary to create a new era for our communities, this country, and the world. We support the volunteers, door knockers, and the movement to elect Senator Sanders because his proposed policies are ideas whose time has come. All of our lives we have been creating movements and art organized around the critical basic human dignity of all people. We support the movement to elect Senator Sanders because engaging in electoral politics is a part of the larger strategic democratic movement for solidarity and a feminist future to take hold. We believe an end to patriarchy demands an end to class and

racial oppression.

All across this country and globe, women and children have been working toward a shift in collective consciousness. A feminist future requires political change by men, women, and gender

We are explicitly naming the ecological disaster we are facing and we must vote for a future where our environment and our planet are treated with the utmost respect and protection



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non-binary people, not just in the structures and laws but in our collective values and behaviors. It requires an end to violence against women, girls, and all femme people. A feminist future demands the spirit of cooperation. We are inspired and motivated by the grassroots movements brewing across the globe and here in the United States of America for decency, dignity, and respect. We amplify poor, unemployed, and working people behind this political moment aching with passion and anxiety toward the uncertainty of tomorrow. We must strategically rally and rise together.

Time is not on our side

We are explicitly naming the ecological disaster we are facing and we must vote for a future where our environment and our planet are treated with the utmost respect and protection. A world where our rainforests are protected, where clean drinking water is not a privatized commodity, and the earth is finally free of fracking and extraction. We are voting for a future to end poverty and rebuild the corrupt dehumanizing state of our world and the fragmentation of ourselves. We choose a politics of collectivity. We choose a future that honors social responsibility and connection.

We stand with the abolitionists, healers, and storytellers who pursue a world where

we are brave enough to consider one another and fight for each other. We envision a world where discrimination, war, and white terrorism are laughed out of the room and

We look forward to the day...where all forms of violence against all women, cis-gender, transgender and non-binary are a distant memory



Photo by Johnny Silvercloud/Shutterstock.com

become a thing of our past. Where we honor the dignity, respect, and self-determination of the Palestinian people. Where the people of Puerto Rico are free of colonial debt and domination. Where our government commits to the transformational power of an authentic apology and restorative process with millions of people displaced and torn apart by corporate interests masked as foreign policy.

We envision a formal acknowledgment of and apology to the First Nations of this land and accountability for the millions of African Americans oppressed by this country's denial of the generational repercussions of

slavery and Jim Crow. We envision a world that boldly confronts its past so that we can begin the corrective process of atonement, repair, and healing.

We vote for a future free of state inflicted, sponsored, and sanctioned violence. In the not so far and brilliant feminist future, we look forward to communities free of dominance, aggression, isolation, and separation. Where no child is caged. Where schools and communities are free from police and prisons. We envision a world without violence.

We envision a country and world that prioritizes mental health and therapy as uni-

We write this statement alongside the broken-hearted people of this country and we welcome the courageous risk a feminist future requires. Our "we" is bigger than any one campaign, person, or agenda



Photo by Johnny Silvercloud/Shutterstock.com



Photo by Johnny Silvercloud/Shutterstock.com

versally accessible. We look forward to a future where comprehensive high-quality childcare and education are free. We believe in a future where nobody gets evicted or has to choose between medicine or food. Where we each have the access and ability to vote and be counted.

We look forward to the day of true sexual autonomy and personal reproductive freedom. Where access to safe abortions, contraception, and quality health care is a human right. Where all forms of violence against all women, cis-gender, transgender and non-binary are a distant memory.

We write this statement alongside the broken-hearted people of this country and we welcome the courageous risk a feminist future requires. Our “we” is bigger than any one campaign, person, or agenda. We know that Senator Elizabeth Warren has inspired so many women who care about justice and freedom. Because of their values, and because they are women and non-binary supporters, they have faced skepticism and misogyny. Many of us, including Senator Sanders, have condemned these attacks and continue to do so. We invite Warren supporters to continue to fight for

a future that she believes in with us—Medicare for All, a bold Green New Deal, student debt cancellation, and a world where people are not attacked on the basis of their gender, sexuality, race, class, immigrant status, disability, or criminal legal status.

We also know that people may consider Joe Biden because he seems safe or a return to normal but through Biden many people who are sick will continue to die because he opposes universal health care. The planet will perish because his climate plans are weak. Immigrants looking to rebuild a home will be deported and Black

**In struggle and with love,
Melina Abdullah, Thandiwe Abdullah, Hamdia Ahmed,
Zaina Alsous, Taina Asili, May Boeve, Cori Bush, Rosa
Clemente, Patrisse Cullors, Molly Crabapple, Dr. Victoria
Dooley, Jonel Edwards, Jodie Evans, Eve Ensler, Zillah
Eisenstein, Barbara Ehrenreich, Laura Flanders, Rachel
Gilmer, Kim Gordon, Sandra Guzman, Alexandra Halaby,
Leah Hunt-Hendrix, Saru Jayaraman, Mahdis Keshavarz,
Naomi Klein, DJ Kuttin Kandi, Rachel Kushner, Winona
LaDuke, Sarah Leonard, Annie Leonard, Aya De Leon,
Thenjiwe McHarris, Jane McAlevey, Anuradha Mittal,
Aja Monet, Helen Peña, Carmen Perez, Derecka Purnell,
Varshini Prakash, Barbara Ransby, Shana L. Redmond,
Linda Sarsour, Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, Sarah
Schulman, Sandra Steingraber, Susan Stryker, Keean-
ga-Yamahtta Taylor, Astra Taylor, Sunaura Taylor, Opal
Tometi, Amy Vilela, Kenidra Woods**

people will continue to be murdered by the police. We deserve more. We are all we got. Senator Sanders cannot guarantee a feminist future; it is up to us. But between him and Biden, Sanders is the clear choice. Biden represents the worldview that brought us enormous income inequality and injustice.

For the nurses, teachers, cooks, domestic workers, bus drivers, farmers, librarians, organizers, caretakers, writers, sex workers, shamans, and waitresses: there's another America waiting for us and we are ready to greet her. We need you to participate, to co-

operate, to be a part of shaping our future on this planet together. Join us.

Read this statement aloud with your friends. Share it in your communities. Post it on your platforms. Let's organize for a #FeministFuture #IWD2020 #Bernie2020.

In struggle and with love,
Melina Abdullah, Thandiwe Abdullah, Hamdia Ahmed, Zaina Alsous, Taina Asili, May Boeve, Cori Bush, Rosa Clemente, Patrisse Cullors, Molly Crabapple, Dr. Victoria Dooley, Jonel Edwards, Jodie Evans, Eve Ensler, Zillah Eisenstein, Barbara Ehrenreich, Laura Flanders, Rachel

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If you'd like to add your name please sign on here: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScS8tZ1JG_n5Oo-3p01n0ixWyqNGg8cVIhX-UNSEO6KfVhCOU5A/viewform?usp=sf_link

Jodie Evans is an activist and co-founder of CODEPINK.

Trump's Budget Proposal Reveals His Values

By Lawrence Wittner

It is often said that government budgets are “an expression of values.” Those values are clear in the Trump administration’s \$4.8 trillion budget proposal for 2021, un-

veiled early this February.

The budget calls for deep cuts in major U.S. government programs, especially those protecting public health. The Department of Health and Human Services would be slashed by 10 percent, while the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which has already been proven to be underfunded and unprepared to deal with the coronavirus outbreak, would be cut by 9 percent. Spending

The budget calls for deep cuts in major U.S. government programs, especially those protecting public health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which has already been proven to be underfunded and unprepared to deal with the coronavirus outbreak, would be cut by 9 percent



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on Medicaid, which currently insures healthcare for one out of five Americans, would plummet by roughly \$900 billion, largely thanks to reductions in coverage for the poor and the disabled. Meanwhile, Medicare expenditures would drop by roughly \$500 billion.

Public education constitutes another low-priority item in the Trump administration's budget proposal. Calling for a funding cut of nearly eight percent in the Department of Education, the proposal hits student assistance programs particularly hard. Despite the soaring costs of a college education, the budget would

eliminate subsidized federal student loans and end the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, which currently cancels federal student loan debt for teachers and other public servants after a decade of loan payments. The budget would also reduce student work-study funding and increase the percentage of discretionary income student borrowers must devote to repayment.

Some of the deepest cuts in the Trump budget relate to the environment. The Environmental Protection Agency would lose 26 percent of its funding, including a 10

...the budget proposes cutting funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the federal government's primary effort to feed the hungry, by \$180 billion between 2021 and 2030

percent reduction in the Superfund hazardous waste cleanup program, a nearly 50 percent reduction in research and development, and a \$376 million decrease in efforts to improve air quality. EPA staffing would fall

to its lowest levels in three decades, thereby hampering enforcement of existing environmental regulations. Moreover, there would be cuts to the National Park Service of \$587 million and to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of \$80 million, including an \$11 million reduction in funding for determining extinction risk under the Endangered Species Act. The administration's approach to the environment is also evident in the budget's call for a cut of half the funding for the ecosystem work of the U.S. Geological Survey and for a 74 percent reduction in funding for the

Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy program of the Department of Energy.

The budget targets other domestic programs for sharp cutbacks, as well. In the area of public transportation, Amtrak's federal grants would be reduced from \$2 billion to less than half that amount. The budget proposal also calls for ending all federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which supports PBS and National Public Radio stations. Although Trump has repeatedly promised not to cut Social Security, his budget would do just that, slashing it by \$71 billion

worth of benefits earmarked for disabled workers.

Programs aiding impoverished Americans come in for particularly harsh treatment. Although homelessness and securing affordable housing in urban areas are major problems in the United States, the budget calls for a 15 percent decrease in funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Programs that help pay for rental assistance for low-income people have been slashed, while award grants to neighborhoods with deteriorating public and federally assisted housing would be eliminated.

Although homelessness and securing affordable housing in urban areas are major problems in the United States, the budget calls for a 15 percent decrease in funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development



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Furthermore, the budget proposes cutting funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the federal government's primary effort to feed the hungry, by \$180 billion between 2021 and 2030. Stricter work requirements would be implemented, and are expected to result in nearly 700,000 Americans being dropped from the program's coverage. Among them are large numbers of children, who would also lose their enrollment in the free school lunch program. Explaining the cuts, the Trump budget message stated that "too many people are still missing the opportunity to move from dependence to self-sufficiency."

It's also noteworthy that, in a world plagued by wars, a massive refugee crisis, climate disasters, and disease epidemics, the Trump budget calls for slashing State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development funding by 22 percent. The biggest cuts target diplomatic engagement, food assistance, and international organizations such as the United Nations, which would receive \$447 million less for UN peacekeeping efforts and \$508 million less for U.S. dues to the world organization. The budget also calls for slashing more than \$3 billion in funding from global health

programs, including half of U.S. funding for the World Health Organization.

By contrast, the Trump budget proposes substantial increases for the president's favorite programs. Additional spending would be devoted to restricting immigration, including another \$2 billion for building Trump's much-touted wall on the U.S.-Mexico border and another \$544 million to hire 4,636 additional ICE enforcement officers and prosecuting attorneys. Moreover, as a *New York Times* analysis noted, "the budget promotes a fossil fuel 'energy boom' in the United States, including an increase in the production of natural gas and crude oil."

Furthermore, despite the fact that U.S. military spending already surpasses the combined expenditures of the next seven military pow-

ers throughout the world, the Trump budget would add billions of dollars to annual U.S. military appropriations, raising them to \$741 billion. This military spending would focus on developing a new generation of weapons, especially nuclear weapons, with the Department of Defense receiving \$29 billion (a 16 percent increase) and the Department of Energy \$20 billion (a 19 percent increase) for this purpose. If one adds in proposed expenditures on "missile defense" and cleaning up nuclear weapons sites, the annual cost of U.S. nuclear war preparations would soar to \$75 billion.

With presidential and congressional elections now looming, Americans will soon have the opportunity to show whether these priorities—and the values underlying them—accord with their own. As the

As the coronavirus pandemic indicates, a government's priorities and values can be matters of life and death

coronavirus pandemic indicates, a government's priorities and values can be matters of life and death. **Z**

Dr. Lawrence Wittner, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is Professor of History emeritus at SUNY/Albany and the author of *Confronting the Bomb* (Stanford University Press).

The “De-Aging” of the World

You're as young as your capacity to live life as if it were an experience of constant new beginnings

By Boaventura de Sousa Santos

In your personal life, aging depends less on the physiological than on social age. Social age is inversely proportional to your capacity to think, feel, and live the new as future, as a task, as still-to-be-experienced present. You're as young as your capacity to live life as if it were an experience of constant new beginnings, leading not to repetitions of the past, but rather to futures—maps waiting to be explored and roads waiting to be travelled, always ready to take risks, admit ignorances and respond

to new challenges. I speak of the future as anticipation, as the “not yet,” as latency or potency. Seeing as you are aware that you never live but in the present, the future is always the incomplete present, a present as a task, as an event, for which you are personally accountable. To have a future is to be the owner of your present. Conversely, the more you live your life in the belief that the world has already decided what you're supposed to expect and, consequently, that the future is closed off to you, the older you are. Thus, aging is living on repetition or in repetition, as if each repetition were unique and unrepeatable. It



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is passing away your days as if it were the days themselves that were passing, in their mindless daily stroll.

Repetition can be lived in three different ways: as if the past were an eternal present that daily routines, institutions and the news all but confirm (aging by living death); as if the past had passed and left in its wake an ungraspable void for which only card games, television or ailment talk can offer an escape (aging by dead living); and finally, as if both the past and the future

were equally remote and inaccessible, causing an insurmountable panic for which only an excessive wasting of the body by alcohol, drugs, gym, church or therapy can offer an escape (aging by life without death).

In our societies of manufactured and computerized bodies, both public and private services have been created to provide assistance to those who encounter serious difficulties in coping with the repetition of repetition. Ultimately, we're talking about the

normalizing of decay. Aging, in these societies, is always the result of a chronic depletion of energy, either spent or still unspent. It consists in displaying with conviction the "sold out" sign on the door of the theater of life, even if no play has been staged there in a long time or if it hasn't ever even seen a first rehearsal. As far as the first two forms of aging are concerned, the goal is to invest in the past as if it had never really passed. It increasingly consists in the marketing of co-aging ser-



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vices. They tend to be effective, because the invention of repetition cunningly conceals the repetition of invention. The underlying idea is that no matter how unbearable the experience of aging, it is always more bearable when it is shared. As for the third form of aging, what is sought is not the omnipresence of the past, but rather the omnibalance of the past, an eternal present whereby the future is relieved of having to haunt the living with the not-yet-here bad news. These are the techniques for aging through rejuvenation. They amount

to a modified version of the metaphor behind the movie *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, based on F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story of the same title, whose protagonist is born an old man and then grows increasingly younger until he dies an infant. According to the techniques for aging through rejuvenation, the clock in the railroad station of the small town in the American South stops instead of moving backwards, and with it time stops as well.

As I said above, social age does not coincide with physiological age. But the degree

of the discrepancy varies according to historical period, including its social context and the other collective circumstances surrounding it. The same applies to societies. The industrialized world in which we now live began to age rapidly during the 1980s. All of a sudden the future was closed off, and the new common sense that said that there was no alternative to the unjust, racist and sexist capitalist society in which we lived entered our homes faster than pizza delivery or Uber Eats, and spread through the news, the emerging social networks,



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and punditocracy's ready-made wisdom. Novel experiments and expectations of collective life had been discredited for good, the world was intrinsically unjust, the rich were rich because they deserved it and the poor were poor in everything, but especially in judgment, you had to live with imperfection, even if you were able to mitigate it by replacing market rationality with the irrationality of the state at whose expense those least able to make it in a competitive society were made to live. Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, was second to none in pronouncing the death of the future: "There is no Alternative"—the infamous TINA. Then Francis Fukuyama turned that death into the ultimate triumph of Western society—"the end of history"—benefitting from the fact that Friedrich Hegel, dead since 1831, could not protest such an obtuse interpretation of his philosophy of history. The reinforced concrete torn down with the fall of the Berlin Wall was reinforced in the thousand cemeteries of the future that were built throughout the world. And indeed many were necessary to bury so much of the future.

Nowadays this major procedure for ageing the world is predominantly represented by the first form of aging men-

tioned above, that of aging by living death. But the two other forms of aging are present as well. Aging by dead living is the preferred form of aging of religious fundamentalisms, which work on the void left by the past and promise to revive it in the form of a glorious future in another world. For the promoters of this aging, our present living is dead and will not resurrect until the clocks of history start to move backward or all clocks begin to strike in unison eternity's last hour. No social responsibility is taken for injustice. There is only guilt for suffering it, the only solution being to expiate that guilt.

The third form of aging (life without death) is the dominant form among millennials, born at the beginning of the period when the theater of the world lowered the curtain on a different and better future. This was a generation condemned to be born old. They were born deprived of the past of the future, because by then the notion of an alternative had vanished from the horizon. Therefore, it never occurred to them to topple the unjust system that robbed them of the hope of a different and better future. Their goal was to attain personal success within the confines of the system. They sacrificed time, rights, leisure and pleasure in the hope of a tri-

umph that, for the vast majority, was never to arrive. They wanted to beat the system from within the system. That was all the system wanted to beat them all the more effectively. This generation is now predominant in the third form of aging (life without death).

The geopolitics of aging strategies deserves to be analyzed in detail, but this is not the place to do it. Let it suffice for now to keep in mind that the world has not aged uniformly, nor have the various forms of aging spread evenly across the planet. It was mostly in the so-called global north that people paradoxically began to wish to live longer without being viewed as old. The point I wish to make here is that clear signs are emerging that the world's aging process is anything but irreversible. I'm not talking about rejuvenation, which, as I said above, is a way to cheat aging. I'm talking about de-aging, that is, of going back to believing in a different future and the capacity to fight for it. I'm talking about rejecting the infinite repetition of the present, for repetition is pulling us inexorably into the abyss.

There emerges a longing for newness, one that has nothing to do with barbarism, for barbarism is where we already are. All across the world people of every phys-

iological age are rising, because, as I've noted before, physiological differences are of no consequence when it comes to the aging or de-aging of the world. Consider, from Chile to Italy to Lebanon and India, the gathering of young and old alike, filling the world's streets and public squares against the politics of repetition and repeat politicians. They are the new insurgents, those who say No to the imminent ecological catastrophe, the scandalous concentration of wealth, the hijacking of democratic institutions by anti-democrats, the irrationality of so-called rational markets, the gigantic stealing of our privacy and intimacy by the new robber barons Google, Facebook, Amazon or Alibaba, the gross indifference to the suffering of immigrants and refugees killed at sea, in the jungle or the desert, or otherwise kept in concentration camps, as if Auschwitz were just some cruel memory, now behind us thanks to the victory of good over evil.

The political forces on the right, which have always fed off the aging of the world, are crying out in fright at what they call an effrontery, as if everything that had caused the young and old alike to take to the streets in order to de-age were not an effrontery as well. Those same forces

argue that there are no proposals—in other words, no repetitions, which is the only newness they recognize. But the truth is that there are proposals. From India to Chile, the forces of repression and the political parties are being confronted with the sense of outrage that is moving the de-aged against the dead letter of such an abundance of constitutional writ. They are being confronted with proposals from plurinational popular constituent assemblies. They are being confronted with proposals for efficient and free public transport services as an exercise in nature-oriented economy. But first and foremost, they are being confronted with the celebration of national, cultural, religious

and sexual diversity, with the search for regions freed from capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy, and with the search for peasant, indigenous, family, feminist and cooperative forms of community-based economy.

The more the world de-ages, the more the powers that have produced the aging of the world and turned it into the industry that ensures their perpetuation will find themselves confronted with the effrontery to which their own effrontery has given rise. Will they ever age? **Z**

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What the Coronavirus Emergency Has to Do with Biden vs. Sanders

By Norman Solomon

On the surface, the coronavirus emergency has nothing in particular to do with Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders. What's obvious is that Donald Trump's unhinged bluster and inaction let the pandemic get a lethal jump on the United States, people are dying while huge numbers of lives are in jeopardy, and quick drastic steps are imperative. Yet at the same time, the differences between what Biden and Sanders are advocating have enormous implications for what could

be done to curb the deadly virus in this country.

The absence of a public health system is consistent with a timeworn pattern of massive holes in the public sector. Biden merely wants to patch up some of the holes, while Sanders wants to build strong structures on truly democratic foundations.

"It is time to ask how we got to where we are, not only our lack of preparation for the virus, but how we end up with an economy where so many people are hurting at a time of massive income and wealth inequality," Sanders said at the close of his recent debate with Biden. "It is time to ask the question of where the power is in America. Who owns the media? Who owns the economy? Who owns the legislative process? Why do we give tax breaks to billionaires and not raise the minimum wage?"

While so-called "moderate" Democrats like Biden don't want to answer—or even hear—such questions, Sanders insists on continuing to ask them. Such perseverance has never been more needed than at this pivotal moment, with so many lives in the balance. "Where the power is in America" has everything to do with why the U.S. government's response to the unfolding coronavirus catastrophe has continued to be so anemic, foreshadowing so many more deaths and so much more grief.

It's urgent to implement all-out measures to contain the coronavirus spread (seriously aiming for containment rather than merely "flattening the curve"). Meanwhile, policies are needed to make sure that insurance-industry profiteers and other sectors of corporate America don't get away with rapaciously ben-

Biden proposes to tweak the health care system and aid only some who suffer economic distress



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efiting from catastrophe in ways that would cause untold misery for vast numbers of people.

A pair of campaign documents released recently—the Biden “Plan to Combat Coronavirus (Covid-19) and Prepare for Future Global Health Threats” and the Sanders “Emergency Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic”—convey big differences in approach to the current unprecedented crisis.

Biden proposes to tweak the health care system and aid only some who suffer economic distress. In sharp contrast, Sanders is proposing far-reaching measures that include free health care for all (“Medicare will ensure that everyone in America, regardless of existing coverage, can receive the health care they need during this crisis”) and major financial assistance to all (“emergency \$2,000 cash payments to every person in

America every month for the duration of the crisis”).

Calling for programs that would spend at least \$2 trillion in response to the coronavirus emergency, Sanders laid out commensurate programs—to “mobilize on a scale not seen since the New Deal and World War II to prevent deaths, job losses, and economic ruin.”

Joe Biden vs. Bernie Sanders is not only an electoral contest between presidential candidates. It is also a contrast of patchwork fixes vs. profound structural changes. Refusal to upset the apple carts of corporate power vs. willingness to fight that power. Tepid adjustments vs. truly transformational agendas.

Sanders was correct when he said last week that “poll after poll, including exit polls, show that a strong majority of the American people support our progressive agenda.” Days ago, the Ber-

nie 2020 campaign sent out a mass email declaring that “our campaign has won the battle of ideas.”

Whether the ideas that Sanders is championing can appreciably shape the government’s response to the coronavirus will have a lot to do with how successful the United States can be in limiting its terrible effects. **Z**

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

Social distancing? Peace and social jus-

In sharp contrast, Sanders is proposing far-reaching measures that include free health care for all and major financial assistance to all



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More demand more coming together, not more distancing

By Kevin Martin

“Social distancing” (or maybe more properly “appropriate physical spacing”) is something people everywhere need to practice in the near term to get through the COVID-19 crisis. And it likely won’t be the last time, unfortunately, that a pandemic threatens us.

But in a broader sense, isn’t “social distancing” a serious, endemic problem? We’re too

“distant” from most people other than family and close friends, in terms of understanding, respect, solidarity and empathy. (We’re also too distant from other species and our natural world, our Mother Earth.) The dominant culture “others” people of different skin colors, countries, religions, classes, sexual orientations, gender identifications and other characteristics that strengthen, rather than divide, the human family. Let’s get through this crisis, and then let’s decrease the distance between us, let’s overcome the walls we erect between us.

While this certainly applies to domestic tranquility, it also can guide the way to positive, badly needed changes in U.S. foreign and military policy.

Recently, the U.S. engaged in tit-for-tat bombing against Iranian-backed militia in Iraq, in retaliation for the killing of two U.S. soldiers and one British soldier by said militia, which was likely retaliation for the U.S. assassination of Iranian military leader Qasem Soleimani, which was likely retaliation for...and ad nauseam. Apparently, while there are conflicting reports, the strikes also killed three Iraqi soldiers, two police officers and a civilian worker, and hit a civilian airport. So, the U.S. is the latest to kill in this fool’s game, setting it up for the Iranian deadly response.

How is this endless cycle of violence promoting U.S. or regional security? Similar strikes nearly led to the out-



break of war with Iran just two months ago, and a region already in constant turmoil, largely due to U.S. militaristic misadventures, can ill afford more.

Nor can we. Nobody ever asks, but what did these military strikes cost, and how will we pay for them? Surely the price tag is a pittance compared to the 6.4 trillion dollars the U.S. has squandered in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last few decades, for no good outcome considering many if not most Iraqis want us gone, and as we try to construct a fragile peace in Afghanistan.

How badly does it have to be bungled, after all, to cause Iraqi feelings of nostalgia for Saddam? How inept does it get to make the Taliban popular in parts of Afghanistan and also make the Afghans deeply and angrily distrust and reject the deal between Trump and the Taliban?

The U.S. and South Korea wisely postponed huge military drills, originally scheduled to begin later this month, out of COVID-19 concerns. Postponement is good, but cancellation would be better, and might help spur a revival of peace talks with North Korea, as even President Trump

has acknowledged the war exercises are expensive and provocative. The Pentagon recently announced a curtailment of the largest military exercises in Europe in a generation, and again, cancellation would be better. Russia certainly knows how fearsome the U.S./NATO military alliance is; we don't need to demonstrate it at huge economic, human and environmental costs.

As the world faces the frightening COVID-19 pandemic, we need global cooperation, not military escalation. Resources wasted on continuous, fruitless military conflict are desperately needed for human health, in the US and globally.

U.S. economic sanctions are exacerbating the severe COVID-19 crisis in Iran, which is just cruel and likely a crime against humanity, again serving no legitimate U.S. or regional security objective. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama eased U.S. economic sanctions and restrictions on humanitarian aid to Iran following devastating earthquakes there in 2003 and 2012. In the current situation, President Trump (who foolishly end-

ed U.S. participation in the multilateral, highly effective Iran anti-nuclear agreement and then threatened to commit war crimes) should do the same in order to help Iran's medical system address the crisis. Perhaps we could learn from Iran's experience, as pandemics know no borders, and different countries may have relative strengths or successes we can all learn from.

Let's get all U.S. troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan, make peace with Iran, and address the real threats to human security like pandemics and the climate crisis. More war is never a good answer, and it makes even less sense at this time. **Z**

Kevin Martin, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is President of Peace Action Education Fund, the country's largest grassroots peace and disarmament organization with more than 200,000 supporters nationwide.

Stop Tightening the Thumb Screws, A Humanitarian

Message

By Kathy Kelly

U.S. sanctions against Iran, cruelly strengthened in March of 2018, continue a collective punishment of extremely vulnerable people. Presently, the U.S. “maximum pressure” policy severely undermines Iranian efforts to cope with the ravages of COVID-19, causing hardship and tragedy while contributing to the global spread of the pandemic. On March 12, 2020, Iran’s Foreign Minister Jawad Zarif urged member states of the UN to end the United States’ unconscionable and lethal economic warfare.

Addressing UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, Zarif detailed how U.S. economic sanctions prevent Iranians from importing necessary medicine and medical equipment.

For over two years, while the U.S. bullied other countries to refrain from purchasing Iranian oil, Iranians have coped with crippling economic decline.

The devastated economy and worsening coronavirus outbreak now drive migrants and refugees, who number in the millions, back to Afghanistan at dramatically increased rates.

In the past two weeks alone, more than 50,000 Afghans returned from Iran, increasing the likelihood that cases of coronavirus will surge in Afghanistan. Decades of war, including U.S. invasion and occupation, have decimated Afghanistan’s health care and food distribution systems.

Jawad Zarif asked the UN to prevent the use of hunger and disease as a weapon of war. His letter demonstrates the wreckage caused by many decades of United States imperialism and suggests revolutionary steps toward dismantling the United States war machine.

During the United States’ 1991 “Desert Storm” operation against Iraq, I was part of the Gulf Peace Team—at first, living in a “peace camp” set up near the Iraq-Saudi border and later, following our removal by Iraqi troops, in a Baghdad hotel which formerly housed many journalists. Finding an abandoned typewriter, we melted a candle onto its rim, (the U.S. had destroyed Iraq’s electrical stations, and most of the hotel rooms were pitch black). We compensated for an absent typewriter ribbon by placing a sheet of red carbon paper over our stationery. When Iraqi authorities realized we managed to type our document, they asked if we would type their letter to the Secre-

tary General of the UN. (Iraq was so beleaguered even cabinet level officials lacked typewriter ribbons.) The letter to Javier Perez de Cuellar implored the UN to prevent the U.S. from bombing a road between Iraq and Jordan, the only way out for refugees and the only way in for humanitarian relief. Devastated by bombing and already bereft of supplies, Iraq was, in 1991, only one year into a deadly sanctions regime that lasted for thirteen years before the U.S. began its full-scale invasion and occupation in 2003. Now, in 2020, Iraqis still suffering from impoverishment, displacement and war earnestly want the U.S. to practice self-distancing and leave their country.

Are we now living in a watershed time? An unstoppable, deadly virus ignores any borders the U.S. tries to reinforce or redraw. The United States military-industrial complex, with its massive arsenals and cruel capacity for siege, isn’t relevant to “security” needs. Why should the U.S., at this crucial juncture, approach other countries with threat and force and presume a right to preserve global inequities? Such arrogance doesn’t even ensure security for the United States military. If the U.S. further isolates and batters Iran, conditions will worsen in Afghanistan and United

States troops stationed there will ultimately be at risk. The simple observation, “We are all part of one another,” becomes acutely evident.

It’s helpful to think of guidance from past leaders who faced wars and pandemics. The Spanish flu pandemic in 1918-19, coupled with the atrocities of World War I, killed 50 million worldwide,

675,000 in the U.S. Thousands of female nurses were on the “front lines,” delivering health care. Among them were black nurses who not only risked their lives to practice the works of mercy but also fought discrimination and racism in their determination to serve. These brave women arduously paved a way for the first 18 black

nurses to serve in the Army Nurse Corps and they provided “a small turning point in the continuing movement for health equity.”

In the spring of 1919, Jane Addams and Alice Hamilton witnessed the effects of sanctions against Germany imposed by Allied forces after World War I. They observed “critical shortages of food,

How are you supposed to wash your hands regularly if you have no running water or soap? How are you supposed to implement “social distancing” if you live in a slum or a refugee or containment camp? -- Refugees living in terrible condition in Camp Vučjak

Photo by By Ajdin Kamber/Shutterstock.com



soap and medical supplies” and wrote indignantly about how children were being punished with starvation for “the sins of statesmen.”

Starvation continued even after the blockade was finally lifted, that summer, with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. Hamilton and Addams reported how the flu epidemic, exacerbated in its spread by starvation and post-war devastation, in turn disrupted the food supply. The two women argued that a policy of sensible food distribution was necessary for both humanitarian and strategic reasons. “What was to be gained by starving more children?” bewildered German parents

asked them.

Jonathan Whitall directs Humanitarian Analysis for Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors without Borders. His most recent analysis poses agonizing questions:

“How are you supposed to wash your hands regularly if you have no running water or soap? How are you supposed to implement ‘social distancing’ if you live in a slum or a refugee or containment camp? How are you supposed to stay at home if your work pays by the hour and requires you to show up? How are you supposed to stop crossing borders if you are fleeing from war? How are you supposed to get tested

for COVID-19 if the health system is privatized and you can’t afford it? How are those with pre-existing health conditions supposed to take extra precautions when they already can’t even access the treatment they need?”

I expect many people worldwide, during the spread of COVID-19, are thinking hard about the glaring, deadly inequalities in our societies, and wonder how best to extend proverbial hands of friendship to people in need while urged to accept isolation and social distancing. One way to help others survive is to insist that the United States lift sanctions against Iran and instead support acts



of practical care. We must jointly confront the coronavirus while constructing a humane future for the world without wasting time or resources on the continuation

of brutal wars.

Z

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

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Photo by John Gomez/Shutterstock.com

Feature



10 Ways to Make the Change You Want

By Rivera Sun

As the editor of *Nonviolence News*, I collect 30-50 stories of nonviolence in action each week. Each story offers us a take-away lesson for our own work for change. These lessons offer us best practices and pro tips from our fellow human beings who are working for change around the world.

We can learn from their successes and their setbacks. We can let their brilliance inspire us and we can stand on their giant shoulders as we strive to make a difference in our own way.

Nonviolence is one of humankind's greatest achievements—and it's just getting started. It's up to us to take it further, use it more skill-

fully, and discover how nonviolence can help us be—and make—the change we wish to see in the world.

Here are ten pointers for change makers from recent news:

1. The Ripple Effect of the LA Teachers Strike

In the wake of last year's strike by Los Angeles teachers, random searches of students are coming to an end district wide—landing a blow against racism and racial profiling in schools. The LA teachers strike was a successful campaign for a set of economic justice goals, but its impact continues, showing how powerful strikes can have an ongoing effect. Sometimes, this is true even when campaigns don't succeed in achieving their stated goals. The 2011 Occupy protests didn't end inequality, but they did break the issue through mass consciousness in an unprecedented way that continues to affect everything from wages to presidential campaigns.

2. #NotAgainSU Students Show Why Making (And Revising) Demands Is Important

Amidst hate crimes, Syracuse University students are pressing for major changes in the institution's approach to diversity and inclusivity. An earlier campaign created and achieved 9 out of 12 demands. After that success, they revised some of the remaining demands, added a new set, and launched a new occupation of buildings. The checklist of demands shows clearly how direct action is succeeding, where the university is dragging its feet, and what work remains to be done. Demands can be powerful—as these students are proving.

3. Climate Victory Gardens Embody the Power of Constructive Program

Gandhi would appreciate the thousands of people who are fighting climate change one backyard garden at a time. It's a constructive



Sunrise Activists Tell Us To Quit Playing By the Rules
Photo by Rachael Warriner/Shutterstock.com

program—a type of action that everyone can do, builds strength and community, and addresses the problem all at the same time. Constructive programs, like the 2,000 Climate Victory Gardens, have the added benefit of involving people who might not otherwise get involved in the movement. Plus, you get fresh veggies. What’s not to love?

4. Sunrise Activists Tell Us To Quit Playing By the Rules

More than 150 middle and high school students from across the United States gathered to demand that senators “stand up or step aside” on the climate crisis. “We’re done playing by the rules,” they say. Their boldness reminds us that when the rules of the game are meant to make some people the perpetual winners and others the losers, it’s time to quit playing by the rules—and perhaps it’s time to change the game entirely. Nonviolent action puts the ball in our court and gives us a whole different way to push for change than through conventional channels.

5. Spain’s Women’s Soccer Shows Us the Power of Organizing for Everyone

Following the players’ strike in November, female soccer players in Spain have won the league’s first-ever collective bargaining agreement and league-wide contracts. Their story shows the power of organizing for—and with—everyone instead of petitioning for individual pay raises. It’s a team sport, after all.

6. Extinction Rebellion’s “Lawn-gate” Shows How Property Destruction Can Backfire

The notorious climate emergency rebels stirred up controversy by digging up the lawn of Cambridge University. The press dubbed

the blowback as “Lawn-gate.” Was “Lawn-gate” nonviolent direct action or vandalism? Did it serve the climate justice movement or backfire on Extinction Rebellion? Property destruction is often controversial both inside movements and among the general population. When considering its worth as part of an action, it’s important to consider how it will be perceived by your society. Will the reaction serve your cause—or detract from it? Did the property destroyed have a negative image which would make the public sympathetic, or was the action taken seen as simply inchoate destruction?

7. Red-state Utah’s Climate Crisis Plan Proves Speaking Beyond the Choir Matters

In a surprising shift, Utah Republicans are supporting a plan that aims to reduce emissions over air quality concerns and global warming. “If we don’t think about it, who will?” they say. How did that happen? By talking “common cents,” economic sustainability of ski slopes, and clean air quality. When we’re organizing for change, it’s helpful to speak the language of the people we want to change, not our own framings and phrasings. After all, we’re convinced. It’s the other people we’ve got to persuade to make a shift.

8. Colombian National Strike Committee’s Renewed Protests Teaches Us to Go Beyond Single Actions

Colombians have been campaigning for change for months. They’ve used a wide variety of tactics, mobilized rotating sectors of the populace, and launched several waves of mass action. Why? Because single marches or one-off demonstrations aren’t enough. Real change comes from sustained, creative, strategic sets of actions designed to achieve specific goals, and then keep building.

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Photo by Yeshua_ph/Shutterstock

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9. Sudan Reminds Us to Protect Those Who Refuse to Hurt Protesters

Sudan recently had a successful nonviolent revolution. The victory did not come without sacrifice—more than 100 people were killed in just one of the violent crackdowns by the regime. Recently, they’ve been campaigning to protect soldiers who were fired for refusing to hurt the people. Why does this matter? Because it’s helpful to build allies with the very people who are ordered to crack down on your movement. And, it’s important to make sure that soldiers who refuse to hurt their people are rewarded, not punished. It sends an important message to their fellow soldiers, leaders, and others about the society’s expectations around mass movements.

10. Anti-Gentrification Fight Demonstrates Why Collecting Solutions Helps

Half the battle is finding a better option. The effort to halt and end gentrification recently shared a set of best practices for fighting gentrification, including everything from Community Land Trusts to Tenant Buy Options. The list highlights success stories, offers solutions to entrenched injustices, and comes in handy when you need to come up with an alternative for your community.

These are just 10 of the 50-plus stories in this week’s issue of *Nonviolence News*. There’s a lot to learn from our fellow human beings’ efforts toward peace and justice. If we pay attention, stay alert, and take notes, we might find our own work for change grows in power, strength, and wisdom. **Z**

Rivera Sun, syndicated by PeaceVoice, has written numerous books, including *The Dandelion Insurrection*. She is the editor of *Nonviolence News* and a nationwide trainer in strategy for non-violent campaigns.



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Feature



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First U.S. Union-Authorized Climate Strike?

By Jeremy Brecher

It isn't easy for unions to strike to protect the climate. U.S. labor law doesn't make it easy to strike over anything except wages, hours, and working conditions—even over things like climate change that profoundly affect workers and their future. So it was important news when Minneapolis commercial

janitors held an Unfair Labor Practices strike this week to protest employer stalling—including demands that their employers help fight climate change. This is the third in a series of commentaries on The Future of Climate Strikes. For the entire series see here.

On Thursday, February 27, thousands of

Minneapolis cleaning workers walked off their jobs and struck their downtown commercial high-rises. Among their key demands was that their employers take action on climate change. It was one of the first—as far as I have been able to discover, the very first—union-sanctioned strike in the U.S. for climate protection demands.

The janitors are members of Service Employees International Union Local 26. They are employed by over a dozen different subcontractors like ABM & Marsden to clean corporate buildings like IDS, Capella Tower, EcoLab, U.S Bank, Wells Fargo, United Health Group, Ameriprise and many more across the Twin Cities. The workers are overwhelmingly immigrants and people of color. One observer described the meeting authorizing the strike as “a rainbow coalition of immigrants from all over the world and people from every race and religion in the state.” The union provided simultaneous interpretation into Spanish, Somali, Vietnamese, Amharic, and Nepalese.

I wanted to know something about the background to the strike, so I called Steve Payne, who wrote an excellent article about plans for the strike in *Labor Notes*. He spent years as an organizer for Local 26 and now works for the North Star chapter of the Sierra Club. Much of this commentary is informed by my discussion with him.

Climate demands

Payne told me that Local 26’s concern with climate went back at least to 2009. Lots of people both on staff and in the leadership of the union care about issues of climate and the environment, which came up frequently in conversations. Climate was a popular issue that resonated for the union’s members. A high proportion of them were immigrants, and many of them were well aware of the im-

Climate was a popular issue that resonated for the union’s members. A high proportion of them were immigrants, and many of them were well aware of the impact of climate change on their homelands

pact of climate change on their homelands. Elsa Guaman, a janitor at ABM who cleans the United Health Group headquarters, said:

“We are people from the countryside in Ecuador, and when I was young it was a fertile place. But then the droughts began, and the land didn’t produce anymore. As people who lived on what we took from the earth, we had to leave. We were not alone. Millions of people from the areas near my village left too, in one of the biggest migrations ever out of South America. Now I clean buildings that are some of the biggest polluters in Minnesota, which furthers the same problem that made me immigrate. This must be addressed. I think if we win green cleaning, we can send a message.”

But what could their union do about climate change besides put out statements and support other organizations? They received a partial answer from California janitors who had won demands for “green cleaning.” Local 26 included green cleaning demands in their 2009

negotiations. They won contract language establishing in each company an “Ad Hoc Committee” of union and company representatives. It would “review the use of green chemicals.” It recognized company responsibility for a safe and healthy workplace and “the use of materials that contribute to a healthy and sustainable ecological environment.” The employer would provide training to employees on the “use, mixing and storage” of cleaning chemicals. The employer “shall make every effort to use only green, sustainable cleaning products where possible.”

While this language gave them a foothold on the issue, it was vague and provided nothing that could be enforced. As the latest contract negotiations approached, the union decided it needed something that had more substance and that could be enforced. But this brought them up against an obstacle: the restrictions of U.S. labor law.

Under federal labor law companies are required to bargain over “mandatory” bargaining issues like wages, hours, and working conditions. Unions can make demands in other areas, but that can be a rather futile effort

The union’s involvement with the wider community was reflected in a “Fighting Today for a Better Tomorrow Week of Action,” overlapping the strike and addressing a range of community issues



By Diana Vucane/Shutterstock.com

because companies can simply ignore them without fear of legal sanction. The line between what is and isn't a subject for bargaining is inherently ambiguous and has been the subject of hundreds of NLRB disputes.

The strategy Local 26 developed for addressing this dilemma is similar to one described by Nato Green of SEIU local 1021 in San Francisco. In an article in *In These Times*, Green wrote, "In my union, we advance our goals on parallel tracks via collective bargaining and public policy, using each to reinforce the other."

Local 26 put together a package of demands some but not all of which could be brought up at the bargaining table. In the second bargaining session, the union presented a demand for the creation of a Green technician janitorial training program. It brought in janitors from California who already had such a training fund. According to Local 26's bargaining update for its members: "Our members are uniquely positioned to help lead the change we all need, in helping to convert to clean energy in this especially important sector. Top down policies won't work if the people who will be responsible for implementing these changes on a day to day basis don't have a voice. One key is training for front line janitors, as green technicians, so that they have the skills."

They proposed contract language that would create a "training program for Green Technicians (including \$0.20 differential) and expanded use of green cleaning."

The demand for a training program could be seen as simply a conventional collective bargaining proposal. But it transcended some of the limitations of the previous contract. It created a vehicle for actually implementing, monitoring, and enforcing good practices. It realizes a strategy that has sometimes been called "regulation in civil society."

Other demands went beyond wages, hours,

and working conditions as usually interpreted. In its bargaining update the union also proposed to create a "table" with building owners and community groups focused on climate to develop "bold solutions." They would include "Green New Deal" policies, getting Minnesota to 100 percent renewable energy, reducing waste, and closing the HERC incinerator that burns trash from downtown office buildings and pollutes nearby neighborhoods.

Days before the strike, Local 26, along with Environment Minnesota, 100%, Minnesota Youth Climate Strike, MN 350, Minnesota Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Climate and Environmental Justice Table, and the North Star Chapter of the Sierra Club issued a report called "Sky High Pollution," subtitled "How Minnesota corporations pollute our planet and politics, and how community collaboration can help the state reach its 2050 greenhouse gas emission reduction goals." The report expressed the wider aspects of the union's fight against climate change. It called for commercial building owners to:

- Work with community groups and the union to create an Owner and Community Green Table
- Withdraw from the anti-climate Minnesota Chamber of Commerce and end lobbying against clean energy policies
- Close the HERC incinerator, a major source both of greenhouse gases and of air pollution that contaminates nearby communities of color
- Adopt the union's proposed Green Cleaning Training Program

Allies

Climate change matters in Minneapolis. In December 2019 the Minneapolis City Council declared a climate emergency and

Top down policies won't work if the people who will be responsible for implementing these changes on a day to day basis don't have a voice

demanding a massive mobilization to halt, reverse and address the consequences and causes of climate change. It set a goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050. Commercial and industrial buildings account for half of all greenhouse gas emissions in Minneapolis, and the city set a goal of 20 percent reduction by these buildings by 2025. As of 2018, however, they were consuming 6 percent more energy than the base year. Local 26's determination to take leadership on climate protection targeted a powerful local concern.

At the rally kicking off the strike, the janitors were joined by environmental groups like the Sierra Club, MN350, the BIPOC Climate Table, the 100% campaign, and the Minnesota Youth Climate Strike, whose leaders released a statement supporting the strike:

"We, as youth, cannot stand to grow up in a world where corporations increasingly gain capital while minorities continue to be punished. Not only are we sick of being dismissed, but so is this beautiful planet. A push towards green training is a benefit for all that is being denied by management and big corporations with the power to combat the oppression that we face daily. We, along with many other environmental allies, will continue to stand in solidarity with our partners in the SEIU Local 26 of commercial janitors."

Opposition to the HERC incinerator also builds bridges to the growing climate justice movement, which has organized a coalition

based in communities of color to close the incinerator.

The union's involvement with the wider community was reflected in a "Fighting Today for a Better Tomorrow Week of Action," overlapping the strike and addressing a range of community issues. It included, for example, a hearing on housing displacement and gentrification with victims of displacement giving testimony to elected officials and clergy, organized by Centro do Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha (CTUL). Other actions included rallies in support of airport, janitorial, and education workers and for better healthcare.

The union's focus on climate change demands is part of a growing trend toward "bargaining for the common good." As a recent article in *The American Prospect* explains, "Bargaining for the Common Good (BCG) is an innovative way of building community-labor alignments, bringing unions and allies together that go beyond the limits to traditional collective bargaining and jointly shape bargaining campaigns that advance the mutual interests of workers and communities alike." It argues "we can flip the narrative and make workers and communities not the victims of climate catastrophe, but the protagonists in the struggle for a just, democratic, and truly sustainable world." The Minneapolis janitors have gone a step beyond "bargaining for the common good" by "striking for the common good"—climate protection.

The Strike

The janitors' contract ran out in December, but they agreed to go on working while negotiations progressed. But on February 8, the union janitors unanimously voted to authorize a ULP strike to stop the companies' Unfair Labor Practices of stalling and refusing to give information. President Iris Altamirano said, "Talks broke down Monday and we're ready to strike for higher wages, green cleaning jobs programs and the sick days our families deserve. Our members do really hard work, putting their bodies on the line, ensuring buildings across the Twin Cities are clean. Too often our work is invisible because we come to work when others are heading home for dinner, yet many of our members haven't had dinner with their families in years."

The purpose of the 24-hour strike was explained by George Mullins, a 30-year janitor who works for Marsden Janitorial cleaning in downtown Minneapolis. "We've been bargaining for months and are sick of the excuses. We want our companies to know we are serious."

Elia Starkweather, a janitor and Local 26 Vice President who works for Harvard cleaning Ameriprise, articulated why climate demands express what workers need just as much as more conventional union demands like higher wages and sick leave: "The bosses continue to say no to everything we've asked to help our families, so I'm ready to strike to win what we need. We're looking for higher wages because the rent keeps going up and our wages need to go up as well, sick days so we can care for our families, and green jobs so our work doesn't destroy our bodies and our planet."

On Thursday, February 27, the janitors walked out as planned. They set up picket lines outside the downtown buildings. Then

they were joined by youth climate strikers and other supporters in a march through downtown. Steve Payne says, "The strike and march were beautiful and incredible."

"Everyone I talked to left feeling inspired and energized for their campaigns. I don't know that I've ever seen a more powerful union action. There were at least a couple hundred environmental allies that joined the picket lines—which is really impressive. The chants shifted from English to Spanish to Somali, people were dancing to hip hop and Latino music. It was a great mixing of all the parts of our movement we need: white middle class environmental activists, young diverse climate strikers, low wage immigrant workers—all fighting for the same set of demands."

The next shift joined the strike, then on February 28 the janitors went back to work.

Negotiations are scheduled to reconvene in March. The one-day strike, with its wide public support, may lead the employers to become more responsive to the workers demands. Local 26 janitors have struck in the past and they may have to do so again. John Nesse, an attorney who represents a group of ten cleaning companies, has already threatened that, "Replacement workers are one of the options." If Local 26 is forced to strike again, one thing is clear: It will do so not only as the representative of its own members, but as the champion of everyone who knows they are threatened by climate change. **Z**

Feature



Photo by Traci HahnL/Shutterstock.com

Virus: All that is Solid Melts into Air

By Boaventura de Sousa Santos

There is a debate within the social sciences about whether it is easier to ascertain the truthfulness and quality of a society's institutions under normal daily circumstances or in exceptional situations, during times of crisis. One can probably learn from both types

of situation, but each of them is certain to bring to the fore and teach us different things. What is the potential knowledge to be derived from the coronavirus pandemic?

The normality of exception. The current pandemic is not your typical crisis scenario,

...the pandemic is only the worsening of a crisis situation that has been afflicting the world population. Hence its specific perilousness. A mere ten or twenty years ago, the public health services of many countries were better prepared to fight the pandemic than they are now

in sharp contrast to a normal situation. Since the 1980s—as neoliberalism established itself as the leading version of capitalism, which in its turn became increasingly dependent on the logic of the financial sector—the world has been living in a permanent state of crisis. This is an anomalous situation for two kinds of reasons. On the one hand, the notion of a permanent crisis is an oxymoron, given that etymologically a crisis is, by definition, both exceptional and temporary in nature, as well as an opportunity to overcome a predicament and move on to a better state of affairs. On the other hand, if a crisis is temporary, it must be explained by the factors that gave rise to it, but when it turns into something permanent, it becomes the cause that explains everything else. Thus, for example, the unending financial crisis is used to explain the cuts to social policies (health, education, social welfare) or wage degradation. With that, it has successfully staved off questions about the real causes of the crisis. The purpose of permanent crisis is to keep it from being overcome. But what is the purpose of such a purpose? It is essentially twofold: to legitimize the scandalous concentration of wealth, and to avoid effective measures aimed at preventing imminent ecological catastrophe. That is the way we have lived these past 40 years. Viewed in this light, the

pandemic is only the worsening of a crisis situation that has been afflicting the world population. Hence its specific perilousness. A mere ten or twenty years ago, the public health services of many countries were better prepared to fight the pandemic than they are now.

The elasticity of the social. In every historical era, the dominant modes of living (work, consumption, leisure, coexistence) and of hastening or holding off death are relatively rigid and appear to stem from rules etched in the stone of human nature. These modes keep changing little by little, so the changes tend to go unnoticed. The outbreak of a pandemic is incompatible with this type of change. It calls for dramatic changes, which become possible from one moment to the next, as if that possibility had been there all along. It is suddenly possible for you to stay at home and again find the time to read a book or spend more time with your children, to consume less, forgo the addiction of whiling away the time in shopping centers, eyeing what is for sale while forgetting all the things that you desire but cannot be bought. The conservative notion that there is no alternative to the mode of life forced on us by hypercapitalism collapses. It becomes evident that the reason there are no alternatives is because the democratic political system has been shaped into

abandoning any consideration of alternatives. Having been expelled from the political system, the alternatives are increasingly bound to enter the lives of citizens through the back door of pandemic crises, environmental disasters and financial collapses. To put it differently, the alternatives are bound to come back in the worst possible manner.

The frailty of the human. The apparent rigidity of social solutions generates an odd sense of security among the classes benefiting the most from them. There remains always, of course, some measure of insecurity, but there are means and resources available to allay it, whether in the form of healthcare, insurance policies, services provided by private security companies, psychotherapy, or gyms. This sense of security gets mixed with feelings of arrogance and even condemnation toward all those who feel victimized by these very social solutions. The viral outbreak interrupts the common sense and causes the sense of security to melt overnight. We know that the pandemic is not blind and that it has its preferred targets. With it, however, a common awareness of planetary, democratic-like communion is somehow being created. That is actually the etymological root of the word “pandemic”: all people. The tragedy is that, in the present case, the best way to show solidarity with one another is to isolate yourself and refrain from even touching others. It is certainly an odd communion of fortunes. Will others be possible?

The ends do not justify the means. The negative impact of the economic slowdown is quite obvious, especially as far as the largest and most dynamic country in the world is concerned. On the other hand, however, there are also some positive consequences. Such is the case, for example, with the decrease in air pollution. An air quality expert from the U.S. space agency (NASA) said that never in the past has such a dramatic drop in pollution

been observed over such a vast area. Does that mean that at the beginning of the 21st century the only way to avoid the approaching ecological catastrophe is by massively destroying human life? Have we lost our cautionary imagination and the political capacity to put it into practice?

We also know that in order to effectively control the pandemic, China has resorted to highly strict methods of repression and surveillance. It is becoming increasingly evident that these measures have proved effective. But whatever other merits China may have, it cannot be said to be a democratic country. It is extremely doubtful that such measures could be implemented, or implemented with the same level of effectiveness, in a democratic country. Does that mean that democracy lacks the political capacity to respond to emergencies? On the contrary, according to *The Economist*, which earlier this year showed that epidemics tend to be less lethal in democratic countries, because of the free flow of information. But since democracies are more and more vulnerable to fake news, we will have to imagine democratic solutions based on participatory democracy practiced at the level of neighborhoods and communities and on civic education geared toward solidarity and cooperation rather than toward entrepreneurship and competitiveness at all costs.

The war of which peace is made. The way in which the pandemic narrative was first framed by the Western media made it clear that there was a deliberate attempt to demonize China. The poor hygienic conditions obtaining in China’s live-animal markets and the strange eating habits of the Chinese people (implying primitivism) were supposed to be the cause of the disease. Subliminally, people across the world were thus being warned against the danger that China, now the world’s second economy, may come to rule the world. If China had proved incapable of preventing

such harm to global health and, what is more, of effectively addressing it, how could one possibly trust the technology of the future as proposed by China? But did the virus actually originate in China? The fact is that, according to the World Health Organization, the origin of the virus is still to be determined. It is, therefore, irresponsible for U.S. officials to speak of the “foreign virus” or the “Chinese coronavirus,” if nothing else because only countries with good public health systems (the U.S. not among them) are in a position to provide free testing and accurately determine which types of influenza have occurred in recent months. What we do know for sure is that, quite apart from the coronavirus, a trade war is being waged between China and the U.S., an all-out war which, by all indications, must end with a winner and a loser. From the U.S. perspective, it is urgent to neutralize China’s leadership in four different areas: cell phone manufactur-

ing, fifth generation telecommunications (artificial intelligence), electric cars, and renewable energy.

The sociology of absences. A pandemic of this magnitude is ample cause for a worldwide commotion. Although a modicum of drama is justified, it is well always to heed the shadows that visibility creates. Thus, for example, MSF (Doctors Without Borders) is currently drawing public attention to the fact that the many thousands of refugees and immigrants detained in Greek internment camps are extremely vulnerable to the virus. In one of these camps (Moria) there is one water tap for 1,300 people and a lack of soap. The internees are forced to live cramped on top of each other. Families of five and six are sleeping in a space less than three square meters. This, too, is Europe—invisible Europe. **Z**



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Feature



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The Mutilated World Is Moved by the Nurses and Doctors

By Vijay Prashad

SARS-Co-2 or COVID-19 moves swiftly across the planet, leaving no region untouched. It is a powerful virus, with a long enough incubation period to hide the symptoms and therefore to gather more and more people in its deadly arms.

Slowly, the world is shutting down, fear is overtaking us. But fear is not an option. The virus is deadly, but it is not the virus alone that engenders fear. Much of the world is afraid because people realize that we live in institutional deserts, that our elected leaders are

mostly incompetent, and that the profit motive has focused so much of human potential on money rather than on humanity. The deep loneliness that has fallen like a shroud on the world comes from that realization as much as from the enforced social isolation. A majority of the world's heads of governments rely upon fear to bewilder their populations; they thrive on panics of one kind or another. They simply do not have the moral fibre to lead us

as this pandemic rushes through our lives.

In an unlikely place, the *Financial Times*, the Africa editor David Pilling writes of the catastrophe occasioned by the shift from public health to private health. There is, he writes, "the temptation to view health through a personal lens," as non-communicable diseases such as cancer, hypertension, and diabetes eclipse other ailments; the antidote to these ailments has been seen as personal (a fitness

Much of the world is afraid because people realize that we live in institutional deserts, that our elected leaders are mostly incompetent, and that the profit motive has focused so much of human potential on money rather than on humanity



regimen) and private (expensive medical insurance). As private medical colleges, private hospitals, and private pharmaceutical companies have ballooned, the public system has withered. This development, Pilling notes, “ignores two facts. One is that the most effective health interventions, from clean water to antibiotics and vaccines, have all been collective. The second is that infectious diseases have not been defeated. They have, at best, been kept at bay.” There is no substitute, as this catastrophe unfolds, to transfer priorities from privatization to the creation of a robust public sector, at the very least for health.

Even in the most threadbare health systems, cannibalized by austerity, it is the nurses and doctors, the ambulance paramedics and the janitors, who have been heroic in their work; doctors and nurses are being called back from retirement, now working long hours with no time to rest. They are working beyond exhaustion to stem the tide against the virus. In this mutilated world, those who hold us together by the bonds of love and fellowship are our heroes, marvellous people who are willing to put themselves in harm’s way to protect their fellow humans. Caregivers—whether in families or in institutions—never get sufficient credit for the enormous burden they have shouldered as politicians have gutted the State and society. I would prefer a planet of nurses rather than a planet of bankers.

News from Italy is startling, but it is a prelude of what might happen if the virus fully enters the favelas and bastis of the world. It is little known that the Spanish flu of 1918-1919 had its worst impact in Western India; of those millions who died in that pandemic, 60 percent were from this part of India; and those who died were weakened already by malnutrition enforced by British colonial policy. Today, the hungry live in these belts of slums that thus far have not been dramat-

ically hit by the virus. If death begins to stalk those areas, where medical care has been severely depleted, the numbers of those who will die shall be startling, the wretchedness of the class structure evident in the mortuary.

The poet Margaret Randall, whose memoir *I Never Left Home* has just been published, has sent us a poem that sets the mood for this period:

COVID-19

When the death toll is expected
to be in the millions
chances are
someone you love will die.
The plagues of old revisit us now
and we scramble
to stay safe, stay
sane and present for others,
help neighbours, buy only
what we need,
from store shelves emptying
to a beat of fear.
Let us share facemasks
like the Chinese
and wash our hands
in silent prayer.
Let us sing from balconies
imagined and real
like Italians
in nationwide lockdown.
Let us be kind to one another
and organise the remedies
and solutions
irresponsible leaders put at risk.
If this is the Big One,
let us go out
with dignity, if a rehearsal
let us finally propose to live in
peace.

Humans have for centuries confronted with great sorrow little understood cataclysmic death, plagues and cholera being the most notable. When the catastrophes strike, it is often women—as nurses, as mothers, and as sisters—who have held society together. Mysterious and mystical explanations have abounded. Science has helped us break through the deep fatalism that has bewildered people; now we seek explanations in the sequencing of genes and in the creation of vaccines. It is belief in reason, science, and solidarity that sent Chinese doctors and nurses to the ends of their country, such as into the Altai Mountains, to heal people and to contain this very dangerous virus that has engulfed us in anxiety and death; it is this that sent them, along with Cuban doctors, to Iran, Iraq, and Italy to assist countries in distress. Their arrival reminds us of a century-long history of socialist doctors and nurses who have thrown themselves into international solidarity for the sake of humanity. These are people who share an ethical landscape with the Indian communist doctors and their people's polyclinics that we wrote about in Dossier no. 25 (February 2020). This is the socialist tradition.

And then there is the imperialist tradition. As COVID-19 spreads, and as Iran was struck hard, a humanitarian response from the United States would have been to end all murderous sanctions and let Iran import medical equipment and supplies. The same applies to Venezuela, where COVID-19 has now begun its march. Paola Estrada of the International People's Assembly and I spoke to the Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza, who told us that his country is facing "difficulties for the timely acquisition of medicines." But Venezuela, like Iran, has been assisted by the Chinese, the Cubans, and the World Health Organisation. They are resolved to break the embargo of imperialism and to break the chain of viral transmission. "Sanctions are a

crime," they say in Venezuela. The U.S. unilateral sanctions take on a special criminal significance in the midst of this pandemic.

Equally criminal is that the siege of Gaza (Palestine) continues, with two million people trapped by the Israeli blockade in a deeply congested area. The Palestinian nurses, doctors, and medical support staff, as well as the teachers and social workers who have, for decades, held together their fragile society do not get as much credit for keeping Palestinian society alive and resilient. One of them was Razan al-Najjar, a 21-year-old medic who was nursing unarmed protestors in the Great March of Return; they were being shot at by Israeli snipers. One sniper aimed his rifle at her and deliberately murdered her on June 1, 2018. There are thousands of nurses, doctors, and medical workers like Razan al-Najjar who are working hard to maintain the collapsing society in Yemen, where—due to the Saudi/Emirati war—more than half of the population lacks the very basic healthcare and nutrition. Imagine what the scourge of COVID-19 will do in Gaza and in Yemen? That blockade, this war, must end.

The World Health Organisation has been working hard, despite insignificant funding, to stave off the spread of the virus. If you are able to donate some money, please do so to WHO's Solidarity Response Fund. Stand up to defend this mutilated world by helping the caregivers whose labour is the salve to see us through to the other side of this ruin. **Z**

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Feature



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An Economic Recovery Program—Theirs vs. Mine

By Jack Rasmus

The coronavirus has been wrecking the U.S. and global economies. While focus has been on addressing the biological devastation wrought by the virus, the economic devastation keeps growing.

Failure to properly address the deepening

economic impact of the coronavirus has been no less shocking to date than the obvious failure of politicians and policymakers to get a handle on the medical-human impact of the virus.

Trump had called the virus a “hoax,” said

it would be over by April, declared publicly there were millions of test kits being used when there weren't, and blamed first the Chinese and then the Europeans for the obvious spread of the virus, and rising death toll, in the U.S.

His answer thus far to the spreading and deepening economic impact of the disease has been to demand U.S. Federal Reserve bank chair, Jay Powell, drop interest rates further, plus advocate a payroll tax cut across the board—the latter a measure that economists almost unanimously say will have no stimulus effect on the economy. Even his own advisers, Steve Mnuchin and Larry Kudlow, reportedly have advised against the payroll tax cut. The payroll tax cut was first enacted under Obama to try to stimulate consumption in the wake of the last 2008 economic crash. It is generally acknowledged not to have had much, if any, effect on economic recovery.

How the Virus is Crushing the Economy

There are at least four major “channels of contagion” by which the virus is driving the contraction of the U.S. and global economy:

1. Global Supply Chain Disruption

This was the easiest to see. Intermediate and final goods exported from China to the U.S. were halted in many industries. U.S. production began to cut back on the delivery of final goods in the U.S. economy, already affected by Trump's trade war with China during 2018-19. And not only goods from China to U.S. directly, but supply chains in which Japan and South Korean goods, made in China and delivered to those countries, would otherwise be shipped to the U.S. Or goods shipped

to Mexico and then exported as final goods to the U.S. Or from Asia to Europe, and then to the U.S. The net effect was a significant drop in U.S. production and therefore in sales and the output of the U.S. economy in general. But that channel of contagion is now being dwarfed by another.

2. Collapsing U.S. Consumer Demand

We can see this now spreading and deepening rapidly throughout the U.S. economy. First, demand for travel related spending—airlines, cruise and shipping, hotels and leisure, entertainment, etc.—were initially impacted. But that's been spreading to other industries as rapidly as the virus itself. Personal services of all kind are coming to a halt, except for healthcare. Restaurants and bars are shutting down. Education is being driven to an online underground. Malls and stores are virtually deserted. Social entertainment, including sports, is suspended everywhere. Even grocery stores are experiencing empty shelves, and consumption in basic necessities will soon fall off. Then there's online purchasing, now developing huge backlog and delivery problems.

The consumption sector is coming to a halt in industry after industry, and it's not over yet. Social distancing required by the virus to slow its spread is, conversely, accelerating the spread of the economic impact.

Consumption was the only sector of the U.S. economy in late 2019 holding it up. And it was slowing in that regard as well by year-end. Now it is collapsing. Nearly 70 percent of the U.S. GDP and economy, it is now joining the contraction in business investment and trade that was occurring throughout 2019.

The recession is here, as of March 2020. The only real question now is how deep will it go and how long will it last. And that question depends, in turn, on how quickly and serious-

ly U.S. politicians will respond. And the actions thus far do not portend well for a prompt “v-shape” recovery.

But there is yet a third channel of economic contagion emerging that may dwarf the effect of the supply chain disruption and household consumer demand collapse. It is the condition of the financial system itself.

3. Financial Markets Deflation & Default

Globally and in the U.S., financial markets are churning and fracturing, with a net effect already of having deflated by more than 20 percent and in some cases 30 percent or more. Not just stock markets, but oil and commodity futures markets, foreign exchange currency markets, corporate bond markets, which are far more important to capitalist economies than stock markets, are showing signs of great stress, to put it mildly. Especially unstable are markets for what’s called junk bonds (particularly in oil fracking, retail, and travel and leisure). And what’s called “junk loans”—i.e. leveraged loans. In the U.S., the combined total at risk is more than \$7 trillion. Add to that the fact that banks globally are sitting on \$10 trillion in non-performing loans. Should prices collapse further, widespread defaults on paying principal and interest on debt will take place. That will result in mass layoffs once again, as in 2008-09; a further collapse of business investment; and a yet further acceleration of contraction of the real economy.

It’s not coincidental that the U.S. central bank, the Federal Reserve, last week pumped an extra \$1.5 trillion into the banks via what’s called the Repo market, plus more through traditional bond channels, and is planning in a couple days this coming week to drop interest rates to near zero and re-institute special funding once again, as in 2008, to bail out mutual funds and other “shadow” (i.e. unregulated) banks. Why? Because liquidity is rapidly dry-

ing up throughout the economy as businesses draw down their bank credit lines to zero as well, in order to hoard cash to weather out the storm of consumption and production collapse on the horizon.

The financial markets collapse, the third channel, may prove to have the greatest devastation on the recession now already hitting the U.S. economy. What began as supply chain and household demand problems will be greatly exacerbated by the financial instability.

Is Trump preparing for this economic contingency? No, not at all. Here’s what Trump, and even the Democrat leadership (Pelosi-Shumer), is proposing:

Trump’s Failed Economic Stimulus “Program”

In the middle of last week Trump addressed the nation on TV and proposed the weakest possible response. It was so weak even investors reacted with a 2,200 point fall in the stock market. There were basically three things Trump proposed:

First, a \$50 billion increase in the small business administration loan fund. Second, a hint of some kind of tax deferral extending the normal IRS April 15 deadline. And, third, a payroll tax cut costing the Social Security trust fund a hit of at least \$800 billion.

He then revisited that paltry proposal on Friday, March 14, when he proposed an apparent additional \$50 billion for the states to spend on emergency measures to address the spreading virus. He clarified that the tax deferral would be only for “some,” not all. He added a suspension of interest on student debt, but failed to explain if that meant a full waiver of debt for all students, or just a temporary halt to paying interest, which would nonetheless continue to accumulate and for which students would still have to pay later,

after the suspension was lifted. Trump also added the proposal that the U.S. would buy more oil from U.S. producers to fill the U.S. strategic reserve. That was to help oil companies experiencing revenue loss from oil prices falling to the low \$30s per barrel. Trump's statements to the press indicated he still wanted the payroll tax cut, even as the Democrats were saying "no way," it wouldn't have any effect except to further destroy social security funding.

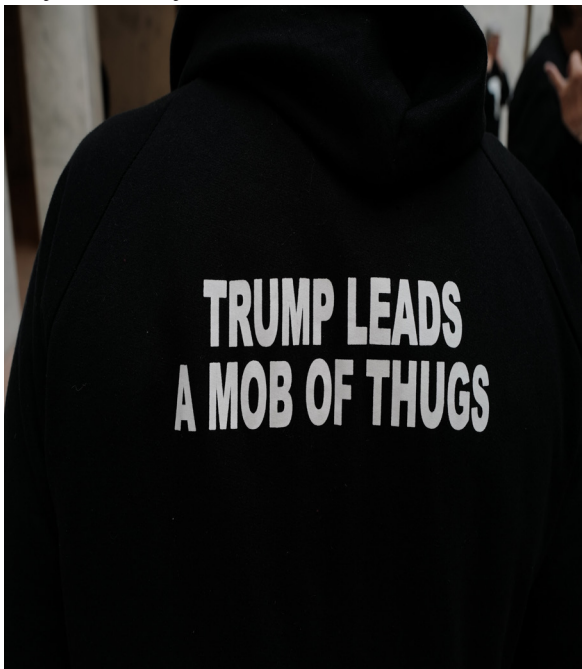
Pelosi & Democrats Blocked Stimulus Program

As Trump was prevaricating and dribbling out minimalist economic responses to the cratering U.S. economy, Pelosi and the Democrats were trying to address the real scope of the problem, even if not as broadly required.

Intense discussions were being held behind the scenes between Pelosi and Trump's Treasury Secretary, Steve Mnuchin. All that came

out of that negotiation by Friday, March 14, however, was an agreement to provide free testing of the virus. But how "free" was not clearly defined. Did that mean those that were sick would have to pay out of pocket and then get reimbursed by the government? If so, millions will hold off getting tested. More than half of U.S. households have less than \$400 for emergencies, according to the Federal Reserve's own data research. They can't afford to get tested.

Pelosi and the Democrats have also been proposing paid medical leave of 14 days, tax credits to small business to help pay for the leave, and an increase in unemployment benefit payments for those who are currently not sick, but could soon be laid off or asked by their employers to stay home (on unpaid medical leave). Pelosi and company, to their credit, also refused to cut payroll taxes. They know of Trump's leaked plans to cut Social Security and Medicare after the November elections.



By Phil Pasquini/Shutterstock.com

Yet that's what exactly Trump will propose: more tax cuts, for business especially, and lower interest rates. It will prove to be throwing money down a rathole

Trump would never say that in four weeks the U.S. has tested fewer than 10,000 nationwide, in contrast to China's testing 200,000 in a single day or South Korea 15,000 in a day. Nonetheless, according to Trump, the U.S. had carried out an "unprecedented response"



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While there are some good provisions in Pelosi's proposals, the Democrat economic stimulus doesn't go far enough to address the scope and magnitude of the negative economic impact that's coming to the U.S. economy: as it shuts down in broad industries and should the financial system crack, as it did in 2008.

Furthermore, it appears that both Trump and McConnell in the Senate are intent on doing their worst to refuse to agree on most of the proposals in the Pelosi plan; demanding in particular acceptance of a payroll tax cut in exchange for other proposals. So don't expect anything big or effective in any agreement coming this week. Trump seems determined not to have an effective fiscal stimulus, now that his budget deficit last year exceeded \$1 trillion—and now that his current budget deficit after only five months is running at a rate of \$1.4 trillion for this year.

An economic stimulus must focus on gov-

ernment spending and income restoration. It cannot focus on tax cutting. Nor on interest rate reduction. Neither of those kinds of policies will stimulate investment or consumption. Why? Because there's a massive shift to hoarding cash already underway by business, and consumers will not get relief quickly enough, or at all if they're unemployed.

Businesses are selling their financial assets across the board to gather in as much cash as possible, needed to continue to pay interest and principal on its \$10 trillion debt run up since 2008, as its prices, sales and revenue drop precipitously in the meantime. There's a "dash for cash" underway. And no amount of tax cutting will lead to re-investing in production. The tax cuts will simply be hoarded and not spent. Ditto for households and consumers. Any payroll tax cut will be hoarded, not spent, to ensure households have enough to continue paying mortgages and car loans and student loans—assuming they still have

jobs. If no jobs, it will be spent on trying to maintain current consumption, not increase it.

The same applies to interest rate reductions by the Fed. Why will businesses borrow—even at a lower rate—to expand production, when consumers are buying less of their goods or if they can't get parts from abroad with which to build the goods? And why would households borrow to take the risk to purchase a new auto or even a new home given the current direction of the economy? Cutting the costs of business investment is now the least important variable determining the outcome of investment. Expectations of a collapsing economy and thus falling profitability is what's driving investment now—and the anxiety of being able to continue to pay for debt accumulated in recent years in order to avoid default.

Yet that's what exactly Trump will propose: more tax cuts, for business especially, and lower interest rates. It will prove to be throwing money down a rathole.

My Proposal for Economic Stimulus & Recovery

Make no mistake, the U.S. is now in recession. And it will deepen considerably before it is over. Moreover, the great risk is now a spreading crisis of credit, a fracturing of the financial system as in 2008-09, and the potential emergence of another "Great Recession," this time even worse than 2008-09. All the efforts by the Federal Reserve and other central banks to pump trillions of dollars more into the U.S. and their economies may prove futile this time around.

What's needed is an immediate restoration of consumer household spending power and a protective floor under incomes that may soon also collapse should mass layoffs emerge once again in another couple months. Here's some measures, a necessary short list, expanding on

some of my earlier proposals, to provide that immediate income effect:

I. Paid Medical Leave

A 14-day paid medical leave until vaccines for the virus are generally available, with eligibility for:

- those tested with virus
- those with symptoms
- all those Parents of K-8 students forced to remain home due to school closures

The 14-day paid leave should be renewable by state legislatures' decision since the economic impact, nor the recovery from the virus, will not occur evenly across all states.

II. Company Reimbursement for Paid Medical Leave

- Paid Medical Leave costs should be reimbursed by the federal government to companies with fewer than 500 workers. Reimbursement by tax credits for companies with more than 50 employees; and by means of direct subsidy payments for companies with fewer than 50.
- 50 percent reimbursement to companies with more than 500 workers by means of tax credits provided the company shows a full restoration of jobs for those laid off within a year of the development of a vaccine for the virus.
- Paid leave shall not result in a reduction of paid sick leave provisions already provided by a company or by union contracts, which shall otherwise remain accrued to workers

III. Employment Guarantees

- Employers are required to restore work-

ers on paid medical leave who return to their former position with the same pay and benefits.

- All other benefits shall continue to accrue for workers while on paid medical leave

IV. Hospital Testing & Related Costs

- Costs for hospital-clinic-doctor office entry and testing will be billed by the health provider directly to the government, not paid by the worker and then reimbursed
- Provider costs associated with the visit for testing (i.e. labs, emergency or other room charges, out patient, in patient, etc.) will similarly be billed by the provider to the government
- Return or follow up visits, if needed, will be billed directly as well
- Pharmacy and drug costs are to be waived for patients determined to be infected by the virus, and all their immediate dependents under age 21, or on Medicare, Medicaid, or otherwise uninsured.

V. Health Insurance Companies Responsibility

- If a worker is insured and on medical leave, or if otherwise laid off due to the economic effects of the virus on their company of primary employment, the health insurance provider shall waive the worker's share of monthly health insurance premiums. This shall apply as well as for their immediate dependents covered by the company's insurance benefits program
- If a worker is insured, or if otherwise unemployed due to the economic effects of the virus on their company of primary

employment, the health benefits insurance provider will waive all deductibles and co-pays for services for those determined infected or on leave due to school shutdowns. This shall apply as well as for their immediate dependents covered by the company's insurance benefits program

- Premiums, deductibles, co-pays and coverage shall remain frozen until the state legislature declares the virus effect is declared over
- State legislatures shall review all insurance company requests to raise rates after the virus effect is over for the next 3 years. Attempts to recoup costs during the virus period by accelerating price increases or reducing coverage will be denied if greater than the rise in the local consumer price index for the urban region.

VI. Medicare & Medicaid

- For those employed while receiving Medicare coverage, the monthly Medicare deductible payment shall be waived until the vaccine for the virus is made available
- For those employed while receiving Medicaid, all doctor or hospital costs to the employee or unemployed shall be paid for by the state's Medicaid authority. All doctors and hospitals shall be required by law to accept Medicaid patients until the vaccine for the virus is made available.
- Refusal by doctors, hospitals or clinics to accept Medicare or Medicaid patients will result in fines levied on the health provider's annual federal tax payment

VII. Unemployment Benefits

- The federal government shall immediately extend unemployment benefits for all layoffs for an additional six months (one year total), effective as of March 1, 2020
 - Companies shall be required to continue to pay unemployment benefits taxes to their states for laid off workers for up to a year, commencing March 1, 2020.
 - There shall be no suspension of the Social Security 6.2 percent payroll tax or the Medicare 1.45 percent tax.
- VIII. General Company Requirements
- For the duration of the virus crisis period, companies shall be required to continue to pay their workers' health insurance monthly premiums if laid off, for a period of six months from date of initial lay off
 - Banks shall be required to provide lending to business customers at interest rates no greater than the original loan, if extended; or for an initial loan, no more than the average rate for the local urban area in which the company is located
 - Banks and mortgage companies shall immediately institute a moratorium on mortgage payments for those on paid medical leave, or for those laid off for economic reasons associated with the effects of the virus on their company for a period of three months or until returning to work, whichever is sooner
 - Auto companies' financial services, credit unions' auto financing, and other sources of financing of vehicles shall in-

Trump's speech was typical "reverse hyperbole." To refute the facts and critics, just say the opposite and exaggerate to the max. It used to be called the "big lie" when Nazi ideologue Joseph Goebbels used it



By Motortion Films/Shutterstock.com

troduce a moratorium on monthly auto loan payments for those on medical leave, or for those laid off for economic reasons associated with the effect of the virus on their company for a period of three months or until returning to work, whichever is sooner

IX. Federal Student Loans & School Districts

- For college students who work, but are laid off due to economic effects associated with the virus at the company or institution for which they work, student loan principal and interest payments shall be suspended until returning to work. Suspension shall be defined as permanent waiver of all interest charges. Such interest payments shall not further accrue.

School districts that shut down shall continue to receive per pupil reimbursement from their states on the same schedule as when students were attending sessions

X. Food Provisioning & Delivery System

K-8 students who were receiving meals while in attendance at their school, but are not so doing due to school shutdown, shall continue to have meals delivered to their primary residence daily. State programs providing 'meals on wheels' for elderly residents or similar programs shall be expanded to cover K-8 students

All former cuts to the SNAP (food stamp) program since January 2017 shall be restored for all those eligible on paid medical leave, leave from work due to school shutdowns, receiving unemployment benefit payments, or on Medicare or Medicaid.

Federal and State governments shall undertake whatever measures necessary to ensure

the physical delivery of food to local grocery outlets, and to remove bottlenecks to online ordering and delivery of food and necessary household items to residents or local distribution centers, including if necessary mobilization of state national guard units and temporary requisition of private delivery company facilities and equipment

Addendum to Financing My "Economic Recovery Program"

Some friends have asked how much my own fiscal-spending based "Economic Recovery Program" would cost? The total cost can't be quantified precisely, as the impact on working families is spreading rapidly. But here's some financing, administering, and implementation principles associated with my proposal:

First, the amount of financing applied in the first phase should be no less than the same amount that the Federal Reserve bank has already allocated to spend on banks and investors. That's \$2.2 trillion in just the last week. So if we can spend that on the bankers, why can't we allocate the same amount of funds to bail out workers and the middle class? Index that \$2.2 trillion to whatever further increases the Fed spends on its pre-emptive bailout of bankers and investors already underway. If the Fed can "create \$2.2 trillion" out of thin air to give to bankers and investors, why can't it do the same for Main St. and working families?

Second, use some of these funds to enroll those without health insurance or whose insurance will not cover the costs of health services, apart from the actual tests only, in the Medicare system. Introduce a one-page

sign-up for Medicare online. Create a special “temporary” membership category. Have healthcare providers bill Medicare for the cost of tests to workers, and for all other related costs, as well as costs for those on unpaid medical leave or unemployed due to the economic effects of the virus on the economy—i.e. economic layoffs. Immediately enroll the 30 million uninsured. Voluntarily enroll the 87 million who are underinsured with massive deductibles and copays, and other dependents who have no coverage, etc. Immediately allocate funds from the \$2.2 trillion to bail out Main St. and transfer the allocated funds to the Medicare-Social Security Trust Fund. And hire as many workers in the Medicare administration as needed.

Third, instead of reimbursing companies for continuing paying wages to workers sent home on unpaid leave, or who are laid off because of the major economic impact that’s coming (there will be mass layoffs starting in May), have the government hire the laid off for the duration of the crisis—which Trump admitted will likely continue through August. Adapt the unemployment benefits system to make the payments to those so covered. This would be a 21st century, electronic-administered “Works Progress Administration” that provided 8 million government jobs to the unemployed.

The administrative apparatus is there already: Medicare and Unemployment Benefits. Why not use it? And make it clear that it is the government that is providing their health care and employment protection—not

the private employers or bankers who would otherwise cut them loose to scramble individually to protect themselves and their families.

Fourth, immediately create a “Public Investment Corporation,” funded and managed by the government (Federal, State and Local) to invest in alternative energy expansion and other climate crisis mitigation that would hire workers, since the current crisis will mean private business investment will collapse across the board and such very much-needed investment from the private sector will not be forthcoming for some time.

Let the Federal Reserve preemptively bail out its bankers and billionaire private investors! But if they can spend \$2.2 trillion on them, then the government can, and should, preemptively bail out Main St. as well.

Further economic measures will be needed to address the current U.S. recession, and the increasing possibility of the recession morphing into another “Great Recession” (or worse). But the above represents an initial phase of immediate fiscal spending response in the short run to restore incomes being devastated right now. **Z**

Jack Rasmus is author of the recently published book, *The Scourge of Neoliberalism: US Economic Policy from Reagan to Trump*, Clarity Press, January 2020. He blogs at jackrasmus.com and his twitter handle is @drjackrasmus. His website is <http://kyklosproductions.com>.

...the above represents an initial phase of immediate fiscal spending response in the short run to restore incomes being devastated right now

The Final Word

Corona in an Up-and-Down Nation

By Badri Raina

Corona is a sly assassin

In an up-and-down nation.

It kills less from partying,

More from starvation.

Those that rush decrepit
trains

In afflicted mega cities

Have no morsel and no note

In their exhausted kitties.

They may not the virus feel,

But hunger bites so keen

That a jaggery bit in a village
home

May be their vaccine.

Their vote gives us govern-
ments,

But governments are not for
them;

So, as Corona demonitizes
now,

They recall an earlier time

When they died in beseech-
ing lines,

Not to an invisible viral
trick,

But, less subtly, to lack of
food

Brought on by a banking
pandemic.

Protesting the income lowering of retired people

Photo by Stephane Bidouze/Shutterstock.com



