

# NEWS & LETTERS

THEORY / PRACTICE

“Human power is its own end”—Karl Marx

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## THOUGHTS FROM THE OUTSIDE

### A mind of one's own vs. COVID-19

by Faruq

In the middle of March we were notified that we would no longer have a job. We were supposed to be paid for sheltering in place. But our contract was cancelled because the store we worked for had to close. Having no income for two weeks was traumatic because I need money to find a place to live, as my parole-arranged housing is coming to an end.

#### TAKING THE ONLY JOBS THERE ARE

I had to take whatever job was offered, which right now is helping to place susceptible homeless people into temporary hotel rooms San Francisco is using to try to stem the spread of COVID-19. Several showed symptoms and then tested positive. What I am doing now is rolling the dice.

**One person had to come into the office because there was something wrong with his paperwork. He was later determined to have the virus. I didn't realize how dangerous my job was when I took it. I do get a little raise as hazard pay, but no money makes up for the danger we are in.**

COVID-19 is sweeping through the largest homeless shelter in San Francisco. It has already affected multiple SROs (single room occupancy hotels), where people share common areas such as a kitchen and bathrooms. Homeless activists have been warning for a long time of the possible health problems this poses and that the only real solution is permanent housing for everyone.

What happened to the Detroit bus driver really woke me up. He pleaded for passengers not to cough right on him after one did. He was a big, healthy guy like me. He tried to tell people that coughing on others was not OK. He paid with his life for their carelessness.

#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN NOW?

The healthcare workers, grocery clerks, bus drivers and delivery people are humanly responding to this crisis, which the “system” only deepened by gutting healthcare capacity and the social safety net.

**It all raises the question: what does it mean to be human in the face of this virus?**

The answer is not just activism or more demonstrations. We need clarity, clarity of thought. I just reread the Master/Slave dialectic section of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*. Hegel makes the point that the development of humanity comes from those who confront life and death, which in this case is the slave. It resonated with me.

Through the life-and-death struggle in the SHU (Security Housing Units) the Idea of Freedom came into my life. I began to question my reality, to examine it. That's where my freedom began. I gained a mind of my own through my experience, my engagement with the Idea in facing my social conditions.

As a descendant of slaves brought to this country, I want to continue developing that mind of my own that the struggle for freedom brought about.

**Now we are slaves to capitalism's idea of producing commodities. Instead of developing myself in the “free” world, I have to sell my ability to labor. I don't have time to reflect fully on my current social conditions.**

In Marx's time workers were driven to an early grave through an inhumanly extended working day. Their struggle for a normal working day demanded an answer to the question: “when does my time become my own?” That is the question I now have. How do I find the time to do what's important, as well as what I need to do to just survive?

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## Draft for Marxist-Humanist Perspectives, 2020-2021

# Shattered by pandemic, world needs new beginnings in revolutionary activity, thought

## Introduction: Deep crises demand a path to liberation

*Because the economic and political crises wracking the capitalist-imperialist world are so horrendous...it is all too tempting to express oneself solely in opposition to what is, without ever specifying what one is for, so weighted down does one become by all these crises crying out for an end....It only assures the transformation of that type of bare opposition into one form or another of halfway house.*

—Raya Dunayevskaya<sup>1</sup>

Pandemic shattered the world in 2020. It has not shattered the roots of the global system that powered its spread and hobbled society's response. That will take revolutionary action, shoots of which are already sprouting across the planet, from widespread labor strikes to growing recognition of the role of capitalism in undermining the health of humanity and the Earth. For precisely that reason, those in power are maneuvering to suppress revolt and dis-

sent, to deploy racism/nationalism/sexism and militarize thought, and to keep the toiling billions at work or impoverished enough to be desperate for work.

The mounting toll only begins with the thousands of deaths—over 150,000 confirmed as of April 17—and millions

to come. Staggering numbers of people have been thrown out of work, from the 22 million who filed for unemployment in the U.S. in just four weeks to most of the over 350 million informal workers in India.<sup>2</sup> A large part of India's 45 million migrant workers, lacking income and shelter, began walking home for hundreds of miles, with dozens known to have died along the way. The social dislocation does not stop there, as state responses in many countries have engendered fear, isolation and bigotry, and violence on the part of both police forces and racists. Abuse from husbands, partners or parents is on the rise.

**Any suggestion that we will return to normal after a brief episode is an illusion. The pandemic is likely to last 18 months or longer, according to a U.S. government plan leaked on March 13. Nor is this the final disaster. It has been 100 years since the last comparable pandemic, the influenza pandemic of 1918-19, which killed 40 to 100 million people. But this is not a 100-year epidemic because conditions have changed. Human destruction of and encroachment into wildlife habitat has vastly accelerated since World War II, and the inten-**

1. “What to Do Facing the Depth of Recession and the Myriad Global Political Crises as Well as the Philosophic Void,” *Perspectives Report to the News and Letters Convention*, Sept. 4, 1982, p. 1.  
2. The world has 2 billion informal workers. On the plight of informal workers in Mexico and South Africa, see “COVID-19 manifests the crisis of capitalism, shows the urgency of a new human society” by J.G.F. Héctor, *newsandletters.org*, March 24, 2020, and “COVID-19 among the Shackdwellers,” p. 11 this issue.

#### Why we print the Draft Perspectives in *News & Letters*

In 1975 News and Letters Committees printed its Draft Perspectives Thesis in *News & Letters* for the first time. The organization has continued the practice ever since. What follows is the 1975 explanation of why we decided to take such action and why we continue to do so:

*With this special issue, News and Letters Committees are breaking totally new ground for the Marxist movement. Publishing the Draft Perspectives Thesis for our coming national gathering directly in the pages of our paper is unprecedented, not only for all other organizations, but even for our own. We do it because our age is in such total crisis, facing a choice between absolute terror or absolute freedom, that a revolutionary organization can no longer allow any separation between theory and practice, philosophy and revolution, workers and intellectuals, “inside” and “outside.” We ask you to join in the discussion of these Perspectives with us. We are not presenting any “pat answers” to the question, “Where Do We Go From Here?” We are raising the questions that demand answers—and we ask you to help us in working them out.*

**sifying climate crisis is adding to the avenues that release new viruses into our globally connected society, as happened with HIV, Ebola, SARS, Zika, H1N1 and the current virus.**

The climate and extinction crisis will force us to deal with multiple intersecting catastrophes. Puerto Rico is still trying to recover from Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 and a swarm of earthquakes from Dec. 28 to Jan. 11, and bracing for the beginning of the hurricane season in June—all on top of being

ravaged by centuries of colonialism and decades of neoliberal structural adjustment.

Even after the pandemic subsides, society will be very different. We are already in the midst of a battle over how society will change in responding and adapting to the pandemic. That calls for the deepest solidarity, in-

ternationally as well as at home, participation in liberatory social movements and battles of ideas, and theoretical preparation for the battles ahead, including revolution, counter-revolution and the question of what happens after the revolution.

#### COMPREHENDING TODAY'S CAPITALISM

It is for this reason that the Marxist-Humanist Perspectives grapples with the meaning of events, not a roundup of the news but an effort to comprehend the current stage of capitalism and the current stage of activity and thought in revolt against it.

**Those who only oppose neoliberalism fail to grasp the historical development of capitalism's inherent contradictions. However, necessary as it is to point at capitalism and call for its abolition, that cannot satisfy us. What is needed is to grasp the meaning of current and historical struggles for liberation, in activity and in thought, as they illuminate the negation of what is and the positive in that negation as the foundation of a new human society.**

That includes the trends and transformations of the new period of global capitalism's disintegration opened by the economic crash of 2008. Central to that period were the revolutions of the Arab Spring and all the revolts that were at least partially inspired by them, and the counter-revolutions that met those revolutions and revolts. It did include a broad undermining of popular legitimacy of the

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UJE-CWA Local 201  
GE workers picket April 8 in Lynn, Mass., demanding adequate sanitation, personal protective equipment, paid sick leave, and conversion of idled jet engine factories to make ventilators.

## ON THE INSIDE

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## WOMAN AS REASON

# The torture of abortion bans

by Terry Moon

The pandemic gripping the world and killing tens of thousands has revealed globally what the genocide in Syria showed in one nation: that the capitalists and rulers who think they own and run the world would do nothing as they watch Bashar al-Assad—with help from Russia and Iran—try to destroy an entire civilian population because they desired freedom.

Now we see capitalists and the governments that do their bidding—and none does that bidding with more gusto than the U.S.'s Donald Trump—willing to sacrifice the poorest workers to a brutal disease. It includes those in the gig economy, production, home-care workers, bus drivers, and farmworkers. It includes those on the front line, such as nurses and doctors, medical technicians, and the list goes on. The only thing that seems to hold Trump and other rulers back from trying to restart the economy—which would also restart the pandemic—is that all the deaths that would result might make them look bad and negatively influence their reelection.

### ABORTION BANS: A FORM OF TORTURE

By banning abortion outright—as a “non-essential medical procedure”—in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, governors in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas not only ensure that many more women may die who would not have otherwise, **they created a unique form of misogynist torture. It is torture** because the pandemic means that women have even more reason for needing abortions: being pregnant compromises a woman's immune system. Marie Stopes International estimates that, because contraception is now harder to get, 9.5 million people worldwide will not get wanted contraception, which “could result in as many as three million additional unintended pregnancies, 2.7 million unsafe abortions and 11,000 pregnancy-related deaths.”

**It is unclear what the virus does to a fetus in the early stages of pregnancy; the number of women in abusive relationships has skyrocketed and pregnant women are particular targets of abuse (see “Women WorldWide” this page); so many have lost jobs, incomes, family members; women die in childbirth, which is 14 times more dangerous than an abortion.<sup>1</sup> More women in the U.S. die of pregnancy-related complications than in any other “developed” country. The U.S. maternal mortality rate was 26.4 per 100,000 births in 2017 and rising. Just as more African-American women are dying from COVID-19, African-American, Native-American and Alaska Native women are about three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women.**

*The torture intensifies* because these bans are based on the most obvious of lies, which reveal to women the contempt in which we are held. It shows that politicians are willing to put our lives in danger to suck up to their anti-abortion fanatical base, to win a few more votes to stay in power and make sure that women know their place and stay there.

### ALL ABORTION BANS ARE BASED ON LIES

Ohio's attorney general David Yost lied when he couched his anti-woman order to ban abortions under the guise of conserving healthcare resources. Other governors told the same lies. Abortion, obviously, is not an “elective surgery” that can be postponed. Abortions don't take up hospital beds because they are done in free-standing clinics. They don't require ventilators or most of the other materials used to treat COVID-19. Having a baby uses hospital beds and more equipment and personnel. Eight national medical groups, including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Board of Obstetrics & Gynecology, stated that elective abortions are “an essential component of comprehensive healthcare,”<sup>2</sup> and that, “The consequences of being unable to obtain an abortion profoundly impact a person's life, health, and well-being.”

**Abortion bans are torture as they force women against their will to carry a fetus to term. Christina Cauterucci explained in *Slate* what forced pregnancy means now: “[W]omen will also need prenatal care, which will compel them to risk exposure to COVID-19—and risk exposing others—to make several visits**

**to doctor's offices staffed by overworked practitioners. If they miscarry or develop certain pregnancy complications, they may have to take up valuable surgical supplies and hospital space during what will long be a dangerous time to inhabit a hospital bed. When they go into labor, in some hospitals, they'll have to endure childbirth alone, without a partner, doula, or family member by their side. Their infants' first days may be spent in a virus-rich environment without proper supplies, staffing, or standards of care.” She rightly calls this “abuse.”**

Women are fighting these bans and have had some success in the courts—those that have not yet been compromised by Trump's appointments of the most incompetent and fanatical. But if the pandemic has shown us anything, with the willful

disregard for human life and the torturous abortion bans so gleefully embraced by many Republican governors, it is that we can't count on courts or common sense, or the corrupt leaders that litter the U.S. government. Never was it clearer that we need a revolution to sweep these death-dealing politicians out and create a society based on new human relations.

## WOMEN WORLDWIDE

by Artemis

In March, in Los Angeles, several homeless families, mainly mothers with children, moved into 13 vacant homes among 200 vacant homes seized by the government for a cancelled freeway project. The group, Reclaiming Our Homes, was inspired by Moms 4 Housing (M4H), whose occupation of a corporate-owned vacant home resulted in allowing them to purchase the home. LA has 46,000 vacant housing units, and Oakland has 15,500, many owned by speculators who buy foreclosed homes, evicting the residents, often people of color, selling them at a higher rate and gentrifying the neighborhood. Dominique Walker of M4H stated, “The true crime lies in this society we live in that can normalize people living in the street. Shelter is a human right.”

\* \* \*

In March, Prince Charles awarded Rachel Lloyd a Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George for showing outstanding international service. Escaping prostitution, Lloyd moved to New York in 1998, founding Girls Educational and Mentoring Service (GEMS), the U.S.'s largest service provider for victims of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and domestic trafficking. GEMS uses these terms instead of “child prostitutes” to “dismantle historic prejudices and stigmatizing labels that blame CSE victims for the trauma they have endured.” The organization influenced legislation, including 2008's Safe Harbor for Exploited Youth Act, meaning youth arrested for prostitution will be presumed victims of sexual exploitation.

\* \* \*

The UN Secretary-General noted the “horri-fying global surge in domestic violence” since the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdowns. Along with the World Health Organization, he called for governments to include measures against it in their plans to fight the pandemic. Data show a threefold increase in women killed by men in Britain. Lucy Hadley of Women's Aid Federation England stated, “I think it's important to make clear the corona virus doesn't cause domestic abuse. It's exacerbating those existing behaviors within relationships and making access to support and safety harder.” Fiona Dwyer of Solace stated, “What we see quite often is that telephones are smashed and computers hacked into, and access to social media and everything else is often forced to be deleted.”

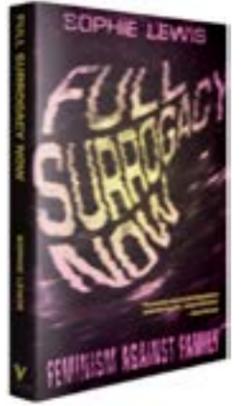
\* \* \*

In Tokyo, Japan, the organization Colabo helps teen girls fleeing home due to abuse, poverty or other reasons. Its members drive a bus called the “Tsubomi Cafe” to the entertainment district to provide food and consultations to young women. Stating “recruitment for the sex industry is continuing,” they now work with a hotel operator who has offered his rooms to the girls since they are empty due to the coronavirus crisis.

## ‘Full Surrogacy Now’

by Adele

Sophie Lewis' critically-praised book, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family*, is a disappointing attempt to find a radical path to a just society of new human relationships by way of commercial surrogacy. This increasingly popular practice involves paying a woman to gestate and bear a child for someone else. She can be artificially inseminated to fertilize her own egg cell or be implanted with a fertilized egg from another woman. There is a trend of wealthy white parents from the Global North travelling to the Global South to hire a woman of color to gestate and birth a baby using their own genetic material. The surrogate usually has no further contact with the child.



### LEWIS IMAGINES NONEXISTENT MOVEMENT

Lewis does provide an excellent critique of one surrogacy clinic in India, revealing its financial exploitation and poor treatment of the surrogates. However, she believes that surrogates could “seize the means of production” and form their own cooperatively-owned business. She says, after they get better working conditions, they would join the reproductive justice movement. They would fight for everyone's right to have or not have children and to raise them in an environment of safety, health, and dignity. She says society would then take collective responsibility for children, abolishing parents' supposed “ownership” of them. Commercial surrogacy, which already confuses the issue of which woman is the child's mother, would fade away, replaced by a different kind of universal “surrogacy.”

**Lewis is clear that her argument depends upon her notion that surrogacy is just another job. She does not believe it is an oppression inflicted upon desperately poor women. She does realize pregnancy and childbirth are dangerous and their danger is lessened by modern medicine and technology. However, she does not appear to know that surrogacy is documented to be even more medically dangerous due to injections of hormones and implantation of foreign genetic material. She even says this technology should be free for anyone to use. She completely dismisses the psychological trauma most surrogates report upon separating from the baby.**

Although there is currently very little organizing among surrogates, Lewis spends much time discussing the sex-workers' rights movement. This purports to be composed of women in prostitution and other sex industries fighting for better working conditions and decriminalization.

### ONCE AGAIN: WOMEN TREATED AS THINGS

Several radical feminist writers in recent years have exposed this movement as orchestrated by pimps in organized crime. Survivors of prostitution have written about its inherent violence and inevitable psychological scarring. They reject the notion that being paid for this treatment is “empowering” or “produces value.” They support the Nordic model of decriminalizing victims and criminalizing pimps and customers, which has been proven to decrease prostitution. Lewis uses the derogatory term Sex Worker Exclusionary Radical Feminist (SWERF), which implies it is feminists who are not listening to prostituted women. She proposes the term SERF (Surrogacy Exclusionary Radical Feminist).

**Lewis is dismissive of the work of radical feminists such as Kajsa Ekis Ekman who have interviewed both women traumatized by prostitution and by surrogacy. In her 2010 book, *Being and Being Bought: Prostitution, Surrogacy, and the Split Self*, Ekman had already debunked arguments such as Lewis'. Theorists claiming surrogacy will lead to caring communities misrepresent the reality of surrogacy in which people are treated as things.**

Those who give this book glowing reviews seem mostly intrigued by what families and communities could become after a revolution against capitalism. Lewis does vaguely mention other cultures' more expansive systems of family/community and those formed by women of color in the U.S. Feminists worldwide have been forming various non-patriarchal families and female-centered villages. Rather than placing false hopes upon surrogacy, it would be more enlightening to study new relations in families/communities that already exist.



Do you have something to say about Women's Liberation, about feminism, about the fight for freedom? *News & Letters* has a principle that people in struggle speak for themselves. Get in touch with us.

See how on page 9. We want to hear from you.

1. “Abortion safer than giving birth: study,” by Genevra Pittman, *Reuters*, Jan. 23, 2012.  
2. “Ohio clinics ordered to halt abortions deemed ‘non-essential’ amid coronavirus response,” by Hannah Knowles, *The Washington Post*, March 21, 2020.

# Workers in revolt against Amazon, Uber, and Lyft

by Buddy Bell

**Los Angeles**—Amazon has been bursting with new business as the COVID-19 pandemic spreads. It has scooped up any workers that don't have the savings to stay at home themselves. The turnover adds to preexisting challenges for workers in Amazon's enormous fulfillment factories who are trying not to contract the virus.

On March 20, workers at the Amazon fulfillment factory in Queens, N.Y., learned of a coworker's positive test for COVID-19 and walked off the job. Infections were reported over the next week at Amazon facilities in Staten Island, N.Y.; Joliet, Ill.; Moreno Valley, Calif.; Shepherdsville, Ky.; Houston and Katy, Tex.; Edison, N.J.; Jacksonville, Fla.; Brownstown, Romulus, and Shelby, Mich.; Wallingford, Conn.; Oklahoma City, Okla.; Calenzano, Italy; Barcelona and San Fernando, Spain.

## WORKERS WALK OUT FOR THEIR LIVES

On March 30, one-third of the Amazon employ-

## Health worker speaks

As a healthcare worker in a community setting, I see that the response from clinic administration to COVID-19 has been but a microcosm of Donald Trump's own: rooted in denialism, optimism, and the capitalist-realist ethos (fetishizing production while denying the possibility of an alternative world).<sup>1</sup> Both approaches have radically failed reason.

### REASONABLE DEMANDS

Instead of implementing a timely transition to telehealth so as to reduce the risk, especially to vulnerable patients, of a potentially fatal exposure to COVID-19; ensuring adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) for all workers; limiting the number of patients so as to protect workers and patients; insisting that all workers remain at home if symptomatic; or implementing triage policies, the administration expected that the exploitative functioning of the clinic continue more or less as usual. Individual petitions and conversations about enforcement of OSHA standards are non-starters in pandemic conditions.

**That this “shop” is non-union places us at a disadvantage, as does the lack of mandated federal paid leave for workers. We are “essential workers” lacking the proper protection.**

In my experience, the glaring lack of unionization is systematic for clinics outside of the hospital setting. The business model of such workplaces is based on privatized and centralized ownership and decision-making structures. Administration confirms the despotism of capital: that State centralism drives and upholds capitalism, and that capital itself is a form of tyranny.

As Pierre-Joseph Proudhon observed, “Roman law defined property as the right to use and abuse one's own within the limits of the law.”<sup>2</sup> Of course, the bosses know they can depend on the people's desperation for their own privilege, dependent on our exploitation, to persist—explained by Marx in *Capital* with reference to the “reserve army of labor” and the “general law” of capitalist accumulation.<sup>3</sup> Doubly so, in light of the highly feminized nature of labor in the healthcare industry, and the lack of social insurance and protection in this country.

### WORK STOPPAGE

One morning we had a spontaneous work stoppage on learning that we'd experienced a positive COVID-19 exposure while lacking appropriate PPE. This resulted in an unprecedented disruption to the clinic's operations, as the robotic and potentially fatal hierarchy yielded—if only momentarily—to collective self-management in the interest of our health and well-being.

**Typically—as has been shown by the fate of the over 100 nurses and doctors who have perished serving their patients and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic—we are considered little more than cannon fodder.<sup>4</sup> We agree that the provision of quality and ethical healthcare is a social imperative that must continue to be prioritized, particularly now. But not in this way.**

Although the public may consider us heroes, what we really need—both to protect our own physical and mental health, and to serve our patients and communities best—is an expeditious transition to a socialized public-health and healthcare system based in unions and cooperatives, centering patients and workers rather than capitalist bosses or insurance companies.

—I. Guerrero

1. See Stefan Gandler, *Critical Marxism in Mexico: Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez and Bolívar Echeverría* (Brill, Leiden and Boston, 2015).

2. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, “What Is Property?” in *Property is Theft: A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Reader*. Ed. Iain McKay (AK Press: Chico, Calif., 2011), 90.

3. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1. Trans. Ben Fowkes. Penguin: London, 1990, chapter 25.

4. Soo Kim, “Over 100 Doctors and Nurses Have Died Combating Coronavirus Around the World.” *Newsweek*, 3 April 2020.

ees at the Calenzano, Italy, plant went on strike. In Staten Island, N.Y., where the number of cases had climbed to 10, workers walked out and demanded the warehouse be shuttered for health reasons. Workers at the Robbinsville, N.J., site walked out in solidarity.

Amazon lashed out immediately, illegally firing a strike organizer and portraying workers who remained on the production line as “heroic.” The next day, non-union supermarket workers at various U.S. locations of Amazon's subsidiary Whole Foods moved forward with a work stoppage that had originally been planned for May 1.



On April 4, 2020, Amazon workers and their allies shut down an Amazon warehouse in Chicago over dangerous working conditions.

### STRIKE ON AMAZON PRIME DAY

This comes nine months after workers went on strike in Shakopee, Minn., for higher pay on the first Amazon-created consumer holiday of Prime Day. When asked why she planned to strike, Meg Brady told KALW: “I think the turning point came when I got injured from repetitive stress. The job I do is basically like doing aerobics for ten hours... I take an item from a conveyor belt, turn around, take a few steps, and put it into a chute. On the other side are packers... It is constant movement—squatting, walking, reaching—for ten hours...”

“I think if Amazon made an investment in ergonomics, it would reduce a lot of injuries... I suggested a raised floor. No changes have been implemented to make it a better workstation.”

**Through Prime Day, Amazon hopes to offer fulfillment of shipping orders faster. “Rebidders” like Brady are expected to process 600 items per hour, one item every six seconds.**

Amazon engineers and tech workers—who are the cutting edge of the company's use of such innovations as work speedup bracelets that time and track worker movements—shocked the corporate sector

## Surviving at Kroger

**Detroit**—I am an employee of a Kroger grocery store in the city, and a union member of United Food and Commercial Workers. Working at the grocery store, you truly appreciate the saying that “goodness is its own reward” because, despite all the news and advertisements touting grocery store employees as heroes, I sure don't feel rewarded like one.

### HEROES GET PIZZA AND PEPSI

At first the store gave us \$25 store credit as thanks for our efforts during this crisis. This was then supplemented by a pizza party, and now discounted beverages from Pepsi. The discount is limited to two drinks per person and does not include Dr. Pepper for reasons that make sense only to the upper levels of Pepsi.

**The hazard pay that our union has heavily touted, only an additional \$2 an hour, was set to expire on April 18, but has been extended to May 2. It does not include back pay, although all employees were given cash bonuses of \$150 for part-timers and \$300 for full-timers.**

It was treated as a victory when the store allowed employees to wear face masks and gloves. But face masks are harder to come by than the holy grail. We are currently provided one face mask to last the entire shift, whether that's four, six or eight hours.

### DISTANCE FROM THE RANK AND FILE

The UFCW has largely been asleep at the wheel when it comes to communicating with employees. Negotiations over safety and wages feel like palace intrigues. When I began collecting signatures in support of hazard pay, people mistook me for either the union steward or the representative, both of whom are women. This is how far from the rank and file the union is.

When the first positive case in my store was reported to me on May 13, it scared the hell out of me. The company brought in third party cleaning services and ordered all of us not to breathe a word to anyone else, advice that I disregarded. The department where the employee who tested positive worked saw a slew of people take the month-long unpaid leave that the company offered. I don't blame them.

—Hank

when they spoke out publicly in support of the Shakopee strike. Two were fired in April after voicing support of warehouse workers' protests.

As public health and well-being come into visible conflict with the efficiency of companies in extracting surplus value from labor, more and more people can be expected to oppose this type of order.

In recent weeks, workers who drive passengers with the mobile applications Uber and Lyft began to see a lot of their business dry up as more and more people cancelled events and started telecommuting in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak. Even though it is safer to stay home, some workers cannot afford to do that, and low-wage workers in general are unlikely to have work-from-home as an option.

### DRIVERS PROTECTING PASSENGERS

On March 11, a radio reporter with KQED was hit by a strong odor of cleaning products as he interviewed driver Erica MacGetto: “I have the surgical masks that the doctor gave me today for any passengers that are coughing. I have my Lysol and then I have my mask that the doctor gave me today that she recommends that I wear... but I'm afraid to wear because I might scare people.”

**MacGetto, who lost her apartment and sleeps in her car, spoke of being hounded by debtors. “PayPal wants their money. I got a reminder that Capital One wants their money today. I just have no choice whatsoever.”**

By March 18, Uber and Lyft were encouraging only medically necessary rides, and were transitioning many of the drivers to UberEats and other food delivery apps. Lyft started allowing the use of its passenger app to arrange delivery of free and reduced-cost lunches to schoolchildren sheltering in place.

For Lyft driver Dominique Smith, this setup was woefully unsustainable. “I worked ten hours yesterday and made \$40,” he told *The Guardian*. “We are getting starvation wages while getting food to people who need it.” Uber driver Cherri Murphy

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## Workers sacrificed

**Chicago**—Meatpackers across the Midwest have been drafted into combat in a pandemic. In late March, workers at the Smithfield packing plant in Sioux Falls, S.D., alerted the public to COVID-19 cases that the company had kept under wraps in order to maintain production targets. By the time even Trump-supporter Gov. Kristi Noem pushed the company to shut it down on April 15, the virus had infected close to 800 workers and their contacts.

### SMITHFIELD IGNORES UNION WARNING

UFCW Local 1473 at Patrick Cudahy in Wisconsin alerted Smithfield in March to two cases at the plant, but the company concealed infections while crowding workers together without protections until grudgingly closing three weeks later. Smithfield's boss lashed out at the pressure to close his plants: “We have a stark choice as a nation: we are either going to produce food or not, even in the face of COVID-19,” as if worker safety interfered.

**Neglect of safety and masks has allowed COVID-19 to race through other packing plants. Tyson closed one plant in Iowa, but kept its Waterloo pork plant producing.**

In the 1980s, major meat suppliers in Chicago and elsewhere reacted to the appearance of non-union Iowa Beef Processors by colluding to impose a wage cut from \$10.33 to \$8.50 an hour on UFCW workers. The pages of *News & Letters* were filled with the voices of workers battling lockouts at Oscar Mayer, Swift, Patrick Cudahy and Hormel. Fighting both their company and anti-union Reagan policies, workers and their unions were weakened but survived.

Today's workforce shares similarity with the immigrants from diverse nationalities in the Chicago Stockyards of the 1900s. Smithfield hires workers with precarious legal status from Nepal, Ethiopia and Burma at the Sioux Falls plant. The average wage, around the goal of the Fight for \$15 Movement, tells us that wage would be no ticket to prosperity.

### SWEATED LABOR

But workers are facing speed-up unlike the 1900s or even the 1980s. We are seeing what Karl Marx called capital's “werewolf hunger for surplus labor” as packing companies try to reap the benefits of the prevailing level of automation—but substituting intensified sweated labor for the capital investment of automation. They block anything that slows down the hog or beef line in normal times, so making workers safer in a pandemic, if it slows the line or adds to expenses, is anathema.

Society now notices meatpackers and calls them, like nurses, bus drivers and store clerks, essential workers. But meatpackers are all but forced at bayonet point into jeopardy during a pandemic, safety equipment and procedures be damned.

—Bob McGuire

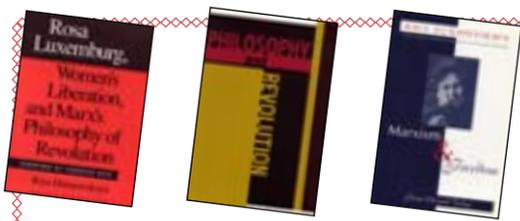
## FROM THE WRITINGS OF RAYADUNAYEVSKAYA

*Editor's note: To address the methodology of "analyzing serious crises and acting to uproot the system that created them," we excerpt "What to Do Facing the Depth of Recession and the Myriad Global Political Crises as Well as the Philosophic Void," Raya Dunayevskaya's Perspectives Report to the News and Letters Committees Convention, Sept. 4, 1982. It can be found in the [Raya Dunayevskaya Collection, #7515](#) and was excerpted in chapter 16 of [Crossroads of History: Marxist-Humanist Writings on the Middle East](#) by Dunayevskaya (News and Letters, 2013). Under the title, Dunayevskaya wrote: "(As well as' does not mean a third or subordinate point, a sort of 'also ran.' Rather, philosophy expresses, dialectically, the meaning of the other two points—economics and politics—as both their ground of being and path for the resolution of their contradictions, subjectively and objectively—Freedom.)"*

### Introduction: Why Being Against "What Is" Is Incomplete without the Corollary, What One Is For

Because the economic and political crises wracking the capitalist-imperialist world are so horrendous...it is all too tempting to express oneself solely in *opposition* to what is, without ever specifying what one is *for*, so weighted down does one become by all these crises crying out for an end.

History, however, warns us of other critical peri-



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### What are Marxist-Humanism and Marx's philosophy of revolution in permanence, and why are they urgent for today?



ods...which give us historic proof that mere opposition to such monstrous degeneration does not lead to new societies. On the contrary. It only assures the transformation of that type of bare opposition into one form or another of a halfway house. That is true both when we look at the failure of bourgeois democracy and when we look at fascism. Both brought on World War II. Such a victory over fascism only laid the ground for the restoration of state-capitalism—Gaullism as well as Stalinism. Indeed, state-capitalism became a universal.

**As we know from World War I, even the magnificent opposition that was successful—the Russian Revolution—once it didn't spread beyond national borders, ended in the transformation of the first workers' state into its opposite, state-capitalism.**

Today, we cannot evade asking: What Now? Is the PLO<sup>1</sup> the absolute opposite of Israel, or just one more narrow nationalism? In our age, when a nuclear war threatens civilization as we have known it, we cannot, must not, accept halfway houses as the answer. Nor do I mean only outright nuclear holocaust. Rather, the immediate crises of today are both in the "Love Canals"<sup>2</sup> of the world and at the point of production....

We cannot satisfy ourselves with detailing only what we are against or with enlarging atrocity stories. They surely abound in Israel's invasion of Lebanon.<sup>3</sup> Many atrocity stories, I'm sure, can also be told of the PLO and its fantastic covenant "to drive the Israelis into the sea." Nor should our support of the Palestinians for self-determination and the PLO as a bargaining agent lead us away from re-exam-

1. For more on the Palestine Liberation Organization, see [Crossroads of History: Marxist-Humanist Writings on the Middle East](#).

2. Residents of the Love Canal neighborhood of Niagara Falls, N.Y., learned in the late 1970s that their families had been sickened by chemicals leaking from landfill their homes had been built on. Their organizing, led by Lois Gibbs and other residents, became emblematic of struggles against toxic waste.

3. In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon, and its Lebanese allies carried out massacres at two Palestinian refugee camps. See "Need for a Total Uprooting: Down with the Perpetrators of the Palestinian Slaughter," chapter 16 of [Crossroads of History: Marxist-Humanist Writings on the Middle East](#).

## The methodology of Perspectives

ining what happens to aborted revolutions—in this case, specifically Lebanon and specifically as aided by the PLO in the 1975-76 Civil War there. Which is why we correctly entitled our Philosophic-Political Letter #6 (August 6, 1976): "Lebanon: The Test Not Only of the PLO but of the Whole Left."<sup>4</sup>

Because the Left did not meet the challenge but followed the PLO is one substantial reason for the *totality* of the crisis today. Just at the point when there was a near success by the indigenous Lebanese Left, and the outcome of the 1975-76 Civil War hung in the balance, the PLO insisted that the concentration must be, not on the native ruler-oppressors represented by the so-called Christian, i.e., neo-fascist, Phalangists, but on Israel alone, though at the moment Israel was nowhere present in Lebanon and Syria was all ready to invade. It is Syria the PLO had dubbed "liberators" instead of a new imperialistic force. The great tragedy was that the whole Left—indigenous Lebanese under Jumblatt, Stalinists, Trotskyists—followed the PLO lead. Here is what we wrote in that Political-Philosophic Letter:

"...the New Left, born in the 1960s, so disdainful of theory (which it forever thinks it can pick up 'en route'), has a strange attitude toward imperialism. It is as if imperialism were not the natural outgrowth of monopoly capitalism, but was a 'conspiracy, organized by a single imaginary center, rather as the Nazis used to refer to the Judeo-Catholic-Masonic Alliance, or Communists under Stalin to the conspiracy of the Trotskyists and Rightists in league with the imperialist secret service.'..."

"[And even, it should now be added, as Khomeini now refers to the U.S. and Israel as the Great Satan.]

**"Evidently nationalism of the so-called Third World is of itself revolutionary even when it is under the banner of a king, a shah,**

deep global economic recession anchored in Ronald Reagan's retrogressionist recession, including religion, as well as its imperialist outreach—and did it so dialectically that you never saw it separate from the revolutionary opposition against it, whether that be Namibia today or in 1904. This Rosa Luxemburg had sensed that early, both as Black dimension and as that new degenerate stage of capitalism—imperialism—which not only Blacks fought against, but so should Marxists... We here got a whiff of [Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution](#)—and, at the same time, rejected Luxemburg's position on Poland and gained from Marx's position when revolutionary nationalism is internationalism. We could also trace the movement from practice in Bolivia, 1952/1982. **Again, the objective situation made us also remember the "subjective" [Marxism and Freedom](#), which first projected that original, dramatic, new category—movement from practice to theory—when we broke through on the seemingly stratospheric Absolute Idea, integrating it with the actual movement from the 1950s as those three new pages of freedom opened in the U.S., East Europe/Vorkuta, and Montgomery, Alabama.**

Altogether too many crises and wars abound and there is no way to know which one will be the next to erupt, which will have repercussions to which we will have to turn at once. But if we do practice our dialectics, we should not have to ask: 1) how does the hieroglyphic "three books, not one" illuminate these crises? 2) how does the challenge to post-Marx Marxists affect our facing the objective situation now? **In a word, Marx's philosophy is no abstraction and because that philosophy is concrete, it expresses the methodology needed for both analyzing serious crises and acting to uproot the system that created them.**

First and foremost, we should keep in mind that every production crisis (as our age with its movement from practice has proved) produces also the crisis in theory—whether it is automation, which made workers ask the questions: What kind of labor should men and women do? Why should there be this gap between mental and manual labor?—or whether it is the peasantry, and not only the Bolivians just referred to, but in India. Even the World Bank (no radical it), in its World Economic Report this year, while admitting that "800 million live in absolute poverty," also had to say: "Far from being tradition-bound, the peasant farmers have shown that they share a rationality that far outweighs the differences in their social and ecological conditions." That is a great deal more to the point than Trotsky's great theory in nothing less important than the Manifesto for the Fourth International, where he speaks only of the backwardness of the peasantry, and Mao is not mentioned once.

At the same time, the non-Hegelian, non-Marxist concept of contradiction that Mao expounded with his "Bloc of Four Classes" has only proved that that type of alternative halfway house, even when it reaches its height in the Cultural Revolution, leads to still one more halfway house. More precisely put, it misleads. That is to say, instead of making a philosophy of revolution the alternative to the party-to-lead, Mao simply asked for "new" leaders like himself. As we showed in [Nationalism, Communism, Marxist-Humanism and the Afro-Asian Revolutions](#), that type of non-alternative, that type of voluntarism, adventurism and administrative mentality has offered itself as leader of the Third World—and left it in a halfway house.

Which is why [Philosophy and Revolution](#) exposed and abandoned so-called revolutionary Alternative Marxisms, whether Trotskyist or Maoist, both politically and philosophically by diving deep into Hegelian dialectics "in and for itself." Even Lenin, who did return to Marx's origins in Hegel and thus created ground for us, had not carried through, in his reorganization, to the party-to-lead which our age demanded be ended, and to Women's Liberation. What was needed was to recognize that Marx alone could transcend the Hegelian dialectic *because* he had not satisfied himself when he "translated" the Hegelian contradiction as class struggle, but had dived further into it after his 1844 discovery of a new continent of thought and of revolution—not only in the *Grundrisse* but in *Capital*.

In a word, Marx never departed from the Hegelian negativity as "the creative principle." That's how, after the defeat of revolutions as in victory, Marx called for "revolution in permanence." This is what Marx developed both in theory and in practice, in organization and in a philosophy—a global philosophy. He went so far with his new moments in the last years of his life that he concluded that what we would now call the Third World need not follow the West's "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation."

5. Dunayevskaya was arguing that her then new book [Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution](#) should be considered in the context of her two earlier books, [Marxism and Freedom](#) and [Philosophy and Revolution](#). See ad on this page.

**or the emirates, or the Syrian Army. Thereby they canonize nationalism, even when it is void of working-class character, as national liberation.**

"It is not that class is the sole characteristic of national liberation movements that revolutionaries can support. It is that the working-class nature is its essence and it is that the revolutionary and international impact emerges from masses in motion..."

"This does not mean that we give up the struggle for self-determination, Palestinian especially. It is that we do not narrow our vision of the revolutionary struggle for a totally different world, on truly new Humanist foundations, the first necessity of which is the unity of philosophy and revolution."...

### IV. The Creative Nature of Marx's Mind and the Tasks of Marxist-Humanists Today

#### 1. The Methodology of the Perspectives

Now then, what has philosophy, concretely, to do with the economic recession, the myriad political crises (of which we could take up only a few) and our tasks today? You, no doubt, noted that, instead of starting with the myriad objective crises, including wars, as we usually do, the Introduction barely touched them, using the references only as point of departure for posing the philosophic need for articulating not alone what one is *against* but what one is *for*....

Again, Section I, on [Israel's 1982 war on Lebanon] and the opposition against all halfway houses, did not satisfy us just with descriptions and analyses of "what is," but proceeded to the concretization of philosophy, its politicalization, which revealed the transformation into opposite, not in the usual way we project that as the transformation of the first workers' state, Russia, into a state-capitalist society, but this time as it was manifested in the difference between Palestine/Israel 1947-48 and Israel, 1982-83. At the same time, we warned the capitalist-imperialist ideologues not to forget the presence of a Third World....

Sections II and III, of course, did analyse the 4. The letter is chapter 7 in [Crossroads of History: Marxist-Humanist Writings on the Middle East](#).

# Canada on trial: War on Wet'suwet'en Nation

TC Energy (formerly TransCanada) continues building the Coastal GasLink pipeline despite the COVID-19 crisis in Canada. It is projected to run 420 miles through Wet'suwet'en First Nation territory—territory that has never been ceded to Canada—from Dawson Creek in northeast British Columbia to Kitimat on the West Coast.

Instead of complying with health requirements, the company is using the global pandemic to divert attention from their actions.

## PIPELINE ALLOWED, PROTEST OUTLAWED

The BC government has allowed construction to continue during the pandemic, at great risk to workers and others, while outlawing protests against the pipeline and other public assemblies. The violent behavior of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and its declaration of “lethal overwatch” of the protests is cause for alarm by anyone who has concerns about

## Virus makes nukes doubly deadly

*“Rolling in the COVID-19 Trojan Horse: these refueling crews traveling from one reactor site and community to the next.” —Paul Gunter*

Nuclear power corporations are exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic. Greed bedevils the fuel cycle—from mining to “turning on the lights”—in every nuclear state. Now endless claims of nuclear power plants' importance emanate from propaganda machines supported by taxes, and supine politicians.

**The nuclear industry showed up for the COVID-19 stimulus package because the cost for nuclear power sees no end, now or in the future. However, with the SARS2 pandemic, the nuke industry is again sacrificing our safety for its bonuses and payoffs. Elected officials ignore the hybrid menace.**

This is the off-season for electrical demand when refueling and necessary repairs are done, which leads to a nuclear dance: over 1,000 contractors migrate through the nation to perform dangerous and intricate work. They bring along their exposure to COVID-19.

## EXELON REJECTS DELAY

When the pandemic started, 1,400 workers came to Montgomery and Chester counties, Penn., to exchange fuel assemblies at the Limerick nuclear power plant. Commissioners requested Exelon postpone the refuel until the rate of COVID-19 was lower. Exelon promised “mitigations,” including social distancing. But social distancing was not happening.

So the COVID-19 terror creeps among nuclear workers. The reactors should be closed until there are healthy people for a safe start-up. But industrialists want personal protective equipment (PPE) before medical staff have enough; they boost disinfecting radiation detectors; they ask for exemptions from the National Regulatory Commission (NRC). Exelon is seeking to delay a steam-generator inspection at Braidwood in Illinois to a refueling outage in 18 months because more than 170 employees from across the U.S. would “mobilize on-site.” But a fuel swap in mid-April will bring 1,000 contractors!

Five people must be in the control room 24/7 and crews work cheek by jowl to swap fuel rods. They mustn't close the plants because citizens might realize we don't need these dangerous installations.

## BONUSES TRUMP SAFETY

“Managers are tied to bonuses; bonuses are tied to deadlines,” says Arnie Gundersen, 45 years in the industry. It incentivizes the 26-day deadline for swapping the fuel. Managers get a 30% bonus (on a \$300,000/year salary!), said Gundersen. A plant closed for safety from COVID-19 might not have secure bonuses, he said.

Bonuses are part of the nuclear industry. For example, Unit 4 Chernobyl had a start-up deadline for 1985 and was approved Dec. 30, 1985 despite a safety test being postponed to April 26, 1986. Unit 2 Three Mile Island had known faults, but being commissioned by Dec. 30, 1978, would save \$40 million in taxes. Unit 2 started up February 1979, and melted down March 1979. They saved \$40 million, and we citizens paid \$1 billion to clean it up.

**The NRC claims responsibility for safety, but only for radiation. COVID-19 protection falls to Exelon, FirstEnergy, Entergy, Talen, etc. Making the industry responsible for safety is similar to FAA's “Boeing plan.” Parroting the same set of excuses, NRC's Scott Burnell says, “Since plants need enough staff to meet requirements, they have a strong incentive to follow OSHA and keep their workers healthy.”**

Illinois is the most nuclear state, but regulators dismiss public concerns. Three reactors are scheduled for refueling. Illinois should protect us by demanding reactors close rather than let over 1,000 workers go from town to town. But no one confronts Exelon about it. I can't talk to the Governor's staff; so I sent an angry letter through his website.

—January

Canadian democracy.

TC Energy is in violation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). But the duplicitous Michaëlle Jean, former Governor General of Canada, signed UNDRIP only as non-binding, while she refused to ratify it.



Three Wet'suwet'en women warriors—Freda Huson, Brenda Michell, and Victoria Redsun—just freed from jail on Feb. 10, 2020, after participating in demonstrations to stop the Coastal GasLink pipeline.

## VIOLATING INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

There are as well questions of authority within the Wet'suwet'en between the elected band councils and the hereditary chiefs. Some elected band councils, established as administrative bodies by the Indian Act of 1876, have signed agreements with TC Energy, while hereditary chiefs, who under tribal law have authority over the land, have not been consulted. That authority is recognized by Canada's Constitution and was confirmed by the Supreme

## Global pandemic indicts capitalism

When following COVID-19 in January, I was struck with the brutality toward the Chinese people. It's one thing to hear about the oppressive government in China and another to see it through citizens breaking through digital censorship. All I heard from U.S. pundits and officials was the need for “draconian measures” to keep it from spreading, like locking people in their homes and tearing away mothers from their children.

The total disregard for the humanity of the Chinese people was not considered. I was appalled at not only the actions of the Chinese government, but also our government and the media's complete acceptance.

## ECHOES OF 1918

I waited for U.S. media to cover this threat to the world. Instead all I saw was repetition of the impeachment hearings. My fear was that this was a threat in the vein of the 1918 Spanish Influenza. This turned out to be close to the truth—it is almost as deadly.

When the media finally reported on the virus, I felt relief that I no longer had to get the message out myself. We could have used that time to acquire protective equipment for healthcare workers and alternative hospital sites. Instead our “president” did his best to minimize the threat and stated it was like the flu, which had already been disputed. Since this began, he has used his press conferences as a way to supplement his campaign rallies which are too dangerous to hold.

## VIRUS HAS ALLIES AT THE TOP

The dangers we face from the virus are exacerbated by the U.S. and European governments. The irony is that Prime Minister Boris Johnson became infected with COVID-19 after his recommendation to wait for “herd immunity”—which would take about 18 months, and that's if we can even acquire immunity to it. That is unknown at this point.

This is a mask for deciding to prioritize the economy over peoples' lives, and another indicator of the ugliness of the capitalist system.

As the world adjusts to quarantines and food and medical shortages, we see regular people reaching out to each other to help provide groceries, money and understanding—what we are not seeing from our government.

**The U.S. places profits over people, bails out huge corporations and provides a one-time sum of \$1,200 to individuals who even qualify. This amount is supposed to last for 10 weeks!**

This pandemic has highlighted so much of what's wrong with capitalism. The economic system leaves us all vulnerable to a deadly virus and requires sacrificing healthcare workers, delivery drivers and other people doing essential work. My hope is that this experience wakes more people up to the dangers and inhumanity of living under capitalism.

—Diana

Court in 1997, though the decision was not finalized and was sent back to a lower court.

**Most tribal members live in deep poverty, and TC Energy is using that as leverage to take rights away from the Wet'suwet'en and other indigenous groups (as an establishment of legal precedent). These are agreements made under duress—people are being asked to negotiate under conditions that are much like having a gun to their heads. It is no dialogue between equals.**

Every sort of question is involved: what is property and ownership; what is self-determination; and what does this mean for the entire world?

## PROTESTS ACROSS CANADA

The Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs sent an open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau about the danger that continued construction brings of increasing the risk of COVID-19 transmission. There have been massive protests across Canada and, most notably, work stoppages and the blocking of rail service between Toronto and Montréal by indigenous groups and their supporters.

**Even the pandemic will not stop this. It has brought together people from all areas of Canada: Indigenous, workers, environmentalists—English and French speakers—feminists, gender activists, and more, and they are in it for the long haul. It has brought Indigenous issues to the world stage.**

Now the New Democratic Party (NPD), once the party of labor and of oppressed minorities, has lost much of its reason to exist. BC Premier John Horgan and others in the NDP-dominated provincial government have lost credibility, and seem unaware of the harm that they have done. Canada is losing its reputation as an enlightened social democracy, especially with its \$15 billion bailout of the energy industry, as it cuts the social safety net to a level that endangers millions.

## FETISH OF DEVELOPMENT

The disregard for human rights is obvious. It calls into question the fetish of “development” and reveals its anti-social nature.

However grim the situation may appear, the movement for human emancipation is growing in Canada in the protests and in the movements in thought. In working together with the deepest collective spirit of respect for each other, we are seeing a glimpse of a new society to come. In these difficult times, we are witnessing an awakening of the human spirit and of a greater idea of freedom and respect.

—D. Chêneville & Ti-Ouistiti

## Uber, Lyft drivers

continued from p. 3

said she was able to make \$90 in nine hours, which only barely covered gas and sanitizer.

In California, Uber and Lyft have been flouting AB5, a state law that specifically classifies rideshare drivers as employees of the apps and not contractors. In San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, drivers held protests (with physical distancing) on March 18 outside empty corporate offices, whose employees had all been directed to work from home. The drivers demanded paid sick leave, a guaranteed minimum wage, reimbursement for cleaning supplies, and redirection of a \$110 million campaign war chest for the repeal of AB5 by ballot initiative.

## DRIVERS TO CALIFORNIA: ENFORCE AB5

Drivers challenged the state for not enforcing AB5. Starting on March 30, the independent union Rideshare Drivers United began encouraging workers to file wage claims online with the California Labor Commission. “It's time for drivers and other misclassified workers to enforce AB5 and show the public and the State of California how much these companies are stealing from us.” Add your own claim at <https://drivers-united.org/a/submit-a-wage-claim>.

Though Uber and Lyft have made a public offer of sick pay if drivers are diagnosed with COVID-19 or are under a doctor's order to self-quarantine, the companies know there are not enough testing kits. In a Mobile Workers Alliance virtual town hall on March 31, Uber driver Ruben said that even with a doctor's note he was denied any benefits.

Hired grocery shoppers at Instacart stayed home on March 28-29 in an attempt to hold their second nationwide strike, for hazard pay and reimbursement for PPE. But Instacart bragged to *The Verge* that because 50,000 new people signed up to deliver groceries, the strike had “absolutely no impact on operations.”

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## THE DIALECTIC IN THOUGHT AND IN LIBERATION

Supporters of capitalism argue that Marx's economic theories only revealed the condition of the 19th century. But over and over they have to come back to him since he was not just an economist. Marx's rootedness in Hegel and Hegel's analysis of 2,500 years of humanity's logic makes it impossible to "neglect" him. Marx formulated that the human being not only is the Object of history but its Subject. Meaning that it is the Subject, the worker, that makes history despite all the apparatus of the capitalists who try to diminish him. At every crisis, thinkers return to Marx's analysis of the inherent contradiction of capitalism, the diminishing rate of profit. Labor cannot be neglected, and neither can Karl Marx.

**Mannel  
Los Angeles**

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Raya Dunayevskaya's moving "[African Revolutions at the Crossroads](#)" (March-April 2020 *N&L*) brings out the depth of the African revolutions, and the contradictions present from the beginning. She consistently showed that "Africa was charged with a dynamism of ideas that opened new paths to revolution and looked for new roads to development." The leaders' lack of a philosophy of revolution in permanence and separation from the masses blocked those new roads. Capitalist "development" exploiting labor and nature brought some industrialization and riches to elite minorities, and devastation to masses—especially in the slums where 60% of urbanized Africans dwell and in the parts of the countryside where farming is disrupted by drought, storms, floods, locusts, and land grabs by foreign capital—but also discontent and revolt seen today.

**Environmentalist  
Southern California**

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I like your international reporting and of course the letters section. If there was any easy resource to digest Hegel's ideas in relation to contemporary Marxism/world events, what would you recommend?

**Reader  
Lancaster, Penn.**

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*Editor's note: While good writings about Hegel are not easy, check out our [online bookstore](#), in particular the book [Philosophy and Revolution](#).*

## LABOR AND PANDEMIC

It's always the low-income people that are most susceptible. So why aren't we being tested, why aren't we getting food, why is nobody coming here? Why not test everybody? I believe it will get worse. There are lots and lots of homeless people, with nowhere to sleep and signs that say "Do not support panhandling." Why don't the pastors do anything? You see the people lying on the street. I grew up on a plantation in Mississippi, so I know what it's like to have racist white people taking everything away from you. There are not enough masks even for the nurses and doctors. They had the nerve to call all the retired nurses to see if they would work. I said no, I don't want to work again. I don't want to go anyplace where everyone has not been tested.

**Retired nurse  
San Bernardino, Calif.**

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What gets me is companies like Uber and Lyft have made billions off the "gig" economy or what we called piece rate. The workers took all the risks and the owners made all the profit. Time to shove all the risk on their billionaire owners and the profit to the workers. Amazon without warehouse workers would fold,



Christian Smalls

# READERS' VIEWS

same for all the delivery and livery drivers for other companies.

**IT worker  
Virginia**

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How many years has the nursing home industry avoided minimum staffing levels? There was never a prevailing wage for nursing home workers. There have never been staffing ratios to protect elders. The nursing homes have become killing fields by the virus.

**Elena  
Detroit**

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The parking lot visible from my apartment has only a few cars. The main street has few cars going by. Freeways are almost empty. A lot of people have no income now. This must also be in Europe and other places around the world. A real global crisis, and what do people do with no income?

**Basha  
Los Angeles**

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We hear about going back to normal, but normal is what got us here. Revolution has to do away with separation of mental and manual work. The coffee place near me has cut labor time by about 40%. It won't be sufficient to send \$3,000 to a family of four. It's not going to even last a month. Unemployment compensation isn't going to cover rent here. In families with this virus, who is going to take care of the children at home? If one parent stays home, what happens to the salary that's gone? More than half of families don't have \$1,000 for an emergency fund. You see a lot of college students going to food banks. To me there's only one reason: workers are not paid enough in this country.

**Teacher  
Los Angeles**

## PANDEMIC AND ECOLOGY

From the fires in California to the [fires in Australia](#), to this disease, everything is reaching a tipping point. These things had been predicted by people the capitalists and fundamentalists did not want to listen to. These things were predicted but laughed out of the room or suppressed. If we could fulfill the sense of ourselves and who we are in this world, we could work together against the crisis in public health, capitalism, and ethnocentrism.

**Mental health worker  
Los Angeles**

## PANDEMIC AND SCHOOL

There is no way not to close schools during this pandemic, if social distancing is to be effective in slowing the spread of the coronavirus. But what has opened, exponentially wider than before, is the "educational divide." In Detroit we are seeing much more than a digital divide. Those with internet access (estimated at half the school population) are receiving instruction if their technology was up to it and they could overcome the glitches. This reveals a two-fold problem: an unacceptable lack of technology that will at best take years to correct and a short-term failure to meet the children's needs with good old-fashioned paper and pencil. At this difficult time, what could be more important than providing lessons about the huge changes in the children's worlds? At the very least, keep the learning going from where they left off in mid-March.

**Retired teacher  
Detroit**

## PANDEMIC AND THE RIGHT

The "reopen the country" demonstrations: Republican donor groups,

Trump campaign organizers, NRA supporters, anti-vaxxers. Hardly a working-class uprising! More worrying than the astro-turfing (using elements of the working class to lend a faux legitimacy to an elite-led action) is the way this lines up behind Trump's attempt to assume power over the states that the Constitution simply does not give him—and which he previously admitted he does not hold. What does it mean for the road ahead when the national leader who defines his power as "total" whips up angry, gun-toting crowds to protest the limits of his power? This is the price Democrats pay for slugging off the "white working class" as Trump's support base. In reality, the white working class is politically divided, and much of Trump's support base is small business capitalists and the corporate CEOs that actually drive the agendas of both parties.

**Feminist  
Washington, D.C.**

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It's interesting in a disgusting way that some of the same people who claim to be "pro-life" are insisting that it is just fine and their "right" to hold church meetings or services with no social distancing, thus making them



Victoria Pickering

COVID-19 able—and evidently willing—to infect other people and perhaps cause their death. Some of these supposed "pro-lifers" also congregate outside abortion clinics, scream at patients, stick their heads, leaflets and other paraphernalia into people's cars, thus possibly infecting them with the potentially deadly coronavirus. This is not pro-life, it is fanaticism that reveals a reckless disregard for life.

**Women's Liberationist  
Chicago**

## WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Regarding the statistics that show that COVID-19 is hitting poor people and people of color harder, yes. It is also hitting women harder, especially women of color, even among the middle class. Women are going to have the highest rates because they are the ones taking care of everyone else—CNAs and social service providers, child and elder-care providers, caregivers for disabled people. And who do you see working in your grocery store? Then there are the nurses, teachers (when school resumes) and social workers—middle class women. Do we really want to go back to the way it was before this pandemic? I say no!

**Revolutionary  
Chicago**

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Terry Moon's lead on "[Women's movements reach for new global stage](#)" (March-April 2020 *N&L*) was excellent. The women-led social justice movements taking place around the world—from the U.S. to India, Brazil and Iraq—deserve more coverage. Thanks, Terry Moon, for enlightening us.

**English as a Second Language teacher  
Chicago**

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I love this article by Ms. Moon! Her respect for those who are struggling for freedom and her ability to hear it without shying away from contradictions is pretty amazing. I know where it comes from: her philosophy. And that is what she says and writes, and how she see things is true. I'm convinced. For now, I feel it and know it and I'm sharing it on social media!

**Reader  
Midwest**

## VOICES FROM BEHIND BARS

*N&L* is absolutely essential. Now that *Under Lock and Key* has gone under, there are fewer publications that pay attention to prisoners.



Thank you once again for printing part of my piece on [slave labor at UNICOR](#) (Sept. Oct. 2019 *N&L*; see also "[Prison Slave Labor](#)," March-April 2020). A couple of days ago, the first person I know on the outside was able to find it on newsandletters.org. Since last I wrote, my friend and fellow prisoner Bill Hewlitt showed me some rather compelling evidence that UNICOR caused his COPD, which is expected to kill him somewhere between a few months to three years from his diagnosis. Alas, he was shipped before I was able to obtain copies of his records.

**Eric Pepke  
Petersburg, Va.**

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I have been a humanist since my early teens (I'm 35) and a Marxist for only the past few years, but I try to do my part. Your newspaper gives my life hope and meaning. I really appreciate what your organization does for people like myself. Thank you so much for throwing me a "lifeline," as the saying goes.

**Prisoner  
Lancaster, Calif.**

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"[Free Lyris Wolfe!](#)" by Urszula Wislanka (March-April 2020) reminded me of how common this type of situation is. Prisons and jails are a very profitable multi-billion-dollar industry. I can't tell you how many times I have heard this same story of proof of innocence. But the prosecutors prosecute anyway. There are no consequences for this kind of outrageous government misconduct. I know because I myself am innocent and yet I got life without parole. Lyris Wolfe is lucky that she had such a large support group to bear witness to the prosecutors' greed or else she may have been convicted like so many of us who didn't have friends or family that were so supportive. I wish mainstream media would tell stories like this. The truth is Lyris Wolfe's story, my story, countless others: human suffering for sale.

**Prisoner  
Calipatria, Calif.**

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People are flooded with information, much of which is questionable. It has always been a breath of fresh air to read *N&L* and get information about world events that is accurate and which pertains to the masses, unshackled by the need to appease corporate sponsors and advertisers. It is for this reason that I decided to participate in News and Letters Committees. Of the many things that I always appreciate, there is a level of belonging regardless of class, social setting, race or gender.

**Robert Taliaferro  
Black River Falls, Wisc.**

\*\*\*

Well, after almost 10 years locked up, my release is only 12 days away! Thank you so much for your paper and support and information through the years. I would like to continue to receive your paper, and have updated my address. I am supposed to have a job waiting out there—with all the lockdown orders, hopefully it's still there. I will be sending funds to allow you to give another inmate subscription like I have been blessed to receive. Thank you again.

**Jason  
Box Elder, S.D.**

*Editor's note: Due to pandemic restrictions, for the time being N&L will unfortunately be online only.*

# Shattered by pandemic, world needs new beginnings

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existing order, which powered the quest to overturn capitalism and create a new society, and as well false alternatives including new flavors of fascism.

**With all this, the ideological pollution of the Left intensified. It is in this context that we can take the measure of Trumpism, which is not just about one individual who is so monstrous that Democrats can depict him as some kind of aberration instead of a crude manifestation of this dying system, but rather Trumpism beyond Trump as the expression of the system's senescence that could actually lead to the destruction of civilization.**

The absolute opposite to this is not just socialism as a generality. The questions of what kind of socialism and what kind of revolution are needed reveal the crying need for a philosophy of liberation. What can make a difference after the revolution between allowing a return to the old, dying system, or making revolution in permanence real? What should be clear, but is too often evaded in the fight to oppose the powers that be, is that to avoid the failure of revolution and thereby the success of the counter-revolution that drives us onward to barbarism and climate chaos, what is needed above all is the unity of philosophy with revolution.

## I. The failed pandemic response and the fetishism of the economy

*I think [the coronavirus] will help accelerate the return of jobs to North America.* —Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross

*America should stay at work.* —Larry Kudlow, economic adviser to Donald Trump

*As long as we can turn the crisis into an opportunity to restore production and social life in an orderly fashion... we will be able to achieve the economic and social development goals set for this year.* —China's maximum leader Xi Jinping

The magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic, with over two million confirmed cases as of mid-April, in almost every country in the world, is overwhelming and can be expected to skyrocket. *This never had to happen.* Every step of its growth resulted from capitalism's inhuman, out-of-control momentum, from its likely emergence out of ecological disruption to government lies, coverups and delays that allowed it to spread unchecked initially in the interest of not disrupting business. The official responses were dictated, time and again, by the rulers' fetishistic devotion to production for production's sake.

Each aspect of the crisis reveals social ills that were already catastrophic but little addressed because they mainly affect the working classes, the poor, people with disabilities and people who are oppressed because of their race, class, sex, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, or immigration status.

### CLASS AND RACE DETERMINE DEATHS

In U.S. cities and the rural South, African Americans are dying at far higher rates from the virus—in Chicago, nearly six times the rate of whites—due to higher unemployment or working in riskier occupations, poverty, inferior health insurance coverage, institutional racism of the medical system, and living or working in more polluted places. The same factors bring Latinx people elevated rates of COVID-19 sickness and death. Undocumented immigrants are excluded from stimulus checks and unemployment benefits. At the same time, police are [harassing Black people for not wearing masks](#), or for being where the cops think they shouldn't be. Cops even assaulted a child selling candy at a Harlem subway station. As determined as the corporate media are to forget it, the passion of Black Lives Matter burns on, and can be expected to burst out again.

Ever since the SARS epidemic of 2002-03, scientists have been warning of the need to prepare for a pandemic. At that time, the Bush administration was preoccupied with fabricated threats to justify invading Iraq. The warnings continued, and in 2016 the Obama administration issued a comprehensive report on the 2013-15 Ebola epidemic. Later it held an exercise simulating a viral pandemic and found severe weaknesses, including projected shortages of ventilators and other critical medical supplies. A 2019 Trump administration exercise found similar results.<sup>3</sup> Last year, Trump White House economists warned that a pandemic could kill half a million in the U.S.

3. David E. Sanger, Eric Lipton, Eileen Sullivan and Michael Crowley, "Before Virus Outbreak, a Cascade of Warnings Went Unheeded," *New York Times*, March 19, 2020.

and devastate the economy.

Trump ignored all of it. His White House "fired the government's entire pandemic response chain of command" in 2018,<sup>4</sup> worked to slash public health



Nurses in front of White House April 21 hold photos of co-workers lost to coronavirus.

spending, undermined the Federal Emergency Management Agency and attacked science and scientists. He has been slashing away at the already measly safety net, including Medicaid and food stamps, and accelerating the decades-long trend of healthcare industry consolidation, hospital closings in rural areas, and pricing the poor out of healthcare.

**The predicted shortage of ventilators and personal protective equipment such as medical face masks came to pass. The lack of preparation and the denial and delays by authorities are the reason the outbreak became a pandemic and the reason they imposed partial shutdowns of economies across the world. The lack of testing materials is catastrophic. When tests were available, the well-connected got tested regardless of need while many people were wrongly turned away, and the federal government in some cases prohibited legitimate uses.**

With materials like ventilators and masks in short supply, the administration funneled what it had based on political favors, not need. Trump told states and hospitals to find their own supplies. Unqualified son-in-law Jared Kushner, taking charge (sort of) of COVID-19 crisis management, announced, "It's supposed to be our stockpile. It's not supposed to be states' stockpiles that they then use." One of its uses turned out to be bounty sold to speculators. States, hospitals, and profiteers had to bid against each other, jacking up prices. Hospitals sometimes found their supply orders were [seized without warning](#) by the federal government for unknown uses.

### PRODUCTION OVER PEOPLE'S LIVES

Meanwhile, existing institutions—nursing homes, homeless shelters, jails, prisons, concentration camps for immigrants—became centers of contagion, just by maintaining the same exploitative conditions as before. Many private nursing homes are perennially understaffed and poorly run, pleading poverty to justify poverty wages, while raking in profits that are siphoned off by owners and their crony contractors. Prisons, jails and concentration camps deprive inmates of healthcare to be punitive and to boost profits.<sup>5</sup> Two of the biggest centers of COVID-19 spreading are Cook County Jail in Chicago and Rikers Island in New York City—jails being places where many of the people have not been convicted but are punished anyway.

**Throughout the crisis, Trump—like other leaders around the world from China's Xi Jinping to Iran's Ali Khamenei to Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador—has focused more on keeping production and the economy going, getting workers back to work, than on remedying the shortage of medical supplies and staff and implementing public health imperatives such as social distancing and shutting nonessential businesses. He incited far-right billionaire-funded mobs to protest lockdowns in states whose governors he has a beef with, praising as "very responsible" even those who blocked an ambulance in Lansing, Mich.**

When it came to the Defense Production Act, which his administration has used for hundreds of thousands of orders for military equipment and armoring the Border Patrol, somehow Trump held back from using it to make companies furnish the lacking medical supplies. He finally got around to ordering GM to supply ventilators, but only after GM had already begun the process.

## II. The true pandemic war

### A. The capitalists' class war

Officials pontificating about a wartime situation did not mention the raging class war, as rulers

exploit the emergency to impose reactionary agendas and grab more power and money for themselves, and working and unemployed people fight back with strikes and other actions.

The \$2 trillion March 27 coronavirus stimulus bill hardly contained enough relief for workers to maintain them as a workforce to be exploited, let alone continue living as before. Republican senators unsuccessfully objected to granting a measly extra \$600 a week in unemployment benefits, fearing that such riches would make people too lazy to come back to work. Meanwhile, Congress devoted nearly \$1 trillion to bailouts and loans for businesses, not counting tax breaks. Much of that will go to industries like the airlines, which recently raked in profits by cutting staff, piling up work on those left, crowding and gouging passengers to create hellish conditions for flight attendants—and yet instead of using that money to prepare for a rainy day or invest in more humane conditions, they lavished more than \$45 billion on stockholders and executives since 2015.

**While few demands will be made of companies getting bailouts, such as making the airlines commit to keeping their promises to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the administration is still making working-class people jump through hoops to get a few food stamps or other benefits.**

Capitalists have tried to stretch the classification of "essential" businesses to keep exploiting labor for profit, from fashion factories to gun shops. Hobby Lobby defied orders to close in several states, endangering their employees and customers. That's the company run by a right-wing religious activist who got the Supreme Court's blessing to deny his workers access to birth control because of his supposed devotion to life. Similarly, Jerry Falwell Jr.'s reactionary Liberty University defied state orders by reopening and exposing students to the spread of the virus—all to resist the ultimate evil of having to refund room and board to students.

### COVID-19: EXCUSE TO POLLUTE & OPPRESS

Coal mining companies, now ruled essential, called for Congress to prop them up by [cutting the tax used to support miners with black lung disease](#)—one of the conditions that make people much more vulnerable to COVID-19—as well as funding for cleaning up abandoned mines. The [oil and gas industry](#) has been [more successful](#) in winning deregulation and blocking climate measures and aid to renewable energy. The Environmental Protection Agency has effectively given industries a pass on pollution during the pandemic, as has the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

Authoritarians like Trump quickly used emergency powers to [push through top items](#) on their wish lists, suppress dissent as did India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in [forcing news media to parrot](#) the government line, and even [close down Parliaments](#) as did Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Hungary passed a law enabling tyrannical Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to [rule by decree](#).

**Violating international law, Trump used emergency powers to turn away asylum seekers at the border, and tried to ban all immigration, an ideological action that has nothing to do with protecting anyone. He pushed a rule to weaken federal employees' unions and to shield his coronavirus task force from having to testify to Congress. He used the pandemic as cover to fire Michael Atkinson as Inspector General of the Intelligence Community, for bringing to light the whistleblower complaint that exposed Trump's extortion of Ukraine.**<sup>6</sup>

Smaller state dictators launched their own abuses, such as the governors of seven states banning abortions,<sup>7</sup> spouting the lie that they are "non-essential" medical procedures, and complaining that abortion clinics use masks and gloves. They had no complaint about ICE soliciting 45,000 N95 surgical masks on March 20 and [using N95 masks to conduct raids](#) on immigrant communities at a time when frontline medical personnel can't get enough.

Wisconsin Republicans used their state's primary as a [dress rehearsal](#) for using the emergency to [deter voters](#), especially African American, especially in November's national elections. They were supported by a ladder of partisan courts all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled absurdly that allowing a few extra days for mail-in voting was a greater threat to democracy than forcing voters to expose themselves to the virus by voting in person, especially in cities with large Black populations, where the number of polling places was drastically reduced.

**Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell are blocking proposals to protect**

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4. Laurie Garrett, "Trump Has Sabotaged America's Coronavirus Response," *Foreign Policy*, Jan. 31, 2020.

5. See "With COVID-19 prisons become 'death camps'" by Urszula Wislanka, p. 12 of this issue.

6. That extends the pattern demonstrated in "Trump after Impeachment," March-April 2020 *N&L*.

7. See "The torture of abortion bans" by Terry Moon, this issue, p. 2.

# Shattered by pandemic, world needs new beginnings

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voting this year from disruptions caused by quarantines. [Trump told Fox News](#) that with voter protections, “you’d never have a Republican elected in this country again.”

Several states are using this opportunity to [pass laws criminalizing protests](#) against fossil fuel infrastructure, a trend that began after water protectors in South Dakota sparked worldwide opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline.

It is not only China that ramped up its already pervasive surveillance. Countries from South Korea to Israel took [steps in that totalitarian direction](#), which is being pushed in the U.S. too, adding to the already massive apparatus erected after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.<sup>8</sup> Beyond surveillance, Trump’s loyalist Attorney General William Barr [secretly asked Congress to allow suspension of some constitutional rights](#), including indefinite detention without trial, with the pandemic as excuse.

The lack of preparation, the authoritarian and regressive measures, the favoritism for a few, the impoverishment and oppression of the vast majority, are a taste of how capitalism will deal with future disasters sparked by the climate and extinction crisis. It does not have to be this way, but in order to respond to the ecological and social breakdowns in a human way, we need to establish a truly human society, and abolish the current anti-human social structure. That is implicit in all the struggles from below.

## B. Subjects of revolution fight back

*And to Mr. Bezos...You think you're powerful? We're the ones that have the power. Without us working, what are you going to do?* —Chris Smalls, Amazon worker [fired for leading a walkout](#)

In country after country, it took concerted pressure from below to push leaders into taking more than token action or coverups, [beginning with China](#). That movement from below was revealed dramatically when [spontaneous strikes](#) swept the [whole country](#) of Italy, [along with mass absenteeism](#) and protests. The strikers demanded adequate health and safety conditions and not to be forced to work in nonessential industries. They protested years of [cuts in medical staff and resources](#). The Italian government—which initially ordered a lockdown except that every factory worker was classified as “essential” and had to keep working in unsafe conditions—was forced to make concessions. In Italy and around the world, [prisoners have held strikes and protests](#).

Refusing to sacrifice their lives on the altar of the economy, workers are looking out for each other and demanding the workplace be made safe for them, that the economy be reorganized around the needs of human beings, not capital. If the business is nonessential, why not produce goods or services that meet vital needs? In Spain, workers at Mercedes and Airbus struck, pointing out that producing cars and airplanes is not essential. [Airbus workers volunteered to convert their factory](#) to make desperately needed ventilators. [GE workers protested](#) in Boston and Lynn, Mass., to demand conversion of their idled jet engine factories to make ventilators.

**Infection of McDonald’s workers in Los Angeles sparked a walkout on March 5 that by April 9 spread to more than 30 fast-food chain restaurants throughout the area and San Jose. Workers demanded what the companies should have provided: masks, gloves, soap, hazard pay, and paid sick leave. Across the U.S., more than 700 fast food workers went on strike during that period.**

[Hospital workers were already organizing](#) before the pandemic broke out in the U.S., demanding better working conditions and higher wages, so that they can afford the healthcare they provide to others. On Jan. 28, 8,000 hospital workers in the Swedish Medical Center chain in Seattle walked out on a

8. See “[Rampant U.S. surveillance slouches toward totalitarianism](#)” by Franklin Dmitryev, Jan.-Feb. 2014 *N&L*, which warned during the Obama administration, “The machinery of counter-revolution grows in reaction to the specter of revolution, forming the apparatus ready-made for a new, high-tech fascism.”

three-day strike over staffing and other issues. The chain had over 900 vacancies. At scores of hospitals and clinics, staff are organizing to demand equipment and safer conditions. [Nurses have](#) long engaged in [struggles](#) against hospitals that do not [hire enough nurses](#) and force those on the job to [look after more patients](#) than they can [safely handle](#). That planned shortage of nurses and [other medical staff](#) is one factor undermining the healthcare system’s capacity to deal with the pandemic. The deadly consequences of overwhelmed hospitals are unfolding now in Italy and Spain, and are beginning in the U.S.<sup>9</sup> At press time, more strikes are breaking out and will continue to do so in the U.S. and internationally.

Other struggles persist despite governments exploiting the crisis to block protests, moving more quickly to impose lockdowns than to find needed medical supplies.

The movement of youth worldwide centering on climate strikes, which has grown too powerful to ignore, temporarily moved to mainly online protests. In addition to three days of online events April 22-24 for the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, there will be social-distanced protests

across the U.S. on April 23, designated Stop the Money Pipeline Day of Action. In places like Chicago, they will target the biggest financial backer of fossil fuels projects, JPMorgan & Chase, demanding an end to all such funding.

In Canada in February, repression of First Nations resistance camps by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, with sniper rifles and other weapons, sparked blockades and protests from Victoria to Halifax that shut down offices and train lines. (See “Canada on trial,” p. 5, this issue.) The Unist’ot’en camp under attack was set up in 2010 to block the construction of pipelines that would carry climate-busting tar sands oil and fracked gas to the coast for export.

Even after the pandemic was declared and large gatherings were cancelled, pipeline companies went ahead with construction, risking devastation of First Nations communities. They run “man camps,” large temporary trailer parks or dormitories, long linked with surges in sexual violence against Indigenous women. Their structure makes them prone to become centers of pandemic contagion, in areas that already lack healthcare. “It’s like bringing smallpox blankets in,” said Faith Spotted Eagle of man camps planned for the Keystone XL Pipeline construction, which has been stopped for now by a court order.

As the pandemic was brewing, [International Women’s Day \(IWD\) this year](#) still saw larger marches, greater militancy of women participants, events in new places, and attacks against them that escalated significantly from previous years. IWD demonstrations followed the Women’s Marches gathering hundreds of thousands in the U.S. and worldwide, [drawing in new women](#) three years after they began. As the vast majority of teachers, healthcare workers, cashiers and fast food counter workers, women have been at the forefront of many of the strikes of the past two years, as well as the organizing for a living wage. These are disproportionately women of color.

While 2019’s uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East gave rise to the label Second Arab Spring, the spark of the first Arab Spring has not been extinguished in Syria. The pandemic worsened the humanitarian crisis of Syrians, 11.7 million of whom need humanitarian aid. One million of them have been pushed into Idlib province in crowded tent camps under harsh conditions and scarce supplies of medicine, food, water, even soap. Deadly attacks on Idlib province by Russia, Iran and the Bashar al-Assad regime are not just a matter of the regime trying to reclaim lost territory. They are an effort to silence the idea of freedom as if it too could be murdered. For years those Russian and Syrian forces have destroyed hospitals and clinics in the Free areas. In Idlib, with the province under daily fire, demonstrations continue, raising slogans like, “The revolution is an idea and you can’t kill an idea.”

## C. Pandemic class war reveals the social structure

*Our labor has been considered essential. Our health has been considered negotiable and our lives are considered expendable.* —Seth Rosenberg, New York subway operator

What comes into view is the actual structure

9. For more on these and other labor struggles, see articles on page 3 of this issue, and “[Pandemic as Battlefield](#)” by Franklin Dmitryev, *newsandletters.org*, March 30, 2020.

of labor, production and class divisions that characterizes globalized capitalism. Contrary to trendy illusions that industrial capitalism has been superseded by an information economy or the centrality of immaterial labor, the indispensability of not only healthcare and child care but manual labor comes to the fore: in factories, farms, construction, cleaning, transportation, delivery and logistics. In addition to doctors and nurses, these are the workers the capitalists have been most determined to keep on the job.

## THE ECONOMY RUNS ON SWEATED LABOR

The economy runs on the back of the lower and

deeper sections of the working class. The majority of these essential workers are paid less than a living wage, have skimpy benefits if any and therefore poor healthcare, little job security and often don’t know if they will get enough hours to get by. A great many are left out of the sick leave provisions of the new CARES act. As in normal times, they are treated as disposable: called in to work in unsafe conditions and having to fight for proper protection. From [Walmart and Target to cleaners of empty WeWork buildings](#), from [California farmworkers](#) to New York transit workers, [at least 68 of whom had died](#) as of April 21,

going to work becomes a life and death question.

Who these essential/disposable workers are reveals another structural aspect of our class society: **Black, Latinx, undocumented and women workers are pushed into these precarious jobs of hard labor. The work of social reproduction, paid or unpaid, is largely done by women. When paid a pittance, it is usually done by women of color or immigrants. Consequently, women, Black and Latinx people, and immigrants are at the forefront of labor struggles, including Fight for \$15.**

This skewed hierarchy is reflected in the racialized class nature of the punitive institutions that warehouse people in homeless shelters, prisons and migrant concentration camps. Mass incarceration has become an integral part of the political and economic system, and serves as part of the disciplinary and scapegoating machinery and as centers of concentration and spreading of disease. Its hateful, punitive nature is seen in how even people who have not been convicted of anything are denied healthcare, such as when [doctors were blocked from giving free flu vaccinations](#) to child detainees in San Ysidro, Calif.

The same groups of people are the ones least likely to be able to stay away from work and public transit or to stay away from other people in crowded institutions. They are the ones most likely to have suffered water or power shutoffs and to be on the wrong side of the digital divide. Homeless and incarcerated people may not even have access to soap.

The structure extends globally, as most countries depend on the world’s 244 million migrant workers, poorly paid and often with no effective legal rights, and now at great risk of infection. In the two most populous countries, India and China, the migrants are mainly from within the same country but oppressed just the same.

China pioneered the “get back to work” demands with its drive to reopen factories, highlighting the fact that production did not disappear just because capitalists in North America and Europe moved most manufacturing to low-wage “developing” countries. What that global redivision of labor means is sharply revealed by the very real threat of starvation faced by millions of people in poor and “middle-income” countries as the capitalists in imperialist countries, who are the ones who call the shots, suddenly cut off orders for their production—abandoning garment workers in Bangladesh and migrant workers in India and Thailand.

## III. Pandemic sets in motion the latent economic collapse

The economy’s fragility, inequality and illusions are not caused by the virus but are highlighted and heightened or exposed by it. The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis projected a possible 52 million unemployed in the U.S. for an [unemployment rate of 32%](#) for April to June, higher than in the Great Depression of the 1930s. They neglected to mention that the Black unemployment rate is still nearly twice that of whites, and the Latinx rate is somewhere in between. For the same quarter, [JP Morgan projects](#)

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Syafiq Haiqal bin Supaizam participates in online global climate strike, April 23, in Pasir Gudang, Malaysia.

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Raya Dunayevskaya, Chairwoman, National Editorial Board (1955-1987). Charles Denby, Editor (1955-1983).

Franklin Dmitryev, National Organizer, News and Letters Committees. Terry Moon, Managing Editor. Felix Martin, Labor Editor (1983-1999).

Olga Domanski, National Organizer (1958-2015). John Alan, National Editorial Board Member Emeritus (2008-2011).

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an immense drop of 40% in the Gross Domestic Product. Hunger stalks the land, food banks are besieged and running out of food, while the irrationality of capitalism leads farmers to dump milk and leave food to rot. Hunger was already advancing; on a world scale, another [world food crisis](#) was brewing and is now virtually certain to appear soon. All this is a great intensification of a catastrophe already underway. Last year's low unemployment statistics barely hid the growing number of people working sporadic or long hours in precarious jobs, piling up consumer debt even higher than the record set in 2008 on the eve of the crash.

Overloaded healthcare systems are turning away patients, whether with COVID-19 or unrelated illnesses, and at the same time laying off doctors and nurses. Layoffs at family practices are expected to balloon to 800,000 by June. Pay has been cut for thousands more medical workers. Rural hospitals were already failing before this. Ethicists are debating how to ration healthcare, but it was already rationed, by high charges. The increasingly consolidated healthcare system was already shot through with planned shortages. Profits—even at non-profits where executives and cronies rake in the loot—were shored up by keeping staff, empty rooms, basic equipment and supplies at a minimum, except those used in more profitable elective procedures like plastic surgery. Now that house of cards is crashing down in the drastically changed environment of a long-predicted pandemic.

## FALLING RATE OF PROFIT

All this is characteristic not only of capitalism but of this stage of it. The pre-existing weakness of the “recovery” is linked to the rate of profit remaining low since 2007. In fact, state-capitalism as a world stage hit a wall with the mid-1970s global economic crisis, the deepest recession since the 1930s Depression. A revolutionary response meant more than pointing out Marx's analysis of the falling rate of profit as cause. We can learn from Raya Dunayevskaya's philosophic comprehension of Marx's law, which was never narrowly economic.<sup>10</sup>

**What Marx showed to be capitalism's law of motion, or the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation, centers on the basic relationship of capital and labor. The preponderance of constant capital over variable capital, that is, dead labor (past labor, materialized in things) over living labor, is seen starkly in workplaces as domination of machines over human workers. It is seen one way in the accumulation of wealth at one pole of society and misery, unemployment and revolt at the other. The growth of capital over labor is seen another way in the falling rate of profit, since profit comes only from surplus value and the only source of value is living labor.**

Political crises and ideological offensives give expression to the absolute general law. Dunayevskaya had to remind Marxist economists of the 1970s and 1980s that the law of motion, with its army of unemployed, has to be seen in strict relationship to workers' revolt—it is capitalism's own internal contradictions that will bring it down. Its dialectical inversion does not end with the object (dead labor) dominating the Subject (living labor), but impels the “live, concrete, revolutionary subject—the proletariat” to reach “to uproot the old society and create totally new, truly human relations as *freely associated*” people.<sup>11</sup> This is necessary to stress, in opposition to Marxists like Ernest Mandel who tied Marx's *Capital* to acceptance of Russian state-capitalism and separated Marx's theory from workers as Subjects and the goal of freely associated labor.

The crisis in profitability in the 1970s led to the restructuring called neoliberalism. It is political, ideological, and economic, deeply rooted in the objective crisis of capitalism. Part of it is expanding trade and expanding capital mobility and flow to the whole world. Globalization is also about shoring up profit by pursuing the lowest short-term costs for capital: outsourcing production to low-wage countries like China (which, with strikes against owners and the regime, is not as low-wage as it used to be) and Bangladesh, and creating global supply chains and using just-in-time production methods, whose fragility is manifested in the current crisis.

The intensified exploitation did shore up the rate of profit for a while, but by 2007 that subsided, and an even deeper economic crisis set in. The weak recovery since 2009 has been sustained by extremely low interest rates. The combination of low rate of profit and low interest rates led to low productive investment and high diversion of profits into dividends, stock buybacks, and purchases of fictitious capital like stocks and bonds, inflating their prices.

10. See “Today's Epigones Who Try to Truncate Marx's *Capital*,” chapter 6 of *Marx's Philosophy of Revolution in Permanence for Our Day: Selected Writings by Raya Dunayevskaya* (Haymarket Books, 2019), as well as chapter 9, “Capitalist Production/Alienated Labor.”

11. “Today's Epigones,” p. 74.

In the past few years, consumer, corporate, and government debt have all reached record levels. Top monopoly companies have built up huge cash hoards but thousands of companies are in danger of bankruptcy. Many are “zombie” companies, that is, their income barely covers expenses, or doesn't, so they keep borrowing to get by, putting them in mortal danger under the sudden economic standstill.

## VAST INEQUALITY COMES TO THE FORE

Liberals see a vast rise in inequality, with eight billionaires owning as much as half of humanity, and stop there. It is really Marx's absolute general law working overtime. Key to the new gilded age is the centralization of capital Marx wrote about—in other words, growth of monopolies and sweeping consolidation of many sectors of the economy: hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, agribusiness, retail, media, Facebook, Google, and Apple. Their monopoly power helps them raise prices, keep down wages and bust unions. The tidal wave of business failures to come will step up that consolidation.

The new colossus is Amazon, whose revenues exceed the national economies of three quarters of the world's countries. The current situation is helping Amazon decimate retail businesses. That does nothing for the warehouse workers who are striking for safer working conditions.

**The aftermath of the 2007-09 Great Recession intensified the above-mentioned trends but also the revolt and, because of that, the counter-revolutionary trends that led to the Tea Party, Trumpism, and their analogues internationally. That this is more than a flirtation is seen in the new crop of leaders, from Trump to Bolsonaro, Modi to Orban, steeped in the totalitarian elevation of ideology over truth and science. The media and social media help propagate the deception and manipulation in which these demagogues thrive, and are helping turn societies toward fascism.**

Swelling nationalism intensifies the pulling apart of the world that is fueled by the low rate of profit and the consequent zero-sum scramble for profits, from the European Union's internal tensions to the oil price war to the Trumpian trade war of all against all, now seen in countries restricting exports of medical supplies needed to handle the pandemic. With several actual shooting wars already underway, the global capitalist crisis raises the threat of war turning global.

## IV. What to do in the face of compounding crises—medical, economic, political, and the philosophic void

*It is my desire that this history of Philosophy should contain for you a summons to grasp the spirit of the time which is present in us by nature. —G.W.F. Hegel<sup>12</sup>*

*Marx's philosophy is no abstraction and because that philosophy is concrete, it expresses the methodology needed for both analyzing serious crises and acting to uproot the system that created them....Marx never departed from the Hegelian negativity as “the creative principle.” That's how, after the defeat of revolutions as in victory, Marx called for “revolution in permanence.” —Raya Dunayevskaya<sup>13</sup>*

The pandemic has intensified what many young people have been voicing in recent years: disgust with capitalism. The popularity of candidates who label themselves socialist, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Bernie Sanders, reflects the groundswell of opposition to capitalism and the search for an alternative.

The urgency of the dire situation must not be

12. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, p. 553.

13. “What to Do Facing the Depth of Recession and the Myriad Global Political Crises as Well as the Philosophic Void,” *Perspectives Report to the News and Letters Convention*, Sept. 4, 1982, pp. 19, 20.

downplayed. Yet at the same time it generates a temptation to focus on the first negation, opposition to what is. Abolishing this sick society and founding a new one on truly human foundations requires that the positive in the negative, the negation of that first negation, be brought to the fore. Yet another half measure would only leave us exposed to the next crisis, from pandemics, climate chaos, economic crash, world war or bloodthirsty fascism.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF WHAT WE ARE FOR

Some are talking about what they are for, but the bulk of what is being projected, even by the “revolutionary” Left, is reforms or at best vague or unexamined concepts of socialism. Often capitalism

is equated to neoliberalism, as if a fine solution would be a return to the kinds of state-capitalism that predominated in the period before and after World War II. That, however, led us to where we are today, and a raft of “democratic” reforms would not abolish the

anti-human momentum of capitalism.

**Totally missing is the self-activity of masses in motion, which is socialism. Self-movement is the inner core of the dialectic, without which there is no true negation of the negation but only shortcuts to halfway solutions.**

Workers' actions have gone far beyond appeals to the power of the state that are central to most of the socialist manifestos issued in the face of the pandemic. Even in defensive actions, workers are trying to shape their own conditions of labor. [Nurses](#) and [doctors](#) have even been fired for demanding N95 masks and other personal protective equipment. Just as in natural disasters, there is a tremendous amount of self-organization in solidarity from below, especially in the most marginalized communities.<sup>14</sup> But as the Uruguayan revolutionary [Raúl Zibechi pointed out](#), “The mainstream media that are determined to instill fear hide the immense solidarity among the people from below. Surely because they fear it, because another world dwells there.”

In the future, we will be living on a planet damaged by capitalism, but the possible kinds of life we can have are poles apart, depending on whether we succeed in fundamentally transforming society. In the absolute opposite of today's society, one based on freely associated labor instead of slavery to capital's production for production's sake, we can leave behind pervasive misery, precarity and antagonism, and self-development and cooperation can flourish, as can a rational relationship to nature. To get there, we need the clear direction that can only come from a philosophy of revolution.

## THE POSITIVE IN THE NEGATIVE

We must be attuned to the positive in the negative, the reach for the future in present and historical resistance and revolt. For only revolution can break us out of capitalism's suicidal spiral that threatens to bounce from one disaster to another—not one after another but overlapping and compounding. We cannot wait for the day of revolution

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14. See the poignant report by Raúl Zibechi, “[Los Movimientos en la Pandemia](#),” *desInformémonos*, April 2, 2020.

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# Shattered by pandemic, world needs new beginnings

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to begin projecting the positive in the negative in the fullness of the body of ideas of Marxist-Humanism. Marx, at the inception of an organization that would be labeled “Marxist,” criticized its self-limiting program, and insisted on projecting as ground for organization his concept of the positive in the total uprooting of this society:

**“After the enslaving subordination of the individual under the division of labor, and with it also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor, from a mere means of life, has itself become the prime necessity of life; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be fully left behind and society inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”<sup>15</sup>**

History shows we cannot afford to stop with the abstractions that pass for socialism. The transformation into opposite of the socialist movement at the time of World War I and the counter-revolution that emerged from within the socialist Russian Revolution show the need to be rooted in objective history and in a dialectical philosophy of revolution that can anticipate and comprehend such transformations. We are confronted with the questions of what kind of socialism, what kind of revolution, and what happens after the overthrow to make revolution in permanence both a method, a goal, and the reality?

**Marxist-Humanism from the beginning has centered the need to abolish alienated labor and the division between mental and manual labor, and base society instead on self-activity, which begins before the revolution and must continue during and after it.**

For the reach to socialism to amount to anything, we must confront the ideological pollution within the Left itself. That is most blatantly seen in those ready to excuse Bashar al-Assad’s genocidal attacks against the Syrian people’s nine-year revolution and in the way apologists for genocide have been accepted as legitimate in coalitions against Trump. As we wrote in our Perspectives Thesis three years ago:

**“Nothing more starkly reveals how deeply today’s ideological retrogression has polluted the Left than the influence of those who defend Assad as ‘anti-imperialist’ and deny the existence of revolution in Syria. It reveals a Left that refuses to surrender to capitalism but surrenders anyway by implicitly abandoning revolution as a realistic goal. It perceives no positive in the negative because it assumes the masses to be backward as a given. It sinks into pure negativity—the mirror image of Trump—defining itself entirely by its opposition to U.S. imperialism.”<sup>16</sup>**

This flows from the history of normalization of state-capitalism and its administrative mentality’s pseudo-revolutionary ideology ever since Stalin’s counter-revolution passed itself off as revolution. Left analyses of the pandemic seldom touch the Syrian revolution and counter-revolution. There is a pull to state-capitalist solutions: we are told that what we need is state planning (christened “democratic”), nationalization, regulatory apparatus—and that the state is the only power strong enough to confront the pandemic and the capitalists who get in the way of stopping it. Missing is the confidence in the masses, confidence in social revolution, with the latter being substituted by “political revolution” or a “revolution of values.” That lack of confidence is inherent in the administrative mentality of the state-capitalist era and its origins in Stalin’s counter-revolution that perverted Marxism into totalitarian Communism.

## OBJECTIVITY OF MARXIST-HUMANISM

The shock of that transformation propelled the origin of Marxist-Humanism. It compelled Raya Dunayevskaya to rethink what had been the predominant assumptions about Marxism, which held that the organized economy, planned and subordinated to the state, was virtually the essence of socialism. That rethinking led to Marx’s 1844 philosophic moment, his concept of alienated labor and the self-activity of the worker as key, and his opposition to “vulgar communism.”<sup>17</sup>

15. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program, Part I*.

16. “Philosophy and revolt confront Trump’s drive to fascism,” Marxist-Humanist Perspectives, 2017-18.

17. See chapter 9 of *Russia: From Proletarian Revolution to State-Capitalist Counter-Revolution: Selected Writings by Raya Dunayevskaya* (Haymarket Books, 2018).

**The total contradiction of counter-revolution coming from within the revolution spurred her to question what had become of Marxist thought. This resulted in recognizing**



Protesters hold up a banner above Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto, April 15. Part of a socially distanced protest over conditions in homeless shelters.

**Marx’s work as a philosophy of revolution in permanence and disentangling it from what post-Marx Marxism has made of it. Even the greatest of Marxist revolutionaries who did not grasp Marx’s original recreation of the dialectic and development of it into a whole philosophy of revolution, instead separating parts of it from the integral philosophical whole.**

Without that direction, generations of Marxists were left unprepared for the transformations into opposite within the Marxist movement and within revolutions. The field was left open to those who channeled capitalism’s objective impulses like Stalin, or like today’s mediocrities who align with the counter-revolutions of Assad, Putin, Iran’s clerics, or even Trump-adjacent rightists.

## THE LEFT’S IDEOLOGICAL POLLUTION

Looking back from this vantage point at the last decade of revolt, the revolutions of the Arab Spring undermined confidence in the existing order, propelling the reach for a new society. False alternatives including fascism proliferated at a time when the ideological pollution of the Left intensified to an incredibly deep disorientation, not excluding lining up with genocide and far right figures and propaganda.

**While the ramifications and “intellectual sediment” from the upsurges of the 2010s are not finished, all this massive revolt has not led us out of the deepening dangers of disintegrating capitalist society. We cannot explain it away only because of the strength of the counter-revolution, both within each country and from without, which is real enough. The question is where does the elemental revolt lead when it is lacking a philosophy of revolution that would give these revolutionary struggles a direction?**

Post-Marx Marxism did not rise to this challenge. It has proven to be a force in the world that often helped block revolution or transform it into opposite—from the aborted 1968 French revolution to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, attracting some to its counter-revolutionary anti-imperialism, to the counter-revolution from within Grenada’s revolution that opened the door for Ronald Reagan’s 1983 invasion—and eased the rise of the Right by discrediting the Left from within.

It should be clear, but is evaded by the Left in general, that to avoid the failure of revolution and the success of the counter-revolution that drives us onward to barbarism and pandemic/climate/extinction chaos, what is needed above all is the unity of philosophy with revolution, of philosophy of revolution in permanence with the subjects of revolution.

**This is not brought about by an elitist party taking command. It is about leadership, not by an individual or a supposedly vanguard organization, but theory of revolution as leadership—in other words, “philosophy, not philosopher.” It depends on the body of ideas of the revolution in permanence, which demands projecting. As Hegel pointed out, the Idea of freedom is not so feeble as to have a right or obligation to exist without actually existing. That does not mean that we can leave the Idea floating on its own. It needs, it demands, an organizational home.**

Out of Dunayevskaya’s work on Marx’s last decade, she made a category of revolution in permanence as the needed ground for organization. As she wrote in “Not by Practice Alone”:

“We...have used precisely Marx’s theory of the philosophy of revolution in permanence, not as an abstraction but as the actual concrete needed in order both to be armed against being pulled into the world market of the whirlpool of capitalism, state as

well as private, and as requiring a decentralized organization whose ground is that continuing ‘revolution in permanence.’...

“Philosophy of ‘revolution in permanence’ cannot possibly be only ground, or even content, substance; it is Subject, and that both objectively and subjectively. The unchained dialectic—both as dialectics of liberation and dialectics of thought, dialectics of self-development—that self-development is both Individual and Universal. The achievement of that can only come with sharp awareness of the absolute contradictions in the nuclear world state-capitalist reality; to project Marx’s philosophy of revolution concretely, its Absolutes as concrete Universals, not abstractions, becomes imperative. This lays ground for daily practical work and not just books or essay writing. That is our organizational task.”<sup>18</sup>

## ORGANIZATION AND THE BODY OF IDEAS

That is the spirit we bring to working out our perspectives and tasks this year. Our projected new publications—on Syria, on Women’s Liberation, on What Is Socialism, and on the climate movement—are about comprehending the current stage of capitalism and this society, the disorientation on the Left as well as everywhere else, the meaning of the movement from practice, and philosophy and revolution reaching out to each other.

**Aiding us in this projection are the two new books of selected writings by Raya Dunayevskaya, *Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution in Permanence for Our Day* and *Russia, from Proletarian Revolution to State-Capitalist Counter-Revolution*. These bring to the fore the Marxist-Humanist comprehension of Marx’s philosophy of revolution in permanence and the Russian Revolution, as well as the dialectics of counter-revolution coming from within the revolution, and the cruciality yet ambivalence of Lenin’s philosophical reorganization with his return to Hegel. These books bring out the centrality of the Marxist-Humanist trilogy of revolution, as incorporated right in our organization’s Constitution:**

*Marxism and Freedom, from 1776 until Today*, “with its dialectical form of presentation of history and theory as emanating from the movement from practice, [laid] the foundation for the articulation of the unity of philosophy and revolution” as developed in *Philosophy and Revolution*. The latter reflected “the need of integrality also of philosophy and organization. As against ‘the party to lead’ concept, such integrality of dialectics and organization reflects the revolutionary maturity of the age and its passion for a philosophy of liberation.” *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution* concentrated on the “new moments” of Marx’s last decade as the trail to our age, as seen in the Man/Woman relationship and in the relationship of the less technologically developed lands to the capitalistically technologically advanced countries. As a consequence, we “see the absolute challenge to our age as the need to concretize Marx’s ‘revolution in permanence’ not alone as the determinant for theory and practice, but as ground for organization in place of ‘the party to lead,’ in order to achieve the total uprooting of this exploitative, racist, sexist society and the creation of truly new human relations.” Our Constitution goes on to single out *American Civilization on Trial: Black Masses as Vanguard*, which “concretized [the trilogy of revolution] on the American scene and for the Black dimension,” as another fundamental Marxist-Humanist work and contribution to the theoretical preparation for revolution.

Nor can these be separated from what it means to have a Marxist-Humanist newspaper—and there are two, *News & Letters* in the U.S. and *Praxis en América Latina* in Mexico, which cooperate closely. News and Letters Committees is responsible for *News & Letters* and we aim to strengthen both its theoretical development and voices from below. There are no others like these, practicing as best we can the new relationship between theory and practice that is at the heart of Marxist-Humanism, and projecting Marxist-Humanist Archives as living. During the pandemic crisis, we will continue publishing *News & Letters* online, although circumstances prevent us from mailing out a printed newspaper.

All of these tasks point to the tremendous need for active, concrete, critical projection of Marxist-Humanism as participants in ongoing movements, and for organizational growth, which needs to become more concrete. Because what it is all about is revolution in permanence, getting rid of this rotten society and establishing one with totally new human relations.

—The Resident Editorial Board of News and Letters Committees, April 22, 2020

18. Raya Dunayevskaya, *The Power of Negativity: Selected Writings on the Dialectic in Hegel and Marx* (Lexington Books, 2002), pp. 276, 288.

# COVID-19 among the shackdwellers

Abahlali baseMjondolo in South Africa has held small meetings with elected leaders in all the provinces where we have members to discuss the coronavirus crisis. The best available scientific information has been shared with our members. We have decided to suspend our entire program until the crisis has passed. This includes our annual UnFreedom Day rally which usually attracts more than 5,000 people.

## 'CLASS DETERMINES WHO HAS AID'

The resources that would have been used for meetings, protests and rallies have all been redirected towards providing equipment that can



by Suzanne Rose

April Dunn was born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy. She was an honor roll student in high school, but she was not able to pass the standardized test needed for graduation. She became a tireless advocate for schools to offer alternative ways for students with disabilities to get a diploma. She met with Louisiana legislators and testified in committees. The bill she advocated, Act 833, passed in both chambers of the Louisiana Legislature. Because of her efforts, people with disabilities can qualify for diplomas. Unfortunately, April died in March from COVID-19. She was 33 years old.

\* \* \*

Workers and the disabled adults they care for in group homes are not able to get the medical equipment they need to avoid COVID-19 and to care for those who have it. One CNA was told by an administrator not to “push so hard for these things” because the people in the home were “close to taking their last breath anyway.” In addition, some of these homes have been slow to inform family members that their loved ones have the virus or even that they have died from it!

\* \* \*

Adults with disabilities are worried that because of COVID-19 their lives will not be saved if they get the virus. Lucy Watts fears she would not be put on a ventilator because she has life-limiting conditions and requires 24-hour care. She is 26 years old. She said, “Life is devalued on the basis of my disabilities and needs rather than my life and the difference I have made in the world. I’m filled with anger, hurt and fear, and I want to fight back.”

\* \* \*

Pediatricians all over the country are considering denying organ transplants to kids with disabilities, even when they are likely to provide significant health benefits. The American Academy of Pediatrics is urging doctors to make “fair” decisions. They warn that to deny organ transplants to kids with disabilities is discriminatory and possibly illegal.

## QUEERNOTES

by Elise

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled that the Peruvian government must provide psychological treatment for, and pay damages to, Trans woman Azul Rojas Marin, who was stripped, beaten and raped with a truncheon by three Peruvian police officers. The ruling that she was tortured and that her detention was discriminatory, arbitrary and illegal, is that court's first finding of torture against an LGBT person. Peru must also create protocols to investigate and track anti-LGBT violence. Rojas Marin's complaint went to the Inter-American Court after prosecutors had dismissed it.

\* \* \*

LGBTQ Asians are fighting the explosion of hate crimes against them, physical, verbal and on-line, blaming them for the COVID-19 pandemic rather than the Chinese government for the coverup of its origins and the poor response by governments including the U.S. Amazon LeThi Foundation, Filipino LGBT Europe Out & Proud and National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance are speaking out against COVID-19 hate and racism against Asians. They offer courses on support groups and skill building specifically for Asian LGBTQ groups.

\* \* \*

Transgender rights groups including Transgender Health and Wellness Centre; Gender Justice LA; Transgender Law Centre; El/La Para Translatinas; and Transgender, Gender Variant, and Intersex Justice Project are demanding California Gov. Gavin Newsom immediately enact the Emergency Transgender Wellness and Equity Fund. This fund would ameliorate disparities in housing, healthcare and employment and move Transgender, Gender Variant and Intersex people towards release from incarceration. Queer people may be especially susceptible to COVID-19, with higher rates of smoking, HIV, AIDS and cancer.

help people to survive this crisis. We are all doing all that we can to communicate the best information, based on science, to our members and to combat fake news and conspiracy theories.

Already people who live in shack settlements are faced with many other diseases such as cholera, tuberculosis, HIV, and various stress-related conditions. This is as a direct result of the failure of the government to provide housing and basic services to our communities; the failures and decline of the healthcare system, as well as the economic crisis that has resulted in mass unemployment. There is real fear that this new virus will hit impoverished people the hardest.

**Class determines who has medical aid and who does not, who has access to water, sanitation and safe means for heating and lighting and who does not. It is now vital that we politicize the crisis caused by the coronavirus and that impoverished and working-class people take their place in this process.**

On March 15 the President of South Africa made a call to all South Africans to take precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the virus. However, many of the measures that are being recommended assume that everyone lives in a house that is at no risk of being destroyed by the state, a house which has water and sanitation.

But millions of us continue to live in shacks of indignity. It does not seem possible to prevent this virus from spreading when we still live in the mud like pigs, when in many settlements there is no water, or hundreds of people share one tap, and many settlements lack any access to sanitation.

Municipalities across the country do not collect refuse from shack settlements. In Mbizana, communities share water with cattle, which results in many diseases.

## WILL STARVATION KILL US FIRST?

Our members have also expressed concern that the high unemployment rate and the extreme poverty in shack settlements makes it difficult for us to stay in our homes. If we do, we may die as a result of starvation before the virus gets us. Our members have noted that it is difficult to isolate ourselves from each other as we live under extremely congested conditions. Another concern is that we continue to have our shacks (illegally and violently) demolished by the state during this time of crisis.

**Weeks ago we wrote to KwaZulu-Natal's Member of the Executive Council for Health requesting an urgent meeting to discuss how we can work together to keep residents of shack settlements safe in this time of crisis. We have not received a reply, or even an acknowledgement of our email.**

We would like to express our appreciation for and solidarity with all nurses, doctors and other health professionals working against this virus, including people working as cleaners and in other jobs in hospitals, and to call for a massive increase in financial support for the healthcare system. In our office in Durban we have pictures of Che Guevara and Frantz Fanon. They were both radical doctors who took the side of the oppressed. Steve Biko was a medical student before he was banned and then murdered. We would like to invite all progressive doctors and other medical experts, to work with us, as comrades, as we oppose this pandemic.

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Land & Dignity! —Abahlali baseMjondolo

## THOUGHTS FROM THE OUTSIDE

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Caring for others is what humans are meant to do. It should not have to be a heroic act. We are guided by one idea, that is the Idea of Freedom. It resonates with everyone on some level. It may appear different out here from when I was in the SHU, when it was a different life-and-death struggle, but it is the same idea.

**The way we gained a mind of our own in the SHU, was to take back the definition of who we are from the guards and the system. We recognized each other's humanity and worked to overcome the racial divides constructed and maintained by the system. We prisoners put our lives on the line to make the statement that we wanted to make, to have our death count, not just die from the system's abuse/neglect. What we did with our own minds was to challenge the system of perpetual solitary confinement. The success of that challenge allowed me to be out.**

The pandemic is again raising the question of who we are as human beings. What is “visible” to the system is only “economic” activity: earning and spending money. We see that playing out in the debate over opening the economy vs. protecting lives. People's lives, our humanity, are being pushed aside to continue production for production's sake.

## YOUTH IN ACTION

by Buddy Bell



Demonstrators in the Dominican Republic on Feb. 27, 2020, at La Plaza de la Bandera in Santo Domingo held a huge rally against the lack of transparency in the electoral process.

Ten thousand Dominican-American youth and supporters took to the streets of New York City on Feb. 22, after congressional elections in the Dominican Republic were suspended. Polls had closed Feb. 16 after four hours of voting because of glitches with electronic ballots that did not list opposition candidates. New York organizer Isabel Cristina told NBC that the march was supporting “real heroes protesting in the Dominican Republic despite being targeted by ultranationalists, the national police and, in some cases, even their own family members.” Widespread protests in Santo Domingo started Feb. 17, lasting more than two weeks, and were attacked with tear gas. Then the Organization of American States intervened to audit the voting machines and to monitor a repeat election held without incident on March 15.

\* \* \*

Emma Theofelus, a 23-year-old lawyer and activist, set a record as Namibia's youngest cabinet member when appointed as Deputy Minister of Information and Communications Technology, just as citizens were beginning to show symptoms of COVID-19 in mid-March. *The Guardian* paraphrased her description of the job: “giving real-time information about coronavirus to the media and the public, while thwarting fake news.” Despite being a long-time advocate of child welfare and government transparency, she attracted criticism from some old politicians. “Anything I set myself to and any environment I want to work into, I can do it; so the issue of inexperience does not hold water. I will bank on the experience I have, but I am also willing to take advice and guidance from those that have been there before me,” she told *African Newspage*.

\* \* \*

Sudanese dancers, DJs, and musicians are freely practicing their professions and performing in public after a popular women's and youth movement successfully toppled the regime of Omar al-Bashir and its “morality police.” Music student Somia Abd Elhay told the news site *Above Whispers*: “We understand that change won't happen tomorrow because of the revolution. It will take time, but what's new after the revolution is that there is hope and that things can change, and it is in our hands to change the things we see as wrong.” Sudan is now governed by a tenuous power-sharing council, which is dominated by a military junta.

## Detroiters dis rally

**Detroit**—Most Detroiters were dismayed by last week's rally of hundreds at the state capital, Lansing, Mich. Despite pleas by organizers and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, hundreds of people got out of their cars to flout social distancing guidelines, scream fantastical conspiracy theory propaganda, and flaunt assault weapons. The “I wanna catch the virus” rally reflects the majority Republican state legislature, which already curtailed the length of time the Governor may extend her stay-at-home order.

**Despite concerns about too much state authority, older Black residents are adhering to the executive order. People recognize that the President's pandering to his right-wing supporters and to some youth denying the severity of the pandemic, is the main danger now.**

Detroit Public Schools, six weeks after closing, have still not provided families with paper lesson packets to be picked up at 17 sites across the 139 square miles of the city, along with breakfast and lunch packs. The Internet learning, despite delays in enabling access, appears to be of high quality and engaging to students, who can video call their teachers and classmates. Long-term consequences for teachers and the effects of about half the students without adequate technology must be considered now.

For more dispatches from Detroit see: <https://newsandletters.org/detroit-dispatch-easter-sunday/> and <https://newsandletters.org/covid-19-detroit-dispatch/>.  
—Susan Van Gelder

# Duterte uses COVID-19 pandemic to further fascist rule

**Manila, the Philippines**—The Filipino people stand together with the rest of the people of the world in battling the COVID-19 pandemic that takes lives especially among the poor and the working class. This health crisis is doubled by the authoritarian and militaristic approach of the Rodrigo Duterte administration. The government had no emergency plan, problems producing personal protective equipment for front-liners, and disorder in imposing a nationwide Public Health Emergency that led to a Luzon island-wide lockdown while trying to institutionalize social amelioration measures.

**When the government confirmed the first case of COVID-19 on Jan. 30, Duterte brushed aside the emergency and said on Feb. 3 that there is nothing to be scared of. He even urged Filipinos to travel around the Philippines to its tourist destinations. By March 9, he changed gear and questioned where the virus came from in a joking manner, while assuring that the government had billions to respond to the pandemic, plus foreign funds and aid also worth millions. But on April 6 he announced that there are no more funds. What happened to the billions for the pandemic?**

Only on March 14 did Duterte declare a national Public Health Emergency. On March 24 he was granted emergency powers by the House of Representatives upon his request. The new “Bayanihan Act—We Heal as One,” to last for two months, enumerated programs and policies to quell the spread of the virus and address the economic needs of the populace. But the law emphasizes police and militaristic mechanisms, instead of the medical needs of

## COVID-19 in prison

by Robert Taliaferro

**Black River Falls, Wisc.**—We are definitely living in interesting times with this virus and the reactions of people to it.

In prison here in Wisconsin, the guys are not as engaged as people in the community simply because of the nature of where we are. We are still in a relatively sterile environment which would change dramatically if someone comes in from the world and is a carrier.

### PRISONERS ARE A VULNERABLE GROUP

When that happens, then nearly everyone in here will get sick to some extent. Because of some of the previous lifestyles and health conditions of many of these guys, quite a few will probably die because of poor immune systems and the negative impact of those lifestyles.

**Back in the world the healthcare workers are having a hard time coping. Depending on the state and their prison system, healthcare inside is marginal during the best of times. Some prisons in Wisconsin are better than in most states, especially those in the South, when it comes to responsible healthcare. But that care is not consistent throughout Wisconsin's 36 or so facilities.**

We also have a population who've had poor social sanitary protocols as a general aspect of their lives; people who cough in their hands, don't wash their hands, then touch...well, everything. There is not much that can be done about that since we live in overly crowded conditions and it's nearly impossible to get people to change habits that they have practiced all of their lives—especially when they are in prison.

### DANGEROUS OVERCROWDING

Wisconsin's prisons are about 6,000 people over capacity, and our social distancing rules are three to six feet apart as opposed to six to ten feet back in the world. The spacing of the bunk beds in a cell is approximately three feet, so go figure.

In the old maximum prisons like Waupun and Green Bay, those cells were built in the late 19th century to house one person only and are much smaller than the cells that I am currently in by several cubic feet, yet they now house two people in much more crowded conditions than you would find in a medium or minimum facility.

**Also, those in maximum prisons can't go outside when they want, or leave the cell when they want, so that would exacerbate the problem. The main thing is the lack of proper ventilation mixed with the lack of space.**

How will a culture that is focused on pure capitalist endeavors recover from nearly a complete shutdown of some of the fundamental elements of its financial infrastructure? Then you have things like tornado season in full force followed by hurricane season and potentially other natural disasters. We are definitely in uncharted waters. Part of what is challenging about the times we live in is dealing with a modern worldwide pandemic when it is imbued with the results of other natural calamities.

the citizens. Millions of poor and working-class citizens have not received the promised economic relief.

Then Duterte created the National Action Plan, a group that will implement the “Bayanihan Act.” It is composed of five military generals. Although the government does not explicitly say the country is under martial law, Duterte is actually implementing a “Martial Law-Type” of response that is violating basic human rights.

### MASS ARRESTS, NOT MASS TESTING

Checkpoints manned by police and the military were set up all over. Citizens are issued Quarantine Passes (QP) by local officials. Social distancing was required to flatten the curve of COVID-19 cases. During lockdown, only one with a QP can go out to buy necessary supplies. Instead of focusing on medical approaches like mass testing, the government launched mass arrests of those who go out to work or find food for their families, saying that they violated the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) law.

**The “Bayanihan Act” is basically a starve or be shot policy. Duterte vowed to shoot to**

## No masks to prisoners



A prisoner making masks for sale to others for the coronavirus at the Hamden County Sheriff's office in Ludlow, Mass.

**Oakland, Calif.**—On April 8, the California Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA) sent a press release claiming that incarcerated people have produced 17,000 barrier masks, and are currently making 10,000 more per day, for use as a COVID-19 safety measure.

**However, dozens of people incarcerated at the California Institution for Women, where many of the masks are being produced, have reported that the vast majority of incarcerated people are not receiving any of these masks for their own use.**

Directing incarcerated people to make masks that they are largely unable to use exemplifies the California Department of Corrections' refusal to take the pandemic crisis seriously. It also reveals a stunning willingness to exploit imprisoned people's labor while not supporting their lives.

### SLAVE LABOR MAKES MASKS

Incarcerated people report working 12 hours per day, seven days a week, to make the masks. CALPIA pays incarcerated workers between 35 cents and \$1 per hour, sustaining a slave labor market that is particularly vulnerable to exploitation in crises such as COVID-19. This development mirrors reports from New York that incarcerated people were forced to produce hand sanitizer for the safety of others without being able to use it for their own safety.

**“It is unimaginable torture to require people to make masks to save lives around the world for pennies only to realize that you are not afforded the dignity of having and possessing a lifesaving mask. It shows an alarming lack of humanity,”** said April Grayson, the Statewide Coordinator of Sister Warriors Freedom Coalition.

Advocates have received offers from businesses and churches willing to provide hundreds of masks for incarcerated people, but as Kelly Savage of the California Coalition for Women Prisoners stated, “The corrections department has neglected to adequately increase prevention measures, not because of lack of resources, but because of lack of will. They simply see incarcerated people as disposable. People are used as laborers when needed for others' safety or profit, and disposed of when they become sick.”

### FAMILIES PLEAD WITH GOVERNOR

People in California's prisons, their families, and advocates have been pleading with Governor Gavin Newsom and the California Department of Corrections for weeks to immediately release vulnerable people and improve safety and health conditions to avoid a deadly public health crisis. Yet, despite a rapidly rising rate of COVID-19 cases emerging from prison staff infections, Gov. Newsom has failed to take action. Incarcerated people continue to report overcrowding, lack of urgent healthcare, lack of cleaning and disinfectant supplies, and lack of access to communication with loved ones.

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**kill ECQ violators. Now, aside from COVID-19, hunger and bullets will be the cause of death for Filipinos. Socialized hunger is the effect of the social distancing for the poor and the working class.**

After the April 30 deadline the ECQ will be implemented as a “total lockdown” of the original ECQ declaration. The government is considering its extension in many areas of the country. The army and the Philippine National Police will be the main enforcers. Thousands have been arrested, detained and killed in police shootings after being perceived as ECQ violators.

What we need now is free mass testing to help flatten the curve and an economic relief package to address hunger. Not fascist rule.

—Human rights activist

## Prisons = death

**Oakland, Calif.**—Nearly forgotten in the horror of COVID-19 are prisoners, an aging population forced together with no ability to practice “social distancing” or even wash adequately. The prisons are rightly called “death camps” by former prisoners. One, Theresa Grady, now with the Center for Justice at Columbia University, called them that in a virtual town hall “#ClemencyCoast2Coast” held on April 8.

### NOT RELEASED BUT DYING INSTEAD

In one of many actions across the country, activists from New York and California have joined to call for release of all prisoners at risk of dying from COVID-19. Many local jails have started depopulating, yet even this small gesture seems to be stuck in limbo for state prisons.

**When New York's Gov. Andrew Cuomo promised to release 400 prisoners, it didn't happen. Raymond Rivera, sent back to Rikers Island on a minor parole violation, died from COVID-19 on April 4. In March Gov. Gavin Newsom of California commuted the sentences of 21 prisoners whose paperwork was already in the system; 3,500 prisoners who already have parole dates might be released within 60 days. Given California's prison population of 123,000 in a system designed for 85,000, that is way too little and too late.**

One of the speakers at the #ClemencyCoast2Coast town hall, Ny Nourn, was released from prison only to be held in an ICE detention camp. “Healthcare” in those camps is devastating. Under current conditions, ICE detention is a death sentence, she said. On April 10 more than 100 prisoners at Mesa Verde detention camp went on a hunger strike. They demand immediate release or ways to protect themselves from the virus. There are at least six other facilities in which prisoners are on ongoing hunger strikes, from Essex County facility in New Jersey to Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Wash.

Also on April 10, prisoners in Lansing, Ks., where there is an outbreak of the virus, staged an uprising.

### PANDEMIC SHOWS INCARCERATION FLAWS

Another speaker at the town hall, James King, an ex-lifer released just four months ago, now with Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, said, “We have to break our addiction to incarceration.” Speaking of his release after having been found suitable, he said, “I am not an exception, I am a reflection” of the changes many others have also accomplished while in prison.

Barbara Chavez, sentenced to life without possibility of parole for someone else's violence in a domestic violence situation, stressed that mass clemency is a good policy in the face of the realities in prison.

**Jose Saldana, an organizer with RAPP (Release Aging People from Prison), served 38 years in prison in New York. He said the average age of people who die in New York's prisons is 57. Many who are worthy of release will die in prison. The only humanitarian solution is mass de-carceration, with the oldest prisoners released first.**

Additionally, speakers noted that the vast majority of those in prison are people of color. That's who will die in disproportionate numbers. Los Angeles' Black population is 5%, in prisons it's 40%.

The culture in prisons does not allow guards to see prisoners as human. They would not be able to do their jobs if they did. It's making them victims as well. They don't ask for masks and disinfectants for prisoners' use, even if it would be in their own interest.

**The #ClemencyCoast2Coast campaign resulted in over 1,000 people flooding the social media accounts of Governors Cuomo and Newsom on April 3 and again on April 10 with messages and pictures calling for mass clemency.**

The town hall's conclusion was that this pandemic has exposed all that is wrong with the system. There is no saving it, it will have to be changed from the bottom up.

—Ursula Wislanka