

DEMOCRATIC LEFT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA • SUMMER 2020 • VOL. XLVIII NO. 1 • dsausa.org



SAFE WORKING CONDITIONS



FREE PUBLIC COLLEGE



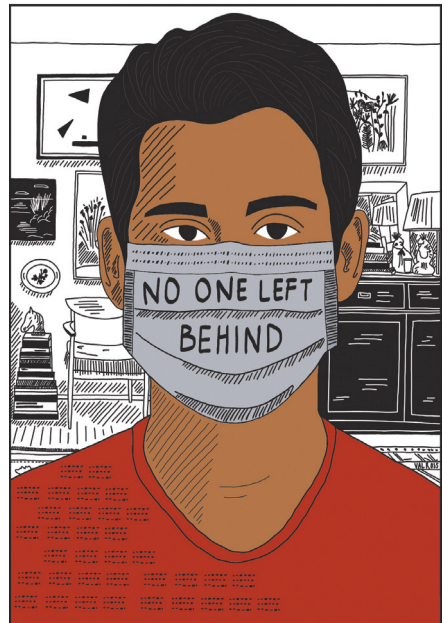
INCOME SECURITY



MEDICARE FOR ALL



FREEDOM FOR DETAINEES



MORATORIUM ON EVICTIONS

Crisis equals opportunity

BY MARIA SVART

“Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying



around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable.”

This quote is not from Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, but rather our late arch nemesis, neoliberal economist Milton Friedman. He and his acolytes were responsible for the murder of our comrades abroad and built think tanks and astro turf operations at home for the same reason DSA has long fought to bring socialist ideas back to the center of political conversation in this country: Ideas have power. With the help of Bernie Sanders and his millions of supporters, socialists are back.

Now a crisis is upon us, the scale of which is almost unimaginable. Will we move in the direction of democratic socialism, or barbarism?

I write this piece as the government is on the cusp of forcing millions of people back into danger, absolving bosses of liability and accepting the coming deaths. In fact, the choice they prefer we make is between dying at work or starving at home. Donald Trump’s horrific handling of the pandemic will be compounded by a global economic crisis whether or not we force construction workers back to luxury

condo work sites or UAW workers back to make cars that no one can buy. Police will continue violence as always in communities of color. And the virus will spread, with a hospital system decimated by decades of Republican and Democratic austerity cuts and restructuring to maximize profits and a growing pool of patients without health insurance—including 27 million who lost it since COVID-19 struck.

The stage is set for a crisis of legitimacy. It could allow us to build a new world on the rubble of the old, if we make the choice to fight for socialism.

But it will not happen naturally. Friedman’s ideological descendents are hard at work manufacturing consent. They say relief makes workers lazy, that we want to be the canaries in the coal mines, that half measures are enough, and that the government cannot afford to save our people, though it was able to hand trillions of dollars to corporate interests. And when we cannot “save” the global economy through sacrificing lives, hawks in both parties will deflect blame and push for war with China.

Socialists have two tasks: to envision the alternative world we can build together, and to organize.

A vision of safety and abundance, of cooperation and care means lifting up workers demanding to make ventilators, farmers giving their produce and dairy to hungry people, and hospital workers providing care—all by printing money the way most politicians seem happy to do for the already filthy rich.

A fight to build that world means joining mutual aid networks rooted in our communities, organizing tenants to withhold rent, finding creative ways to pressure politicians for relief, or building support for our candidates. It means

everywhere creating lists of people and organizations to call on when your friends, neighbors, or someone you don’t know strikes for their safety or hazard pay. Because the strikes are coming. They have already started.

Here is a brief sampling of what your fellow DSAers are doing across the country to build grassroots working class power.

- **NEW ORLEANS DSA** built a coalition of unions and community groups to demand the convention center spend \$100 million for laid off hospitality workers.
- **NORTH JERSEY DSA** organized “phone zaps” and car caravan protests demanding the local ICE detention center release detainees while also doing mutual aid to provide food for hundreds of families.
- **LOS ANGELES DSA** filmed a direct action stunt at the Ritz Carlton with its 900 empty rooms and \$270 million in taxpayer subsidies to highlight how the mayor made ultimately empty promises to move unhoused residents into hotels during COVID-19.
- From **CHICO, CA** to **NYC**, many chapters are doing aid work directly or via Solidarity Funds to raise and distribute relief. **TWIN CITIES DSA** effectively integrated its aid work as a tactic to support those in need while also enlisting people to pressure their local and statewide governments to halt evictions.
- **PHILADELPHIA** and **PHOENIX DSA** organized call-Congress phone banks to push for the Emergency Health Care Guarantee Act, empowering Medicare

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Democratic Left (ISSN 1643207) is published quarterly at P.O. Box 1038, New York NY 10272. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY (Publication No. 701-960). Subscriptions: \$25 regular, \$30 institutional. Postmaster: Send address changes to P.O. Box 1038, New York NY 10272. (212) 727-8610. Signed articles express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily the organization.

Executive Editor: Maria Svart

Editor: Maxine Phillips

Editorial Team: Laura Colaneri, Christine Lombardi, Stephen Magro, Don McIntosh, Christine Riddiough

NPC Liaisons: Marianela D’Aprile and Tawny Tidwell

Cover Art: Val Ross, primroseworkshop.com

Layout: Don McIntosh

Book Review Editor: Stephen Magro

Online Editor: Christine Lombardi

Founding Editor: Michael Harrington

Democratic Socialists of America promotes a humane international social order based on equitable distribution of resources, meaningful work, a healthy environment, sustainable growth, gender and racial equality, and non-oppressive relationships. Equality, solidarity, and democracy can only be achieved through international political and social cooperation aimed at ensuring that economic institutions benefit people. We are dedicated to building truly international social movements—of unions, environmentalists, feminists, and people of color—which together can elevate global justice over brutalizing global competition.

Epidemics are powerful agents of change

Yellow fever, cholera, and smallpox left behind improvements in government and health.

BY JUDITH WALZER LEAVITT
AND LEWIS A. LEAVITT

Is it true that some clouds have silver linings? When it comes to epidemics, the answer is yes. With a few notable exceptions, epidemic infectious diseases, even as they caused suffering and death, have enhanced government's ability to control future outbreaks and protect the public's health.

The traditional examples of positive and long-term public health responses are yellow fever and cholera. These two diseases brought intermittent terror and death to U.S. cities in the 18th and 19th centuries. They also successfully stirred cities to spend money for needed, yet expensive, projects to tame the unsanitary urban environment, which was thought to cause disease, such as sewerage and water-supply systems and garbage disposal works. Without the high degree of fear engendered by the sudden onset of epidemics (as opposed to endemic diseases such as tuberculosis), lethargic city governments would never have spent such large sums of money on projects of such magnitude. Epidemics also increased the power of public officials to control infectious diseases by allowing them to forcibly place patients deemed dangerous to the public health in isolation hospitals. It took the shock of epidemics to force the changes.

This power was not always used positively. During a smallpox epidemic in Milwaukee in 1894, for example, health officials forcibly seized children from their mothers' arms in the immigrant sections of the city while allowing middle-class, native-born families to harbor their sick children in their own homes.

Coercion under such unfair conditions led to month-long rioting in the streets and the impeachment of the health commissioner. A confluence of ethnic-group mutual mistrust and political party competition building on this mistrust led to the diminution of health department powers and budgets that lasted for years.



Boston Red Cross workers making anti-influenza masks in 1918. (National Archives)

In 1947, when smallpox threatened New York, the health commissioner embarked on a public information campaign that combined isolation of cases with free vaccination for all New Yorkers. Frequent and honest multilingual messaging and equity in vaccine distribution, with help from the U.S. Public Health Service, led to public trust and a just and effective intervention. People waited patiently in long lines that wound around city streets, and within weeks, 6,350,000 city residents were vaccinated and the epidemic averted.

The history of epidemics teaches us two important lessons. First, because epidemics elicit fear and focus the public's mind, they can energize government actions. But second, those governmental actions can elicit ethnic, class, and racial strife as "others" are identified as carriers of infection, as in the Milwaukee example or when gays and Haitians were blamed for HIV/AIDS. A movement to promote public health benefit must take advantage of the first lesson and address the second. Fairness and public trust, as the New York smallpox example demonstrates, are the indispensable conditions for developing robust public health institutions.

During the past few decades, despite SARS, MERS, and H1N1 scares, our government has neglected public health, forgetting the devastation that epidem-

ics wreaked in the past. COVID-19 has exposed cracks in our public health system that cannot manage disease testing or even provide protective gear for health workers.

As with past outbreaks, the coronavirus epidemic exposes opposing social and political forces. COVID-19 has produced a public health crisis in the United States, which is ripe for positive reform, but it has also produced some of the finger pointing toward Asians that could signal insidious inequities. If historical precedent holds, we have a chance to use this crisis for sweeping changes in public health institutions. We must seize this opportunity to mount a concerted effort to use the public's fears and the focus generated by them to promote new, fair, and just investments in public health programs. As we work to create robust and equitable public health, we could find a silver lining.

Judith Walzer Leavitt, professor emerita of the history of medicine at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is the author of *The Healthiest City: Milwaukee and the Politics of Health Reform*. Lewis A. Leavitt, M.D., is professor emeritus of pediatrics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

‘Major unrest is going to have to happen’

**KANDIST
MALLETT**

TALKS TO

**CHRISTINE
LOMBARDI**



How does someone who has written for *Teen Vogue* and *Blavity.com* (“serving the multifaceted lives of black millennials”) turn out to be such an anticapitalist? Was it growing up in Southern California?

I went to California State University at Long Beach, where I majored in political science and studied community organizing. The prof who was my mentor was a low-key anarchist. I was kinda liberal, getting jaded with the two-party system. Then came the financial crash, during my senior year. I guess you could say I’ve been anticapitalist since then. I spent the next few years teaching English in Vietnam, living in Ho Chi Minh City. The year I got back to the States, Occupy happened.

Occupy! Where you saw police creating riots out of street art.

Occupy L.A. was probably one of the longest-lasting occupations, and I got in very deep. The greatest thing about Occupy for me was the relationships I was able to build. From those relationships, we could work to either organize direct actions or to share space when spontaneous actions were happening in L.A. (for instance, in response to the killings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown). There was a lot of internal struggle, because there were so many ideas of what people thought Occupy should mean. In the end, the destruction of Occupy wasn’t from the state but from the inability of a lot of the white participants to deal with race. I think that’s important to note, because a lot of DSA people came from Occupy.

The headline promised a lot: “The Coronavirus Pandemic Demonstrates the Failures of Capitalism.” What followed wasn’t in *Jacobin*, *Dissent* or *In These Times*, but *TeenVogue.com*. The article, by Kandist Mallett, lives up to the title: “Selling your labor in a capitalist marketplace just so you don’t end up on the street is horrible and unnatural, and we shouldn’t have to live this way,” she tells readers, before looking at how to respond to this moment of crisis. Democratic Left editorial team member Christine Lombardi interviewed Mallett by phone and email.

As someone with a background in community organizing, do you see your writing as organizing?

No! [Long pause.] Yes! I do.

Many of us have been admiring *Teen Vogue*’s lefty turn over the past few years; your work there includes a smart take on Iran and sanctions, and they have a labor editor talking about a general strike! What does it look like from the other side?

Their politics editors are very open to leftist ideas, to be sure. But I have to laugh sometimes: [after that coronavirus piece] some guy Tweeted it, writing “Teen Vogue goes full Marxist.”

I don’t understand how someone can say they’re a capitalist these days, with the damage all around us.

Your piece was partly about seizing the possibilities of this moment, when everyone's suddenly semi-socialist. In this transformational/dangerous moment, what organizing do you think needs to happen?

The failures of the government have been exposed. I would love to see some unified effort to respond. And I want to see social movement outside the Democratic Party. Because Ohio happened, because Wisconsin happened. Even the new wave of legislators we elected are in danger of seeing their work erased.

I really think we need a global effort, one that builds our own sort of safety net. We need to push for debt forgiveness across the board, for a universal basic income (and not just the [Andrew] Yang \$1,000 a month).

What inspires you and gives you hope?

When people hit the streets, I'm inspired. The culture's shifting, and people are talking about general strike! Though we need to look closely: If everyone's at home, what constitutes a strike? I'm inspired by all the networks that are protecting people's homes against eviction. I love it that community gardens, mutual aid systems, are all political now. Direct action, unifying that strength and collective energy: That's how we win.

When I asked in our first conversation what you hope DSA members learn from this piece, you responded diplomatically that at least in SoCal DSA meetings, "A lot of these spaces—not a lot of black people." Many of us in DSA recognize its whiteness as a real problem. How do you think DSA and its

locals can best support the struggle?

Whiteness doesn't just exist as an identity but as a power structure. I think often it's easy to look at the Right and say they're white supremacist, and their political ideals are guided through their whiteness. But the same exists on the Left or with liberals. There's been this trend with a lot of leftist platforms to romanticize the white working class and to push this class-first analysis. But any class analysis that doesn't also include a racial analysis is a white supremacist one. If we look at DSA on a local level, I'm curious to see what's the racial makeup of its members or how many of those white members are participating in gentrification of black or brown communities. The issue of whiteness exists in all political organizing where white people are included. Inevitably, white people's ideas, words, senses of humor, shared history and cultural references, and so on end up taking vast amounts of space, generating a sense of discomfort and ultimately self-censorship among people who implicitly know they're on the outside. It's not just Chapo Trap House, it's also the wider white attention economy—one that uplifts so many redundant white platformists. And here's where it matters for materialists: That attention brings in real income. That income becomes wealth, which perpetuates white supremacy across decades and generations. We must understand that class redistribution also means racial redistribution of material wealth. And if there's no chance of the state doing that, then at least among the Left, reparations along intersecting class and race lines must be a constant practice, e.g., "Here's

my Venmo." Furthermore, I think it's important for non-white, especially black DSA members to have their own organizing space and for the larger DSA network to financially support those efforts.

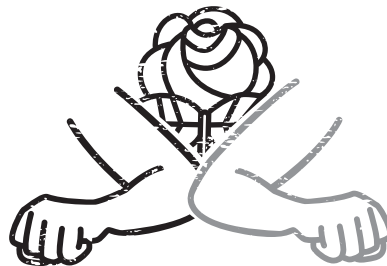
There's been a wave of headlines about COVID-19's disproportionate impact on African American communities. As Charles Blow just wrote in the *New York Times*, "the devastating effects of this virus may be as much about pre-existing social conditions as pre-existing medical ones." What does that mean for you as a writer, as an activist?

It'll be important to continue to report on how the pandemic has impacted black communities as well as how much the states' recovery efforts have reached those communities. We also have to consider that black people disproportionately make up people at the absolute lowest rung of society: homeless people, incarcerated people, people with chronic illnesses and substance use issues, and so on. These are all markers of poverty, hence why Stuart Hall says, "Race is the modality through which class is experienced."

What do you see as your own role in helping imagine a better tomorrow?

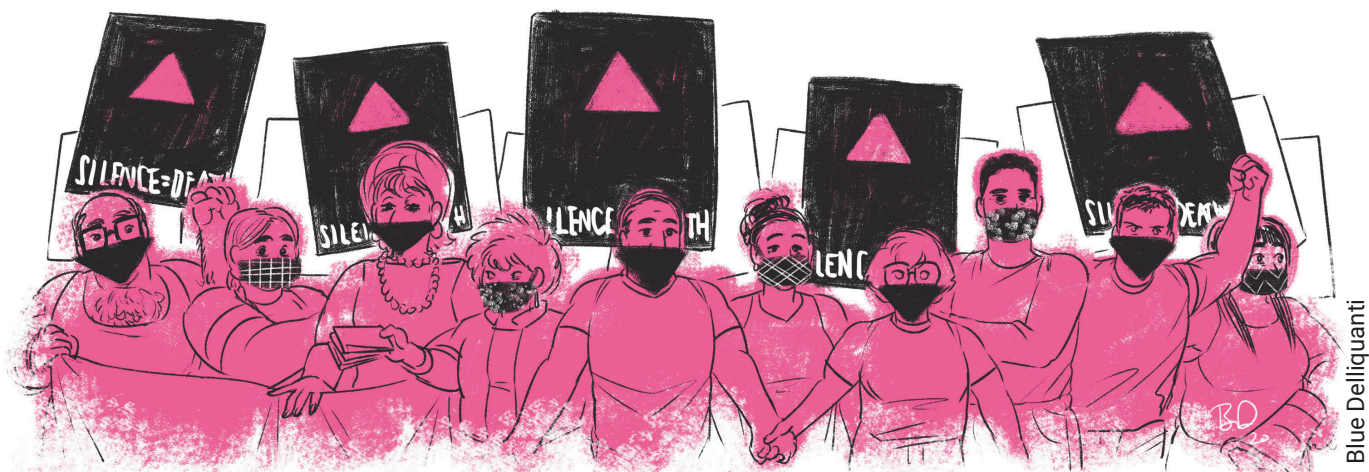
The elite were all expecting us to riot, and there's no doubt that major unrest is going to have to happen. I'll keep writing about ways we can live outside the current paradigm, and focus where our attention is most needed. My next piece is about prisons, whose populations are super-vulnerable. The way the state treats people at the bottom of the society should inform the counter demands of any revolution we hope to incite. ■

**STAY WELL,
RAISE HELL,
ORGANIZÉ!**



In this time of COVID-19, DSA is offering more national programming to support your organizing.

Our list at dsausa.org/calendar is updated regularly with at least one call a week, whether political education, organizing training, or national campaign strategy.



Blue Deliquanti

The pandemic that brought us together

AIDS revealed indifference to LGBTQ lives ... and led the community to organize.

BY JOHN D'EMILIO

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the inadequacy of a health care system pounded by decades of alternating Republican and neoliberal Democratic rule in Washington—the lack of access that many people have, the insufficient capacity to treat patients during an emergency, the extreme shortage of needed supplies. And it has demonstrated the financial insecurity of a significant portion of the population. But it also has shown how people can come together, and especially how those on the front line are prepared to work beyond the limits of what seems possible in order to save lives.

As a gay man who lived through the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s (I do not remember the word “pandemic” being used in those years), it is impossible for me not to draw dramatic and enraging contrasts between the response to AIDS and the response to COVID-19, and not to see how much the former has influenced the latter. When Donald Trump began his daily briefings, there were perhaps 400 deaths in the nation. By contrast, Ronald Reagan did not give his first public speech about AIDS until almost six years into the epidemic, at which point the death toll exceeded 25,000 in the United States. Within weeks of the first COVID-19 death, media outlets overflowed with coverage commemorating the lives

of those lost to the pandemic and celebrating the health care workers, first responders, and community volunteers who risk their own health to provide necessary services to the ill. During the AIDS epidemic, the media barely acknowledged the spread of AIDS until a well-known celebrity—Hollywood icon Rock Hudson—was revealed to have AIDS. When media did cover the topic, they tended to do so in ways that placed blame on people with AIDS, as in the *New York Post* headline of October 6, 1987: “The Man Who Gave Us AIDS.” In the early years of the AIDS epidemic, stories circulated within the LGBTQ community of hospitals and medical staff who would have nothing to do with someone who had AIDS. A *Newsweek* cover announced that “fears are growing that the AIDS epidemic may spread beyond gays ... to threaten the public at large.”

But the AIDS epidemic also produced a transformative response from the LGBTQ community. Massive numbers of people came out, joined organizations, and engaged in politics and protest. The budgets of community organizations, both service-oriented and activist, grew dramatically. Paid staff became far more common. The resources available to LGBTQ people-of-color organizations reached an unprecedented level. By the end of the 1980s, the major story about AIDS had become the direct-action protests occurring across the country as ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) groups took to the streets. By the beginning of the 1990s, the LGBTQ community had become a recognized, though still controversial,

political constituency in national politics. Congress finally passed legislation, such as the Ryan White Care Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, that acknowledged the need to respond to AIDS. Homophobia and oppression are still with us, of course, but we can see positive changes as a result of that epidemic.

These long-term effects of the AIDS epidemic reverberate as I think about the current health crisis. So many issues—guaranteeing access to health care, the right to at least a basic financial security, and the need of workers to have a collective voice—have surfaced with urgency. And the efforts of protesters in many places around such issues as canceling rent payments and preventing evictions suggest that some are ready to take action. Can a virus that infects—pardon the expression—“the public at large” have the power to bring people together to effect permanent, progressive change? Will this pandemic give legislative agendas like the Green New Deal more plausibility? It will not be until the results come in from the fall elections that we will know whether the pandemic will have raised a broad and deep enough dissatisfaction with the Trump White House and the Republican Senate to open some doors to a progressive agenda. We must make sure that the answer is yes. ■

Chicago DSA member John D’Emilio is a historian of sexuality and social movements, the author of *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* and, with Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*.

Empty shelves and zombie fracking firms

Having left no fat for the famine, U.S. capitalism is uniquely vulnerable to COVID-19.

BY BILL BARCLAY

We don't yet know the long-term significance of COVID-19 for the United States, but it has already exposed some underlying fault lines in our political economy and, of course, in class power. The biggest cracks to date are the costs of the "lean manufacturing" model, the perils of zombie financing in the fossil fuel industry, and the enduring power of finance.

What's with the shortages?

The United States is still the second largest manufacturing nation, after China. So why do we find ourselves short of ventilators, masks, Personal Protective Equipment, and so on?

Over the past four decades, U.S. manufacturers of everything from iPhones to drugs have adopted a "lean manufacturing" model: just-in-time supplies, outsourced component production, and global supply chains. Our global supply chains are geographically concentrated in China and rely on only one or two sources (that is, no redundancy). Single-sourced supply chains reduce costs and increase profits, pleasing banks and investors, but leave us vulnerable to disruptions in the global trade system. Consider these examples:

- 80% of active pharmaceutical ingredients used in drugs manufactured in the United States are produced abroad;
- 97% of antibiotics used in the United States are produced in China;
- 95% of surgical masks used in the United States are produced abroad; and
- 70% of N95 (and other tight-fitting respirator masks) are imported from other countries, primarily China.

Zombie financing: The costs of fracking

In 2000, the United States was the world's largest importer of petroleum, sucking in over 10 million barrels a day. We consumed a quarter of the world's petroleum output while producing less than 10%. In 2019, the United States was a net exporter of petroleum and petroleum products—and the world's largest producer. We were chasing the holy grail of energy independence.

"There is a Magic Money Tree. It blooms whenever there is the political will for it to bloom. We must demand that the Tree continue to bloom—for all of our needs."

What happened?

In two words: hydraulic fracturing. Or in one word, fracking.

The environmental problems with fracking are well documented. But little attention has been paid to the finances of the industry. Fracking wells have a relatively short life. Companies must constantly be drilling new ones. And this doesn't come cheap. So money must be borrowed—many billions over the last decade.

Well, you may say, so what? The companies will pay it back out of their profits. But fracking companies are not profitable. Instead, companies have paid off old debt by issuing new debt. (A rolling loan gathers no loss, as they say in banking.) The bulk of this debt is BBB-rated, one notch above junk. Investors, including pension funds, have bought this new debt because it paid higher rates.

COVID-19 has changed these calculations. Plunging prices and a glut of oil have illuminated the reality: Fracking companies are a perfect (but not

the only) example of what the Bank for International Settlements calls "zombies"—companies that cannot meet interest payments on their debt, much less pay off the principal. Bankruptcies and job losses have already begun.

Who gets what

By early May, Congress had authorized over \$2.2 trillion to fight COVID-19. For working people: a one-time \$1,200 check; four months of a \$600/week increase to unemployment benefits; plus, for the first time, unemployment benefits to gig workers. Lose your job, join the more than 30 million others unemployed and seeking help, and wait in lines at overwhelmed food pantries.

But the bulk of the spending is for businesses, big and small. The process for receiving this largesse is faster and easier than navigating the rickety unemployment systems of various states. And there are no constraints on executive pay or dividend payouts. All of this is to be expected: We live in a capitalist political economy with a very high concentration of wealth.

Is there an opening for the Left?

The other day a (non-economist) friend asked me, "Where is all this money coming from?" Taxes? No. The Federal Reserve and Treasury simply created it in response to congressional legislation. There is a Magic Money Tree. It blooms whenever there is the political will for it to bloom. We must demand that the Tree continue to bloom—for all of our needs. This is crucial in the fights ahead, because another zombie is emerging into the light: austerity. You know the message: We have been profligate, and now we must pay—by cutting public services and jobs. Already some governors of low-wage states are threatening to deny unemployment benefits to workers who stay off the job because of health concerns.

Oh, and we've probably gotten rid of fracking—at a cost of about 2.5 million jobs, with no replacements planned. Green New Deal, anyone? ■

Bill Barclay is a member of the Chicago Political Economy Group and DSA Ventura County CA.



Illustration by Megan Ganey: ADAPT protesters in Las Vegas, 1993 (Photo: Tim Onlin) Image via Lives Worth Living, a 2011 PBS documentary film directed by Eric Neudel and produced by Alison Gilkey.

Shelter in place? Welcome to our world

When the epidemic is over, will disabled people again be treated as expendable?

BY CHRISTINE LOMBARDI AND SUNSHINE MUGRABI

In the Netflix documentary *Crip Camp*, we meet a group of teenagers hanging out together in a camp in the Catskills during the 1960s. Like most teens, they're into pairing off to make out, party, and play sports.

The difference? They're all disabled. In a dramatic turn of events, the teens grow up and take on the U.S. government, staging protests that paved the way to the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA).

One camper, Judy Heumann, went on to lead a 25-day sit-in in San Francisco demanding rights for the disabled in 1977. Of her camp experience, she told the *New York Times*, "[W]e could be ourselves and it absolutely helped us formulate our futures."

Heumann and her peers laid the groundwork for the next wave of activism. This includes ADAPT, which

saved the Affordable Care Act in 2017 by staging a sit-in in the halls of Congress.

Now, as we craft a socialist response to the pandemic, it's essential that we include the voices of disabled people and those with chronic illness. Not only is it the right thing to do, it will make us smarter and stronger as a movement.

For those of us who are chronically ill and disabled, "sheltering in place" and "social isolation" describe our lives before the pandemic. We know what it's like to be cut off from the world and stuck at home. Through this, we've developed ways to build coalitions and community. We share resources and help each other through the struggles we must face. We organize.

We're already casualties of our failed healthcare system. Our lives have been treated as separate and unequal by the government. We've been locked out of the job market thanks to prejudice and inaccessibility. Yet, we go on.

We fight for our rights even when we can't physically show up to do so. For example, long before the coronavirus crisis, ME Action held "Millions

Missing" virtual rallies to highlight the invisible population of people who are homebound due to chronic illness.

COVID-19 has thrown back the curtain on our healthcare system, which is really a patchwork of unstable parts, unaffordable for many. A morning scan of pandemic headlines brings an assault of numbers: infection rates, death tolls, shortages of protective equipment. We watch as COVID-19 slams prisons, nursing homes, group homes—anywhere people live in close quarters, tended by low-wage people now tagged as "heroes."

Whether we are in one of those populations or not, we can see the harsh light those numbers throw on our society's foundational inequities: The disease hits harder in communities of color, made vulnerable by centuries of deprivation. It also disproportionately harms anyone who is sick, disabled, or elderly—especially if they're institutionalized.

Disability justice isn't separate from racial and economic justice. It's a key component. At a mid-April panel on "Grounding Movements in Disability

Justice,” Azza Altiraifi pointed out that ableism has capitalism at its heart: “A bodymind that isn’t ‘productive’ to capital is categorized as disposable.” In the 19th century, Talila Lewis elaborated, scientists created disease categories with which to make black bodies less able. They came up with pseudoscientific terms: drapetomania made blacks try to escape the plantation, and work stoppages were due to dysaesthesia aethiopica, which caused a black worker to act “like a person half asleep.”

To this day, chronically ill people are subjected to seemingly arbitrary disease categories: neurological disorders, pain syndromes, somatoform disorders, functional disorders, the list goes on. All have the gloss of science but are often meaningless and can be infused with prejudice. Many more women than men are diagnosed with fibromyalgia, for example—especially black women. Because there’s no one test for it, anyone with pain can be branded with it.

In the relentless placing of profits before people, we no longer have health care, but the healthcare “industry.” Care is organized around procedures (tests, surgeries), not the health of any one consumer or patient. That health may require ongoing care, but that’s often seen as prohibitively expensive.

For example, one of us (Mugrabi) saw her neurologist celebrate her diagnosis of dystonia, which was “treatable.” She was happy at first, until she discovered that the illness was also incurable, which he hadn’t mentioned. The system rewarded the doctor for performing a procedure that turned out not to work, but didn’t reward him for taking time to consider the many symptoms that didn’t fit that diagnosis. It was years before she got a better treatment.

This has been the reality for decades for disabled and chronically ill people. We’re lucky to get a diagnosis at all. And even if we do, we don’t fit into the system, which is designed to squeeze profitable procedures out of its “products”—not help and support people with long term and complex health issues. This explains the seeming paradox of overtaxed ICUs and hospital closings and layoffs as hospitals go under because they have to treat the sick rather than focus on elective surgeries that yield big profits.

Now, we’re even more vulnerable, as many of us have underlying conditions that make us more susceptible to COVID-19. And far from protecting us, many states are trying to enact laws that put disabled people at the back of the line if it comes to healthcare rationing,

“For those of us who are chronically ill and disabled, ‘sheltering in place’ and ‘social isolation’ describe our lives before the pandemic. We know what it’s like to be cut off from the world and stuck at home. Through this, we’ve developed ways to build coalitions and community.”

such as deciding who gets a ventilator. Those who rely on ventilators to survive are in danger of having them taken away. This is based on abled people’s ideas about what constitutes quality of life, rather than on anything objective.

You’ve heard about states fighting for protective equipment and ventilators. But how many chronically ill and disabled people have lost their home care, which they need for tasks of daily life? This is thanks to a perfect storm—caregivers fearing infection, public transportation shutting down, and states being unwilling to step in and help keep these protections in place. Parents of chronically ill children have been pressured to sign DNRs (do-not-resuscitate orders) that might deny them access to a ventilator.

Some DSAers are already in the fight. Central New Jersey DSA’s Disability Solidarity Working Group is chaired by Kristen Smith, former staffer at ADAPT, the flagship organization of disability direct action. Just

as Central NJ is working closely with ADAPT, these battles are best fought in partnership with the disability/chronic illness community.

Its activists have worked hard to develop cures and shed a light on even the rarest of illnesses. On Twitter, Smith responded to concerns about personal care aides: “Those who rely on PCAs for survival aren’t getting what we need. [Having to fight for someone to bathe you, for example—or administer your daily medications—benefits no one.] A rubric tool at the state level, and bureaucratic “one size fits all” red tape is leaving people at risk and vulnerable. Help the disability community get healthcare justice and their needed care coverage.”

Such expertise will be even more crucial as we approach a post-COVID period, which could come with its own chronic-illness crisis. There is ample evidence that the virus attacks neurological systems and organs, and we know that post-viral chronic fatigue illnesses are likely. When the headlines have disappeared, will those affected again be treated as expendable?

Disabled activists remind us that we are all one illness or one accident away from disability. Those who survive to old age even without illness or accident will experience disability. Most of us are, at best, temporarily able.

COVID-19 has thrown the situation into sharp focus. This crisis challenges all of us to fight for a world where one’s life is not dependent on how useful one is, a place where we are all creating communities of the heart. The most vulnerable hold a mirror up, and show we have to do better than this. ■

Sunshine Mugrabi is an author, tech industry consultant, and chronic illness advocate. After years of going from doctor to doctor, she now has a dual diagnosis of two rare diseases, cervical dystonia and Stiff Person Syndrome.

Christine Lombardi, *Democratic Left* web editor, has suffered from multiple sclerosis for over 35 years and has won awards for consumer health journalism.

Are public colleges finished?

COVID-19 could topple public universities, which have been targeted by neoliberals since the 1970s.

BY BENJAMIN BALTHASER

“How did you go bankrupt?” a character in *The Sun Also Rises* asks over drinks. “Two ways,” the friend replies, “gradually, then suddenly.” As we watch public university systems furlough staff and threaten to shut their doors, we might ask the same question. In just the last few weeks, states from Missouri to Nevada to New Jersey have announced double-digit cuts to their higher education budgets, Vermont threatened to close all but its flagship campus, and the University of Ohio has announced layoffs in the hundreds and the shuttering of whole programs, from African American studies to Women, Gender, and Sexuality studies.

For state colleges and universities, trouble has been a long time coming. They have been in the cross hairs of neoliberalism since the late 1970s. Once-robust institutions offering free education to millions of students and stable, often unionized employment to hundreds of thousands of faculty and staff across the country, state colleges have seen their budgets go down sometimes by as much as 90% since the Reagan years. In the last decade alone, states slashed \$9 billion from their higher education budgets.

Cost is perhaps the most visible sign of the years of austerity. When my mom attended UCLA as a working-class, first-generation student in the mid-1960s, she paid nothing. Tuition and fees at UCLA now run over \$10,000 a year. Student debt nationwide last year topped one trillion dollars, with the average student loan burden around \$30,000.

The other crisis is far less visible. Until the mid-1980s, three-quarters of all faculty were tenured or tenure-track. Today, two-thirds of university instruction is done by lecturers and adjuncts. These are faculty with no free-speech protections who are often on short-term contracts. Most adjuncts are paid between \$2,000 and \$5,000 per course, which works out to just above minimum wage. One adjunct in my own department said she



Alton

UCLA, one of the flagship public universities in the country, has been a target of the Right for decades.

calculated her hourly pay at under \$3.

In short, low-wage temporary faculty teach highly indebted students, staffed often by outsourced food and service workers.

Yet the question remains: Why is the university such a site of neoliberal transformation? One needs to remember that the political rise of the New Right began not only as an assault on unions and affirmative action, but as an attack on the crown jewel of the public university system—the University of California. Ronald Reagan ran for governor of California against the “hippies” and Black Power protesters of Berkeley and UC San Diego. In a press conference two weeks after he introduced tuition for UC schools, he stated that making students pay for higher education would, “get rid of undesirables. Those there to agitate and not to study might think twice before they pay tuition—they might think twice how much they want to pay to carry a picket sign.” In an influential document written at the same time, Reagan adviser and future Supreme Court justice Lewis Powell characterized higher education not as a means to democratize society or for class advancement for lower- and middle-class students, but rather as an epic struggle between social norms and radical student and faculty culture.

Although the Left may discount this as rhetorical posturing, the public university is, or at least was, an institution unlike

any other. Often one of the last wall-to-wall union employers, it attracted the likes of Angela Davis, Herbert Marcuse, and Naomi Klein. While public universities are engines of economic growth, they are purposely designed not to adhere to market efficiencies. Writing papers, reading literature, learning differential equations, speaking foreign languages, engaging in long discussions about history and philosophy—these are not activities that generate revenue. Nor are they meant to.

Their purpose is to turn students into thinking people, and more important, into critical citizens. Higher education is by definition a social good, not something to be engaged in solely for private gain. In other words, it is designed as the opposite of an entrepreneurial society.

That vision of the university remains, like democracy itself, as a half-finished promise, never having been available for everyone. Yet it is clear that the assault on the public university was no accident. Democratic and Republican legislatures alike converged to imagine a public university entirely privatized, funded solely through tuition (albeit often with subsidies for low-income students), private foundations, and research grants, in ways that reflected governments’ general turn away from welfare (as in for the common good) to a predatory state. As perhaps the most dramatic illustration of this, money taken from the UC and California State University system was diverted directly

into the boom of prison building in the 1980s and 1990s.

COVID-19 may be the final blow. The model in which the “student is the ATM,” as one UC administrator put it, is no longer viable. Students can neither afford an expensive degree nor will they sign up for classes that will, out of necessity, be online. I expect that we will see many more public colleges threatened with closure, or perhaps worse, running as ghost ships, with skeleton crews of non-tenured faculty and highly leveraged students. Purdue University’s decision to re-open in the fall, and put students, community members, and staff at risk, only displays the fatal logic of neoliberal institutions that must run like for-profit businesses.

Yet it doesn’t have to be this way. Bernie Sanders’s proposal for free public college and reinstatement of tenure is exactly the kind of vision we need. What is remarkable about Sanders’s proposal is precisely that it is framed as a public good, available to all. Like water, and, we hope, housing and food, we should have a right to it because we are alive.

It is no accident that it is at public universities that we see movements by students and faculty demanding that universities be more inclusive, respect students of color, and offer staff a living wage. The university can be an incubator and reservoir of the values we need now that capitalism is in ruins around us, of life not lived for profit. Or it can be another piece of the wreckage of neoliberalism, abandoned by the rich as they run for their bunkers.

As I write in early May, faculty unions, AAUP (American Association of University Professors) chapters, and student organizations have been issuing petitions, organizing online union meetings, and in some cases even reversing some of these cuts, as in the University of Vermont system’s recent announcement it will not close three campuses after all. They need our support if we are to emerge from this pandemic with anything resembling a notion of our collective good. ■

Chicago DSA member Benjamin Balthaser is Associate Professor of Multi-Ethnic U.S. Literature at Indiana University, South Bend.

Diary of a Letter Carrier

Saving the U.S. Postal Service has gone from a no-brainer issue to a DSA campaign. Below, a DSA member shares what it’s like to deliver during the epidemic. Because postal employees may face retaliation if they speak out, we’re not publishing his name.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, my day begins an hour and a half earlier than normal.

After punching in, several of us go outside and check our trucks. This is the normal morning procedure, except for the fact that we now take an odd mixture of water and bleach with us to clean the parts of our trucks that we touch most often during our routes. The mixture we use smells awful, and God only knows what it’s doing to our lungs. We have to use this homemade mix because there isn’t enough sanitizer available. Indeed, several local breweries make sanitizer for us because we cannot find something so basic as Lysol or Purell.

After checking and cleaning our trucks, we go back into the office and start casing our mail. As is normal for this time of year, there’s not much mail. But we are currently receiving more parcels than we receive during the Christmas season—especially from Amazon. The consensus around the office is that Jeff Bezos lied when he said Amazon would only ship essential items during this crisis.

It feels like Bezos is making billions off of this crisis, while those of us on the frontlines are working longer hours and making the same rate of pay.

Once on the road, our routes provide some challenges. People aren’t staying in their houses, nor are they social distancing. I can’t tell you how many parents let their children come up to our trucks and ask for the mail. People flag us down on the streets trying to give us return packages for something they bought at J.Crew that doesn’t fit. We’re not supposed to take these packages, but people don’t seem to understand why we don’t want to interact with them. Honestly, I’m not concerned about contracting COVID-19 from customers; what I’m concerned

about is infecting my customers with COVID-19. If people knew what we touch during the day, they’d be horrified. Furthermore, most of the public doesn’t seem to understand that we do not have enough masks and gloves to protect ourselves and our customers. Our branch—one of the larger ones in my state—only received cloth masks two weeks ago.

Since there are so many parcels these days, we usually get a text on our scanners from management asking us to come back around 1 p.m. in order to get the rest of our packages. It’s like starting your route all over again. And this means no more eight-hour workdays. Many of us are putting in 10+ hours a day 10 days straight before we get a day off. We do it because it’s the right thing to do, and we do it for our customers. Having said that, we’re all exhausted. And as my union steward says, “Exhaustion is a safety issue.” Does management always understand this sentiment? No. Many of us often feel as if the numbers are more important than our lives. If it weren’t for the union [National Association of Letter Carriers], I can’t imagine what this job would be like. As one postal employee put it, “We aren’t essential; we’re sacrificial.”

On a personal note, my wife is working from home these days. She constantly worries about what I’m bringing home with me. Am I asymptomatic and spreading COVID-19 without knowing it? Is she asymptomatic? Her fears are justified, because I know people at our branch who’ve tested positive for COVID-19. Basically, everyone I work with errs on the side of assuming we’ve been exposed to this virus. But, none of us who are “healthy” can get tested because there are not enough testing kits. It seems ridiculous to us that essential federal employees who are in constant contact with the public can’t get tested. ■

Find out about the Democratic Socialist Labor Commission’s campaign to save the USPS at labor.dsaua.org/DSAforUSPS

Reparations: Not just for descendants

System-wide legal shackles didn't end with slavery.

BY BILL FLETCHER, JR.

There are two debates about reparations for African Americans: whether it is a legitimate demand, and who should be eligible. This latter argument has been tinged with African American nativism and, ironically, has drawn the support of some white, right-wing populists.

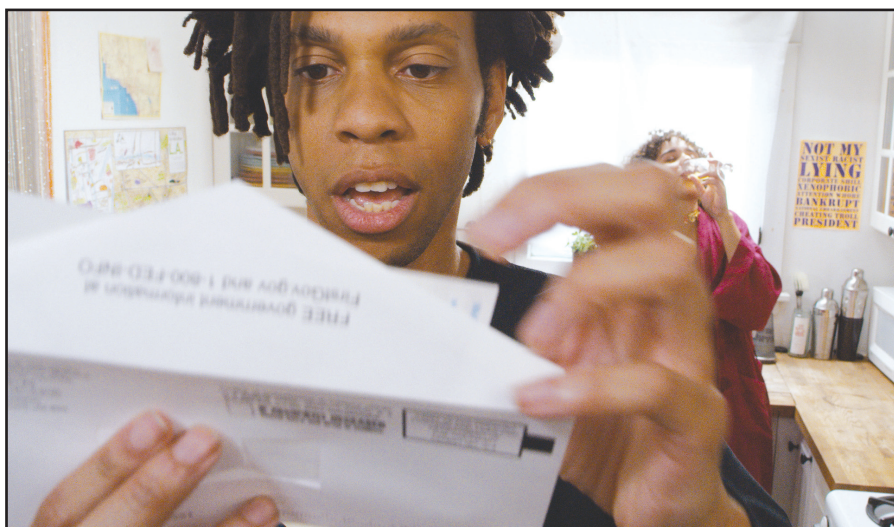
Reparations is a legitimate domestic and international demand for compensation and repair for the damages associated with slavery, genocide, and colonialism. I would go further and argue that it is a legitimate demand in response to the horrors committed by the United States overseas since its foundation.

That said, there is the specific question of reparations for African Americans. Some argue that reparations for African Americans should be reserved for those who can trace a direct line to slavery. All others who fall within the rubric of “Black America” are to be excluded.

The argument for reparations for slavery is a sound one. The theft of millions in order to build capitalism needs little clarification. The challenge in the reparations debate, however, is not so much when the “clock” starts, but, rather, when does it stop.

Africans were brought to the Western Hemisphere in chains in the 1500s. Though there were some Moors from Spain who came voluntarily, the overwhelming majority were brought as slaves to what we now know as Latin America. Africans who were captured and brought to North America came as both indentured servants and as slaves. As part of the instituting of social control over the laboring classes of the 13 British colonies, the British elite implemented the construction of “race” and racist oppression, which included instituting slavery-for-life for those who had African blood.

Formal slavery in the United States can be said to have ended in 1865 with the defeat of the Confederacy in the U.S. Civil War. For some proponents of reparations, the story apparently ends there. The argument is that only the victims of U.S. slavery should receive compensation. There are problems with this line of thought.



The comedic short film *Sixteen Thousand Dollars* looks at what could happen if near-future America paid reparations for slavery. Visit twitter.com/16kfilm for more on the film, which was backed in part by the DSA Fund. Photo: Yellow Laces Productions.

1) How much blood?

What proportion of one’s “blood” needs to be derived from the period of 1619: 1865? 50%? 80%? 15%? Any determination becomes exceedingly subjective. And what does it mean to have been raised with a “Black identity”? What if someone was raised in a family that passed for white but then one realized that one was African-descendant?

2) Why 1865?

Yes, slavery ended in 1865, at least formally. But racist and national oppression of African Americans did not. The Reconstruction period was followed by what W.E.B. Du Bois called the “counter-revolution of property,” with which Jim Crow segregation was associated. This was a period of intense oppression and the super-exploitation of the African American worker. Why would the “clock” time out in 1865?

3) Who is “Black America”?

Even if one leaves aside post-1965 African immigration to the United States, African Americans, as a people, have multiple sources, including Cape Verdeans (who began to arrive in the 19th century); African descendants of slavery imposed by the British in North America; African Caribbean descendants who began migrating to the United States in the first decade of the 20th century; and African descendants from

Latin America, who began arriving with the end of the U.S. war against Mexico (1848). If one restricts the definition of African American—and, therefore, those who can receive reparations—to those who can trace their lineage to slavery, that means that Malcolm X’s family is called into question because his mother was from Grenada.

4) Individual, or collective?

All this assumes a “check” made out to individuals, rather than collective reparations. Foreclosing the idea of collective reparations means dismissing the need for the reorganization of the United States and the introduction of dramatic changes in the social, political, and economic conditions faced by people of African descent. Even if the proper calculation can be made regarding what individuals who can trace some of their lineage back to the plantation are entitled to, would receiving that check mean that white capitalist America was off the hook? Is that the vision we have been fighting for?

The debate continues. And the stakes are high. ■

DSA member Bill Fletcher, Jr., is the executive editor of globalafricanworker.com, past president of TransAfrica Forum, and a long-time leftist trade unionist.

COVID-19 makes reform more possible

Non-reformist reforms can change the rules of the game.

BY STEVE TARZYNSKI

COVID-19 has exposed the long-standing disparities and inefficiency of the U.S. healthcare system to a degree never imagined, and opened up major avenues for change.

The human and social costs of flaws in the system have brought unnecessary death and suffering, global economic devastation, and historic levels of government debt. Our public health infrastructure has been hollowed out, and our healthcare workforce has been sent into battle without the armor and weapons it needed to fight the virus.

The crisis has accelerated a decades-long transformation of the U.S. healthcare system from one centered on patient care and social responsibility to a business model driven by the profit motive and dominated by corporate values. The slow train wreck of U.S. healthcare has become a runaway disaster.

There is some good news. The training and altruism of our frontline healthcare workers have been highly effective. Solidarity with CDC (Centers for Disease Control) public health directives has beaten back the pandemic and saved lives, and there is determined global cooperation to find treatments and a vaccine.

So, where do we go from here?

Three extremely difficult and complex things must happen to vanquish COVID-19. First, we need an effective vaccine. Second, we need effective treatments for all phases of the disease. Third, we need to reverse four decades of radical libertarian control and determined destruction of our government. The only path to that goal is through a Democratic presidential victory, Democratic control of the Senate, and retention of Democratic control of the House.

Where does this place democratic socialists? Antonio Gramsci said that revolution in western democracies is not a convulsive event but a long complex process; that the Left in these countries has always fought for the expansion and



“We would never have chosen this pandemic as a means to create a different history, but we can use it.”

defense of democracy; and that respect for democratic process is essential. André Gorz wrote of “non-reformist reforms” that simultaneously change the rules of the political game while playing it and expand the political power of the working class.

In this context, the 2020 presidential campaign opens prospects for healthcare system reform. Gramsci reminds us that class struggle runs through all the institutions of civil society and the state apparatus itself, and that socialists must never abandon any political terrain. For Gramscians, including this author, the DSA convention’s refusal to endorse anyone but a democratic socialist for president was a misreading of the situation. A Democratic presidency along with Democratic control of both houses of Congress would not be the enemy. Rather, it would be an arena of struggle

to advance “non-reformist” reforms. Such reforms might include “Medicare Extra” and a robust public option. These could lead to Medicare For All and certainly would be central to the long process of repairing the devastation caused by the pandemic.

In this arena of struggle, democratic socialists must keep in mind four strategic considerations:

- Make healthcare a public good, not a commodity. It must be managed as a public good, moving first, as Ezra Klein has written, from a private system with fractured public options to a public system with highly regulated private options. This is a “non-reformist” reform, and presumptive Democratic candidate Joe Biden must be pushed to support a program such as Medicare Extra, which would be far beyond the tinkering he currently proposes.
- Move quickly to universal coverage and unlink health insurance from employment. There are only two ways to do this: (1) sell healthcare on the open market or (2) set up a unified system of public financing such as Medicare for All.
- Increase system capacity by increasing international cooperation and coordination among governments.
- Channel the anger of the younger generation of physicians and other healthcare workers emerging from their COVID-19 experience. They’ve seen the failures. Now they must see the alternatives.

Democratic socialists working within a broad coalition for meaningful reform have their work cut out for them. We would never have chosen this pandemic as a means to create a different history, but we can use it. Let us start now. ■

Steve Tarzynski is a founding member and former national leader of DSA. He is a physician and a long time healthcare reform activist.

FURTHER READING

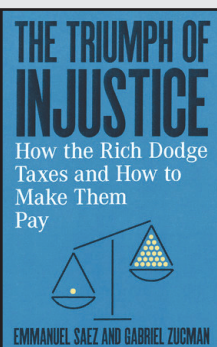
Tax justice means taxes for the rich

BY ZOE SHERMAN

My late Great Aunt Ruth, who was born into tenement poverty more than a century ago, and who raised her own two children in a middle-class co-op, recounted a telling anecdote that showcased her attitude about taxes. Both of Ruth's children grew up to become lawyers. An acquaintance commented to Ruth that her lawyer children would be helpful to her in figuring out tax loopholes so she could avoid paying. Ruth was deeply offended. To her, this sounded like an assumption that she was a freeloader. She enjoyed the use of public goods. She lived in modest comfort. Why should anyone think that she would shirk her responsibilities as a taxpayer? In my mind's ear, I can still hear the shocked indignation in her tone.

Contrast this with the anecdote that opens Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman's new book *The Triumph of Injustice*. They revisit the 2016 presidential debate in which Hillary Clinton highlighted Donald Trump's tax avoidance. Confronted with the documentation that he had paid no federal income tax in the few years for which his tax returns were publicly available, Trump responded, "That makes me smart." No indignation. (Also, no dignity.) Just shameless smugness.

Saez and Zucman argue that the tax system is "the most important institution of any democratic society," not just because of the practical matters of financing public goods but because it is an expression of interdependence and collectivity. "Without taxes," they write, "there is no cooperation, no prosperity, no common destiny." The book is suffused with the principle that tax policy is not a puzzle with one right answer to be determined by technocratic expertise; it is a matter for democratic deliberation over desired ends and appropriate means. Tax evasion pursued by the rich and enabled by lapdog-of-the-



TRIUMPH OF INJUSTICE: How the Rich Dodge Taxes and How to Make Them Pay
(W.W. Norton & Company, 2019)

rich government is a crisis of national moral character and of democracy itself.

Saez and Zucman have done a necessary public service by undertaking an enormous amount of careful data work documenting the distribution of income and tax burden over the last century. Furthermore, the book is accompanied by a nifty online tool to help inform our democratic deliberation over tax policy. Using the calculation methods employed in the book, they have made a tax simulator that can be used to test the likely effects of various tax policies on aggregate government revenues and distribution of the tax burden across different income levels. It is freely accessible on the website taxjusticenow.org.

Saez and Zucman document the history of tax policy (what the tax code on the books says) and tax incidence (who actually pays how much in practice). "Looking at most of the great retreats of progressive taxation," they write, "we find the same pattern: first, an outburst of tax dodging; then, governments lamenting that taxing the rich has become impossible and slashing their rates." They are right to be outraged. Why should we reward moral bankruptcy with swollen bank accounts? Where is the tough-on-crime, law-and-order crowd when we need them?

Instead of giving up on even pretending to collect adequate taxes from the rich and making ever greater concessions to the interests of the wealthy with each new change in

the tax code, Saez and Zucman suggest that the interests of the wealthy should carry no weight whatsoever. When designing tax policy, they write that "we should not concern ourselves with the monetary interests of the rich. We should care only about how taxing them affects the rest of the population. The goal should not be to 'make the rich pay their fair share' (a somewhat nebulous concept), but to ensure that the great wealth of some benefits the least well off." If we design tax policy to maximize tax revenue, which they suggest would require a top marginal tax rate of about 75%, and we are serious about enforcement, they estimate the amount collected from the wealthy could increase, "by about four percentage points of national income, or \$750 billion a year in 2019."

What of the risk that confiscatory tax rates disincentivize valuable economic activities? What if the tax is such a disincentive and the rich cut back so much on their economic activities that tax revenues actually fall? As long as tax revenues are falling because of real reductions in top incomes and not because of tax dodging, that's OK with them. Reducing top incomes to compress the income distribution is so worthwhile a goal that we may reasonably choose to sacrifice some tax revenue for it. Concentrations of wealth are inescapably also undemocratic concentrations of political power, causing a degradation of the social environment. "Extreme wealth, like carbon emissions, imposes a negative externality on the rest of us. The point of taxing carbon is not to raise revenue but to reduce carbon emissions. The same goes for high tax rates on the very highest incomes: They are not aimed at funding government programs in the long run. They are aimed at reducing the income of the ultra-wealthy."

Although Saez and Zucman focus much more on collecting taxes than on public spending, we could inten-

sify our outrage over tax dodgers who suffer no consequences by drawing a contrast with the treatment of anyone trying to avail themselves of the social safety net benefits due to them. Once a tax law is passed defining the tax obligations of the rich, the amount defined in the law rightfully belongs in the public coffers. The rich resist. These days, the resource-starved Internal Revenue Service waves the white flag, and the rich keep our money. In 2018, the wealthiest 400 Americans evaded about 25% of their tax obligations, with the rest of the top 0.1% nearly matching their leaders' evasion rate.

Enforcement of estate taxes in particular has collapsed. "The capitulation has been so severe that if we take seriously the wealth reported on estate tax returns nowadays, it looks like rich people are either almost nonexistent in America or that they never die." Perhaps they are not get-

ting away with murder, but they are getting away with theft.

Despite rampant fraud, rich people claiming tax deductions are not treated with suspicion. They are not tested for drugs. A social worker will not show up to check for the presence of a *de facto* domestic partner not acknowledged in the filing. Once a law is passed defining the welfare obligations of the state to its citizens, the amount defined in the law rightfully belongs to the qualified beneficiaries. Try to collect unemployment insurance or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and see what happens. Of all the arguments I've heard made in favor of estate taxes, none of them have seriously emphasized the risk that heirs will make stupid choices with their money, blowing it on drugs or frivolous indulgences like manicures or making unhealthy choices at the supermarket.

Yet how often have we heard calls for more generous social welfare benefits and less degrading distribution mechanisms dismissed with the charge that poor and unemployed people will defraud the system and do stupid things with the money, so we'd better not give it to them at all?

Don't shrug and say possession is nine-tenths of the law, urge Saez and Zucman. Allowing tax evasion is a choice. When the wealthy respond to the tax code by saying, "You and who else are going to make me pay?" we don't have to mumble that the public can make do without, after all. We can make—and at times have made—a different choice. We can make them pay. ■

Zoe Sherman is an Associate Professor of Economics at Merrimack College. Her writing appears regularly in *Dollars & Sense*.

From the DSA national director

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

to cover all healthcare costs for the uninsured and all out-of-pocket expenses for those with insurance for the duration of the coronavirus crisis.

- **NYC, NORTH TEXAS**, and other chapters are organizing against police violence and detention practices, including collecting letters for a community board safety meeting demanding accountability for disproportionate and violent policing of social distancing in black communities.
- **DENVER, CHICAGO, NYC** and many other DSA chapters are organizing tenants for #Rent-Freeze, #CancelRent, and #Rent-Strike campaigns at the state level as well as pressuring their Congress members to support the Rent and Mortgage Cancellation Act to create a national mortgage and rent suspension.
- **LOUISVILLE, METRO WASHINGTON D.C., TACOMA, NYC, SAN**



FRANCISCO, PHILADELPHIA, and LOS ANGELES are all supporting nationally endorsed candidates for local, state, and federal office, finding creative new ways to raise money and contact voters despite social distancing.

- Dozens of DSA members in office released a joint letter laying out demands for a just local, state, and national response to COVID-19 and lifting our vision of an alternative to disaster capitalism during the pandemic.
- And nationally, our **DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST LABOR COMMISSION** has three worker organizing

projects. The Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee, in partnership with the UE, supports workers anywhere fighting for improved conditions under COVID-19. The Restaurant Organizing Project organizes restaurant workers to fight for immediate relief and also a longer term vision to reshape the entire industry. And it just launched a Campaign to Save the USPS!

I welcome the thousands of people who joined DSA in the last few months and encourage you to look up your local chapter at dsausa.org/chapters and sign up for an upcoming call. You're in the right place. ■

DSA BY THE NUMBERS



Twitter followers
281,500



Facebook followers
202,126



Instagram followers
67,400

Moving? Let us know: info@dsausa.org. The Post Office charges for every returned copy of *Democratic Left*. We save money, and you don't miss an issue.

Poor People's Campaign

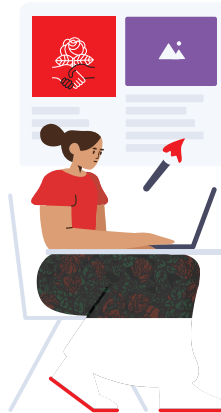
NOW ONLINE AT
JUNE2020.ORG

CONTINUING THE FIGHT
#POORPEOPLESCAMPAIGN

STEVE PAVEY, HOPE IN FOCUS

REPAIRERS OF THE FAITH
Poor People's Campaign
NATIONAL CALL FOR RACIAL JUSTICE
KAIROS

Democratic Left needs skilled volunteers!



Illustrators, photographers, graphic artists, layout artists... an art director, apply at bit.ly/3bzWd5s

Join the largest socialist organization in the United States!

- I want to join DSA. Enclosed are my dues: \$175 Sustainer \$110 Family \$45 Introductory \$20 Student \$27 Low-Income
- I want to renew membership. Enclosed are my renewal dues: \$175 Sustainer \$110 Family \$60 Regular \$20 Student \$27 Low-Income
- Enclosed is an extra contribution to help DSA in its work

Name _____ Year of birth _____

Address _____ City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Union affiliation _____ School _____

Check enclosed Bill my credit card (below)

Circle one Visa Mastercard Card # _____ Expiration _____

Signature _____ Security code _____

Return to: DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA PO Box 1038, New York, NY 10272