



UUJEC Spring Newsletter 2020

Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community

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Silver Lining in COVID-19!

“Hey!” We have a problem here and we need paid sick leave. Yeah, right. How long have we been advocating for this? Finally, people can hear us. It just took COVID-19 to get their attention.

While we’re speaking, let’s see if they can hear us say we need housing for the homeless, or affordable childcare and education. The COVID-19 has exposed how vulnerable we are without such universal programs.

Without paid sick leave, employees have to carry the entire burden of protecting co-workers and customers. The employer gains because co-workers and customers are protected from infections. Without paid sick leave, employees have a devil’s bargain: work sick or become homeless and destitute.

Now we can see that Universal Healthcare has universal benefits even if you’re rich and will have to pay a lot more taxes. COVID-19 didn’t come from the unwashed masses—it came on a jet plane carrying well-to-do people. We can also see that our capitalist healthcare is a hazard to our health, leading to the evisceration of national leadership and resources for epidemics, leaving state and local jurisdictions in desperate need.

Bacterial infections are becoming more dangerous because the pharmaceutical companies are selling antibiotics by the ton for animal feed. The pharma industry is making money while they are destroying the antibiotic’s ability to work—as bacteria develop resistance to antibiotics. Development of antibiotics costs a billion dollars, but the pharma industry isn’t interested because selling a course of antibiotics doesn’t create cash flow.

So, our government needs to take charge and develop antibiotics and antiviral medications.

Salt Lake City discovered that paying \$600 rent per month for a homeless people was a bargain compared to the cost of leaving them on the street. HUD estimates it costs \$30,000-\$50,000 per year for people to live on the streets with emergency room visits, police time spent and other social services. All we have to do is stop being so cruel. Humanitarian issues aside, why house them? Because their health is at stake—which means our universal access to good food, universal healthcare and free health is at stake.

While we’re fixing America’s biggest problems, affordable or even free education and childcare is a top issue. Childcare costs are comparable to private college tuition. And we wonder why births have declined in the US—3.8 million babies born in 2019. This is the lowest number of births since 1986 when we had 240 million Americans (today we have 327 million). The average cost of daycare is \$972 per month. Add student loans and the cost of rent or to buy a house—it’s hard to find jobs that pay that well. The median cost of a home in the US is \$200,000, in NYC it’s over \$600,000 and in San Francisco it’s \$1.1 million.

As we were heading into COVID-19 quarantine, work requirements for SNAP (formerly food stamps) were going to kick in on April 1, Congress passed a bill to suspend those requirements. 700,000 to over a million people were expected to lose benefits. We need to make sure that people always have food. Our farmers are awash with food—there’s no reason to have anyone starve except intentional cruelty. As the government has become more and more stingy, our local food pantries have picked up more and more of the slack.

This is our moment to advance our values in the US. It may be a long time before we have such an ideal time. There’s no reason, as the wealthiest country in the history of the earth, that our care of the most vulnerable needs to be so shabby.

Submitted by Terry Lowman

Book Review

Mongrel Firebugs and Men of Property: Capitalism and Class Conflict in American History

By Steve Fraser (2019)



This is a fun read. Steve Fraser is a good writer and analyst of recent history, but also broad-minded rather than overtly ideological. He's particularly effective as a psychological critic of the conquistadors of industry, from William Randolph Hearst through Donald Trump. Both

men had similar demagogic personalities and ambitions. Yet Hearst's populism was from the Left and his political ambitions were foiled by the political machines of the day, while Trump's base is on the Right and he succeeded in outmaneuvering the political mandarins. Hearst rode the wave of the stark class war of the early industrial revolution. Trump is riding a much-different wave of rebellion against the escalating loss of opportunity of the present era. Fraser asks, What's going on here? Why the differences?

He starts by illuminating the chasm between the populist outrage at the Trusts during the First Gilded Age versus the quiet acquiescence toward corporate monopolies during this Second Gilded Age. He wonders how could we restore the old populist anger that once targeted the "family or dynastic capitalism" of the first era, now stymied by shareholder capitalism and consumerism. One surprise is the resurgence of corporations "going private", now "1/3 of the Fortune 500" (p 232), which provides an opening. However, many modern day titans of industry are social liberals or technological visionaries, like Bill Gates or Elon Musk, providing cover for their more reactionary or money-bound dynastic brethren like the Kochs or Waltons.

Another tack Fraser takes is to look deeper at the vulnerable ideological underpinnings of capitalism, especially the libertarian, free-market ideology promoted by the Koch Brothers. Fraser points out that long ago Marx "described capitalism as the religion of daily life...that requires the whole world as a due sacrifice" (p 248). Fraser says "The Donald is not the author of that destruction but it's outcome" (p 250), like a "Mafia Don" who "stands for nothing" (p. 251). "He hasn't done the space

work" to become a real fascist – "all is theater" (p 253).

But finally Fraser leaves it to the next generation to "recover the capacity to dream again of social emancipation" (p 253). I suggest that this could arise from today's global upheavals – escalating inequality, climate catastrophes and other limits to growth, and now pandemics.

Submitted by Dick Burkhart

Know your Board



Adam Wasserman has been a UU for 12 years with three different congregations: UU Congregation of Fairfax in Northern Virginia, UU Fellowship of Montgomery in Alabama, and most recently the UU Congregation of Santa

Fe in New Mexico. During this time he has been passionate about many social justice issues, but especially economic inequality, racial justice, and the need to reform our political system to get money out of politics. While living in the Washington DC area he chaired a working group on economic justice as part of Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice, which organizes advocacy on Capitol Hill. Adam recently retired from federal service where he specialized in international affairs and education. In 2018 he and his wife Gale relocated to Santa Fe, New Mexico where they are getting to know a vibrant UU community and enjoying the change of pace from Washington.

§ The Green New Deal §

Yes We Can! A UUJEC webinar on May 14

Too often the argument "How can we possibly pay for it?" stops any further discussion of implementing the **Green New Deal**. Join **UUJEC** for a webinar on how to change conventional thinking. A "can do" attitude can make impressive headway, both against global warming and the social, economic, political gridlock that stymies us. Stephanie Kelton, author of *The Deficit Myth: Modern Monetary Theory and the Birth of the People's Economy*, urges us to begin by figuring out the human,

material and organizational resources we need and then see what is (surprisingly) already available with modest shifts of resources. Only then do we seek additional revenue taking care to avoid inflation.

UUJEC's Dr. Dick Burkhardt, mathematician and economic justice activist, will introduce Dr. Kelton's video and help answer the questions it raises among us. Please join us May 14, see below.

Our country demonstrated the spectacular success of this straightforward method during WW II, even though it meant reallocating half our GDP per year. With the **Green New Deal** we can be far less rushed and more deliberate, taking less than one-tenth per year, yet still create a life-saving legacy for future generations.

Join Zoom Meeting, Adam Wasserman, host; Thurs May 14, 8 pm EDT, 7 pm CDT, 6 pm MDT, 5 pm PDT
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6687480796>
Meeting ID: 668 748 0796

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Questions? Write us at: greentf@uujec.org

Four Climate Crisis Lessons We Should Learn from the Pandemic

Many observers have begun to think about how our response to Covid-19 might relate to the climate crisis. There are instructive similarities between these two natural disasters, the immediate one from Covid-19, and the ongoing one from global warming. Maybe, just maybe, America's experience with one crisis will make it more ready to consider the Green New Deal or similar public efforts. Here are four potential lessons.

1. Speed matters. Everyone now realizes that even a short delay in responding to the spread of Covid-19 has huge consequences. More people get sick, more hospitals get overwhelmed, more people die. Hesitating because you distrust experts and scientists, or because you want to believe it's some kind of political plot, is disastrous. If you

move fast and move big, however, you can flatten the curve and keep a very serious situation from becoming a nightmare.

We long ago lost our chance to flatten the curve on global warming. We will have to deal with the consequences, the droughts and rising oceans and dying forests, just as we have to deal with the consequences of the virus. But it is not too late to make a difference, and acting today is better than acting tomorrow.

II. This is not just a technical problem. No one says about the pandemic that we should count on scientists to fix it and meanwhile we should just go on with business as usual. We are of course trying hard to find a vaccine and other treatments. But everyone realizes that this is also an economic and social crisis, and that our responses need to go way beyond the norm. We are throwing the kitchen sink at the economy to keep people and companies afloat. We are considering formerly crazy ideas like sending people government checks and offering free government provided medical services. We are changing our personal behavior quickly and radically as we realize that our actions matter to everyone else, and vice versa.

The climate crisis is likewise not just an engineering challenge, though many see it that way. They hope some technical fix will let us live the same as always, but without destroying the planet. This is wishful thinking. Our response requires us to move from one economic paradigm to another. This demands big public programs—training and unemployment benefits and guaranteed healthcare and so on.

That's what the Green New Deal tries to do. Conservatives and centrists scoffed at the cost, but are now eager to throw trillions into our pandemic response. The lesson here is, we have the resources, we, just, need to have the will to use them.

As with the pandemic, our response to the climate crisis has to include new ways of being in the world. We will have to consume less, travel less, make-do with fewer cheap conveniences. We will have to be less individualistic and take into account how our actions affect our neighbors, communities, and the

world. Unlike the pandemic, however, these changes will not be temporary.

III Nothing works without trust. Americans can't just be ordered to comply with social distancing and other alterations of personal behavior. They have to be convinced and to accept facts and the consequences of their actions. One reason our response has been less than stellar is a broad lack of trust in government and in authorities of all kinds. Half the population strongly distrusts our current leadership. The other half strongly distrusts almost all sources of objective information, and instead believed initial partisan messages that the coronavirus was a liberal plot to bring down Trump and destroy capitalism.

China, South Korea, and Singapore seem to be keeping the contagion at bay more successfully than in the West. China has the power to require obedience, but the fact is most Chinese think highly of their leaders and believe they have their best interests at heart. There are clear cultural differences at work here that transcend political systems. In Asia the individual counts for less, and family and community for more. With Trump's "America First", there is no basis for the cooperation and self-sacrifice any community needs in a time of troubles.

The contrast between different approaches could have lasting effects. *China is already seeking to capitalize* on the perception that it has responded effectively to the pandemic. If this is successful, China will try to do the same with its aggressive national projects to fight global warming.

In America we have a ruling party that dislikes and distrusts the government that it runs. It has done its best to *discredit and sideline career government workers*. Now it needs them to do their jobs in a no-kidding emergency, but morale is low, key management slots have been deliberately left empty, and incompetent hacks fill many positions.

The response to climate change likewise depends on trust. Do we believe what the scientists and experts say? Do our government and our elected leaders have our best interests at heart? Much of our citizenry answers these questions with a resounding 'no.'

We cannot turn attitudes around overnight. For a long time the prevailing ideology in American life has fortified selfishness and mocked the idea of public interest.

Americans have always been skeptical of government, but the back-to-back crises of the Depression and World War II changed attitudes by showing that government could improve lives and accomplish big things. Today that trust is gone, eaten away by Vietnam and Watergate, but also by an unrelenting right-wing critique that questions the very possibility of public service. This attack on government is a thinly disguised attack on democracy itself.

Much of the opposition to climate action stems from a reluctance by the public to empower what is viewed as a corrupt and incompetent bureaucracy. Conservative leaders worry that if government is allowed to act effectively, it will undermine their narrative that only the private sector can be trusted. If our institutions cope effectively with disease, however, it could make Americans rethink these stereotypes.

IV. Reality can only be denied for so long.

Today, those who initially downplayed the virus threat have had to turn 180 degrees. When your spouse or neighbor goes to the hospital, *it's not fake news anymore*. The same is happening with climate denial as Australia burns and seas rise. I expect that soon a majority of Americans, including conservatives, will abandon their denial and demand action.

As that happens, we will need to be able to offer clear, believable plans backed by leaders who can be trusted to do the right thing *When a crisis hits, it's too late to come up with new ideas*. The ideas that get implemented are ones that are readily available.

This is why I think it is so important to make the Green New Deal familiar. Already many of the specific projects embodied in the Green New Deal are *broadly popular*. To the extent possible they should be incorporated into programs to stimulate the economy in this current crisis; this will be the springboard for future action.

Submitted by Adam Wasserman