



March 2020

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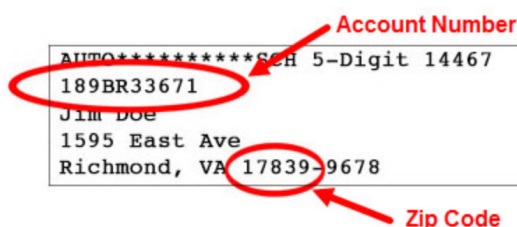
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The Richest and the Rest of Us

By H. Patricia Hynes

Why, in the richest of countries, the U.S., are 40 million people (or 1 in 8) on food stamps?

Nearly 25 percent of homeless people are working. Why are working people living out of their cars, under bridges and in parks?

Why do we have an epidemic of “deaths of despair” by suicide, alcohol and drugs?

The United States has the lowest life expectancy—a snapshot of a country’s overall health—of comparable well-to-do countries, lower

“The 500 richest people in the world... gained a combined \$1.2 trillion in wealth in 2019, further exacerbating inequities that have not been seen since the late 1920s...Eight of the 10 richest people in the world are from the U.S.” — Bloomberg, 12/27/2019

than Canada’s by 4 years and lower than that of our low-income, socialist neighbor, Cuba. Why?

Why, despite our touted economic expansion under Trump, do 40-50 percent of Americans not have \$400 readily available for emergencies?

And, in a country of billionaires, why are 1 in 5 children living in poverty?

The average number of years U.S. people live has been dropping since 2014, due in large part to the increase in suicides and drug and alcohol overdoses among midlife adults, across all racial groups. Parallel with this tragic trend is growing income inequality, the gap in income and wealth between the richest people and the rest of us. By September 2019, this gap had reached its highest level since the Great Depression.

One factor in this growing inequality gap is the 2017 Trump-Republican Tax Cut. Despite the speechifying that the 2017 tax cut would increase jobs, raise salaries, and give every working household a cut in their taxes, the richest 1 percent have come out the winner. In 2020, they will enjoy an average tax cut of \$50,000 while the bottom 80 percent will average \$645. Thanks to tax cuts for corporations, 91 profitable corporations, including Amazon and



One factor in this growing inequality gap is the 2017 Trump-Republican Tax Cut

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The United States ranks highest in income inequality of all wealthy countries

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General Motors, paid no corporate income taxes in 2018. Despite the promise that the tax cut would increase working families' salaries by \$4,000 to \$9,000, median family income grew only by \$514 in 2018, the year after the law went into effect.

The United States ranks highest in income inequality of all wealthy countries. Correspondingly we rank highest in ill health and social problems, compared with other rich, developed countries. And, conversely, the Scandinavian countries and Japan, where income and wealth are more fairly distributed, fare best in health and social well-being.

Why have young students

and adults across the United States reported dramatic increases in anxiety in surveys from the 1950s through the 1990s? Mental disorders associated with anxiety parallel this trend of increasing income inequality between the rich and the rest, as does the number of people disabled by mental disorders who qualify for Social Security Disability Insurance.

Studies link these trends in anxiety and resulting mental disability to the finding that community life is weaker in societies with larger income gaps between the rich and the rest. Not surprisingly, community life, measured by involvement in local groups, voluntary organizations and

civic associations—often called social cohesion—is more robust in more equal societies. This, in turn, feeds social trust and helps explain why rates of homicide are consistently lower in more equal societies.

Greater income differences make class differences—between the poor, the working class, the shrinking middle class and the wealthy—more stark and more powerfully felt by those less well off. Material wealth, which is conspicuously on display in more unequal societies, increasingly replaces an inner sense of well being as the measure of one's value.

So what to do? Here are a handful of solutions: increase cooperative and employee-owned companies; place employees on company boards; rebuild the union movement; reduce the ratio of CEO pay to the average of worker pay, and support the Fight for \$15 campaign. All of these proposed initiatives are reinforced by studies showing that they increase worker productivity, satisfaction, and innovation as well as provide fairer wages in more equal work places. The Fight for \$15, a national campaign for \$15 per hour minimum wage, is especially vital, given that nearly two-thirds of the minimum wage workers in the United States are women, a

wage that consigns them and their children to poverty.

We all have a stake in this issue of our country's extreme wealth gap. Reducing it will rescue the working poor and the shrinking middle class and promote economic equality for women and people of color. **Z**

Pat Hynes, a retired Professor of Environmental Health, directs the Traprock Center for peace and Justice: <https://traprock.org>.

Pipeline or a Pipe-dream: Israel, Turkey Hydrocarbon Conflict is Brewing in the Mediterranean

By Ramzy Baroud

Massive natural gas discoveries off the eastern coast of Israel and Palestine is slated to make Tel Aviv a regional energy hub. Whether Israel will be able to translate positive indicators of the largely untapped gas reserves into actual economic and strategic wealth is yet to be seen.

What is certain, however, is that the Middle East is already in the throes of a major geostrategic war, which has

the potential of becoming an actual military confrontation.

Unsurprisingly, Israel is at the heart of this growing conflict.

"Last week, we started to stream gas to Egypt. We turned Israel into an energy superpower," Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, bragged during a cabinet meeting on January 19.

Netanyahu's self-congratulatory remarks came on the heels of some exciting financial news for the embattled Prime Minister, as both Jordan and Egypt are now Tel Aviv's clients, receiving billions of cubic meters of Israeli gas.

For Netanyahu, pumping Israeli gas to two neighboring Arab countries constitutes more than just economic and

political advantages—it is a huge personal boost. The Israeli leader is trying to convince the public to vote for him in yet another general election in March, while pleading to Israel's political elite to give him immunity so that he can stay out of prison for various corruption charges.

For years, Israel has been exploiting the discovery of massive deposits of natural gas from the Leviathan and Tamar fields—located nearly 125 kilometers and 80 kilometers west of Haifa respectively—to reconstruct regional alliances and to redefine its geopolitical centrality to Europe.

The Israeli strategy, however, has already created potentials for conflict in an already



A Turkish Coast Guard ship sails near Istanbul. Disputes over Mediterranean oil and gas exploration have put Turkey into conflict with its neighbors

Photo by Hayden Stirling/Shutterstock.com

unstable region, expanding the power play to include Cyprus, Greece, France, Italy, and Libya, as well as Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, and Russia.

On January 2, Netanyahu was in Athens signing a gas pipeline deal, alongside Greek Prime Minister, Kyriako Mitsotakis, and Cyprus President, Nicos Anastasiades.

The EastMed pipeline is projected to travel from Israel to Cyprus, to Greece and, ultimately, to Italy, thus transporting eastern Mediterranean gas directly to the heart of Europe.

A few years ago, this scenario seemed unthinkable, as Israel has, in fact, imported much of its natural gas from neighboring Egypt.

Israel's Tamar field partly rectified Israel's reliance on imported gas when it began production in 2003. Shortly after, Israel struck gas again, this time with far greater potential, in the massive Leviathan field. On December 31, 2019, Leviathan began pumping gas for the first time.

Leviathan is located in the Mediterranean Sea's Levantine Basin, a region that is rich with hydrocarbons.

"Leviathan is estimated to hold over 21 trillion cubic feet of natural gas—enough to fill Israeli power-generation needs for the next 40

years, while still leaving an ample supply for export," wrote Frank Musmar in the BESA Center for Strategic Studies.

Egypt's share of Israeli gas—85 billion cubic meters (bcm), with an estimated cost of \$19.5 billion—is acquired through the private Egyptian entity Dolphinus Holdings. The Jordanian deal was signed between the country's national electricity company NEPCO, and an American firm, Noble Energy, which owns a 45 percent stake in the Israeli project.

Jordanians have been protesting Israel's gas deal en masse, as they view economic cooperation between their country and Israel as an act of normalization, especially as Tel Aviv continues to occupy

and oppress Palestinians.

The echoes of the popular protests have reached the Jordanian parliament which, on January 19, unanimously voted in favor of a law to ban gas imports from Israel. Israel is diversifying beyond exerting regional economic dominance to becoming a big player on the international geopolitical stage as well. The EastMed pipeline project, estimated at €6 billion, is expected to cover 10 percent of Europe's overall need for natural gas. This is where things get even more interesting.

Turkey believes that the deal, which involves its own regional rivals, Cyprus and Greece, is designed specifically to marginalize it economically by excluding it



Russian President Vladimir Putin and President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan. If the EastMed pipeline becomes a reality, Turkey and Russia will stand to lose the most

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from the Mediterranean's hydrocarbon boom.

Ankara is already a massive energy hub, being the host of TurkStream, which feeds Europe, with approximately 40 percent of its needs of natural gas coming from Russia. This fact has provided both Moscow and Ankara not only with more than economic advantages but geostrategic leverage as well. If the EastMed pipeline becomes a reality, Turkey and Russia will stand to lose the most.

In a series of successive, and surprising moves, Turkey retaliated by signing a maritime border deal with Libya's internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA), and by committing to send military support to help Tripoli in its fight against forces loyal to General Khalifa Haftar.

"Turkey will not permit any activity that is against its own interests in the region," Fuat Oktay, Turkey's Vice-President, told Anadolu News Agency, adding that, "any plan that disregards Turkey has absolutely no chance of success."

Although European countries were quick to condemn Ankara, the latter has succeeded in changing the rules of the game by staking a claim to vast areas that are also claimed by Greece and Cyprus as part of their so-

called exclusive economic zones (EEZ).

Not only will Turkey be drilling in Libya's territorial waters for natural gas, but in disputed water near Cyprus as well. Ankara is accusing Cyprus of violating "the equal claim to discoveries," an arrangement that followed the military conflict between both countries in 1974.

If the issue is not resolved, the EastMed pipeline project could potentially turn into a pipedream. What seemed like a lucrative deal, with immense geopolitical significance from an Israeli point of view, now appears to be another extension of the wider Middle Eastern conflict.

While the European Union is eager to loosen Russia's strategic control over the natural gas market, the EastMed pipeline increasingly appears unfeasible from every possible angle.

However, considering the massive deposits of natural gas that are ready to fuel struggling European mar-

kets, it is almost certain that the Mediterranean natural gas will eventually become a major source of political disputes, if not a war. **Z**

Ramzy Baroud is a journalist and the editor of *The Palestine Chronicle*. He is the author of five books. His latest is *These Chains Will Be Broken: Palestinian Stories of Struggle and Defiance in Israeli Prisons* (Clarity Press, Atlanta). His website is www.ramzybaroud.net

Could the climate crisis be "The Good News of Damnation"?

By Lawrence Wittner

On August 12, 1945, six days after the U.S. government obliterated the city of Hiroshima with a single atomic bomb, Robert Hutchins, the president of the University of Chicago,



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Fridays for Future" protest - The student strike for global warming

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delivered a remarkable public address. Speaking on his weekly radio program, "Chicago Roundtable," Hutchins observed that Leon Bloy, a French philosopher, had referred to "the good news of damnation" under the assumption that only the fear of perpetual hellfire would motivate moral behavior. "It may be," Hutchins remarked, "that the atomic bomb is the good news of damnation, that it may frighten us into that Christian character and those righteous actions and those positive political steps necessary to the creation of a world society."

According to Hutchins, this world society would serve as the foundation of a world government, and, in the context of the existential danger posed by nuclear war, he was totally

committed to creating it. "Up to last Monday," he said, "I didn't have much hope for a world state." But the shock of the atomic bombing, he added, crystallized "the necessity of a world organization."

In the following months, Hutchins created, and then presided over, a Committee to Frame a World Constitution—a group of farsighted intellectuals who conducted discussions on how best to overcome humanity's ancient divisions and, thereby, move beyond nationalism to a humane and effective system of global governance. In 1948, they issued a Preliminary Draft of a World Constitution, with a Preamble declaring that, to secure human advancement, peace, and justice, "the age of nations must end and the era of humanity

begin."

The Chicago committee constituted but a small part of a surprisingly large and influential world government movement that, drawing on the slogan "One World or None," flourished during the late 1940s. In the United States, the largest of the new organizations, United World Federalists, claimed 46,775 members and 720 chapters by mid-1949. The goal of creating a world federation was endorsed by 45 major national organizations, including the National Grange, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the United Auto Workers, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, the Young Democrats, the Young Republicans, and numerous religious bodies. That year, 20 state legislatures passed



Washington DC., USA, May 6, 1979 - California Governor Jerry Brown addresses the massive crowd of protestors that gathered at the west front steps of the U.S. Capitol during the "No Nukes" protest

Photo by mark reinstein/Shutterstock.com

resolutions endorsing world government, while 111 members of the House of Representatives and 21 Senators sponsored a congressional resolution declaring that the new United Nations should be transformed into "a world federation." Much the same kind of uprising occurred in nations around the world.

Although this popular crusade waned with the intensification of the Cold War, as did the hopes for a sweeping transformation of the nation-state system, the movement did secure a number of vital changes in the international order. Not only did the United Nations begin playing an important part in global peace and justice efforts, but the original impetus for the world government

movement—the existential danger of nuclear war—began to be addressed by world society.

Indeed, a massive, transnational nuclear disarmament movement, often led by former activists in the world government campaign, emerged and rallied people all around the planet. In this fashion, it placed enormous pressure upon the world's governments to back away from the brink of catastrophe. By the mid-1990s, national governments had reluctantly agreed to a sweeping array of international nuclear arms control and disarmament treaties and were no longer threatening to plunge the world into a nuclear holocaust.

More recently, however, that world society has been

crumbling, thanks to a dangerous return of nationalism. From the United States to Russia, from India to Brazil, numerous countries have been swept up in xenophobia, triggering not only a disastrous revival of the nuclear arms race, but an inability to work together to challenge the latest existential threat to human survival: climate change. Championing their own narrow national interests—often based on little more than enhancing the profits of their fossil fuel industries—these nations have either torn loose from the limited international environmental agreements of the past or, at best, shown their unwillingness to take the more significant steps necessary to address the crisis.

And a crisis it is. With the polar ice caps melting, sea levels rising, an entire continent (such as Australia) in flames, agriculture collapsing, and storms of unprecedented ferocity wreaking havoc, climate catastrophe is no longer a prediction, but a reality.

What can be done about it?

Clearly, just as in the case of heading off nuclear annihilation, no single nation can tackle the problem on its own. Even if a small country like the Netherlands, or a large country like the United States, managed to quickly develop a system of 100 percent renewable energy, that

action would be insufficient, for other countries would still be generating more than enough greenhouse gasses to destroy the planet.

So there really is no other solution to the onrushing climate catastrophe than for people and nations to forget their tribal animosities and start behaving as part of a world society, bound together by an effective system of global governance. The climate crisis, like the prospect of nuclear annihilation, really is “the good news of damnation.” And we can only overcome it by working together.

One world or none. **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).

Extradition of Assange Would Set a Dangerous Precedent

By Marjorie Cohn

The Trump administration is seeking extradition of WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange, to the United States



Extinction Rebellion march protesters in Trafalgar Square London. Red Brigade protesters march in solemnity to bring awareness of climate change
Photo by Christopher Sharpe/Shutterstock.com

for trial on charges carrying 175 years in prison. On February 24, a court in the UK will hold a hearing to determine whether to grant Trump's request. The treaty between the U.S. and the UK prohibits extradition for a "political offense." Assange was indicted for exposing U.S. war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. That is a classic political offense. Moreover, Assange's extradition would violate the legal prohibition against sending a person to a country where he is in danger of being tortured.

WikiLeaks Exposed Evidence of U.S. War Crimes

In 2010 and 2011, WikiLeaks published classified documents provided by U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning. They contained 90,000 reports about the war in Afghanistan, including the Afghan War Logs, which documented more civilian casualties by coalition forces than the U.S. military had previously reported.

WikiLeaks also published nearly 400,000 field reports about the Iraq War, which contained evidence of U.S. war crimes, over 15,000 previously unreported deaths of Iraqi civilians, and the systematic murder, torture, rape and abuse by the Iraqi army and authorities that were ignored by U.S. forces.

In addition, WikiLeaks published the Guantánamo Files, 779 secret reports that revealed the U.S. government's systematic violation of the Geneva Conventions and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, by abusing nearly 800 men and boys, ages 14 to 89.

One of the most notorious releases by WikiLeaks was the 2007 "Collateral Murder" video, which showed a U.S. Army Apache helicopter target and fire on unarmed civilians in Baghdad. More than 12 civilians were killed, including 2 Reuters reporters and a man who came to rescue the wounded. Two children were injured. Then a U.S. Army tank drove over one of the bodies, severing it in half. Those acts constitute three separate war crimes prohibited by the Geneva Conventions and the *U.S. Army Field Manual*.

Manning was arrested in 2010 and held in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day for 11 months. She was forced to stand nude during daily inspections. The former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture said her treatment was cruel, inhuman and degrading, and possibly constituted torture. Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison, and after she had served

7 years, Barack Obama commuted her sentence as he left office.

Two years later, in May 2019, Manning was jailed for refusing to answer questions before a grand jury about Assange and WikiLeaks. She remains in custody.

On December 31, 2019, Nils Melzer, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, released a letter he had sent to the U.S. government expressing "serious concern at the reported use of coercive measures against Ms. Manning, particularly given the history of her previous conviction and ill-treatment in detention." He said her incarceration amounted to torture and urged that she be released without delay.

Two days later, Manning pledged to stay the course, saying, "My long-standing objection to the immoral practice of throwing people in jail without charge or trial, for the sole purpose of forcing them to testify before a secret, government-run investigative panel, remains strong."

Assange Faces 175 Years in Prison If Extradited to the U.S.

Meanwhile, Sweden issued an arrest warrant in 2010 for Assange on alleged rape and sexual molestation charges. Assange

was questioned by Swedish prosecutors and then left for the UK, where he was arrested and later released on house arrest. After Sweden's request for extradition of Assange was granted by the UK Supreme Court in 2012, he was given asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he lived for seven years. A new Ecuadorian government revoked Assange's asylum in April 2019 and allowed UK authorities to enter the embassy and arrest him.

In 2017, Sweden dropped its investigation of Assange. On May 1, 2019, he was sentenced to 50 weeks in jail by the UK court for jumping bail and now faces extradition to the United States. Assange

stands charged by the Trump administration with 17 counts of violating the Espionage Act and conspiracy with Manning to crack a password on a Defense Department computer. He could be sentenced to 175 years in prison.

Assange's health has severely deteriorated. On May 31, 2019, UN Special Rapporteur Nils Melzer declared that Assange exhibited signs of prolonged exposure to psychological torture. During his years of isolation in the Ecuadorian embassy, the UK government denied him permission to go to a hospital for treatment, resulting in seriously worsening medical conditions.

"In 20 years of work with

victims of war, violence and political persecution I have never seen a group of democratic States ganging up to deliberately isolate, demonise and abuse a single individual for such a long time and with so little regard for human dignity and the rule of law," Melzer said.

The U.S.-UK Treaty Forbids Extradition for Political Offenses

The 2003 extradition treaty between the U.S. and the UK states, "Extradition shall not be granted if the offense for which extradition is requested is a political offense." It is the Requested State (in this case, the UK) that "determines that the re-



The Trump administration singled out Assange to send a clear message to journalists that they publish material critical of U.S. policy at their peril

Photo by Bogdan Khmelnytskyi/Shutterstock.com

quest [by the U.S.] was politically motivated.”

Although there is no clear definition of “political offense,” it routinely includes treason, sedition and espionage, and offenses directed against state power. Assange published “true information obtained from a whistleblower, making the charges against him political in nature, rather than criminal,” Robert Mackey wrote at *The Intercept*.

The Obama administration did not indict Assange because it didn’t want to establish “a precedent that could chill investigative reporting about national security matters by treating it as a crime,” according to Charlie Savage of *The New York Times*. Obama could not distinguish between what WikiLeaks did and what news media organizations like the *Times* do in “soliciting and publishing information they obtain that the government wants to keep secret,” Savage noted. Indeed, many of the documents WikiLeaks released were published in collaboration with the *Times*, *The Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *El País* and *Der Spiegel*. The outlets published articles based on documents WikiLeaks had released, including “logs of significant combat events in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.”

Assange is being targeted for “political offenses” be-



Photo by John Gomez/Shutterstock.com

cause WikiLeaks published evidence of U.S. war crimes. He cannot be extradited to the United States under the terms of the U.S.-UK extradition treaty.

The Convention Against Torture Bars Assange's Transfer to the U.S.

The Convention against Torture has a provision called non-refoulement that forbids extradition to a country where there are substantial grounds to believe a person would be in danger of being tortured. Since Manning was tortured by being held in solitary confinement for 11 months, it is likely Assange would face a similar fate if he were extradited to the United States.

Moreover, a country has a duty to refuse extradition

when it would violate fundamental rights, such as the right to be free from torture and cruel treatment.

The Johannesburg Principles of national security, freedom of expression and access to information, which were adopted by a group of experts in 1995, have been widely cited by judges, lawyers, journalists, academics and civil society. They provide, “No person may be punished on national security grounds for disclosure of information if the public interest in knowing the information outweighs the harm from the disclosure.” Significantly, WikiLeaks’s publication of the Iraq War documents, including evidence of Iraqi torture centers the U.S. had established, actually saved lives. After the Iraqi

government refused to grant civil and criminal immunity to U.S. soldiers, Obama was compelled to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq.

Deny Extradition of Assange to the U.S.

Assange's extradition hearing will begin on February 24 in Judge Vanessa Baraitser's London courtroom. More than 70 lawyers and legal academics, as well as at least 12 former heads of state, have signed a letter that will be sent to the UK Home Secretary, stating, "The fact that the charges are brought under the Espionage Act further reveals that this is a matter of a pure political offence [citation omitted]. There is broad international consensus that such offences should not be subject to extradition [citation omitted]."

Veterans for Peace and the National Lawyers Guild have endorsed a petition urging

the judge to deny extradition because Assange is charged with a political offense. It reads, "The essence of Assange's 'crime' is that he published documents and videos which revealed the reality of US military and political actions."

Assange has been awarded *Consortium News's* Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award for "practicing the highest order of journalism—revealing crimes of the state."

The Trump administration singled out Assange to send a clear message to journalists that they publish material critical of U.S. policy at their peril. "The extradition of Assange would mean the end of journalistic investigations into the inner workings of power," Chris Hedges wrote at *Truthdig*.

By the very terms of the U.S.-UK extradition treaty, and consistent with the Torture Convention's non-re-

foulement provision, Judge Baraitser must deny Trump's request for the Assange's extradition to the United States.

Go to couragefound.org for information about how to oppose Assange's extradition.

To sign the lawyers/academics letter to the UK Home Secretary, send an email to lawyers4assange@protonmail.com and you will receive a copy of the letter. **Z**

Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers and a member of the advisory board of Veterans for Peace. Her most recent book is *Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues*. The Publication of origin for this article is Truthout.



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Dealing with Government Repression

By Ted Glick

(The following is largely excerpted from my book *Burglar for Peace: Lessons Learned in the Catholic Left's Resistance to the Vietnam War*, coming



By Michael Candelori/Shutterstock.com

out this June.)

Since Trump took office three years ago, at least 18 states have seen the introduction of legislation by right-wing climate deniers tied to the fossil fuel industry to criminalize organized protests against new gas or oil pipelines. Other movements have also experienced repressive action by local, state and federal governments. It is an issue that we must take seriously.

My first years of progressive activism and organizing took place during the presidency of Richard Nixon, without doubt one of, if not the most, repressive presidential administrations we have

experienced in the U.S. in the modern era. It was under Nixon that the Republican Party with its “southern strategy” began its move toward becoming the kind of regressive entity that allowed pathological liar, racist and sexual predator Donald Trump to be elected President in November 2016.

During Nixon’s first term, from 1969 to 1973, he oversaw the use of government agencies to attempt to destroy groups like the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, and the American Indian Movement, including armed attacks by police leading to fatalities. Newly enacted conspiracy laws were used to indict leaders of the peace movement

and other movements. An entirely illegal and clandestine apparatus was created to sabotage the campaigns of his political opponents in the Democratic Party, leading to the midnight break-in at the Watergate Hotel which eventually led to the exposure of this apparatus and Nixon’s forced resignation from office in 1974.

I personally experienced this repressive apparatus, primarily via my inclusion as a defendant in the Harrisburg 8/7 case.

I learned several things during those Nixon years about how to deal with government repression.

One critical lesson is the disparity between how gov-



Ultimately, what I have learned is that government repression can have a disruptive impact on our work, for sure, but we can also turn a negative into a positive

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ernment deals with people of color—Black, Latinx, First Nation and Asian/Pacific Islander—compared with white people of European descent. The historical realities of military aggression, broken treaties, slavery, Jim Crow segregation, assumed white dominance, and institutionalized racism continue to have negative, discriminatory impacts.

Among these impacts is a willingness by some police to carelessly shoot and brutalize young Black and other men of color for no justifiable reason, which has given rise to the deeply important movement for Black Lives.

Another impact is the unequal treatment meted out within the legal system, from police to prosecutors to prison personnel, when it comes to people of color as compared

to white people. For example, people of color arrested as part of a nonviolent civil disobedience action can be subject to more severe charges or additional hardship while in police custody or behind bars as compared to whites.

Those of us of European descent must be conscious of these realities and act accordingly, and be ready to speak up and challenge unequal, discriminatory or explicitly white supremacist words and actions wherever they happen. This is also our responsibility when it comes to discriminatory words and actions toward immigrants, LGBTQ people, women, or any other group.

Another lesson as far as dealing with government repression is not to let it paralyze or divide organizations or movements.

This is one of the objectives of unjust governments trying to repress those who challenge its policies and practices. The efforts to criminalize demonstrations against new fossil infrastructure, for example, are all about discouraging people from taking part. But if we intelligently speak out against the proposed legislation and accurately portray those supporting it as un-American, anti-democratic, pro-pollution and in favor of climate deniers, their efforts can result in strengthening our base of support.

Another method of repression is to send government infiltrators into our meetings who are trained to look for differences and deepen and harden them. That is one of the reasons why we need to develop a movement culture which is respectful and

healthy. Within such a cultural environment, it is much harder for people trying to create divisions among us to succeed.

These actions are similar to those of agent provocateurs, people who try to get others to engage in violent speech or action toward police or others representing government.

Anger against injustice and oppression is not just legitimate, it is a necessary component of successfully building a movement for real change. But anger needs to be used in a disciplined way. Those who are quick to call cops “pigs” or throw bricks or in other ways are prone to display anger negatively are either government agents attempting to discredit the movement or are people in need of intervention, that need to be taken aside and spoken with in a direct, to-the-point, and loving way about the counter-productiveness of what they are doing. Some will keep doing so, but some will change—maybe not right away, but hopefully given time they will.

We need to accept that government surveillance is a given if we are serious about challenging the oppressive system and bringing about fundamental, revolutionary change. We should be on the alert for government infiltrators. When legitimate suspi-

cions are aroused, we should investigate and, if it seems necessary, directly confront the person or persons in question.

There are other affirmative steps we can take to prevent government disruption of our actions. For example, if we are organizing a nonviolent direct action that includes the element of surprise, we need to take whatever steps are necessary for that action to occur, such as the use of encrypted email, secure forms of communication, as well as to consciously limit what is said or written about it beforehand to only what is absolutely necessary.

Ultimately, what I have

learned is that government repression can have a disruptive impact on our work, for sure, but we can also turn a negative into a positive. To the extent to which we can creatively, intelligently and fearlessly expose the truth of what we are about as we respond to what they are doing to us, to that extent will we strengthen and build our movement. **Z**

Ted Glick is the author of the forthcoming *Burglar for Peace* and an activist, organizer and writer since 1968. Past writings and other information can be found at <https://tedglick.com>, and he can be fol-



Anger against injustice and oppression is not just legitimate, it is a necessary component of successfully building a movement for real change
Photo by By Ramji Creations



Sanders “won 4 in 10 of voters with household incomes under \$50,000 and nearly 3 in 10 with incomes between \$50,00 and \$99,000”

Photo by Ron Adar/Shutterstock.com

lowed on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/jtglick>.

The Escalating Class War Against Bernie Sanders

By Norman Solomon

More than ever, Bernie Sanders is public enemy number one for power elites that thrive on economic injustice. The Bernie 2020 campaign is a direct threat to the undemocratic leverage that extremely wealthy individuals and huge corporations constantly exert on the political process. No wonder we’re now seeing so much anti-Bernie rage from leading corporate Democrats—eagerly amplified by corporate

media.

In American politics, hell ly amplifying the voices of hath no fury like corporate well-paid reporters and pundits whose jobs involve ac-

ceptance of corporate power, against Sanders are routine including the prerogatives of in a wide range of main- corporate owners and spon- stream outlets. (The media sors. And, in news coverage watch group FAIR has long of politics, there’s an inex- documented the problem, il- haustible supply of former lminated by one piece after Democratic officeholders and another after another after appointees who’ve been lu- another just this month.) In cratively feeding from corpo- sharp contrast, positivity to- rate troughs as lobbyists, con- ward Sanders in mass media sultants and PR operatives. spheres is scarce.

The pattern is enmeshed go unmentioned. with the corporatism that the An important media head- Sanders campaign seeks to quarters for hostility toward replace with genuine democ- the Sanders campaign is racy—disempowering great MSNBC, owned by Com- wealth and corporate heft cast—a notoriously anti-la- while empowering everyday bor and anti-consumer cor- people to participate in a truly poration. “People need to democratic process. remember,” I pointed out on

Democracy Now!, “that if you, for instance, don’t trust Comcast, why would you trust a network that is owned by Comcast? These are class interests being worked out where the top strata of ownership and investors hires the CEO, hires the managing editors, hires the reporters. And so, what we’re seeing, and not to be rhetorical about it, but we really are seeing a class war underway.”

Routinely, the talking heads and go-to sources for mainline news outlets are far removed from the economic pressures besetting so many Americans. And so, media professionals with the most clout and largest megaphones are quite distant from the Sanders base.

Voting patterns in the New Hampshire primary reflected whose economic interests the Sanders campaign is promising to serve. With 10 active candidates on the Democratic ballot, Sanders “won 4 in 10 of voters with household incomes under \$50,000 and nearly 3 in 10 with incomes between \$50,00 and \$99,000,” the *Washington Post* reported.

Meanwhile, a trio of researchers associated with the Institute for New Economic Thinking—Thomas Ferguson, Jie Chen and Paul Jorgensen—found that, “the higher the town’s income, the

fewer votes cast” for Sanders. “Lower income towns in New Hampshire voted heavily for Sanders; richer towns did the opposite.”

The researchers saw in the data “further dramatic evidence of a point we have made before: that the Democratic Party is now sharply divided by social class.”

It’s a reality with media implications that are hidden in plain sight. The often-vitriolic and sometimes preposterous attacks on Sanders via powerful national media outlets are almost always coming from affluent or outright wealthy people. Meanwhile, low-income Americans have virtually zero access to the TV studios (other than providing after-hours janitorial services).

With very few exceptions, the loudest voices to be heard from mass media are coming from individuals with wealth far above the financial vicinity of average Americans. Virtually none of the most widely read, seen and heard journalists are on the low end of the nation’s extreme income inequality. Viewed in that light—and keeping in mind that corporate ownership and advertising dominate mainstream media—it shouldn’t be surprising that few prominent journalists have much good to say about a presidential campaign fiercely aligned

with the working class.

“If there is going to be class warfare in this country,” Bernie Sanders told the Iowa AFL-CIO convention last summer, “it’s time that the working class of this country won that war and not just the corporate elite.”

To the corporate elite, goals like that are unacceptable. **Z**

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

Is it Time for a New Labor Center in the United States? New Thinking on the Crisis of Labor

By Kim Scipes

The failures of the labor movement in the U.S. are legion over the past 40 years. It’s not needed to repeat the failures nor the efforts to revitalize the labor movement, most of the latter which have been unsuccessful to date. (For the best compilation of writings on these and related issues, while not complete,



There are a growing number of workers who are recognizing the need to unionize, and want to create new unions; think of the upsurge among teachers
Photo by Atomazul/Shutterstock.com

please see the “Contemporary Labor Issues” bibliography, online and with many links to original articles at <https://faculty.pnw.edu/kim-sci-pes/contemporary-labor-issues-bibliography/#Change-sintheUSLaborMovement>.)

Yet while the labor left—using the term broadly—has fought to address weaknesses in the AFL-CIO, and has won some victories over the past 40 years, we have overwhelmingly failed to change the structure, leadership operation or foreign policy of the U.S. labor movement. And, truthfully, about the only “strategy” that is being proposed today by and for labor

activists in face of this general failure is “more militancy.”

I’m wondering if it is time to “think out of the box,” recognize our failures, and try to come up with something new...?

I’ve been working on a manuscript that examines the difference between union organizing in steel and meat-packing in the Chicago area (including northwest Indiana) between 1933-1955, and how these unions addressed white supremacy and racism in the workplace, union and community. It’s part of an effort to publish my Ph.D. dissertation, which I completed in 2003. I think there’s a lot that

labor activists can learn from this study.

Basically, it is argued that there were two different forms of economic trade unionism developed within the CIO: business unionism and social justice unionism. (In other words, the CIO was not just one glorious crusade of workers, as is often projected by labor activists, but had serious political differences contained within from the beginning.) There were two different conceptualizations of trade unionism: one saw control of the union in the hands of officials and the scope of unionism limited almost exclusively to the

workplace (business unionism), while the other saw control of the union in the hands of the rank and file and the scope of unionism to include the workplace as well as the communities in which workers lived (social justice unionism). Ultimately, the business unionists prevailed, and in 1949-50 expelled most of the social justice unionists—somewhere between 750,000 and 1 million workers. The labor movement has

unionism to new workers appears all but dead.

Yet there are a growing number of workers who are recognizing the need to unionize, and want to create new unions; think of the upsurge among teachers, for one, challenging reactionary state-level politicians and oftentimes current union leaders, as well as various workers' struggles taking place around the country—and most of these new unionists want to create

as to advance the well-being of all of the member unions. In international labor terminology, the AFL-CIO is a labor center.

The number of labor centers internationally varies from one per country (as in the U.S., the UK, Australia, China, Germany, New Zealand, Vietnam) to more than one (Brazil, Canada, France, the Philippines, South Africa, Sweden). It is not uncommon to have three or four labor

One labor center in this country only hurts workers today, and impedes new efforts to unionize

yet to recover from the purges in 1949-50.

We face the consequences of these purges today. Basically, the AFL-CIO is composed of business unionists who think that power to control the organization belongs in the hands of senior elected officials, with the scope of unionism limited to the workplace. Over the past 40 years, these senior elected officials have lurched from one defeat to another, with major victories few and far between. Some unions survive today, largely because they have been able to defend what they have; the idea of expanding

unions that are democratically led by rank and file leaders, who encompass an idea of unionism that extends beyond the workplace to include their various communities. In other words, they seek an organizational outlet other than the established AFL-CIO unions, which generally cannot meet their needs and/or concerns. It's time union activists take this new approach seriously.

For this argument to make sense, we have to divert for a moment, so we can talk about "labor centers." A labor center is a combination of unions, joined together by an overarching organization, so

centers in a single country. And around each labor center are its supporters; together constituting a labor movement.

In the United States, we've generally only had one labor center, although the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) and the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) also served as competing labor centers to the AFL (American Federation of Labor), at least for a while. Ultimately, the AFL has prevailed.

Key to the AFL's domination has been Samuel Gompers's idea that there should

only be one labor center in this country; others were denigrated as “dual” unions. And the AFL has always worked in a determined manner against competing labor centers; it has sought to maintain control over the labor movement—whether this was good or bad for workers.

One labor center in this country only hurts workers today, and impedes new efforts to unionize. The argument is that the AFL-CIO and its current hidebound leadership cannot and will not meet the needs of the new unionism emerging today—and

trying to channel this new unionism into the AFL-CIO will only kill it.

(There are those supporting the possible election of Sara Nelson of the Flight Attendants to be the next President of the AFL-CIO. It appears that her election would be a very positive development. Nonetheless, even if she is elected, the AFL-CIO will still be controlled by the Executive Committee, which is dominated by the men [and a few women] who have so successfully led labor over the past 40 years.)

It is time for those of us who believe in unionism to step up, reject the failed leadership of the AFL-CIO, and try to create a new labor center to which today’s unionists will join. This, it is argued, must be built on the concept of social justice unionism, where the unions in this new labor center will have to be controlled by each union’s rank and file, where all members have equal say in the development of their union, and with a vision that not only includes each workplace, but the union and workers’ communities as well. We need a viable social



We need a viable social justice unionism alternative to today's AFL-CIO
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justice unionism alternative to today's AFL-CIO.

Is this proposal controversial? Undoubtedly. Serious trade unionists will object that adopting a proposal such as this will "split" the labor movement, and there is almost no doubt the AFL-CIO leadership will rail against it

conference in Chicago in April 2020 that we have a wide-ranging discussion of this idea. Should activists then think this proposal is worth exploring further, it is suggested that we elect from the conference membership a body that will be widely representative of all conference

which we can learn, and that we can unite in joint struggle and advance the interests of members of both labor centers—a labor center with unions that can meet the increasing needs of workers today.

Z
Kim Scipes is former elected Chicago Chapter Chair and

...the hope is we can work with the AFL-CIO's unions, who have much experience and knowledge from which we can learn, and that we can unite in joint struggle and advance the interests of members of both labor centers—a labor center with unions that can meet the increasing needs of workers today

for this reason, although AFL-CIO leaders will be more concerned with losing control of the labor movement than meeting the needs of these newly mobilizing workers. This argument cannot withstand much serious scrutiny, however: we haven't had a vibrant labor "movement" for at least 40 years, if not 70, so "splitting" a dead House of Labor does not appear so detrimental. Nonetheless, it is recognized that there is a serious argument here, and discussion and debate is welcomed.

Accordingly, it is proposed that at the Labor Notes

members and will meet after the conference over the next two years to recommend the development of a new labor center and lay the groundwork to advance a firm proposal at the subsequent Labor Notes conference in 2022.

This new labor center is not considered to be antagonistic to the existing unions or to the AFL-CIO, although it is hoped that it will reject federal funding, such as that which funds the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). In fact, the hope is we can work with the AFL-CIO's unions, who have much experience and knowledge from

long-time member of the National Writers Union, UAW #1981. He's previously been a member of the Graphic Communications International Union, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers. He lives and works in Northwest Indiana, teaching at Purdue University Northwest for the past 16 years. He has published three books, and over 225 articles and book reviews, mostly on labor, in the U.S. and around the world. His latest book, *Building Global Labor Solidarity: Lessons from the Philippines, South Africa, Northwestern Europe and the United States*, will be published late this summer. His writings--many with links to the original article--can be accessed at <https://faculty.pnw.edu/kim-scipes/publications/#2>.

Feature



Even more threatening than Sanders's proposals to carry forward New Deal-style policies is his inspiring a popular movement that is steadily engaged in political action and direct activism to change the social order

Photo by Rachael Warriner/Shutterstock.com

Sanders Threatens the Establishment by Inspiring Popular Movements

C.J. Polychroniou interviews Noam Chomsky

C.J. Polychroniou: The impeachment trial of Donald Trump is nearly over, and what a farce it has been—something you had predicted from the start, which is also the reason why you thought that an impeachment inquiry was a rather foolish move on the part of the Democrats. With that in mind, what does this farcical episode tell us

about the contemporary state of U.S. politics, and do you anticipate any political fallout in the 2020 election?

Noam Chomsky: It seemed clear from the outset that the impeachment effort could not be serious, and would end up being another gift by the Democrats to Trump, much as the Mueller affair was. Any doubts about its farcical nature were put to rest by its opening spectacle: Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts struggling to keep a straight face while swearing in senators who solemnly pledged that they would be unmoved by partisan concerns, and at once proceeded—as everyone knew they would—to behave and vote along strictly party lines. Could there be a clearer exhibition of pure farce?

Are the crimes discussed a basis for im-

peachment? Seems so to me. Has Trump committed vastly more serious crimes? That is hardly debatable. What might be debatable is whether he is indeed the most dangerous criminal in human history (which happens to be my personal view). Hitler had been perhaps the leading candidate for this honor. His goal was to rid the German-run world of Jews, Roma, homosexuals and other “deviants,” along with tens of millions of Slav “Untermenschen.” But Hitler was not dedicated with fervor to destroying the prospects of organized human life on Earth in the not-distant future (along with millions of other species).

Trump is. And those who think he doesn’t know what he’s doing haven’t been looking closely.

Is that a wild and ludicrous exaggeration? Or the very simple and apparent truth? It’s



His Magnificence was followed by the quiet and informed comments of a 17-year-old girl instructing the heads of state, CEOs, media leaders and grand intellectuals about what it means to be a responsible adult

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Even more threatening than Sanders's proposals to carry forward New Deal-style policies, I think, is his inspiring a popular movement that is steadily engaged in political action and direct activism to change the social order—a movement of people, mostly young, who have not internalized the norms of liberal democracy

Photo by Rachael Warriner/Shutterstock.com

not difficult to figure out the answer. We've discussed it often before. There is no need to review what is happening on Trump's watch while he devotes every effort to accelerating the race to catastrophe, trailed by such lesser lights as Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and Australia's Scott Morrison.

Every day brings new forebodings. We have just learned, for example, that the gigantic Thwaites Glacier in West Antarctica has been eroding from warm water below. The *Washington Post* describes this as "a troubling finding that could speed its melt in a region with the potential to eventually unleash more than 10 feet of sea-level rise," adding, "Scientists already knew that Thwaites was losing massive amounts of ice—more than 600 billion tons over the past several decades, and most recently as much as 50 billion tons per year." It has now been confirmed, as suspected, that, "this was occurring because a layer

of relatively warmer ocean water, which circles Antarctica below the colder surface layer, had moved closer to shore and begun to eat away at the glaciers themselves, affecting West Antarctica in particular." The chief scientist involved in the study warns that this may signal "an unstoppable retreat that has huge implications for global sea-level rise."

That's today. Tomorrow will be something worse.

What's causing the warmer water? No secret. This is only one of the likely irreversible tipping points that may be reached if "the Chosen One," as he modestly describes himself, is granted another four years to carry out his project of global destruction.

We have just witnessed an extraordinary event at the January Davos meeting of the Masters of the Universe, as they are called; for Adam Smith, they were only "the masters of mankind," but 250 years ago it was just

British merchants and manufacturers.

The conference opened with Trump's oration about what a fabulous creature he is. The encomium was interrupted only by a comment that we should not be "alarmist" about the climate. His Magnificence was followed by the quiet and informed comments of a 17-year old girl instructing the heads of state, CEOs, media leaders and grand intellectuals about what it means to be a responsible adult.

Quite a spectacle.

Trump's war on organized life on Earth is only the barest beginning. More narrowly, in recent days, the Chosen One has issued executive orders ridding the country of the plague of regulations that protect children from mercury poisoning and preserve the country's water supplies and lands, along with other impediments to further enrichment of Trump's primary constituency, extreme wealth and

corporate power.

On the side, he has been casually proceeding to dismantle the last vestiges of the arms control regime that has provided some limited degree of security from terminal nuclear war, eliciting cheers from the military industry. And as we have just learned, the great pacifist who is committed to end interventions "dropped more bombs and other munitions in Afghanistan last year than any other year since documentation began in 2006, Air Force data shows."

He is also ramping up his acts of war—which is what they are—against Iran. I won't even go into his giving Israel what the Israeli press calls "a gift to the right," formally giving the back of his imperial hand to international law, the World Court, the UN Security Council and overwhelming international opinion, while shoring up the Evangelical vote for the 2020



There is no need to review what is happening on Trump's watch while he devotes every effort to accelerating the race to catastrophe

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election. The prerogative of supreme power.

In brief, the list of Trump's crimes is immense, not least the worst crime in human history. But none merit a nod in the impeachment proceedings. This is hardly a novelty; rather the norm. The current proceedings are often compared with Watergate. Nixon's hideous crimes were eliminated from the charges against him despite the efforts of Rep. Robert Frederick Drinan and a few others. The Nixon impeachment charges focused on his illegal acts to harm Democrats.

Any resemblance to the farce that is now winding up? Does it suggest some insight into what motivates the powerful?

Speaking of the 2020 election, the corporate Democratic establishment and the liberal media are once again mobilizing to undermine Bernie Sanders, even though he may very

well be the most electable Democrat. First, can you summarize for us what you perceive to be the core of Sanders's politico-ideological gestalt, and then explain what scares both conservatives and liberals—the possibility of someone like Sanders leading the country?

The core of Sanders's "politico-ideological gestalt" is his long-standing commitment to the interests of the large majority of the population, not the top 0.1 percent (not 1 percent, 0.1 percent) who hold more than 20 percent of the country's wealth, not the very rich who were the prime beneficiaries of the slow recovery from the 2008 disaster caused by financial capital. The U.S. achievement in this regard far surpasses that of other developed countries, so we learn from recently released studies, which show that in the U.S., 65 percent of the growth of the past decade went to



Trump's war on organized life on Earth is only the barest beginning
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Hundreds of young people occupy Representative offices to pressure the new Congress to support a committee for a Green New Deal

Photo by Rachael Warriner/Shutterstock.com

the very rich; next in line was Germany, at 51 percent, then declining sharply. The same studies show that if current trends persist, in the next decade all growth in the U.S. will go to the rich.

The welfare of these sectors has never been Sanders's concern.

The Democratic establishment and liberal media are hardly likely to look kindly on someone who forthrightly proclaims, "I have no use for those—regardless of their political party—who hold some foolish dream of spinning the clock back to days when unorganized labor was a huddled, almost helpless mass.... Only a handful of unreconstructed reactionaries harbor the ugly thought of breaking unions. Only a fool would try to deprive working men

and women of the right to join the union of their choice." By "right to work" laws, for example, or by hiring scabs, or by threatening to ship jobs to Mexico to undermine organizing efforts, to sample the bipartisan political leadership.

That's surely the kind of socialist wild man whom the country is not ready to tolerate.

The wild man in this case is President Dwight Eisenhower, the last conservative president. His remarks are a good illustration of how far the political class has shifted to the right under Clintonite "New Democrats" and the Reagan-Gingrich Republicans. The latter have drifted so far off the political spectrum that they are ranked near neo-fascist parties in the international spectrum, well to the right of

“conservatives.”

Even more threatening than Sanders’s proposals to carry forward New Deal-style policies, I think, is his inspiring a popular movement that is steadily engaged in political action and direct activism to change the social order—a movement of people, mostly young, who have not internalized the norms of liberal democracy: that the public are “ignorant and meddling outsiders” who are to be “spectators, not participants in action,” entitled to push a lever every four years but are then to return to their TV sets and video games while the “responsible men” look after serious matters.

This is a fundamental principle of democracy as expounded by prominent and influential liberal 20th-century American intellectuals, who took cognizance of “the stupidity of the average man” and recognized that we should not be deluded by “democratic dogmatisms about men being the best judges of their own interests.” They are not; we are—the “responsible men,” the “intelligent minority.” The “bewildered herd” must therefore be “put in their place” by “necessary illusions” and “emotionally potent simplifications.” These are among the pronouncements of the most influential 20th century public intellectual, Walter Lippmann, in his “progressive essays on democracy”; Harold Lasswell, one of the founders of modern political science; and Reinhold Niebuhr, the admired “theologian of the (liberal) establishment.” All highly respected Wilson-FDR-Kennedy liberals.

Inspiring a popular movement that violates these norms is a serious attack on democracy, so conceived, an intolerable assault against good order.

I believe we witnessed something similar in the last UK elections in the case of Jeremy Corbyn. Do you agree? And, if so, what does this tell us about liberal democracy, which is

nowadays in serious trouble itself on account of the rise and spread of authoritarianism and the far right in many parts of the world?

There are definite similarities. Corbyn, a decent and honorable man, was subjected to an extraordinary flood of vilification and defamation, which he was unable to confront. At the same time, polls indicated that the policies that he put forth—and that had led to a remarkable victory for Labour in 2017—remained popular. A special feature in the UK was Brexit, a matter I won’t go into here. (My personal opinion, for what it’s worth, is that it is a serious blow to both Britain and the EU, and is likely to cause Britain—or what remains of it—to become even more of a vassal of the U.S. than it has been under Blair’s New Labour and the Tories, whose social and economic policies have caused the country great harm.) Corbyn’s vacillation on the Brexit issue, which became a toxic one, surely contributed to the negative feelings about him that seem to have been a major factor in the electoral disaster for Labour, but it was only one.

As in the case of Sanders, I suspect that the prime reason for the bitter hatred of Corbyn on the part of a very wide spectrum of the British establishment is his effort to turn the Labour Party into a participatory organization that would not leave electoral politics in the hands of the Labour bureaucracy and would proceed beyond the narrow realm of electoral politics to far broader and constant activism and engagement in public affairs.

More generally, much of the world is aflame. As the men of Davos recognized with trepidation at their January meeting, the peasants are coming with their pitchforks: The neoliberal order they have imposed for the past 40 years, while ultra-generous to them and their class, has had a bitter impact on the general population. A leading theme at Davos was that the Masters must declare that they are changing

their stance from service to the rich to attending to the concerns of “stakeholders”—working people and communities. Another theme was that while not “alarmists,” they acknowledge the threat of global warming.

The unstated implication is that there is no need for regulations and other actions about climate change: We Big Boys will take care of it. Greta Thunberg and the other children demonstrating out there can go back to school. And now that we see the flaws in our neoliberal model of capitalism, you can put aside all those disruptive political programs calling for health care, rights of workers, women, the poor. We’re taking care of it, so just go back to your private pursuits, keeping to democratic norms.

As the neoliberal order is visibly collapsing, it is giving rise to “morbid symptoms” (to borrow Gramsci’s famous phrase when the fascist plague was looming). Among these are the spread of authoritarianism and the far right that you mention. More generally, what we are witnessing is quite understandable anger, resentment and contempt for the political institutions that have implemented the neoliberal assault—but also the rise of activist movements that seek to overcome the ills

of global society and to stem and reverse the race to destruction.

The confrontation could hardly have been exhibited more dramatically than by the appearance of Greta Thunberg immediately after the most powerful man in the world—the leader in the race to destruction—had admonished the Masters to disdain the “heirs of yesterday’s foolish fortune tellers” (virtually 100 percent of climate scientists) and to take up his wrecking ball. **Z**

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The unstated implication is that there is no need for regulations and other actions about climate change: We Big Boys will take care of it

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Feature



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Can the World's Second Superpower Rise From the Ashes of Twenty Years of War?

By Meda Benjamin & Nicolas J S Davies

February 15 marks the day, 17 years ago, when global demonstrations against the pending Iraq invasion were so massive that the *New York Times* called world public opinion “the second superpower.” But the U.S. ignored it and invaded Iraq

anyway. So what has become of the momentous hopes of that day?

The U.S. military has not won a war since 1945, unless you count recovering the tiny colonial outposts of Grenada, Panama and Kuwait, but there is one threat it has consistently

outmaneuvered without firing more than a few deadly rifle shots and some tear gas. Ironically, this existential threat is the very one that could peacefully cut it down to size and take away its most dangerous and expensive weapons: its own peace-loving citizens.

During the Vietnam war, young Americans facing a life-and-death draft lottery built a powerful anti-war movement. President Nixon proposed ending the draft as a way to undermine the peace movement, since he believed that young people would stop protesting the war once they were no longer obligated to fight. In 1973, the draft was ended, leaving a volunteer army that insulated the vast majority of Americans from the deadly impact of America's wars.

Despite the lack of a draft, a new anti-war movement—this time with global reach—sprung up in the period between the crimes of 9/11 and the illegal U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The February 15, 2003, protests were the largest demonstrations in hu-

man history, uniting people around the world in opposition to the unthinkable prospect that the U.S. would actually launch its threatened “shock and awe” assault on Iraq. Some 30 million people in 800 cities took part on every continent, including Antarctica. This massive repudiation of war, memorialized in the documentary *We Are Many*, led *New York Times* journalist Patrick E. Tyler to comment that there were now two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world public opinion.

The U.S. war machine demonstrated total disdain for its upstart rival, and unleashed an illegal war based on lies that has now raged on through many phases of violence and chaos for 17 years. With no end in sight to U.S. and allied wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Libya, Syria, Palestine, Yemen and West Africa, and Trump's escalating diplomatic and economic warfare against Iran, Venezuela and North Korea threatening to explode into new wars, where is the second superpower now, when we need it more than ever?



During the Vietnam war, young Americans facing a life-and-death draft lottery built a powerful anti-war movement
Photo by JStone/Shutterstock.com

Since the U.S. assassination of Iran's General Soleimani in Iraq on January 2, the peace movement has reemerged onto the streets, including people who marched in February 2003 and new activists too young to remember a time when the U.S. was not at war. There have been three separate days of protest, one on January 4, another on the 9th and a global day of action on the 25th. The rallies took place in hundreds of cities, but they did not attract nearly the numbers who came out to protest the pending war with Iraq in 2003, or even those of the smaller rallies and vigils that continued as the Iraq war spiraled out of control until at least 2007.

Our failure to stop the U.S. war on Iraq in 2003 was deeply discouraging. But the number of people active in the U.S. anti-war movement shrank even more after the 2008 election of Barack Obama. Many people did not want to protest the nation's first black president, and many, including the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, really believed he would be a "peace president."

While Obama reluctantly honored Bush's agreement with the Iraqi government to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq and he signed the Iran nuclear deal, he was far from a peace president. He oversaw a new doctrine of covert and proxy war that substantially reduced U.S. military casualties, but unleashed an escalation of the war in Afghanistan, a campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria that destroyed entire cities, a ten-fold increase in CIA drone strikes on Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, and bloody proxy wars in Libya and Syria that rage on today. In the end, Obama spent more on the military and dropped more bombs on more countries than Bush did. He also refused to hold Bush and his cronies responsible for their war crimes.

Obama's wars were no more successful than Bush's in restoring peace or stability to any of those countries or improving the lives of their

people. But Obama's "disguised, quiet, media-free approach" to war made the U.S. state of endless war much more politically sustainable. By reducing U.S. casualties and waging war with less fanfare, he moved America's wars farther into the shadows and gave the American public an illusion of peace in the midst of endless war, effectively disarming and dividing the peace movement.

Obama's secretive war policy was backed up by a vicious campaign against any brave whistleblowers who tried to drag it out into the light. Jeffrey Sterling, Thomas Drake, Chelsea Manning, John Kiriakou, Edward Snowden and now Julian Assange have been prosecuted and jailed under unprecedented new interpretations of the WWI-era Espionage Act.

With Donald Trump in the White House, we hear Republicans making the same excuses for Trump—who ran on an anti-war platform—that Democrats made for Obama. First, his supporters accept lip service about wanting to end wars and bring troops home as revealing what the president really wants to do, even as he keeps escalating the wars. Second, they ask us to be patient because, despite all the real world evidence, they are convinced he is working hard behind the scenes for peace. Third, in a final cop-out that undermines their other two arguments, they throw up their hands and say that he is "only" the president, and the Pentagon or "deep state" is too powerful for even him to tame.

Obama and Trump supporters alike have used this shaky tripod of political unaccountability to give the man behind the desk where the buck used to stop an entire deck of "get out of jail free" cards for endless war and war crimes.

Obama and Trump's "disguised, quiet, media-free approach" to war has inoculated America's wars and militarism against the virus of democracy, but new social movements

have grown up to tackle problems closer to home. The financial crisis led to the rise of the Occupy Movement, and now the climate crisis and America's entrenched race and immigration problems have all provoked new grassroots movements. Peace advocates have been encouraging these movements to join the call for major Pentagon cuts, insisting that the hundreds of billions saved could help fund everything from Medicare for All to the Green New Deal to free college tuition.

A few sectors of the peace movement have been showing how to use creative tactics and build diverse movements. The movement for Palestinians' human and civil rights includes students, Muslim and Jewish groups, as well as black and indigenous groups fighting similar struggles here at home. Also inspirational are campaigns for peace on the Korean peninsula led by Korean Americans, such as Wom-

en Cross the DMZ, which has brought together women from North Korea, South Korea and the United States to show the Trump administration what real diplomacy looks like.

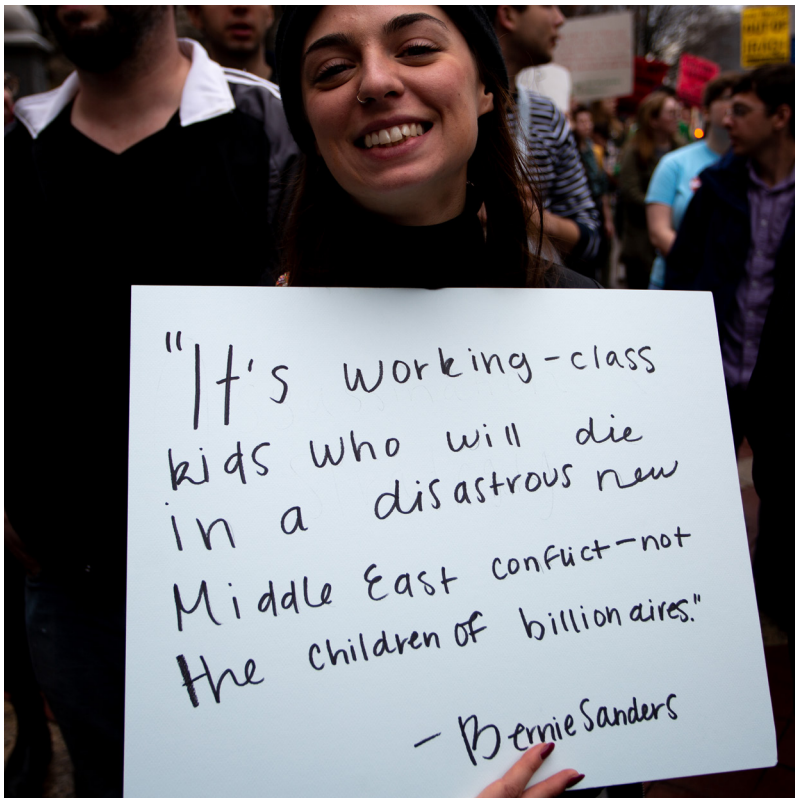
There have also been successful popular efforts pushing a reluctant Congress to take anti-war positions. For decades, Congress has been only too happy to leave warmaking to the president, abrogating its constitutional role as the only power authorized to declare war. Thanks to public pressure, there has been a remarkable shift. In 2019, both houses of Congress voted to end U.S. support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen and to ban arms sales to Saudi Arabia for the war in Yemen, although President Trump vetoed both bills.

Now Congress is working on bills to explicitly prohibit an unauthorized war on Iran. These bills prove that public pressure can move Congress, including a Republican-dom-



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Photo by John Gomez/Shutterstock.com



A new president like Bernie Sanders in the White House would create a new opening for peace
Photo by Johnny Silvercloud/Shutterstock.com

inated Senate, to reclaim its constitutional powers over war and peace from the executive branch.

Another bright light in Congress is the pioneering work of first-term Congressperson Ilhan Omar, who recently laid out a series of bills called Pathway to PEACE that challenge our militaristic foreign policy. While her bills will be hard to get passed in Congress, they lay out a marker for where we should be headed. Omar's office, unlike many others in Congress, actually works directly with grassroots organizations that can push this vision forward.

The presidential election offers an opportunity to push the anti-war agenda. The most effective and committed anti-war champion in the race is Bernie Sanders. The popularity of his call for getting the U.S. out of its imperi-

al interventions and his votes against 84 percent of military spending bills since 2013 are reflected not only in his poll numbers but also in the way other Democratic candidates are rushing to take similar positions. All now say the U.S. should rejoin the Iran nuclear deal; all have criticized the "bloated" Pentagon budget, despite regularly voting for it; and most have promised to bring U.S. troops home from the greater Middle East.

So, as we look to the future in this election year, what are our chances of reviving the world's second superpower and ending America's wars?

Absent a major new war, we are unlikely to see big demonstrations in the streets. But two decades of endless war have created a strong anti-war sentiment among the public.

A 2019 Pew Research Center poll found that 62 percent of Americans said the war in Iraq was not worth fighting and 59 percent said the same for the war in Afghanistan.

On Iran, a September 2019 University of Maryland poll showed that a mere one-fifth of Americans said the U.S. "should be prepared to go to war" to achieve its goals in Iran, while three-quarters said that U.S. goals do not warrant military intervention. Along with the Pentagon's assessment of how disastrous a war with Iran would be, this public sentiment fueled global protests and condemnation that have temporarily forced Trump to dial down his military escalation and threats against Iran.

So, while our government's war propaganda has convinced many Americans that we are powerless to stop its catastrophic wars, it has

failed to convince most Americans that we are wrong to want to. As on other issues, activism has two main hurdles to overcome: first to convince people that something is wrong; and secondly to show them that, by working together to build a popular movement, we can do something about it.

The peace movement's small victories demonstrate that we have more power to challenge U.S. militarism than most Americans realize. As more peace-loving people in the U.S. and across the world discover the power they really have, the second superpower we glimpsed briefly on February 15, 2003 has the potential to rise stronger, more committed and more determined from the ashes of two decades of war.

A new president like Bernie Sanders in the White House would create a new opening for peace. But as on many domestic issues, that opening will only bear fruit and overcome the opposition of powerful vested interests if

there is a mass movement behind it every step of the way. If there is a lesson for peace-loving Americans in the Obama and Trump presidencies, it is that we cannot just walk out of the voting booth and leave it to a champion in the White House to end our wars and bring us peace. In the final analysis, it really is up to us. Please join us. **Z**

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Medea Benjamin protesting war with Iran
Photo by Maria Oswalt/Shutterstock.com

Feature



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Women and Trauma in the Trump/Putin Era

By Andrea Mazzarino

Last month, as hundreds of thousands of people showed up for the Women's March in Washington, DC, a few miles from my home, I was at a karate dojo testing for my first belt. My fellow prac-

titioners, ranging in age from five into their seventies, looked on as I hammered my fist through a two-inch piece of wood. The words of one of the black belts there echoed in my head. "Imagine the board is Trump," he'd

whispered to me, grinning, aware that not everyone in our dojo shared his views. When I split that board, everyone clapped.

Despite pride in that small achievement, I bit my lip in shame, knowing that I should have been at that march with my two children. They, after all, are going to inherit this gender-unequal world of ours, presently ruled by our infamously pussy-grabbing president, a world that seems ever less hospitable, despite the heightened awareness that the #MeToo movement has brought to it.

Women still earn about 79 cents on the male dollar (62 cents if you're a black woman). One in 5 of us will be raped in our lifetimes (compared with one in 72 men). According to the Centers for Disease Control, homicide ranks fifth among the most common causes of death for women aged 20 to 44, with a majority of us killed by intimate partners. A 2018 survey found that 81 percent of women in the U.S. had experienced sexual harassment in some form at the hands (often literally) of colleagues or supervisors. The recent damning report on the harassment and bullying of Victoria's Secret employees is a case in point.

At the rate things are going, the prospects for personal security seem pretty dim not just for me in the years to come but for my three-year-old daughter, who—my guess—will have a better chance of feeling safe if she comes to the dojo with me, rather than holding an anti-Trump placard under a gray January sky.

Mind you, I'm hardly indifferent to the present degradation of our anything-but-all-American world. As a co-founder of Brown University's Costs of War Project and a military spouse, I've written often enough about the importance of bearing witness to the world's horrors and made an effort to highlight spikes in gender violence and also the burdens shouldered by female caretakers in the sorts of U.S. military communities I've been living in these last years.

Over the past two decades, I've also traveled to Russia, where I researched gender discrimination, violence, and other human rights violations against the country's most vulnerable citizens. Now, as a therapist-in-training with veterans, military families, and immigrants and refugees from around the world, many of them survivors of violence, I struggle with my



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own sense of hopelessness amid a barrage of stories about bloodshed, sexual outrages, and racism, as well as the specter of a climbing suicide rate in this country.

Toward the end of President Donald Trump's first year in office, I found myself in modest despair and was reminded of the famous French Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire's advice to "tend my own small patch of garden"—even as I tried to do my own small bit to at least record the inhumanity now taking place on a global scale on a distinctly endangered planet. I even started to repost on a social media apolitical mommy blog articles suggesting that being a stay-at-home mom was the most impactful way to change the world. At the time, I didn't truly believe such sentiments, but I had my doubts as well about changing a world that seemed to be going from bad to worse.

Just a Bunch of Women's Stories—Insights from Russia

In Russia during the mid-2000s, when the chaos of the post-Soviet 1990s gave way to the authoritarian, pro-childbirth Putin era, I spent several years as an anthropology doctoral student studying gender discrimination and violence among that country's white-collar female workforce.

One winter day, I sat at a St. Petersburg café sipping tea with a young female manager of a Russian gasoline company. After I'd heard her stories of being asked to wear short skirts to work, getting attacked by male colleagues during business trips to Europe, and being paid less than half of what her male colleagues made, she urged me to ask other women I interviewed about their hobbies.

I nodded for her to continue. "I do martial arts—karate, aikido," she said. "You should try it. There are times when you need to feel strong."

I barely took in those comments of hers. The notion of writing a dissertation about hobbies felt preposterous. There were so many more



A 2018 survey found that 81 percent of women in the U.S. had experienced sexual harassment in some form at the hands (often literally) of colleagues or supervisors

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"I know what it's like to live with such a leader"
Photo by Diego G Diaz/Shutterstock.com

important things to focus on in a society where the repression of organizing efforts was intensifying through bureaucratic restrictions and thuggish intimidation.

I would call the offices of women's rights groups in Moscow and St. Petersburg and find that the numbers were out of order. A woman who had started a profitable business and also used it as a home for a small advocacy group against sexual harassment arrived one day to find its windows smashed, her equipment stolen, and "whore" spray-painted across a wall.

One day, almost on a whim, I decided to visit an aikido class in St. Petersburg with a woman in my study who'd also been singing that martial art's praises. It turned out to be full of women. As the students there rolled, threw one another, and ran for conditioning, their instructors reminded them that, in everything they did, they had to project "strength and a will to live."

Increasingly, I found myself asking women about their "hobbies" and, increasingly, I

came to see martial arts, yoga, traveling, and in several cases walking on hot coals—activities that Russian women loosely grouped under the term "self-development" or samorazvitie—as essential to the task of toughening oneself against a government determined to crush women's bodily integrity. It was a government that propagandized for heterosexual families, but showed not the slightest interest in protecting women from husbands and in-laws who beat them or colleagues and employers who attacked them sexually at work.

Back in the United States, at my dissertation defense, one of my committee members dismissed much of my work as "just a bunch of women's stories." How true. And yet, even then, I didn't grasp the full significance of what I'd seen.

What We Got from the Russians

On November 8, 2016, about six years after earning my doctorate and eight months



I was about to give birth to a daughter then and we had elected a president who, months earlier, had been outed for boasting about grabbing women's private parts without their consent

Photo by Joanna Will/Shutterstock.com

pregnant with my daughter, I half-dozed on the couch as a U.S. map on my TV screen turned an ever-more Trumpian red. My mind spontaneously returned to memories of Facebook ads with pictures whose lighting emphasized every wrinkle on Hillary Clinton's face, highlighting her grimaces, portraying her with black Xs across that face. Those ads sparked a sense of familiarity in me. They reminded me of Russian smear-campaign images, but I hadn't made the link with Election 2016 until that jolting moment of Donald Trump's victory.

A few months later, my husband reminded me that I sat up then and in my pregnancy-induced drowsiness said, "I feel like we've been attacked."

The next morning, depression settling in, I received an email from an old Russian friend and fellow feminist scholar who offered me her sympathy: "I know what it's like to live with such a leader," she wrote, referring, of course, to Russian President Vladimir Pu-

tin. "You have the same problems that we do now."

Nothing in my own experience, of course, bears much relationship to the magnitude of fear, financial insecurity, and lack of social protection against violence that many of my Russian colleagues face in their daily lives. Yet so long after reading my friend's email, I'm beginning to see just what she meant.

When you bear witness to the horrors of this world, when you know that your mind and body and those of the small children in your care are vulnerable to such horrors, and when the leader your country has elected is not only unlikely to guard against them but may sanction them, it can take a toll on both mind and body. I was about to give birth to a daughter then and we had elected a president who, months earlier, had been outed for boasting about grabbing women's private parts without their consent. What would the men in my daughter's generation grow up thinking was okay?



From my own work with female survivors of rape, I knew that comments insulting women's personalities and intelligence existed on the same continuum with physical attacks

Photo by Rena Schild/Shutterstock.com

How the Military Protects Its Women

In my own community—my husband is a submarine officer in the Navy—it was only about a decade ago that women were first allowed to serve on such ships. In the wake of that decision, I would find myself looking on in disgust during informal ceremonies meant to bid farewell to certain officers and initiate others, as officers joked about women's hormonal changes and our capacity to get pregnant. For servicemen, gag gifts like fake-pregnancy tests and Aleve (for imaginary PMS) began to proliferate along with the suggestion that their femininity made them implicitly less reliable.

Young women who were junior submariners sat silently through such moments and no one

(including me) said anything for fear of sanction. Among service members I spoke with, the phrase “I ripped him another asshole” was a common way to denote verbal discipline for mistakes made on a Navy ship. I cringed every time I heard of it being used, having spoken to women (and men, too) to whom this had literally happened during horrific acts of violence.

From my own work with female survivors of rape, I knew that comments insulting women's personalities and intelligence existed on the same continuum with physical attacks. Both served to intimidate us and devalue our humanity. A May 2019 *New York Times* article, citing Department of Defense data, reported that there had been a 50 percent increase in sexual assault on women in uniform in the previous 2 years.

How the Impossible Becomes Possible

It's a hallmark of trauma that you think of one form of violence and it calls to mind others of a like nature. In my research for the Costs of War Project on America's never-ending conflicts and in co-writing the book *War and Health: The Medical Consequences of the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, my senses grew ever more attuned to some of the worst of the world's horrors.

In the stories of women I met and in the research I did, there were always maimed and suffering women's bodies. Feeding my infant daughter, I would skim the news of armed conflict around the world as part of my work compiling a report on war and the way it was destroying the lives and bodies of civilians in the Greater Middle East and beyond. I remember, for example, reading a story about a woman in the Democratic Republic of the

Congo whose nine-year-old daughter had been raped by a militia group and was later held by the police. I had nightmares in which I was that mother.

That summer of 2017 as I cared for two toddlers on my own, a haze of wildfire smoke began to curl through the foothills of the Cascade Mountains and into the kitchen of my Pacific Northwest home. Under the circumstances, how could I not have thought about the ways in which crises that had once seemed impossibly far away could suddenly seem both possible and close at hand?

Weeks after that year's July Fourth, my husband and I were jolted awake when an explosion broke the silence of the midnight sky. Someone had set off fireworks, startling both of us—but him far more than me. I wondered then what he had seen and heard in his life apart from me that he couldn't talk about. We took each other's hands. "I know it was just



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fireworks,” I said, “but somehow I feel less safe. Like, if something happened, no one would care.” He nodded: “I know,” he said, half-soothingly.

To claim that living a privileged life in the United States while learning about violence in far away places constitutes “trauma” will seem understandably laughable to many. Yet, as a social-work professor told me that summer, if you’re empathizing with others to the extent that you should be, there is a remarkably small psychological difference (at least in the moment) between bearing witness and experiencing an event yourself.

Soon after the unexpected July fireworks, needing to regain a sense of efficacy, I located the nearest aikido dojo and signed up to start practicing again. Within a few weeks, I found myself paying better attention to patients than I had ever thought possible. I soon accepted a proposal to return to Russia and produce a documentary on the experiences of people with disabilities living in institutions there.

At one point, I told a woman at the dojo who had worked as a nurse with female veterans experiencing complex trauma that I was growing increasingly nervous about the new Trump administration’s policies. In response, she pointed to the knot in her belt at the center of her abdomen, which aikido instructors claim roots you to the ground when you are attacked, and said, “This helps, you know.”

Cultivating Your Garden in a Trumpian Era

The advantage of activities like aikido (even if they are very much on life’s sidelines) is that you can have an experience increasingly hard to find in this Trumpian world of ours. In such places, people who wouldn’t normally agree on much of anything can still support one another. In our dojo, there were Trump supporters, staunch Democrats, indig-

enous people, blacks, whites—all practicing together, offering each other hands-on help when someone was ill or desperately short on childcare. I thought: Wasn’t this just the kind of coexistence without agreement that the Russian authorities were trying to undo in 2016 and the Trump administration is trying to undo now?

For years after the momentous 2011 protests in Russia against election fraud, I asked friends who had been in Moscow and St. Petersburg about their motivations then. One replied: “What were we not marching for?” Another said: “We didn’t want the same things.” For example, a considerable number of my Russian colleagues wanted protection from sexual harassment, discrimination, or violence against LGBTQ people who had faced death threats for acts no less basic than just walking down the street as themselves. Among my friends, the only thing that didn’t seem to fly in the protest movement of that moment was adhering to simplistic party lines that excluded difference.

Recently, I visited a training session led by a team of psychologists and therapists who go into combat zones to offer group-crisis therapy to survivors of wartime violence and sexual assault. One of those psychologists asked us to begin moving to pop music that reflected different emotions from sadness to hope. She argued that it was a way to meld the physical, cognitive, and emotional. If you felt sad, then you should show it with your body, but also choose music that allows you to move to different emotions entirely. I’ve used similar techniques with my clients, some of whom have found them to be useful indeed, particularly in group settings.

It’s not that such acts of self-care or sideline hobbies will solve this world’s desperate and deepening problems. It’s that those problems are growing so overwhelming under this president that shoring up your own defenses is it-

self a noteworthy achievement.

Voltaire, after all, urged his readers to cultivate their gardens at a time of government-sponsored torture and intolerance across Europe. Arguably, his suggestions reflected less a mark of skepticism about the possibility of changing our world for the better than a recognition that basic human freedoms—like bodily integrity—are deeply threatened and must be protected.

Any community built on respect and compassion for human rights, any community that allows its citizens to cultivate their own gardens, is well worth our time. **Z**

Andrea Mazzarino, a *TomDispatch* regular, co-founded Brown University's Costs of War Project. She is an activist and social worker interested in the health impacts of war. She has held various clinical, research, and advocacy positions, includ-

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This article first appeared on *TomDispatch.com*, a weblog of the Nation Institute, which offers a steady flow of alternate sources, news, and opinion from Tom Engelhardt, long time editor in publishing, co-founder of the American Empire Project, author of *The End of Victory Culture*, as of a novel, *The Last Days of Publishing*. His latest book is *A Nation Unmade By War* (Haymarket Books).



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Feature



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Toward A New Universal Declaration Of Human Rights, I

By Boaventura de Sousa Santos

Baruch de Spinoza, the great 17th century philosopher, wrote that the two basic human emotions (or “affections,” as he called them) are fear and hope, and he suggested that a balance needs to be struck between the two, because fear unmin-

gled with hope leads to despair and hope unmingled with fear can lead to destructive self-confidence. This very idea can be applied to contemporary societies, especially at a time when, what with cyberspace, instant interpersonal digital communications, the massification of industrial entertainment and mass

The global social division of fear and hope is so unequal that a number of phenomena that used to be unthinkable less than 30 years ago now strike us as being the ordinary features of a new normal

customization of commercial and political microtargeting, collective sentiment is becoming more and more “like” individual sentiments, even if it is still made up of selective aggregates. That is why identification with what you hear or read is so immediate these days (“it is what I think”—even if you have never really thought about “it” before), as is also the case with loathing (“I knew I had reasons to hate it”—even if you have never really hated “it” before). Thus, collective sentiment easily becomes invented memory, somewhere in the future of the past of individuals. The only reason this has become possible, of course, is that, in the absence of any alternative, the degradation of the material conditions of life makes you vulnerable to reassuring ratifications of the status quo.

Once we convert hope and fear into collective sentiment, we come to the conclusion that there may never have been such an unequal global distribution of fear and hope. The vast majority of the world’s population live in fear—fear of hunger, war, violence, disease, employers, job loss or the likelihood of never finding a job, fear of the next drought or the next flood. Almost invariably, that fear is experienced without the least bit of hope that something can be done to make things better. In contrast, a tiny portion of the world’s population lives in such an excess of hope that they seem utterly devoid of fear. They are not afraid of any enemies because they deem the

latter to be either destroyed or disarmed; they are not afraid of the uncertainties of the future because they are well insured against every possible risk; they are not afraid of the uncertainties at home because they can move to any other country or continent at any moment (and are even looking into the possibility of occupying other planets); they are not afraid of violence because they have security experts at their service, along with sophisticated alarm systems, electrified walls and private armies.

The global social division of fear and hope is so unequal that a number of phenomena that used to be unthinkable less than 30 years ago now strike us as being the ordinary features of a new normal. Workers “accept” being more and more exploited through labor, with no rights whatsoever; young entrepreneurs “confuse” autonomy with self-enslavement; racialized populations are confronted with racist prejudices, often on the part of supposed non-racists; women and LGBTQ people continue to be the victims of gender-based violence, notwithstanding all the achievements of feminist and anti-homophobic movements; and non-believers as well as believers of the “wrong” religions are the victims of the worst forms of fundamentalism. At the political level, democracy as the rule of the many for the benefit of the many tends to be turned into rule of the few for the benefit of the few; democratic normalcy allows itself to be infiltrated by the fascist-leaning state of exception, at the

same time that the judicial system, understood to be the empire of the law for the protection of the weak against the arbitrary power of the strong, gradually turns into a legal war waged by the powerful against the oppressed and by the fascists against the democrats.

It is imperative to change this state of affairs, lest life become utterly unbearable for the vast majority of humankind. The moment the only freedom left for that vast majority is the freedom to be miserably destitute, we will be face to face with the misery of freedom. In order to get out of such hell, seemingly programmed by a voracious and quite unintelligent design, the unequal distribution of fear and hope needs to be altered. It is imperative that the vast majorities regain some hope, and for that to happen it is imperative that the small

minorities filled with excessive hope (caused by their not fearing the resistance of those who have but fear) feel fear again. This will require many ruptures and struggles at the social, political, cultural, epistemological, subjective and intersubjective level. The last century started off feeling optimistic that ruptures with fear and struggles for hope were at hand and that they would be successful. Initially, that optimism went by the initiatory names of socialism and communism. These were later joined by a new constellation of names, such as republicanism, secularism and laicism. As the century progressed, other names and phrases came along, such as liberation from colonial rule, self-determination, democracy, human rights, women's liberation and emancipation, etc. In this first half of the 21st cen-



The judicial system, understood to be the empire of the law for the protection of the weak against the arbitrary power of the strong, gradually turns into a legal war waged by the powerful against the oppressed and by the fascists against the democrats

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It is imperative that the vast majorities regain some hope, and for that to happen it is imperative that the small minorities filled with excessive hope (caused by their not fearing the resistance of those who have but fear) feel fear again

tury, we live in the midst of the ruins of many of those names. The first two seem, at best, relegated to history books, sunk into oblivion at worst. The rest lie, if not disfigured, then at least benumbed by the accumulation of as many defeats as they had victories. This is why the ruptures and struggles against the despicably unequal distribution of fear and hope are bound to be a gigantic task, in view of how fragile all the tools at our disposal are. In fact, this discrepancy is itself a manifestation of today's imbalance between fear and hope. The struggle against the imbalance must start by making use of the very tools that mirror the imbalance. Only through successful struggles against the imbalance will it be possible to beckon to the vast majorities with the spread of hope and the dwindling of fear.

When foundations sink, they turn into ruins. When there seems to be nothing but ruins around you, the only choice left for you is to search among the ruins, looking not only for the memory of what used to be better, but first and foremost for how to disidentify yourself from whatever it was that, in the design of the foundations, made the whole edifice so fragile. The process consists in turning dead ruins into living ones, and it shall have as many dimensions as is required by a forward-looking socio-archaeology. At this start of a new year, let us begin with human rights. Human rights have a dual genealogy. In the course of their long history since the 16th century, they have

successively (and sometimes simultaneously) served to legitimize Eurocentric, capitalist and colonialist oppression and to legitimize the struggles against that very oppression. But they have always been much more an instrument of oppression than an instrument in the struggle against oppression. Hence their contribution to today's situation of extreme inequality in the global division of fear and hope. In the middle of the last century, after Europe was ravaged by two wars whose effects had an impact across the globe due to colonialism, human rights reached a high point with the promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was to provide the ideological underpinnings of the work carried out by the United Nations. On December 10 of last year, the Declaration celebrated its 71st anniversary. This is not the place to embark on a detailed analysis of the declaration, which was far from universal in the first place (it is actually very much Eurocentric, both culturally and politically), but which has gradually come to stand for a global narrative of human dignity.

It can be said that from 1948 to 1989 human rights were mostly an instrument of the cold war, though this remained a minority view for quite some time. The hegemonic rhetoric of human rights was used by Western democratic governments as a way of stressing capitalism's superiority vis-à-vis the type of communism of the socialist bloc formed by the Soviet

The hegemonic rhetoric of human rights was used by Western democratic governments as a way of stressing capitalism's superiority vis-à-vis the type of communism of the socialist bloc formed by the Soviet and Chinese regimes

and Chinese regimes. According to that rhetoric, human rights violations occurred exclusively within this bloc and in every country that sided with it or came under its sway. Violations in “friendly” Western countries, over which the U.S. increasingly extended its own sway, were either ignored or silenced. For a long time, Portuguese fascism benefited from this “sociology of absences,” as did Indonesia when it invaded and occupied East Timor, or Israel from the beginning of its colonial occupation of Palestine to the present. Generally speaking, European colonialism was for a long time the main beneficiary of this sociology of absences. Capitalism’s moral superiority over socialism was built in this manner, with the active collaboration of the socialist parties of the Western world. This process was not free of contradictions.

Throughout this period, human rights were often invoked by social organizations and movements in capitalist countries and countries under U.S. influence, as a form of resistance against egregious violations of those rights. At the international level, imperialist interventions by the United Kingdom and the United States in the Middle East and by the United States in Latin America throughout the 20th century were never considered to be human rights violations, in spite of the fact that numerous human rights activists sacrificed their lives to defend them. On the other hand, the political struggles waged in many coun-

tries, and in North Atlantic capitalist countries in particular, have gradually expanded the number of human rights, adding social, economic and cultural rights to the list of civil and political rights. Thus, there emerged a divide between those (the liberal camp) who prioritized civil and political over all other rights, and those (the socialist or social democratic camp) who gave priority to economic and social rights or the indivisibility of human rights.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was viewed as the unconditional triumph of human rights. However, subsequent international politics showed that the human rights had fallen along with the socialist bloc. From then on, the form of global capitalism that had been establishing itself since the 1980s (neoliberalism and global financial capital) fostered an increasingly narrow narrative of human rights. It fought against social and economic rights at first, and now, at a time when economic freedom has gained priority over all other freedoms and the far right is on the rise, even civil and political rights—and liberal democracy with them—are being challenged as obstacles to capitalist growth. These developments have confirmed the connection between the hegemonic conception of human rights and the cold war.

In view of all this, we are faced with two paradoxical and disturbing conclusions and a very demanding challenge. The supposed his-

Human rights have ceased to be a conditionality in the context of international relations; thus, rather than subjects of human rights, individuals and peoples have, at best, been reduced to objects of human rights rhetoric

toric triumph of human rights is leading to an unprecedented degradation of the expectations of a decent life for the majority of the world's population. Human rights have ceased to be a conditionality in the context of international relations; thus, rather than subjects of human rights, individuals and peoples have, at best, been reduced to objects of human rights rhet-

oric. As for the challenge, it can be phrased in the following terms: Is it still possible to turn human rights into living ruins, a tool for turning despair into hope? I certainly think so. In my next column I will seek to salvage the seeds of hope inhabiting the living ruins of human rights. Z



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Feature



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Trump Betrays His Promise to Protect and Fight for American Workers

By Lawrence Wittner

Campaigning for the presidency in 2016, Donald Trump promised that, if he was elected, “American worker[s] will finally have a president who will protect them and fight for them.” Has he kept this promise? When it comes to protecting workers’ health and safety, his administration has been

Once in office, Trump packed the leadership of U.S. regulatory agencies with pro-corporate zealots, leading to predictable results

a disaster. Once in office, Trump packed the leadership of U.S. regulatory agencies with pro-corporate zealots, leading to predictable results. They repealed an Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) rule requiring employers to keep accurate records of injuries, repealed a rule requiring that federal contractors follow safety and labor laws, and withdrew an OSHA policy allowing workers to participate in OSHA inspections. In addition, as the AFL-CIO noted, the Trump administration targeted job safety rules for toxic chemicals, mine examinations, and child labor protections for destruction. It also sharply reduced the number of OSHA inspectors. As of 2019, only 875 were enforcing health and safety regulations nationwide—the lowest level in the agency’s half-century of operation.

Meanwhile, although Trump bragged in June 2019 that the wages of American workers “are rising at the fastest rate in many decades,” this claim is far from the truth. In fact, wages rose faster only a few years before, under his predecessor. Furthermore, an examination of what economists call “real wages”—wages offset by inflation—reveals that they have remained remarkably stagnant during the Trump era. As the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics later reported, “real” average weekly earnings of American workers rose during 2019 by just one-tenth of 1 percent.

The wage stagnation of the Trump era is particularly hard on America’s vast number of

low-paid workers. According to a study by the Brookings Institution appearing in late 2019, 44 percent of U.S. workers (53 million Americans) were employed in low-wage jobs that paid median wages of \$18,000 a year. The writers of the report concluded that “nearly half of all workers earn wages that are not enough, on their own, to promote economic security.” Moreover, as data gathered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates, the percentage of low-wage workers has grown dramatically. Naturally, many of these workers have been forced, by economic necessity, to work two—and sometimes three—jobs to survive.

The Trump administration bears considerable responsibility for this impoverishment of American workers. It has consistently opposed raising the starvation-level federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, set in 2009. Indeed, Trump opposes establishing any federal wage minimum, and his GOP minions have blocked a minimum wage increase passed in 2019 by the Democratic-controlled House from being introduced in the Senate. In addition, the Trump administration stymied a scheduled pay raise for federal workers and gutted Obama administration rules that made millions of Americans eligible to receive overtime pay for their overtime work.

Trump has also championed measures to deprive American workers of major healthcare and pension benefits that they have funded through their tax payments. Although, during

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his 2015-16 campaign, Trump promised never to cut Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, he has repeatedly sought to do so. On February 8, 2020, he again insisted that his new federal budget “will not be touching your Social Security or Medicare.” But, only two days later, Trump unveiled a budget that called for cutting Medicare by half a trillion dollars, Medicaid by \$900 billion, and Social Security by \$24 billion.

The Trump administration has also been waging an assault upon labor unions, which

provide the major organizational muscle defending the rights of America’s workers. Thanks to Trump’s anti-labor appointments to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), an agency established in the 1930s to guarantee fair treatment for workers and their unions, it has become ever more difficult for unions to operate. The NLRB has issued rulings constraining how and where workers can organize and protest, gerrymandering bargaining units to the benefit of employers, permitting corporations to fire workers in re-



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In recent decades, as an unrelenting corporate attack has crippled unions in the private sector, big business, the wealthy, and their rightwing allies in public office have turned to destroying the lingering strength of public sector unions

taliation for union activity, and narrowing the right to strike. Given the NLRB's pro-corporate bias, even existing labor organizations—such as unions comprised of graduate student workers—are now being threatened with loss of collective bargaining rights.

In recent decades, as an unrelenting corporate attack has crippled unions in the private sector, big business, the wealthy, and their rightwing allies in public office have turned to destroying the lingering strength of public sector unions. Working toward this goal, they have promoted “right-to-work” laws on the state and national level. These laws, by eliminating the obligation of workers to pay for the union representation they receive, encourage the emergence of millions of “free riders” and, thereby, provide an effective way to undermine unions. Shortly after Trump's inauguration, House Republicans introduced the National Right to Work Act and, within days, the White House announced the new president's support for “right-to-work” laws.

Although anti-union forces never managed to push the National Right to Work Act through Congress, they did secure an important victory. After they brought the “right-to-work” case of *Janus v. AFSCME* before the

Supreme Court, Trump's Justice Department joined the case with an anti-union brief. Then, thanks to Trump's appointment of Neil Gorsuch, a rightwing ideologue, to the Supreme Court, the court issued a 5-4 ruling, overturning precedent and declaring that workers could refuse to pay dues to public sector unions representing them.

In the aftermath of this decision, public sector unions worked vigorously—and, in most cases, successfully—to convince workers to pay dues voluntarily. But their membership did decline. Consequently, despite opinion polls showing that about half of America's non-unionized workers want to join a union, the *Janus* decision and the other anti-labor measures of the Trump administration have combined to reduce union membership in the United States to a record low of 10.3 percent.

As a *New York Times* editorial concluded, Trump, as president, has sent “a clear message to American workers: You're on your own.”

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