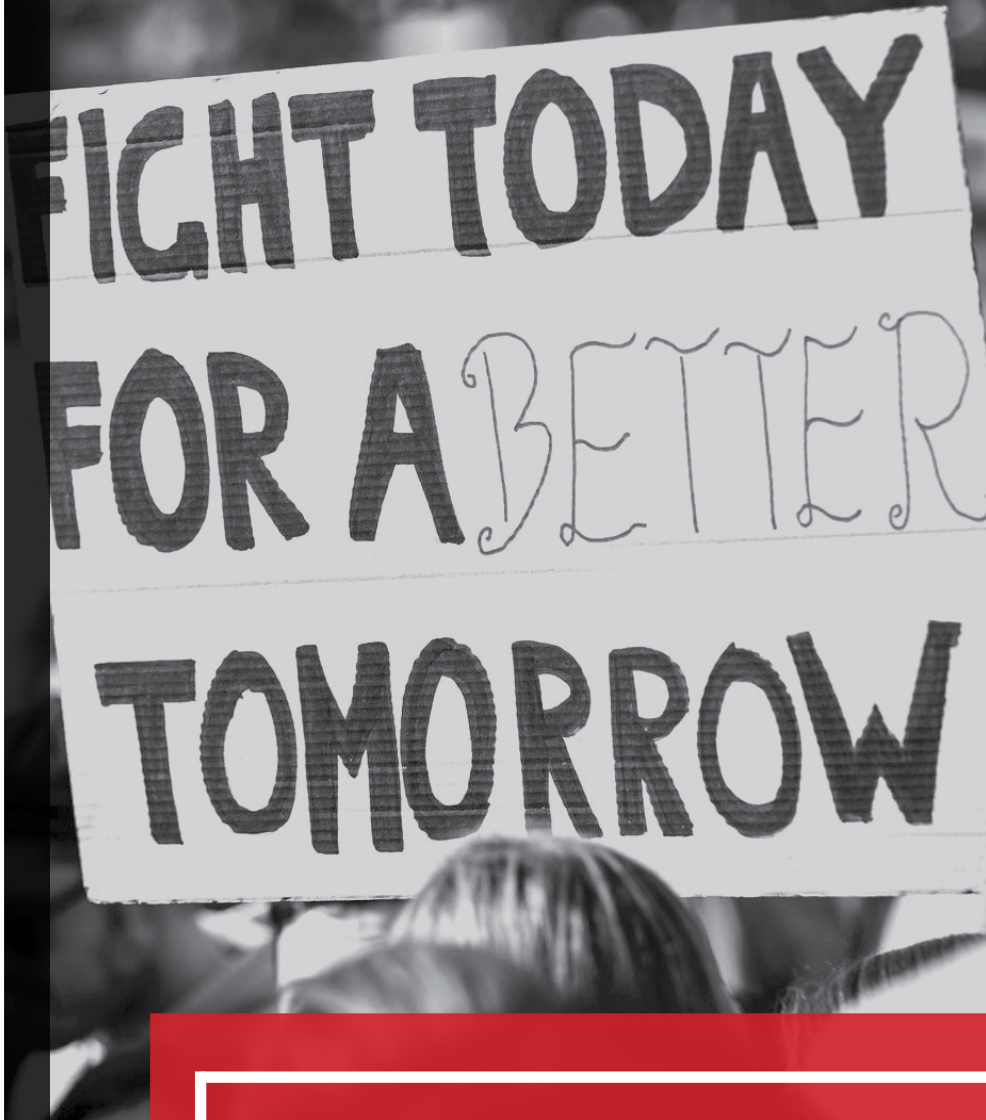




MAGAZINE

JUNE 2023



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*"It's not just institutions
we have to change.
It's us too."*

-Lonnie Ray Atkinson



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The SNAP Expansion Helped Me Lead a Dignified Life on Disability — Now It's Gone

Joyce Kendrick

One thing I was grateful for during the pandemic was masks — and not just for safety reasons.

I'm on Medicare for disability, which unfortunately doesn't cover dental care. At 60 years old, I've lost many of my teeth. It was nice hiding behind a mask for a while.

But I was grateful for another reason, too: for once, Congress actually expanded the social safety net.

With stimulus payments and extra SNAP benefits, it was so much easier to survive. Before, I had to supplement my tiny benefits at food pantries, where choices are limited. It was a challenge to get food that I could eat without my teeth.

These are things about being poor that people don't understand until it happens to them.

I was raised in a loving family in a middle-class neighborhood. But as a child I suffered over a decade of traumatic sexual abuse by a neighbor who kept me quiet with violent threats.

I've struggled with my physical and mental health ever since. It was especially hard to get a correct mental health diagnosis in the years before people understood the trauma that comes from the kind of abuse I experienced.

It was difficult to hold down a job. After two failed back surgeries and with my mental health struggles, I was forced to rely on disability. With just \$700 a month of benefits, I moved into a motel room.

That's the life I was living before lawmakers ex-

panded services during the pandemic.

After the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, my SNAP benefits mercifully increased to \$284 per month. The stimulus payments allowed me to get back on my feet again. And at around the same time, I learned about Medicare's Extra Help program, which got my monthly \$165 Medicare premium covered by Medicaid.

At last, I could focus on more than just trying to survive.

I found housing through a family member. I received some proper mental health treatment and was finally diagnosed with Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I got nutritious food that I was able to eat.

But now all that's gone. Lawmakers let the SNAP expansion and other pandemic programs expire, and I've been told I'm no longer eligible for Medicare's Extra Help program. So I'm in survival mode again.

My story is hardly unique.

The expanded SNAP benefits kept 4.2 million people out of poverty during 2021, including 14 percent of children out of poverty, while the expanded Child Tax Credit cut child poverty nearly in half.

Combined with the direct stimulus payments, the American Rescue Plan brought poverty down by 22 percent, illustrating that poverty is indeed a political choice in America. By July 2022, the unemployment level had fallen to a 50-year low of 3.5 percent.

With pandemic aid expired, those gains are being reversed. More of us will have to choose between paying for health care and car repairs, or between putting food on the table and seeing a dentist.

We need stronger safety net protections that won't be torn away by lawmakers or complicated eligibility requirements. But now whenever I turn on the news, I hear politicians demanding we slash human needs programs even further so they can extend tax giveaways to the very wealthy. How is that fair?

That's why I've joined the Poor People's Campaign — a movement led by people like me, impacted by policies that harm the poor in order to help the wealthy. We know that proper social investments keep us out of poverty, drastically reduce unemployment, and give lifelong positive benefits to children. So we're fighting back.

In the world's wealthiest country, we must learn this lesson and move in that direction again — not away from it. Join us.



How Workers in the South Are Defying History

Tom Conway

Workers at Blue Bird Corporation in Fort Valley, Georgia, launched a union drive to secure better wages, work-life balance, and a voice on the job.

The company resisted them. History defied them. Geography worked against them.

But they stood together, believed in themselves, and achieved a historic victory that's reverberating throughout the South.

About 1,400 workers at the electric bus manufacturer voted overwhelmingly in May 2023 to join the United Steelworkers (USW), reflecting the rise of collective power in a part of the country where bosses and right-wing politicians long contrived to foil it.

"It's just time for a change," explained Rinardo Cooper, a member of USW Local 572 and a paper machine operator at Graphic Packaging in Macon, Georgia.

Cooper, who assisted the workers at Blue Bird with their union drive, expects more Southerners to follow suit even if they face their own uphill battles.

Given the South's pro-corporate environment, it's no surprise that Georgia has one of the nation's lowest union membership rates, 4.4 percent. North Carolina's rate is even lower, at 2.8 percent. And South Carolina's is 1.7 percent.

Many corporations actually choose to locate in the South because the low union density enables them to pay poor wages, skimp on safety, and perpetuate the system of oppression.

In a 2019 study, "The Double Standard at Work," the AFL-CIO found that even European-based companies with good records in their home countries take advantage of workers they employ in America's South.

They've "interfered with freedom of association, launched aggressive campaigns against employees' organizing attempts, and failed to bargain in good faith when workers choose union representation," noted the report, citing, among other abuses, Volkswagen's union-busting efforts at a Tennessee plant.

"They keep stuffing their pockets and paying pennies on the dollar," Cooper said of companies cashing in at workers' expense.

The consequences are dire.

States with low union membership have significantly higher poverty, according to a 2021 study by researchers at the University of Minnesota and the University of California, Riverside. Georgia's 14 percent poverty rate, for example, is among the worst in the country.

However, the tide is turning as workers increasingly see union membership as a clear path forward, observed Cooper, who left his own job at Blue Bird several months before the union win because the grueling schedule left him little time to spend with family.

Now, as a union paper worker, he not only makes higher wages than he did at Blue Bird but also benefits from safer working conditions and a voice on the job. And with the USW holding the company accountable, he's free to take the vacation and other time off he earns.

Cooper's story helped to inspire the bus company workers' quest for better lives. But they also resolved to fight for their fair share as Blue Bird increasingly leans on their knowledge, skills, and dedication in the coming years.

The company stands to land tens of millions in subsidies from President Joe Biden's Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and other federal programs aimed at putting more electric vehicles on the roads, supercharging the manufacturing economy, and supporting good jobs.

These goals are inextricably linked, as Biden made clear in a statement congratulating the bus company workers on their USW vote. "The fact is: The middle class built America," he said. "And unions built the middle class."

Worker power is spreading not only in manufacturing but across numerous industries in the South.

About 500 ramp agents, truck drivers, and other workers at Charlotte Douglas International Airport in North Carolina also voted in May to form a union. Workers in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 2022 unionized the first Starbucks in the South.

And first responders in Virginia and utility workers in Georgia and Kentucky also formed unions in early 2023, while workers at Lowe's in Louisiana launched groundbreaking efforts to unionize the home-improvement giant.

"I wouldn't hesitate to tell any worker at any manufacturing place here that the route you need to take is the union. That's the only fairness you're going to get," declared Anthony Ploof, who helped to lead dozens of co-workers at Carfair Composites USA into the USW in 2023.

Workers at the Anniston, Alabama, branch of the company make fiberglass-reinforced polymer components for vehicles, including hybrid and electric buses. Like all workers, they decided to unionize to gain a seat at the table and a means of holding their employer accountable.



Photo: United Steelworkers

Instead of fighting the union effort, as many companies do, Carfair remained neutral so the workers could exercise their will. In the end, 98 percent voted to join the USW, showing that workers overwhelmingly want unions when they're free to choose without bullying, threats, or retaliation.

"It didn't take much here," said Ploof, noting workers had little experience with unions but educated themselves about the benefits and quickly came to a consensus on joining the USW.

"It's reaching out from Carfair," he added, noting workers at other companies in the area have approached him to ask, "How is that working out? How do we organize?"

As his new union brothers and sisters at Blue Bird prepare to negotiate their first contract, Cooper hopes to get involved in other organizing drives, lift up more workers, and continue changing the trajectory of the South.

"We just really need to keep putting the message out there, letting people know that there is a better way than what the employers are wanting you to believe," he said.

The Speech That Biden Should Give: ‘I’ve Changed My Mind’

Norman Solomon

My fellow Americans:

I’ve changed my mind. With a heavy heart, I am announcing that I will not seek or accept the Democratic Party’s nomination for president in 2024.

The poll numbers indicate that I would be a burden on the party’s national ticket next year and would also have problematic effects on many down-ballot races. It’s time to face grim political realities — however unfortunate they may be.

While I appreciate the loyalty of so many Democrats in Congress who would like to run for the 2024 presidential nomination but would not consider running against me, I now realize that my insistence on seeking re-election has had important negative effects. And the longer I delay in announcing a change of course, the less time they’ll have to build their own national campaigns.

The specter of a second Donald Trump presidency is just too cataclysmic to allow any personal political ambition on my part to serve as an enabler to that fascistic demagogue.

I must acknowledge the fact that my capacities to defeat Trump are greatly diminished — perhaps first and foremost because, seeking re-election, I would be representing a status quo that so many Americans are now telling pollsters they believe is on the wrong track. I have come to question the claims of my friends and boosters that I’m best positioned to defeat Trump in 2024 because I did so in 2020. To be frank, that’s malarky.

I won in 2020 largely due to big turnouts from African Americans and young people, voting for me in lopsided numbers. But, sadly, since then my

support among black voters has dropped, and more than 90 percent of young Democrats told pollsters last summer that they wanted a Democratic nominee other than me.

In recent months, three of my administration’s decisions — for oil drilling in the Arctic, a hefty boost for liquified natural gas exports, and extensive oil leasing in the Gulf of Mexico — have further eroded my standing among environmentally minded voters and young voters in particular. I’ve been told that these decisions have disappointed many Democratic activists and seemed to show a cavalier attitude toward the climate crisis that I have repeatedly labeled as “existential.”

I now believe that an open contested primary is the best path forward for Democrats as we look toward the 2024 election. I will no longer stand in the way — which should encourage Democratic aspirants to step forward and help assure a truly open presidential primary process. Such a process of debate, and then party unity, helped us to defeat Trump in 2020. Such a process can and should do the same in 2024.

I am known for being verbose to the point of becoming stumbly and sometimes even unfathomable, so I’ll leave it there. More than a year and a half remains in my presidential term. During that time, I will concentrate on doing the best job as president that I can.

It has been reported by many journalists that I am a great believer in fate. I will not deny it. But I have come to realize that fate should not be understood as fatalism or passivity. The Democratic Party will be running against an extreme MAGA Republican Party next year. It is time to discard illusions and get on with that monumental task.

Philadelphia Elects First Openly-Gay Member of City Council and Other Results

Ken Bank

The recent election for Mayor of Philadelphia was very disappointing for progressive activists who with good reason had to believe their candidate Helen Gym, who was endorsed by Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, would win a plurality of votes in a hotly contested Democratic primary election with as many as ten candidates on the ballot. Whoever wins the Democratic primary will become the next Mayor after the election in November since Democrats have an overwhelming registration margin and no Republican was elected Mayor in almost one hundred years. Like other progressive candidates in mayoral campaigns throughout the country, Helen Gym's political agenda consisted of broadening and democratizing Philadelphia's economy, making it more diversified and responsive to the needs of disadvantaged individuals and communities, especially those of minority background and communities of color.

Helen Gym promoted programs and policies that were consistent with many of the ideals promoted by the 20 Theses 4 Liberation, to rebuild and renovate schools, increase teacher rewards and involvement, a guaranteed jobs program for underprivileged youth, and to increase public safety by providing more social services to make criminal behavior less likely. Of great importance to democratize the city's economy, Helen Gym was the only candidate to pledge that as Mayor she would implement the law already passed by City Council to establish a public bank, the Philadelphia Public Financial Authority, which would provide loans and other means of financial support for community development and public improvements. Advocates for Democratic Socialism and social justice

had every reason to believe that as Mayor Helen Gym would rejuvenate Philadelphia and make it a model of success for economic democracy and social justice.

Despite the loss, there was some good news and reason for hope. The winner of the election was Charelle Parker, a black woman who will be the first woman mayor in Philadelphia's history. Though more of a moderate Democrat, she has some progressive credentials, endorsed by most labor and African-American special interest groups, and ultimately won the election with overwhelming voter margins in black communities and neighborhoods. Though public safety was Charelle Parker's priority campaign issue, as a progressive member of City Council she did vote to establish a public bank for Philadelphia, though she was not as committed to implement the law as Helen Gym.

The most important result of the primary election for progressives and social justice advocates was the election to city council of Rue Landau, who will become the first openly gay member of city council. As a member of ACT UP during the height of the AIDS epidemic, she fought on the frontlines for access to better health care for people with HIV and AIDS. In 2014, while serving as Executive Director of the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations, Landau and her wife became the first same sex couple in Pennsylvania to receive a marriage license. Landau began her career as a civil rights attorney at Community Legal Services defending low-income renters against evictions. She then spent 12 years directing Philadelphia's Commission on Human Relations as well as the Fair Housing



Commission, where she focused on advancing the state's civil rights laws. She helped advance laws to advance wage equity, create reasonable accommodations for pregnant people and strengthen anti-discrimination protections, including specifically for LGBTQ+ people. As member of city council Rue's priority is a holistic, community-centered approach to public safety, providing financial resources to invest in community development, especially in disadvantaged and minority neighborhoods, and facilitating the availability of affordable housing.

In another positive step forward for advocates of social justice and democratic economy was the re-election of city council member Isaiah Thomas, who was endorsed by every progressive organization and who was the top vote getter among more than 20 candidates for city council. As a member of city council Isaiah Thomas introduced the Driving Equality Bill, aka "Driving While Black", which became a nationwide model for reducing negative interactions with police. He also passed the "Black Workers Matter" economic recovery package to ensure that federal funds allocated for pandemic relief would benefit black workers. He also actively supported and voted for the Philadelphia Public Financial Authority, a public bank to serve the needs of disadvantaged groups and communities restricted from access to traditional sources of financing.

Perhaps the most important lesson for progressive activists, Democratic Socialists and others

concerned with achieving economic democracy and social justice is that these goals cannot be achieved without significant support from the African-American community. Helen Gym lost because she was unable to achieve that support since Charelle Parker, an African-American woman, won overwhelmingly from black voters, especially older women who represented the largest bloc of voters in the election. Another reason Helen Gym lost is that she failed to adequately address the issue that was most important to the black community, especially black women who were mostly concerned about public safety and rampant crime in their community. Black women who voted were much less concerned about achieving economic democracy, social justice and the Black Lives Matter movement than they were about their personal safety. In Philadelphia, the overwhelming percentage from victims of crime were black, especially black women.

The results from the election in Philadelphia were a mixed bag for progressives and other advocates for economic democracy, social justice and especially the 20 Theses 4 Liberation. Despite the loss with Helen Gym, other advocates for liberation democracy and social justice, especially the election of Rue Landau and Isaiah Thomas to city council, give hope that some progress might be achieved. Next to Helen Gym, Charelle Parker for Mayor was the next best option given that all the other candidates were white, wealthy, and advocates for neo-liberal capitalism. Although Parker stressed that her priority was public safety, she has also been an advocate for economic development in disadvantaged communities, affordable housing and improvements to public education. She also voted for and continues to support the law establishing a public bank for Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Public Financial Authority, even though she is less committed to its implementation than Helen Gym. Hopefully, progressives, social democrats and other advocates for liberation will take lessons from the Philadelphia election results, and modify their electoral strategy as needed to win, especially in large cities with a significant percentage of minority voters, especially African-Americans.

Mischief-Making in Pretoria-Moscow-Washington Foreign and Trade Policies

Patrick Bond

Has the South African government unequivocally sided with Russia, as witnessed not just in February's joint military exercises (alongside China) but also in allegedly selling weapons to Moscow late last year? Will the relationship prevent President Cyril Ramaphosa from having Vladimir Putin arrested at the Johannesburg summit, in late August, of the Brazil-Russia-India-China-Johannesburg bloc – as the International Criminal Court arrest warrant (for abuse of captured Ukrainian children) requires? And will any of these factors threaten the single largest component of South Africa's export trade, the African Growth and Opportunity Act duty-free imports to the United States, worth several billion dollars last year alone?

During the current fog of war, with its accompanying military profiteering racket, it is entirely predictable for South African politicians to have a go at seeding the clouds of doubt. Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana was among the most evasive, on May 14, when deflecting the furious U.S. State Department claim that South Africans loaded weaponry destined for Russia on the ship *Lady R*, at a Cape Town naval base in December 2022: "If it did happen as the Americans claim, it could be a conduct of people who were mischief makers."

Who would make mischief from lethal arms dealing, and what are the broader economic implications?

The world's leading military profiteer remains the United States. And in spite of White House and State Department rhetoric about the "battle between democracies and autocracies," the latter are favoured arms customers by President Joseph Biden's administration. As *The Intercept's* Stephen

Semler concluded last week after reviewing official 2022 trade data, Biden "has helped increase the military power of a large number of authoritarian countries... The U.S. sold weapons to at least 57 percent of the world's autocratic countries in 2022." The likes of Saudi Arabia, Israel and Egypt top the list. In the process, reported *Axios*, "The U.S. accounted for 40% of total [arms] exports from 2018-2022, up from 33% in the previous five years, while Russia declined from 22% to 16%."

Other military mischief makers include South Africa's own arms dealers, led by the parastatal agency Denel and the Paramount Group. But Obed Bapela, the deputy head of the African National Congress foreign policy committee which has insisted on abstentions when the United Nations votes on Russia's invasion, recently claimed on SAfm national radio, "I was with the management of Denel, I was there last week Friday. Denel has not been in production for the past three years."

In reality, Rheinmetall-Denel Munitions (RDM) is a major joint venture in Somerset West which has been producing and selling quite a bit of deadly weaponry, including in recent weeks. While the firm denies providing Putin with ammunition (as RDM's are apparently non-compatible with Russian guns), according to *DefenceWeb* there has been "an uptick in business, most likely due to the war in Ukraine. In December 2022, for example, RDM announced a NATO country order for 155 mm Assegai ammunition."

Bragged RDM managing director Jan-Patrick Helmsen, "We're very pleased that two customers – including a NATO member state and a non-NATO country – have again placed their trust in our

globally proven Assegai indirect fire technology.” Düsseldorf-based Rheinmetall is a long-standing ally of repressive regimes; it was once Adolf Hitler’s number two arms supplier, and also had no misgivings about selling to the apartheid regime.

Today, “RDM exports over 80% of its production, mainly to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, both of which are notorious for abuses of human rights,” anti-militarist campaigner Terry Crawford-Browne reminded in the wake of a 2018 explosion at the firm’s Cape Town plant that killed eight workers due to RDM managerial sloppiness. He continued, “To evade German arms export regulations, Rheinmetall deliberately locates much of its production in countries where the rule of law is weak.”

In addition to repressive Middle East oilgarchies, there have been prolific South African military sales to NATO countries, including seven major recent buyers including the United States, as the military-procurement parastatal Armscor concedes in last year’s annual report. Its chairman Phillip Dexter is explicitly committed to “commercialization” of arms acquisition services and while the parastatal has oversight duties with the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), the system is profoundly flawed.

Ironically, Dexter is among South Africa’s most openly pro-Putin political figures, having tweeted in late April, “We look forward to hosting and protecting the President of the Russian Federation. Imperialists and their joke of an ICC be damned. They must first arrest all their war criminals before we take them seriously. Even then we will defend Putin.”

Yet Armscor confirmed major South African arms sales to Germany and Britain, including materiel that may well find their way to the Russia-Ukraine battleground, on the West’s side. That would not be surprising, because in 2021, the Profiting from Misery report by the NGOs Open Secrets and Lawyers for Human Rights included a depressing list of NCACC fails, including allow-



Photo: Peter Tkac

ing SA weapons into Yemen via Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Johannesburg-based Ivor Ichikowitz runs the Paramount Group, whose Mbombe armoured vehicles found their way into war-torn Libya via Jordan in 2019. He apparently believes in pleasing all sides engaged in war, writing last year, “Russia, long a player in Africa through its military and political support of liberation movements, and latterly through providing defence materiel and military advisers to many independent countries, embarked on a deliberate charm offensive in July in the wake of its disastrous invasion of Ukraine.”

And this year, Ichikowitz enthused further in New African, “despite the worldwide condemnation of his country’s current invasion of Ukraine, Russia’s top diplomat places priority on Russian-African ties. Last year’s \$20 billion in trade between Russia and Africa would suggest as much; it is a marked 17% increase over the previous year, but still a fraction of the commitment other powers are making, and with fewer strings attached.”

Last week, Ramaphosa and Putin had a friendly call to “intensify mutually beneficial ties in various fields.” Days earlier, foreign policy spokesperson Clayton Monyela likewise applauded the “mutually beneficial and cordial relationship that

exists between the United States of America and South Africa,” while at the same time expressing “utter displeasure” with U.S. Ambassador Reuben Brigety’s May 11 outburst about the Lady R’s cargo: “We are confident that weapons were loaded onto that vessel and I would bet my life on the accuracy of that assertion.”

Brigety’s assuredness reminds of U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, who bet (and lost) one million Iraqi lives on a confident claim that Saddam Hussein’s prolific Weapons of Mass Destruction justified the 2003 U.S. invasion. No, Washington’s occupying troops never located those WMDs.

Likewise, the fog of war requires Godongwana to reiterate, as he did in Parliament last week, that “our policy is not to sell arms or ammunition to any party in the Russia-Ukraine conflict,” for he fears South Africa’s imminent exclusion from the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).

But if that happens, we can anticipate major Western Multinational Corporations having to dramatically cut back export-oriented production at their South African branch plants, especially of AGOA-vulnerable products: automobiles (of which the U.S. imported \$1.6 billion duty free under AGOA in 2022), metals and minerals (\$463 million), agricultural products (\$458 million), and chemicals (\$360 million).

These are South Africa’s most capital-intensive sectors, and their outputs are greatest in terms of CO₂ and methane emissions, contributing to crises such as the April-May 2022 Durban Rain Bombs that killed 500, or Cyclone Freddy that felled more than 1000 Malawians a few weeks ago. Regardless of AGOA, these firms will soon attract European climate sanctions under the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism because of their extremely high embedded CO₂ emissions.

Moreover, the Energy-Intensive Users Group’s 27 companies guzzle 40% of South Africa’s electricity mostly for these exports. In the process of smelting minerals, they deplete the natural resource

wealth of South Africa – to the extent the net economic costs of mining outweigh benefits – and create prolific pollution.

In some cases, especially BHP Billiton’s South32 aluminium smelter in Richards Bay, the electricity price charged the Australian firm is only a small fraction of what ordinary South Africans pay. That smelter alone uses at least 5% of the national grid’s supply, but calls to redistribute the electricity to the rest of the economy – made even by Standard Bank chief executive Derek Cooper during the initial Eskom blackout crisis of 2008 and by Business Day columnist Michael Avery last year – have not been heeded given prevailing power relations.

So if Washington ends AGOA and the result is less smelting and thus more electricity available for small businesses and ordinary households, it would be an economic blessing in disguise – in the same way the grey listing of South African banks by the Financial Action Task Force in February has already had a positive impact on legislation and regulation against money-laundering.

Or in another case of combined financial-and-climate sanctions, Xi Jinping’s September 2021 divestment announcement – that Belt & Road Initiative projects could no longer include coal-fired power plants – soon reverberated into South Africa’s Musina-Makhado Special Economic Zone (and may spell its death-knell).

But obviously beneficial processes for the majority of South Africans – such as reducing output by guzzling smelters as well as other long-overdue financial and trade sanctions against, especially, extractive-industry capitalists – continue to be disguised by war-mongering mischief-makers. Especially for those located in Pretoria government headquarters and at the offices of Johannesburg and Cape Town arms manufacturers, neutrality is a convenient fiction, as they continue to sell weapons to both sides in a terrible conflict zone.

A Timely Call for Peace in Ukraine by U.S. National Security Experts

Medea Benjamin, Nicolas J. S. Davies

On May 16, 2023, The New York Times published a full-page advertisement signed by 15 U.S. national security experts about the war in Ukraine. It was headed “The U.S. Should Be a Force for Peace in the World,” and was drafted by the Eisenhower Media Network.

While condemning Russia’s invasion, the statement provides a more objective account of the crisis in Ukraine than the U.S. government or The New York Times has previously presented to the public, including the disastrous U.S. role in NATO expansion, the warnings ignored by successive U.S. administrations and the escalating tensions that ultimately led to war.

The statement calls the war an “unmitigated disaster,” and urges President Biden and Congress “to end the war speedily through diplomacy, especially given the dangers of military escalation that could spiral out of control.”

This call for diplomacy by wise, experienced former insiders—U.S. diplomats, military officers and civilian officials—would have been a welcome intervention on any one of the past 442 days of this war. Yet their appeal now comes at an especially critical moment in the war.

On May 10th, President Zelenskyy announced that he is delaying Ukraine’s long-awaited “spring offensive” to avoid “unacceptable” losses to Ukrainian forces. Western policy has repeatedly put Zelenskyy in near-impossible positions, caught between the need to show signs of progress on the battlefield to justify further Western support and arms deliveries and, on the other hand, the shocking human cost of continued war represented by the fresh graveyards where tens of thousands of Ukrainians now lie buried.

It is not clear how a delay in the planned Ukrainian counter-attack would prevent it leading to unacceptable Ukrainian losses when it finally occurs, unless the delay in fact leads to scaling back and calling off many of the operations that have been planned. Zelenskyy appears to be reaching a limit in terms of how many more of his people he is willing to sacrifice to satisfy Western demands for signs of military progress to hold together the Western alliance and maintain the flow of weapons and money to Ukraine.

Zelenskyy’s predicament is certainly the fault of Russia’s invasion, but also of his April 2022 deal with the devil in the shape of then-U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Johnson promised Zelenskyy that the U.K. and the “collective West” were “in it for the long run” and would back him to recover all of Ukraine’s former territory, just as long as Ukraine stopped negotiating with Russia.

Johnson was never in a position to fulfill that promise and, since he was forced to resign as prime minister, he has endorsed a Russian withdrawal only from the territory it invaded since February 2022, not a return to pre-2014 borders. Yet that compromise was exactly what he talked Zelenskyy out of agreeing to in April 2022, when most of the war’s dead were still alive and the framework of a peace agreement was on the table at diplomatic talks in Turkey.

Zelenskyy has tried desperately to hold his Western backers to Johnson’s overblown promise. But short of direct U.S. and NATO military intervention, it seems that no quantity of Western weapons can decisively break the stalemate in what has degenerated into a brutal war of attrition, fought mainly by artillery and trench and urban warfare.

An American general bragged that the West has supplied Ukraine with 600 different weapons systems, but this itself creates problems. For example, the different 105 mm guns sent by the U.K., France, Germany and the U.S. all use different shells. And each time heavy losses force Ukraine to re-form survivors into new units, many of them have to be retrained on weapons and equipment they've never used before.

Despite U.S. deliveries of at least six types of anti-aircraft missiles—Stinger, NASAMS, Hawk, Rim-7, Avenger and at least one Patriot missile battery—a leaked Pentagon document revealed that Ukraine's Russian-built S-300 and Buk anti-aircraft systems still make up almost 90 percent of its main air defenses. NATO countries have searched their weapons stockpiles for all the missiles they can provide for those systems, but Ukraine has nearly exhausted those supplies, leaving its forces newly vulnerable to Russian air strikes just as it prepares to launch its new counter-attack.

Since at least June 2022, President Biden and other U.S. officials have acknowledged that the war must end in a diplomatic settlement, and have insisted that they are arming Ukraine to put it “in the strongest possible position at the negotiating table.” Until now, they have claimed that each new weapons system they have sent and each Ukrainian counter-offensive have contributed to that goal and left Ukraine in a stronger position.

But the leaked Pentagon documents and recent statements by U.S. and Ukrainian officials make it clear that Ukraine's planned spring offensive, already delayed into summer, would lack the previous element of surprise and encounter stronger Russian defenses than the offensives that recovered some of its lost territory last fall.

One leaked Pentagon document warned that “enduring Ukrainian deficiencies in training and munitions supplies probably will strain progress and exacerbate casualties during the offensive,” concluding that it would probably make smaller territorial gains than the fall offensives did.

How can a new offensive with mixed results and higher casualties put Ukraine in a stronger position at a currently non-existent negotiating table? If the offensive reveals that even huge quantities of Western military aid have failed to give Ukraine military superiority or reduce its casualties to a sustainable level, it could very well leave Ukraine in a weaker negotiating position, instead of a stronger one.

Meanwhile, offers to mediate peace talks have been pouring in from countries all over the world, from the Vatican to China to Brazil. It has been six months since the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, suggested publicly, after Ukraine's military gains last fall, that the moment had come to negotiate from a position of strength. “When there's an opportunity to negotiate, when peace can be achieved, seize it,” he said.

It would be doubly or triply tragic if, on top of the diplomatic failures that led to the war in the first place and the U.S. and U.K. undermining peace negotiations in April 2022, the chance for diplomacy that General Milley wanted to seize is lost in the forlorn hope of attaining an even stronger negotiating position that is not really achievable.

If the United States persists in backing the plan for a Ukrainian offensive, instead of encouraging Zelenskyy to seize the moment for diplomacy, it will share considerable responsibility for the failure to seize the chance for peace, and for the appalling and ever-rising human costs of this war.

The experts who signed The New York Times statement recalled that, in 1997, 50 senior U.S. foreign policy experts warned President Clinton that expanding NATO was a “policy error of historic proportions” and that, unfortunately, Clinton chose to ignore the warning. President Biden, who is now pursuing his own policy error of historic proportions by prolonging this war, would do well to take the advice of today's policy experts by helping to forge a diplomatic settlement and making the United States a force for peace in the world.

What I Owe the Twenty Theses, An Embrace in Two Parts.

Lonnie Ray Atkinson

Part One:

When I was initially asked to sign onto the Twenty Theses for Liberation, my first thought was, “Why not?” I knew the authors; I agreed with the sentiments. Signing on wasn’t going to cost me anything.

So I did.

Since then, having reread the document and taken some time to reflect, it’s hard not to be embarrassed by my reaction/attitude.

You know you’re cynical when you read something this comprehensive, urgent, and simultaneously hopeful and the most enthusiasm you can muster is, “It can’t hurt.” Yet I’m willing to bet I’m not alone. Not because there isn’t substance and inspiration to be found. But because we’re not sure we can really win.

How many of us are merely going through the motions, fighting the good fight, “contributing something,” with little to no expectations of it amounting to anything?

These feelings are instructive. Evidence of just how much we are up against. And, if we are honest, evidence of our own failures in movement building.

But if these failures are to be lessons, it’s imperative that we engage this call with more than just our signature.

This can’t be all we are. And the Twenty Theses isn’t just some petition on a clipboard.

It’s a compass for our journey. And a promise that the place we seek is real.

Do you still believe that? Do you still believe there is real promise in humanity?

If so, we don’t need a map; we need each other. And we need a compass.

For the value in a compass is not merely in keeping your sense of direction. It’s about keeping your party together. A reference to cite in times of confusion or disagreement, or even despair. Something reliable and true.

That’s what I see in this document. I hope more people will give it serious attention and reflection.

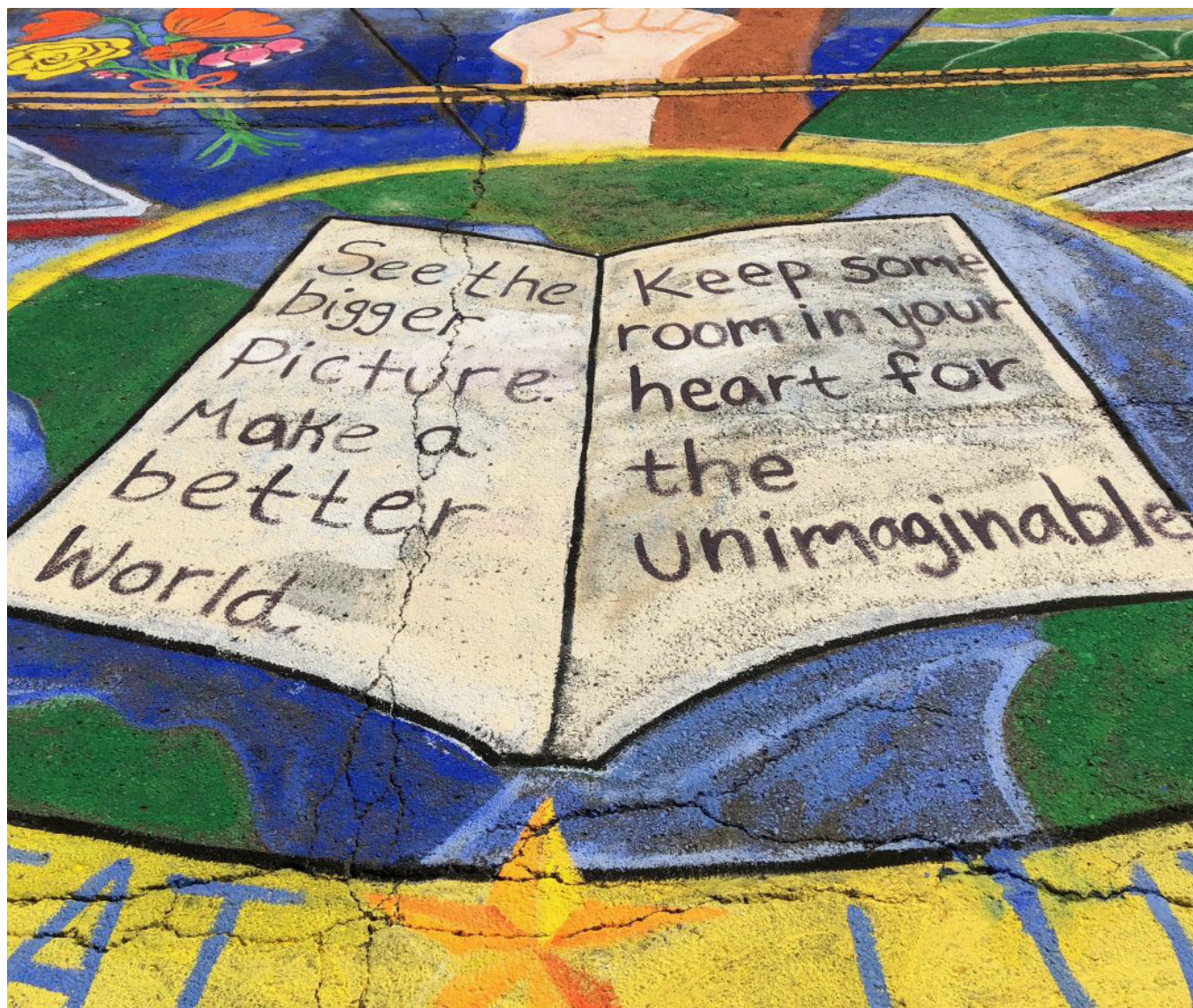
Part Two:

As a signatory to the Twenty Theses for Liberation, my first act of engagement, if I may be so bold, would be to ask: Is it too early to embrace the call for refinement?

If not, I would like to make a suggestion for potential inclusion in a future addendum.

Thesis One (Foundations) lists polity, economy, kinship, culture, ecology, and international relations as central aims of attention for a long-term liberatory movement.

As I celebrate the holistic nature of this foundation, one thing I feel is missing from the list is Education.



Not that Education is missing from the document. It is included. But more so as a mention, alongside other aspects which make up the core aims. It is alluded to rather than focused upon.

If these Twenty Theses are meant to be instrumental to the trajectory we desire for a better world, what kinds of humans would a future like this require?

I acknowledge that wording, “what kinds of humans,” may be awkward. But the question is quite serious.

What kinds of humans would be capable of and adept to operating within political institutions

free from elitism and domination?

What kinds of humans would be agreeable to an economy that aspires to classlessness and sees equity as a guiding principle?

What kinds of humans would be able to navigate kinship, gender, and sexual relations in a healthy manner? To embrace truly liberatory, non-hierarchical cultural and community relations?

It's not just institutions we have to change. It's us too.

The reason why so many are resistant to proposed alternatives, why so many have a hard

time believing “human nature” would even allow for a just society, is because our minds have been conditioned from birth to accept current norms and expectations. To indeed believe these norms are a natural order.

Of course, this isn’t evidence of human nature. It’s a testimony to the impact our institutions have on our development.

So again, if we truly believe that our better world is possible, we must ask: What kinds of humans could ever pull all this off, much less thrive in such liberated institutions?

And by answering this question, we can begin to ask: What kind of educational model could aid in producing such humans?

Think of it like reverse engineering. No different from deciding upon an economic model by first asking what values we want to see manifested in the end result.

If we want healthy humans, curious and critically thinking humans, humans who can resolve disputes without resorting to violence, humans equipped to participate in a better polity, in a better economy, in better kinship, gender, sexual and cultural relations, then that’s what our education system should be about. Not preparing children to one day fill slots in a competition-based workforce so they may justify their survival and/or dignity.

We must build a model of learning based on experimenting and experiencing, guided by evidence and best practices, gained from careful yet ambitious trial and error.

We must seek a diverse array of interdisciplinary instructors. Teachers who see their empathy lessons every bit as important as, if not more important than, lessons on math and science. A curriculum that sees the foundation-forming of media literacy, cultural appreciation, and emotional intelligence/resilience as a requisite

to engaging with literature, history, and civic/social studies.

Far beyond the capitalistic assembly line rehearsal we have become accustomed to, we must envision education that doesn’t end after twelve years and the optional degree, but rather extends throughout a life and beyond the walls of early schooling. An education that maintains the very capacity it has built, and continues to build. Equipping us for our kinship, community, and polity roles, in addition to our economic ones.

But before we can do this, we must acknowledge the teachings of our current institutions for what they are. For the lessons that have perpetuated centuries of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ableism, and every other form of hierarchical oppression are a form of abuse. And in the same manner we aspire to avoid the physical and mental legacy of childhood trauma, we must find a way to produce adults who do not recreate and pass on the same harmful behavior.

Our institutions will only be as good, will only be as solid, as the people who are expected to facilitate them and function within them. Unless we can equip the members of our communities to find their potential and contribute to society in ways that are both valuable and fulfilling, while simultaneously supporting others doing the same, there’s no reason to believe these institutions will produce the values and outcomes we desire.

For these reasons, I humbly recommend that Education be considered, in addendum or future iteration of the Theses, as an additional core element of strategic importance.

I offer this suggestion, not as a critique, but as a demonstration of the necessary, good faith participation needed if the current iteration of the Theses is to ultimately achieve its goals.

Education #4Liberation: Schooling Today and Tomorrow

Michael Albert

Suppose you support the 20 Theses project based on having strong affinity with the 20 Theses for Liberation, including having your own additions and refinements. And suppose you are a teacher, say, or a student, or in any event concerned about education and interested in fighting for changes regarding educational policies and practices. How might you approach that topic. What kinds of program for educational change might you arrive at, due to applying the 20 Theses to educational concerns. First you might think about education in society or what we now have. Next you might think about education vision or what we want. You might next think about contingent issues due to your locale, position, and means. Finally might think about education program and how you might join with others to attain your aims.

Education and Society—What We Have

Part of education, whether today or tomorrow, is to convey knowledge and skills best oriented to each individual. Graduates of educational preparation, after all, benefit from being who they desire to be. To think about education from this angle, you might examine the process of conveying information and skills and developing associated talents in each student consistent with their capacities and aspirations. You might ask, what is the best way for young men and women to learn given what is available to learn, the students' talents, and the abilities and tools of their teachers.

But part of education, whether today or tomorrow, is contextual and social. Graduates of educational preparation, after all, need to function within whatever contexts their society provides. To think about education from this angle, you might examine the process of conveying information and skills and developing talents from the point of view of soci-

ety's needs. You might ask, what is the best way for students to learn consistent with their fitting roles that society makes available at work, in homes, in cultural communities, and in politics?

This polarity between on the one hand fostering peoples' freedom and fulfillment and on the other hand preparing people to fit society's agenda is captured by the pedagogic revolutionary, Paulo Freire, when he writes, "There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the practice of freedom – the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with the reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."

Freire was right about education today but in a better future, ideally society's interests will be the same as those of each new generation of students. The roles society offers will accord with each year's new entrants' desires to become what they consider their most worthy, capable, and fulfilled selves. A desirable society, such as that sought by the 20 Theses, will need its members to have whatever skills, insights, and aspirations they desire to have. A desirable society's roles will not place limits on individual fulfillment and development but will foster it. In that case, education will seek to expand and fulfill each student's capacities in whatever directions they choose. That is what individuals will desire and it is also what a desirable future society's roles will need and seek. But as long as that concordance of personal and social aims isn't present, education will have to choose between serving students' needs and developing their capacities on the one hand, and serving society's dictates on the other.

We can see one dimension of the above by noting that most readers of this article likely live in societies that have capitalist economies including private ownership of productive assets, corporate divisions of labor, authoritarian decision-making, and market allocation. And, while this essay will focus mostly on that economic dimension of education, one could similarly and equally legitimately think about education by way of highlighting its sex/gender/kinship, race/ethnic/religious, political, ecological, or other dimensions, or, in a more complete treatment than here, by way of addressing all of these life dimensions interactively.

At any rate, because of its particular economic institutions, capitalism imposes on populations huge disparities in wealth and income. Within a capitalist economy, about two percent of the population, called capitalists, own most of society's productive property and accrue profits from it. Below the owners, a class of lawyers, doctors, engineers, managers, and other empowered employees comprise roughly twenty percent of the population. They largely monopolize empowering tasks and the daily levers of control over their own and over other people's economic lives. Though subordinate to owners, these "coordinators" enjoy considerable personal and group influence over economic outcomes. They earn high incomes and enjoy high status. In contrast, below this coordinator class, the bottom eighty percent of producers do largely rote and repetitive work. They take orders from above, receive low incomes, barely influence economic outcomes, and have little status. They are the working class.

The key institutions of capitalist economies impose this threefold class division. First, private ownership of productive property demarcates the dominant capitalist class from the rest. Markets structurally impose on the owners a need to accumulate profits. The corporate decision-making structure gives the owners ultimate power over how their property is used.

Second, the low number of owners and the large requirements of exercising control propel the creation of an intermediate coordinator class. Owners can't

oversee their wide-reaching assets without assistance. The corporate division of labor defines the coordinator class as those who monopolize empowering work and dominate daily decision making. The requisites of legitimating control by managers and other coordinator class members ensures that this class monopolizes advanced training, skills, and knowledge—as well as the confidence that accompanies these.

Third, all these capitalist features taken together ensure that the largest portion of citizens are left with little or no individual bargaining power. These disempowered workers do rote, tedious, and overwhelmingly obedient jobs for low wages.

Depending on the relative bargaining power of the three classes, capitalism's features vary in the suffering they impose and the opportunities they provide. But in every instance of capitalism, the broad scaffolding of the economy's defining institutions are as indicated. What implications does all this have for education?

If an economy has roughly two percent of its members ruling through their ownership of property, about eighteen to twenty percent administering and defining outcomes due to monopolizing empowering circumstances, and roughly eighty percent obeying due to doing only rote tasks, then regardless of their personal inclinations and desires, when each year's new recruits enter the economy they must be prepared to occupy their designated slot in one of these three classes. Recruits must be prepared to exercise assigned functions, pay attention to designated responsibilities, and submissively accept their place. This is true for those who rule, for those who have great but less than ruling power, and for those who obey.

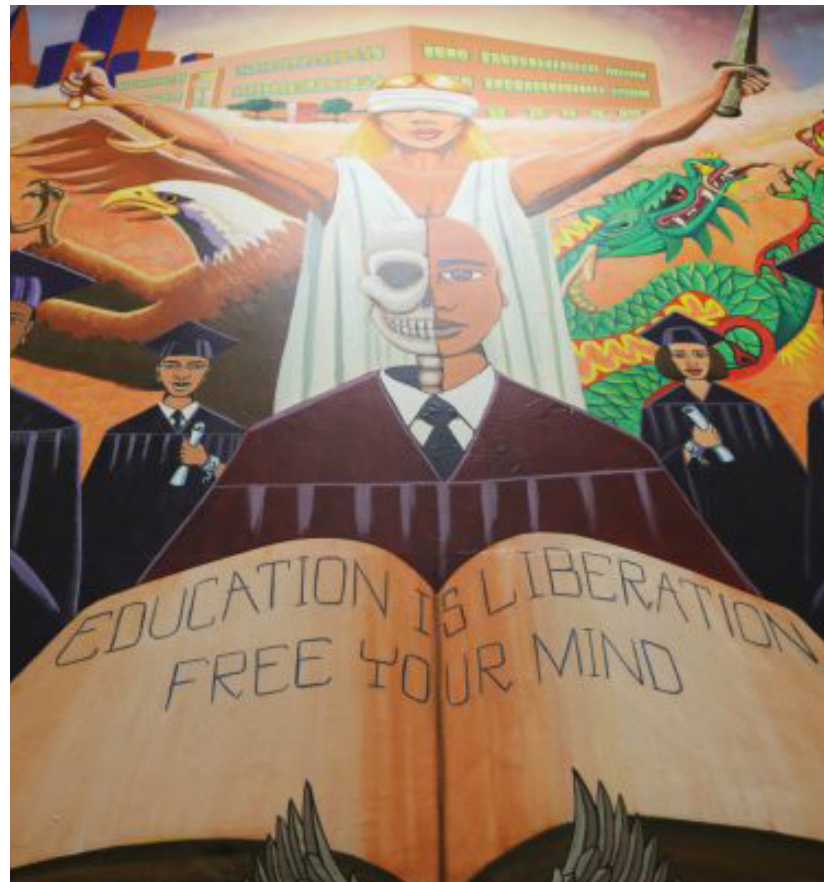
I wish to at least note (lest I give a wrong impression regarding other core features of societies) that I am not suggesting economics alone contours education. For example, in societies in which familial sexism, community racism, and political authoritarianism bend us into hierarchies that intersect, mold, and are molded by each other as well as by

the three-class economic system, each year's new recruits entering society will need to be prepared to occupy their designated sex/gender, race/ethnic, and political as well as class slots. Recruits must be prepared to exercise their assigned kinship, community, and political as well as economic functions and responsibilities. They must expect to enjoy the advantages but also accept the limitations of their roles. This is true for those on top, for those who have intermediate but less than dominant power, and for those who will overwhelmingly endure from below gender, community, and political as well as economic hierarchies.

A useful word for all this educational (and social) preparation is "tracking." Each new generation is divided into segments, and each segment is tracked into its appropriate destination. Thus, when we consider the capitalist economic dimension, we see that the educational system processes the incoming population so that about eighty percent lose their inclination to determine events. Their confidence is severely limited. Their knowledge is kept minimal and narrow. The main skills they learn are to obey and to endure boredom. As Bertrand Russell often joked, "People are born ignorant, not stupid; they are made stupid by education."

Another twenty percent of the incoming population are tracked to expect to have a considerable but not ultimate say over their own and over other people's lives. They become confident and enjoy a monopoly on various skills and insights. The upper reaches of this privileged group, like the future owners above them, learn how to have dinner with one another and to otherwise comport themselves in accord with their lofty status at the major societal "finishing schools" such as Harvard and Oxford. They also become ignorant of and oblivious to social desires that run contrary to their advantages and callings.

When we consider sex/gender, racial/ethnic, and political dimensions, we see that education involves similar tracking, but now oriented to folks fitting society's sexist, racist, and authoritarian roles, whether up top or down low, so they accept their attendant benefits, responsibilities, and limitations.



The point of all the above is, for example, if a society requires its population to have three broad patterns of economic hopes, expectations, and capacities, its educational system will be designed to provide precisely those outcomes. In that context, any effort to describe education as a system by means of which each individual maximally develops their potentials and pursues their interests will either be mere rhetoric or hamstrung by presuppositions that some people possess only highly circumscribed potentials and interests, which are therefore all they are welcomed to pursue. Of course, whether as students or as teachers, people can try to attain better educational outcomes against society's role requirements, but this will entail acting against the logic of capitalism, sexism, racism, and authoritarianism.

Regarding the largest part of the public, as the great satirist H. L. Mencken summarized, "The aim of public education is not to spread enlightenment at all; it is simply to reduce as many individuals as

possible to the same safe level, to breed and train a standardized citizenry, to put down dissent and originality. That is its aim in the United States, whatever the pretensions of politicians, pedagogues and other such mountebanks, and that is its aim everywhere else.”

As just a bit of instructive real world evidence for the perspective offered above, when the Carnegie Commission on Education considered the state of U.S. education as part of a government effort to understand what “went wrong” in the 1960s, it decided that the problem was too much education. The population, the Commission reported, had been educated such that it came to expect that it would have significant say in society and ample income, job fulfillment, dignity, and respect. With such expectations, upon entering society, most members of the population had their high expectations trashed and in response, many rebelled. The solution, the Commission reported, was to reduce the tendency of education to induce high expectations in too large a proportion of the population. It was necessary to cut back higher education and make lower education more rote and mechanical—save for those few who were destined to rule and needed both capacity but also the callousness toward others to do so. The result of this inclination has been a steady diminution in the quality and reach of education and its composition and sense of compassion in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world.

Education Vision — What We Want

Is there an alternative? Will society’s hierarchies always largely crowd out education that seeks to develop each student’s potentials and sympathies in accord with his or her aspirations? Will gains for students only arrive as a result of struggles against systemic dictates? Will gains be periodically obliterated by economic, gender, cultural, and political pressures whenever vigilance in defending them diminishes?

If we look at education from the angle of the person to be educated, we may differ over issues of exact methodology since it is unlikely there is one best

universally optimal approach. We suspect, however, that we would agree on broad aims.

Worthy education would assist students to discover, explore, and fulfill their capacities and potentials while simultaneously enhancing their confidence and expanding their ability to think, reason, assess, and empathize in the ways needed to function effectively among socially aware and caring adults. Other people might formulate a mandate for worthy education somewhat differently than that, but one thing is quite clear. For this type of education to happen, society must need this type of incoming adult. It must not want, for example, wage slaves (or women, minorities, or citizens) who are obedient and passive. It must not have elite owners or coordinators (or men, whites, or political elites) who are callous and commanding.

We do not need education to bend and mutilate people to abide or impose oppressive structures. We need education to facilitate people becoming their fullest, best selves who worthy society welcomes and fulfills.

In other words, to be compatible with education conceived from the angle of the student, a society needs to seek from each participant nothing less than the fullest utilization of their capacities and inclinations in whatever ways they desire, whatever those capacities, inclinations, and desires may turn out to be. This observation pushes us to ask what kind of society would do this because only that type of society will allow, welcome, and support education for liberation.

Consider the economic dimension of the question. In current class divided society, roughly eighty percent of us are presently taught in schools to endure boredom and take orders because that’s what capitalism needs from its working class. We watch the clock hoping the school day will end. We get punished for disobedience. Working together is cheating. Another twenty percent or thereabouts are made ambitious for themselves as well as callous to the conditions of those below and ignorant about their own callousness because this is what

capitalism needs from its coordinator class. And at the very top, roughly two percent are made at least willing to be cruel and self seeking as those traits are essential to ownership. Similarly for other dimensions in current sexist, racist, authoritarian society, women and men, members of different races (religions, ethnicities, etc.), and political authorities and their subordinates all come through education prepared for their elevated or subordinate lot in life. Of course all this isn't perfectly cut and dried. It is, however, the overall average picture.

So while it is true that in any society, education will need to fit well with society's broad defining institutions, in a society with a desirable, worthy economy, for example, that society will want everyone to be as capable, creative, productive, and empathetic as we can be while pursuing all other ends as we choose. Society will in that case, want us to each participate as full and equal citizens. But what will constitute a desirable, worthy, economy (or, you might ask, extending the scope of this discussion, a desirable, worthy kinship, culture, or polity)?

Some seek a solidarity economy, others a diversity economy, some an equity economy, and others a self-managing economy. Each of these would require classlessness. In these respects, such a worthy economy's educational system will be based on and need to generate solidarity, diversity, equity, and self management—as well as rich and diverse capacities for comprehension and creativity. Everyone in a such an economy would benefit from every worker and consumer being confident and well educated. Add to such an economy renovated kinship, community, and polity, (or, vice versa, add to renovated kinship, community, or polity a renovated economy) and you have a new type society that needs a new type education.

Under current society, talk of desirable pedagogy means pedagogy that is consistent with the desire to reproduce the hierarchies of society. In that case, desirable pedagogy is more about control and tracking than it is about edification and fulfillment. On the other hand, pedagogy in current society could try to seek edification and fulfillment, but

that would contradict the basic needs of the current economy, kinship, culture, and polity because it would seek to establish outcomes inconsistent with current private ownership, remuneration for property and power, corporate divisions of labor, markets, gender hierarchy, sexual norms, racial relations, and political structures. In current society to get desirable education one must overcome undesirable sexist, racist, authoritarian, and classist pressures.

Consider the last, the classist pressures, not as most important, but simply as indicative of the sorts of needed changes. In current economics, good personal education is something we have to win and then perpetually defend because the underlying institutions of society are at odds with it. Good personal education in a classless economy is instead part and parcel of the logic of that society's collective economic and social life.

Do these observations have implications for the actual structure and procedures of schooling and education implicit in the structures of a liberated economy, and, for that matter, the implicit in the structures of liberated kinship, culture, and polity? Surely the answer is yes, not least but also not confined to the fact that of course educational institutions would themselves be self managing, would interface with participatory planning, and would incorporate a classless division of labor.

Put differently, there would not be some staff of schools and universities who only teach, others who only administer, and still others who only clean up. But the specific features of changes in how we teach, learn, and share will no doubt emerge only from the actual experience of teaching, learning, and sharing in a new society, and will no doubt also have a myriad of shapes and forms. Maybe occasionally the familiar memorization approach to learning will make sense. But likely more often an approach that emphasizes doing and interacting with those who can already do, where students learn from each other and from mentors will make more sense. Likely, lectures will play a role, and certainly reading and collective projects will play a

role. Perhaps some kind of evaluative grading will be sensible. Without doubt, however, there will be standards.

If we consider economics, kinship, community, and politics, a good economy would certainly not have people who are poorly equipped to undertake tasks they wind up doing, whether it be to fly passenger planes, compose music, build houses, drive trucks, or conduct cancer research. Or whether it be to parent, engage with different cultural communities, or participate in law making and collective political projects, and much more of course.

How much education will people get? How many years? What will be the balance between generalist preparation to be a full citizen and specialized training in a field of major pursuit or in broader life requirements? To what degree will resources go to raising the comprehension and capacity of less able students as compared to advancing students pursuing cutting edge intellectual insights? To what degree will resources go to expand peoples' comprehension and capacities as compared to advance other social ends? These choices and countless others are not a matter of a priori determination. They are what free people in context of free institutions will decide for themselves in a better future.

The point here is that save for a minority, and in various respects even for them, current society annihilates aspirations for worthy education. In contrast, a desirable society would actualize educational aspirations of all its members. It would simultaneously seek to prepare each new generation for roles that exist in society and also for their own personal development and fulfillment as they desire it—precisely because the former requires and aids the latter, and the latter requires and aids the former. Curricula would be chosen, adapted, and evolve in accord. So too for methods of interaction. All involved would, as with all sides of life, participate in a self-managing manner. But that's in a better future. From our current positions and circumstances in current society how can teachers, students, others in education institutions, and citizens at large move education toward where it needs to ultimately arrive?

Education Program — What Can We Do Now

A question arises. What now? What might sensibly occur to win gains today that would lead toward a better tomorrow, and how might such steps occur? Consider pre-college public school education or a college campus. What might people do to improve education today and to simultaneously move toward the kind of liberated education noted above? For every educational venue there are some educators, some others who work to make the venue viable, many others who participate to learn, as well as a surrounding population. Given the above observations about education, now and in a better future, what demands or campaigns might activists today usefully pursue?

Consider a college. What are some kinds of change won by what kinds of movements that might not only improve current relations and outcomes but also foster desires and organizations eager and prepared to win yet more?

Of course, what makes sense at any one campus will depend greatly on conditions and available means there. What to demand for any campus is contextual and contingent. But we know that young faculty and graduate students are currently organizing around the country for better conditions and wages. What might be added? A growing role in decision making to move toward making each whole campus self managed by all its participants—support staff, faculty, grad students, and students. A say over curriculum and teaching methods to ensure that all who participate wind up sufficiently empowered, knowledgeable, skilled, and compassionate to partake effectively of their rightful share of immediate decision making and, when they pursue roles in society, to have attitudes and capacities to function well and cooperatively there as well. Establishment of a worker/student councils via which all participants in educational institutions can exercise influence and through which all their aims can be sought. Changes in roles and responsibilities that move toward a new universally empowering division of labor so all decisions are well informed. An approach to wages that moves toward equity for all

participants based on effort and sacrifice expended, not on bargaining power or even output. New or refined allocation of tasks and responsibilities and of content of daily life arrangements and of curriculum plus means of pedagogy sought by the worker and student councils to counter existing racist, sexist, and classist behavior patterns and assumptions.

And what about the relation of the campus to the surrounding community and society? What might be added in that regard? Context and means will determine detailed program but the aim will presumably be for a college or university to be a good citizen regarding the impact of its use of land and resources on surrounding communities, and regarding appropriate use of its athletic, cultural, scientific, and educational assets including their use by neighbors when not used by those directly involved.

Consider next a public primary or secondary school. What are some kinds of change won by what kinds of movements that might not only improve their current relations and outcomes but also foster desires and organizations eager and prepared to win yet more?

In many respects it is not only the same question as for a higher education institution, it will also be essentially the same answers, though again, details will differ in different schools that have different assets and conditions. Even so, we know that many teachers and students are currently organizing widely for better conditions and wages. What might be added? Refinements in decision making to move toward making each whole school self managed by all its participants—support staff, teachers, students, and students' parents. A say over curriculum and teaching methods to ensure that all who participate wind up sufficiently empowered, knowledgeable, skilled, and compassionate to partake effectively of their rightful share of decision making and, when they pursue roles in society, to have attitudes and capacities to operate well and cooperatively there as well. Establishment of a worker/student councils via which all can exercise influence and through

which all these aims can be sought. Changes in roles and responsibilities that move toward a new universally empowering division of labor so all decisions are well informed. An approach to wages that moves toward equity for all workers based on effort and sacrifice expended, not based on bargaining power or even output. New or refined allocation of tasks and responsibilities and of content of daily life arrangements as well as of curriculum and pedagogy to counter existing racist, sexist, and classist behavior patterns and assumptions.

And what about the relation of the school to the surrounding community and society? What might be added in that regard? Context and means will determine detailed program but the aim will presumably be for a primary or secondary school to be a good citizen regarding its use of land and resources affecting the surrounding community. For appropriate use of its athletic, cultural, scientific, and educational assets including their use by neighbors when not used by those directly involved, for example, using the school at night for neighborhood education, entertainment, celebration, meetings, etc.

The idea in all the above mentioned cases is for the relevant participants to create organizational means, confidence, and desires to move their respective educational institution's structure, decision making, distribution of benefits and responsibilities, curriculum, and pedagogy toward preferred educational attainments while also recognizing the need for broader societal change in accord.

The Twenty Theses for Liberation, its signers hope you will agree, can provide a worthy basis for education-related movements to orient themselves in light of education as it is and toward education as it ought to be while simultaneously aiding and seeking aid from others doing likewise in other domains of life. And all the more so as you and others refine, advance, and share the ideas. To those ends, please visit 4Liberation.org.

Why It's Important to Get Behind "20 Theses #4Liberation"

Bridget Meehan

20 Theses for Liberation was co-published by multiple outlets on 1 May. Co-authored by 30 progressive activists (of which I am one) and co-hosted by 5 international organisations at the time of publication, 20 Theses proposes a basis for collectively seeking a shared vision and strategy for a winning better world. The hope is that, without being prescriptive, 20 Theses can be a unifying force for the Left, serving as a guide that activists can refine, improve and use.

20 Theses begins by expressing the desire for a movement of movements, though pointing out that this is not a new idea. Indeed, it is not new but it is elusive and essential in a world where we face compounding existential problems, among them nuclear annihilation and ecological breakdown and a drift toward Fascist activism. Problems of this magnitude can cause overwhelming feelings of doom or apathy – we're screwed so why bother? At times, that can be exactly how we feel when we're part of a progressive programme that's working alone simply because these problems are too enormous to be defeated by individual programmes. The truth is, if we remain separate, we cannot win a better world. The truth is, if we want to win, we must unite to form a movement of mutually supportive movements. 20 Theses attempts to facilitate that unity.

Clearly, uniting to form a movement of movements makes a lot of sense. Why then has it remained so elusive?

It's possible that activists may feel threatened by an approach that expects them to join forces with others. They may fear losing out to programmes in the same area of interest, viewing them as competitors rather than collaborators. They may worry that their message will get crowded out or diluted and

become less important. They may believe that having to work with others could side-track them from their primary focus, requiring them to throw away their own agenda and take on someone else's. They may consider building unity with others as a waste of time. Or they may be indifferent and simply not see the point of uniting. Or it may be none of the above.

Many of these reasons could be overcome if we were able to agree a shared vision and strategy that enabled us to see the bigger picture and the ultimate end goal which is to win. With sufficient shared vision and strategy, the Left could unite. Every Left programme would be able to locate itself within the overarching shared vision. Each would be able to understand its relationship with other programmes and the contribution it makes to the end goal, without having to compromise on its own agenda.

20 Theses proposes a starting point upon which a shared vision and strategy could be arrived at by suggesting six spheres of social life and a series of organising principles. The six spheres are polity, economy, kinship, culture, ecology, and international relations. These are broad enough to accommodate pretty much any Left programme and place it within the context of the physical and social world.

A shared vision addressing the six spheres would be like a large river system with a multitude of tributaries; where each Left programme is a small tributary that flows into a bigger tributary representing the sphere it fits into; the bigger tributaries flow into the river that represents our shared vision and, that flows as one and in the same direction towards the sea that represents our ultimate goal of winning a better world.

For example, I might be part of a programme for black empowerment. If my programme buys into creating a shared vision based on 20 Theses, we might locate ourselves in the culture sphere. We might also forge partnerships with climate campaigners (ecology) because black communities suffer disproportionately from industrial pollution; with feminist campaigners (kinship) because our female members endure crippling levels of discrimination; with a minimum wage campaign (economy) because black workers on average earn less than white workers; with prison legislation reformers (polity) because incarceration rates are higher for black people; with the anti-war movement (international relations) because, in addition to wanting an end to war, the billions of dollars in public money spent on the military industrial complex means there's less money for social programmes like education, health, housing.

Or, for example, I may be involved in a programme for a mutual bank which could find a home in the economy sphere. Under a shared vision emerging from 20 Theses, the bank programme I pursue might see fit to join forces with climate campaigners (ecology) because once in operation, the bank would prioritise investment in enterprises that have environmental value; with participatory budgeting campaigners (polity) because the bank shares their goal to democratise decisions about public money spending; with the international tax justice campaign (international relations) because the bank helps retain wealth in local communities and prevents it from being diverted into the global finance sector and tax havens; with a migrant rights group (culture) because the bank can ensure migrant workers are guaranteed access to basic banking services; with anti-child poverty campaigners (kinship) because the bank will have technology that makes budgeting and saving much easier.

By uniting with all these other programmes in seemingly unrelated spheres, our campaign for black empowerment or our campaign for a mutual bank can build solidarity across movements, creating an interconnected movement of movements that are more powerful and more effective together

than apart and that can share mutual support and learning. It is possible for each programme within this movement of movements to share the same vision and same ultimate goal of winning a new society while simultaneously pursuing different intermediate goals. No programme need feel displaced, threatened, distracted or diminished. And because campaigns are united, success in one campaign has a positive impact on the others. In other words, success for one means success for all, means a step closer to the end goal of winning another world.

The ability to keep a focus on the long-term goal while campaigning for immediate goals in the here and now is not to be underestimated. It's the difference between working for reforms in a reformist way versus working for reforms in a non-reformist way. Often, Left activists work for reforms and often, for lack of vision, we don't advance to non-reformist reforms. For example, without a shared vision that 20 Theses could help create, we might campaign for a 4-day working week. Once we accomplish that, it's likely our campaign would come to an end. Our goal is achieved, our job is done, we can all go home. The energy, learning, resources and momentum amassed during the campaign disperses and is lost. This is a reform, well won and valuable, but not going beyond itself.

By contrast, within the context of a shared vision, the campaign for a 4-day working week could be part of the long-term goal to replace capitalism with a participatory economy which would culminate in self-managed workplaces that are part of the commons. So, we would not stop at winning the 4-day working week. We would keep going thus transforming it into a non-reformist reform because it isn't an end in itself. We would use the energy, learning, resources and momentum amassed during the campaign to move to the next campaign which might be to demand better working conditions for workers; and the campaign after that which might be to seek greater worker self-management in workplaces, and so on and so on. We would campaign for a series of non-reformist reforms, one after the other, guided by our shared vision, until we reached our end goal.



The Left has shown moments of unity in the past but these have, by and large, dissipated or splintered once success or a certain level of success was achieved. Examples are the US labour strikes in the 1930s or the US anti-war movement in the 1960s and 1970s. In these, while momentous victories were achieved, they stopped before any longer-term goal was achieved. What might have been won had they continued with the same singular determination to demand more?

And so, what is next for 20 Theses?

At the crassest level, the plan is to grow the number of signers to the document. I want hundreds of thousands, millions even, of activists and programmes to sign.

As you contemplate signing, ask yourself, do you accept that it's possible to use 20 Theses to have a deep and wide conversation that could arrive at a shared vision without losing sight of your own agenda? Are you prepared to trust the process, trust fellow activists, and work to reach a shared under-

standing bigger than your own area of interest? Will you unite with others and become part of a movement of movements? Do you truly believe success for one can be success for all and that winning is possible?

If you or your programme can answer yes to at least one of these questions, then I invite you to sign. And once you do, that's when the work really begins.

And while those of us who sign don't have to agree with every word in each of the twenty theses, while we might see what is missing or what is inadequately described, it shouldn't stop us from engaging in a discussion to improve 20 Theses. It shouldn't stop us from accepting the principle that united under a shared vision we will be stronger and more effective; so long as that shared vision is broad enough to give a home to the myriad of activists out there; so long as that shared vision is flexible enough to evolve and accommodate change. And that imperfect as it is, 20 Theses is still a good place for us to start creating that vision.

Suggestions From the Peer Support World

Jim Driscoll

We have hit an organizational dead end in the progressive social change movement, just when we are also facing terminal threats to our species. Noam Chomsky (2019) has named the two most immediate threats: (a) the ongoing climate catastrophe and (b) the worst ever threat of nuclear war. At least a dozen species threats loom just behind these two (Pamlin and Armstrong, 2015.) Like many of you, I have spent the last 40 years doing full-time social change, including both to deal with climate change and to prevent nuclear war.. What is different about my story is that it was combat in Vietnam that led me to quit college teaching and become a full-time activist—and that dealing with the aftereffects of combat led me to spend these same forty years in two innovative peer-support (PS) communities: Co-counseling and Anonymous recovery. While both these communities have been the subject of intensive and justifiable criticism, they also both follow uncommon, positive organizational practices. Those practices suggest a way out of the organizational dead end in time to avoid annihilation.

Young people of color have named this organizational dead end as the “NGO-industrial complex” (“NGOIC”) (Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, 2017.) Following the model of corporations under capitalism, NGOICs employ highly-paid, professional staff on a permanent, career basis, using funds raised from rich people and their foundations and organize their work in a hierarchy, typically headed by an “Executive Director” (or sometimes, fashionably, two “Co-Directors.”) Inevitably, the interests and values of funders push NGOs to make conservative choices in policies and tactics. Indeed, by law in the USA, the organizational form most

frequently followed to give the rich the benefits of tax-deductibility, the 501 (c) (3), is prohibited from engaging in elections, grassroots lobbying beyond a small amount (5% of the first \$100,000 in income), much less civil disobedience. Setting aside the threat of funding cutoffs, people who aspire and train for such NGOIC careers also support conservative policy and strategic choices for personal reasons. Their family and colleagues in the media, government, religion and other sectors recommend and reward such conservative choices. Prophetically, the German sociologist Robert Michels identified almost precisely the same NGOIC over a hundred years ago in his critique of the then powerful socialist parties in Europe (Michels, 1962.) More recently, Harvard professor Theda Skocpol blamed it for the failure of our massive environmental organizations to tackle the climate crisis in 2009. We have known about this organizational dead end for over a century and yet we still turn into it, again and again.

Indeed, the “progressive” NGOIC in the US collectively spends at least a hundred billion dollars each year in this organizational dead end and employs several hundred thousand highly-educated, dedicated, energetic workers. Yet all these crises continue to worsen.

The intentional peer support (PS) communities suggest a better direction. Following it, the Anonymous world has engaged millions of members in dozens of organizations and provides the dominant mode of recovery from most addictions. Co-counseling has 100,000 members including many activists worldwide with several offshoots. This better direction supports the approach of most non-violent, direct-action

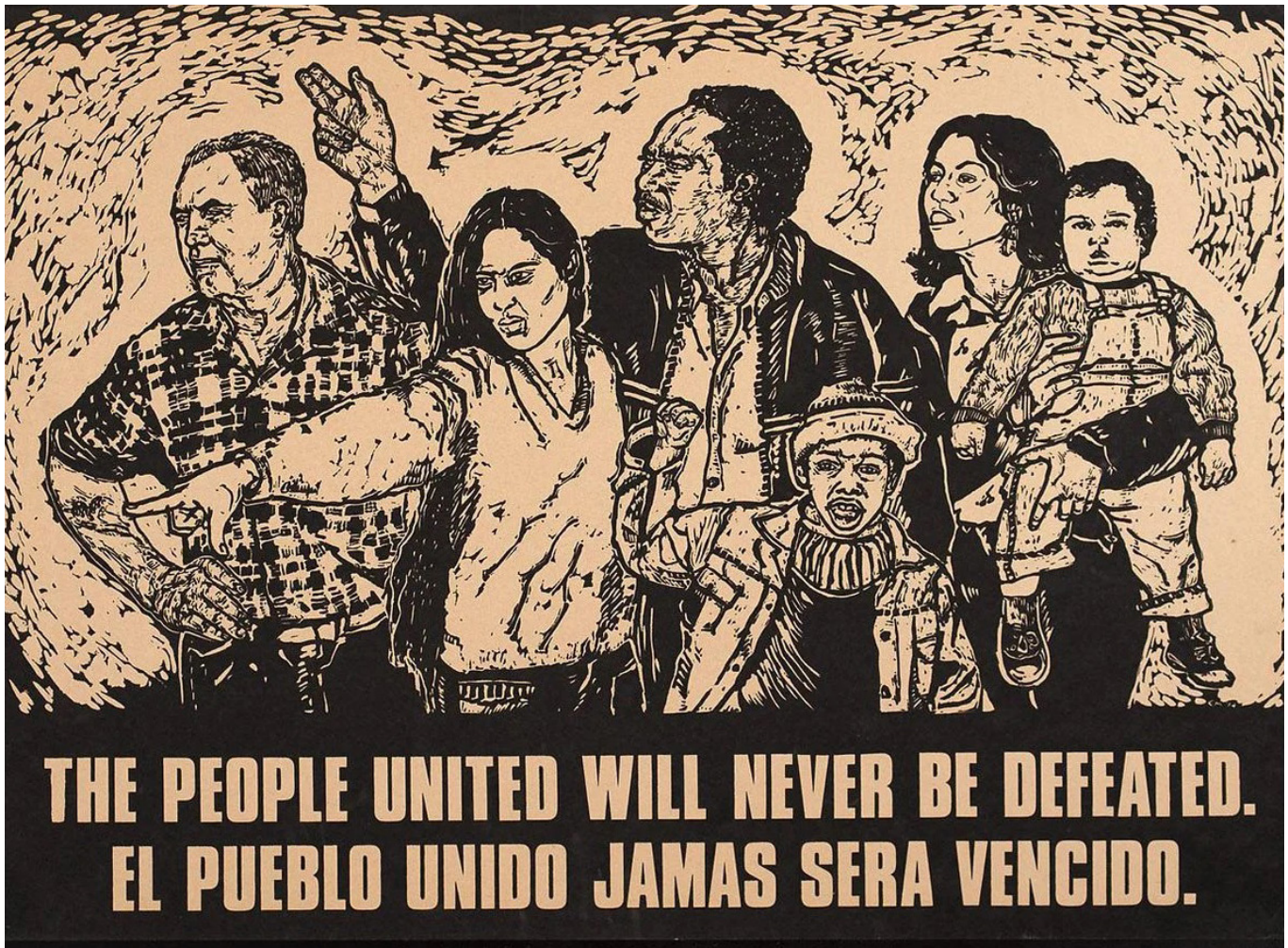
campaigns (Cornell, 2011) and the suggestions of Albert and Hahnel (1999) in “participatory economics.” (1)

Here is a small-scale example from my own experience of how it might look to build and run a social change movement on a less careerist, hierarchical and more horizontal, peer-support basis. In 2005, twenty-five young U.S. veterans, just back from the horrors of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, spent a weekend in a residential, peer-support workshop, cried in each other’s arms, and figured out how to create a movement to help each other heal and change the world that caused their pain (MacEachron and Gustavsen, 2012.) After the first evening and the next day exchanging peer support, they spent the second evening in egalitarian problem solving and planning action. First, they brainstormed the major problems confronting their generation of veterans. Then, they broke up in self-generated groups to share information, on an egalitarian footing, on how to deal with those issues: PTSD, the GI Bill, the VA, the war itself. Finally, later in the evening and the next morning, those groups reconvened and followed a horizontal process to turn their ideas into action. During that weekend, in addition to their personal healing, they helped launch organizations to help lead their generation, at least two of which are still functioning almost two decades later. Using the horizontal tools of co-counseling, we ran 85 of these residential, weekend workshops from 2005-11 for 1,500 returning US veterans. We helped reshape how the VA treats PTSD (what these younger veterans call “the moral injury of war”) and how young veterans organize politically. While weekend workshops are not an organization, these peer-support workshops based on the tools of co-counseling demonstrate how people can organize more effectively on a horizontal basis.

Here are some of the important organizing practices these two PS communities have converged upon and which may be worth considering.

EMAILS WON’T DO IT. Both these communities ask participants to spend a lot of time in their quest to change human behavior, 1-3 hours a day of specific activities. How could changing anything as fundamental and all-encompassing as our social system require less effort? Our workplaces, careers, family structure, education, you name it, most realistic observers agree, everything must change. By contrast, most “social change” NGOs rely primarily on click-activism, a flurry of emails to their members asking for money or signatures on a petition, or at most attending a local meeting once a month.

- **STOP HOLDING OUR FIRING SQUADS IN A CIRCLE.** This witticism nails our tendency on the left (in fairness, in all human activity) to act out our individual bad habits on each other—put downs, oppressive remarks and actions, suspicions, gossip, cliques. Often I think we on the left are also reacting to our ineffectiveness (or hopelessness) about changing the larger social system. By contrast, the Anonymous world works systematically on personal bad habits as an alternative to imposing them on our fellow/sister activists. Co-counseling insists its members tackle all the oppressions handed down by our society: racism, sexism, classism, etc. Again, to change any one of these habits in either community usually takes hours each week in reading, reflecting, and sharing. However, the results are worth it in both communities. For example, in both, their regular activities include long, productive meetings, intentionally positive, usually free of put downs. They hold far fewer firing-squads.
- **THERE IS NO SHORTCUT FOR INTIMACY.** The two PS communities take one-on-one, relational organizing to a deeper level (cf. Gans, 2009.) The Anonymous world rests on at least one intense mentoring relationship between “sponsor” and “sponsee” or more peer-oriented “accountability buddies.” These one-on-one relationships often involve deep emotional sharing, vulnerability and ad-



vice-giving. Likewise, co-counseling is based on such sharing. Importantly, most personal interactions in both PS communities rely on timed, uninterrupted listening turns and encourage the expression of deep feelings. By comparison, the NGOIC typically prescribes one meeting each month for any organization's members/supporters in any geographical area. Only a small fraction of members even attend these meetings which are typically dominated by a few leaders and include little emotional content. Such interactions do not provide adequate social support for our stressful social change work. They have not attracted and retained the millions of new members and allies we need.

- **GROUP HUGS.** Rarely does the NGOIC ask an activist to join a permanent small group to get emotional support, share information

and act together (Engler and Engler, 2016). By comparison, the other team—take, for example, almost any right-wing, evangelical mega-church—relies heavily on a network of small, ongoing groups (Worthnow, 1994.) So do both PS communities. Co-counseling has further refined the use of groups. When focused on social support, the co-counseling groups rely on timed turns. When the group meets to share information on a topic, participants do not use timers and instead follow simple rules: “No one speaks twice before everyone speaks once.” “No one speaks four times until everyone has spoken twice.” When groups meet to take action, they take timed turns answering four questions: First, “what have you done recently on this topic?” Second, “what else should we know on this topic?” Third, “what are you going to do?” Finally, “what might get in your way of doing

what you just said you would do?” Like those evangelical churches, these two PS communities emphasize small groups. In addition, they vary the design of group meetings depending on their purpose.

- **HOW DO GROUPS RELATE?** In the NGOIC model, local groups of activists don’t relate much to each other at all. Communication flows hierarchically, not horizontally between local groups. Paid staff run national programs. Activists in local groups or chapters largely choose among suggestions or directives from the national organization. By contrast, the Anonymous model connects groups through “Intergroups,” analogous to the “Spokes council” in the direct-action model used for civil disobedience actions. Each ongoing, small, Anonymous “Meeting” selects a temporary “direct” representative to attend monthly Intergroup meetings to make decisions affecting all the groups. The Meeting’s representatives do not make personal decisions in the Intergroup, they represent their Meeting’s thinking. If a new topic comes up, they return to their group to get guidance. Intergroup decisions are made by consensus with a majority vote used as a backup.
- **HORIZONTAL ORGANIZATIONS**—Contrary to the NGOIC hierarchical, individualistic corporate model, the basic research in organizational psychology supports a horizontal, group-centered approach (Driscoll, 1980.) It suggests that leaders rotate; staff perform tasks balanced to be equally appealing; groups decide by consensus. The Anonymous community adds: pay staff (“special workers”) to support but not lead (e.g. accounting, newsletters, emails); only volunteers lead; spokes councils connect the groups.

What else is needed?

Horizontal organizations may reduce the conservative pull of the NGOIC. However, my expe-

rience with these two PS communities suggests the need for further protection. The traditional Anonymous organizations have refused to modify their policies and literature to accommodate the increasing numbers of us who identify as atheists and agnostics. The official Anonymous literature and informal culture both emphasize and enforce belief in an interventionary, person-alistic force: god or a “Higher Power” (always capitalized and usually masculinized). To deal with this challenge, we secular folks have built our own informal sub-communities, such as SecularOvereaters.org (which I helped found), within and alongside the formal organizations. It includes members of the formal organization and others who choose not to join. By contrast, the formal co-counseling structure stifled attempts to correct a pattern of serious misconduct by its founder and long-time leader. In addition, both these PS communities started and have stayed overwhelmingly white and middle-class with all the racism and classism that implies. Thus, a horizontal structure is not a panacea for solving all the problems posed by the NGOIC.

A vision

Founded, as we say, by a “group of drunks” in 1934 (actually by drunks who had been recruited by the same Christian sect), the Anonymous communities have now diversified and helped millions around the world deal with a range of problems many of us previously found life-threatening. All over the world people gather every day, in person and increasingly online, in scheduled groups to support each other. Often taking timed, uninterrupted turns, they share deep feelings. They exchange information and advice. And they do it in a near-perfectly horizontal organization: completely self-supporting financially (a foundation cannot give them more than \$10,000), no paid leaders; rotating leadership; consensus decision making; and governed through a set of nested spokes councils.

It can be done.

Bust the Myths About Collective Agreements

Rasmus Hästbacka, Emil Broberg

In Sweden, as in many other countries, employers are attacking the collective agreements (or the labor contracts, as it's called in North America). "If workers are to defend collective agreements and push the frontline forward, the myths about collective agreements must be dispelled." Thus write Rasmus Hästbacka and Emil Broberg. Below they highlight three myths that are produced by Swedish unions, not by employers, to the detriment of workers. Hästbacka and Broberg are members of the Swedish syndicalist union SAC.

At least since the early 1900s, Swedish employers have been very class conscious and well organized. The Swedish Employers' Association (SAF) was founded in 1902. SAF was replaced in 2001 by the association Svenskt Näringsliv (Confederation of Swedish Enterprise).

Curt Nicolin was the chairman of SAF in the 1970s. Nicolin's battle cry of 1976 has become legendary: "We must short-circuit the trade union system." Employers were desperate and it is easy to understand why. Right up to the year 1980, the wages' share of the produced value in companies increased, at the expense of the profits' share. At that time, demands for democratization of workplaces were also very popular.

During Curt Nicolin's time, an offensive was launched against working people that we are still living under in Sweden. This offensive is well described in the Swedish TV documentary "The wage dumpers" (Lönesänkarna) and by researchers writing the anthology "The decreased wage share" (Den sänkta lönandelen, 2013).

The employers' offensive has indeed borne fruit. On June 12, 1999, the well-known capitalist Rob-

ert Weil made the following statement in Sweden's biggest newspaper Dagens Nyheter:

"Capitalists, unite and thank the wage earners! Thanks to the many who gave up almost everything so that we capitalists could get too much! But now the party of capital is most likely over soon and we will probably never experience anything like it again."

Nine years later, in Dagens Nyheter on February 20, 2008, Robert Weil stated that the party had not ended. Capitalists were even better off.

FIVE STRATEGIES

A given target for offensive employers is collective agreements. In the Swedish labor market today, collective agreements are attacked by means of at least five different strategies. Employers...

- (1) ...refuse to sign collective agreements
- (2) ...sign agreements but refuse to follow them
- (3) ...hire other companies with cheap labor
- (4) ...conduct so called "collective agreement shopping", i.e. apply cheap collective agreements instead of expensive agreements
- (5) ...advocate and actually abide by collective agreements, but then conduct militant struggle to change the content of agreements to the detriment of workers.

The first and second strategy (refusing to sign collective agreements or refusing to follow them) are used by various criminal employers who are



outside the employers' associations. It is a sign of our times that Swedish state authorities are developing a collaboration against "working life criminality" (in Swedish: *arbetslivskriminalitet*). It is also telling that a current research project at Stockholm University raises the question: Why doesn't Swedish labor law work?

The strategy to sign collective agreements but refuse to abide by them is not only used by obvious crooks. The strategy is also used by many companies within reputable employers' associations, such as ALMEGA in the service sector.

The third strategy (hiring other companies with cheap labor) is often used by municipal and state employers. Labor is cheap because these companies don't have or don't follow collective agreements – or the companies apply agreements that are so lousy that labor is cheap.

The fourth strategy (collective agreement shopping) is promoted by new legislation, namely the Swedish anti-strike act of 2019. This act was supported by leaders of the big social democratic union LO as well as by leaders of the white-collar unions TCO and Saco. Union grassroots and

critical lawyers warned that the anti-strike act would protect employers who conduct collective agreement shopping. It was dismissed as "heresy" by the LO secretary Torbjörn Johansson (in Swedish: "irrlärör").

After the anti-strike act entered into force, numerous cases of collective agreement shopping have been reported, primarily by the union paper *Arbetaren*. The former LO lawyer Kurt Junesjö sums it up: "LO unions are now stuck in the shit." LO organizes most of the blue-collar working class. Of course, collective agreement shopping can also drive white-collar workers into the shit. One example is that already in 2018, the Swedish Union of Journalists accepted insecure employment contracts for up to 4 years (according to a new collective agreement) instead of a maximum of 2 years (according to the old agreement).

The fifth strategy (to comply with collective agreements but change the content to the detriment of workers) is used by employers in the export industry. These employers have a weapon in negotiations that surpasses the lockout several times over: the threat of relocating production across national borders.

FIRST MYTH

Swedish trade unions are good at praising collective agreements, but worse at monitoring and enforcing agreements. Collective agreements are praised in an uncritical way that actually harms workers. Many unions fuel myths about collective agreements that make it harder for workers to understand their situation and improve it. We are referring to three myths in particular that should be dispelled as soon as possible.

The first myth is that collective agreements is a guarantee for workers' rights. No, collective agreements contain rights, but these rights must be defended when employers violate them. According to Swedish law, this is done through private enforcement. Hopefully, this means that a union will react with negotiations and lawsuits when there is a breach of an agreement. Unfortunately, this doesn't work against militant and rich employers. Then the collective of workers must assert their rights and put suitable pressure on the bosses.

Some Swedish trade unions appear to have given up when it comes to monitoring and enforcing collective agreements. Two LO unions in the construction industry and hotel and restaurant industry each have a list of "decent" employers. On these lists we find employers who systematically violate collective agreements. The two LO unions know it, but they let the employers remain on the lists (with the argument that the employers are bound by collective agreements).

Another union that seems to have given up is the LO union that organizes care takers of real estates. Syndicalists in this industry have first-hand experience of this union actually protecting criminal employers. In exchange, the employers pressure their employees to join the LO union.

Syndicalists spend a lot of time and energy defending collective agreements concluded by LO unions within the construction, real estate, hotel and restaurant industries. But more hard work is needed.

SECOND MYTH

The second myth promoted by Swedish unions is that collective agreements are purely beneficial to workers, that they are wholly positive. No, collective agreements are a product of struggle, compromise and horse trading. Collective agreements are in themselves neither positive nor negative. It is the content of the agreement and the union's ability to monitor and use the agreement that determine the value of the agreement.

One aspect of collective agreements that is always negative for workers is the industrial peace obligation, i.e. an anti-strike clause that automatically follows every agreement according to Swedish law. This does not prevent the employer from using a multitude of weapons against the staff: relocation, reorganization, planning under threat of dismissals, etc.

From the workers' point of view, the industrial peace obligation can be accepted if the union succeeds in selling industrial peace at a high price. In 2007, a survey showed that employers within the hotel and restaurant industry are the most positive employers when it comes to collective agreements. In Arbetaren, Rebecka Bohlin made the following comment: "It's really not surprising that employers in the hotel and restaurant industry are satisfied with their collective agreements – after all, the deal gives them the cheapest labor in the country."

The most employer-friendly part of Swedish collective agreements is that the agreements usually give employers very strong prerogatives when it comes to leading the labor process. This means, for example, that employers can arbitrarily increase the work pace and reduce staff density, without breaking collective agreements.

Employers' prerogatives have been expanded through so-called "individual wage setting". Syndicalists underline that this gives bosses the right to arbitrarily determine wages. The worst variety of "individual wage setting" is so-called

zero agreements. It means collective agreement without guaranteed wage increases. That is to sell industrial peace at a pretty low price.

Furthermore, many collective agreements contain concessions that give workers weaker rights than stipulated in Swedish law. Statutory rights can to a large extent be replaced by collective agreements. Sometimes collective agreements have been so lousy that the Swedish Labor Court has classified the agreement as an “undue erosion” of workers’ rights. In these cases, employers have been forced to apply the law instead of the collective agreement.

An example of a collective agreement which, in our opinion, should be regarded as “undue erosion” is an agreement in the health care sector. This agreement covers personal assistants in private companies. The agreement gives companies the right to terminate an employment as soon as the cooperation with the client doesn’t work. If the companies were not bound by this collective agreement, they would be obliged to try to relocate the worker to another client or to another job within the employer’s business (according to the Swedish employment protection act).

THIRD MYTH

The third and last myth is that employers without collective agreements have the right to pay as low wages as they wish. This myth has been promoted via LO’s posters and advertisements. It can appear to be true, because in Sweden we have no minimum wage according to law. But in fact, Swedish unions can take the employer to court and demand fair wages. The standard for fairness will then be the nationwide collective agreement in the industry. This means that the court can level the wages, at least to the minimum level of the national collective agreement. If there is no national agreement, current wage statistics in the industry can serve as a standard.

The Labor Court cases are clear in situations where the individual’s wage is unclear: then the

wage must be adjusted up to the minimum level of the collective agreement. What if, on the contrary, a wage is both clear and low from the start? Even in these situations, the court would probably adjust the wage up to the minimum level, at least if the worker is in a particularly weak or inferior bargaining position.

FIGHTING BACK

When workers need a clear understanding of their situation, Swedish unions provide the opposite. Why do so many unions produce myths about collective agreements? Why are so many unions so dishonest? A crude but reasonable answer is that Swedish unions suck. If Swedish unions were honest about their corrupt and weak performance, they would probably lose many members and recruit very few. The myth of the collective agreement as being this fantastic and universal solution serves as a façade of a pretty rotten house.

Anyhow, if workers are to defend collective agreements and push the frontline forward, the myths about collective agreements must be dispelled. All union organizers and shop stewards should repeat three things: that collective agreements do not guarantee rights, are not purely beneficial to workers and that employers without collective agreements do not have the right to pay as low wages as they wish.

We also need to repeat what the basic task of the union is. A successful union conducts collective struggle for collective deals. Then the deals will have a valuable content that workers are willing to defend.

All union representatives should also encourage workers to unleash their creativity. Try both collective agreements and other ways to make deals! Try both strikes and alternatives to strikes! Try both formal collective bargaining and other ways to confront the bosses! Creativity on the shop floor is the essence of syndicalist strategy.