

RALLY, COMRADES!

THE VOICE OF THE LEAGUE OF REVOLUTIONARIES FOR A NEW AMERICA

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Millions Worldwide Decry George Floyd Murder



Taylor spoke to an energized crowd in Oakland, CA on May 29 as attendees chant "No justice no peace!" Photo: Michelle Snider

Something New is in Our Grasp

From the Editors

Millions of Americans and people worldwide are revolted by the cold-blooded murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police and organizing and speaking out in a myriad of ways. Preceding Floyd's murder, 26-year-old Breonna Taylor was shot to death in her Louisville apartment, after three police officers entered, while serving a "no-knock warrant." In late February, 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery was shot and killed by two vigilantes while he was jogging in South Georgia. Since 2015, police in the U.S. have not gone more than two days without fatally shooting someone.

George Floyd's death is added to the over 132,000 (increasing every day) who have died from the coronavirus in the U.S., the majority coming from the most impover-

ished urban, suburban, and rural communities. The Powderhorn community, where George Floyd died, is suffering disproportionately from Covid-19. As of May 29, 34 percent of people infected with the virus in Minneapolis are Black, even though they make up only 18 percent of the city's population.

The people who rule America are desperate for us to fight police terror separate from those conditions that call into question their rule. They are desperate to stop the political and ideological awakening of the American people. They must deepen the destitution and, at the same time, prevent and contain social upheavals. This can only be done with a fascist police state.

Police brutality today is an expression of the power to shut off your water, evict you from or foreclose on your home, slash essential services, destroy food rather than distribute it, and turn you away from emer-

gency rooms and send you home to die. With more and more jobs performed without human labor, greater sections of the population are out of work with no means to survive in this system.

The ruling class is united in maintaining its power. The unity of the working class expressed against police brutality, under today's conditions of mounting unemployment, homelessness, hunger, and declining health, can advance our class's unity for the necessities of life.

The aim of the League of Revolutionaries for a New America is class unity across color, nationality, or gender lines. We must reassert the time-honored slogan of "all for each and each for all." Within those addressing the underlying problems revealed by the pandemic and outcries against police brutality is an evolving class unity. Something new is within our grasp. Join us as we join with you in fighting for a New America. **RC**

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An Epoch of Social Revolution

Inside Rally, Comrades!

The events unfolding in the streets over police brutality and the COVID 19 crisis vividly express the crisis underway in the world. Its roots go to the tremendous upheaval in the economy. It is transforming from jobs-based industrial production to one based in electronics, requiring fewer of us to work in ever-expanding sectors. This issue of *Rally, Comrades!* covers the social results of the changes wracking the world, and the fight for a new America, wherein the products of electronic production are distributed according to need. We live in a time of significant change, in an epoch of social revolution.

Police brutality today is an expression of

the power to shut off your water, evict you from or foreclose on your home, slash essential services, destroy food rather than distribute it, and turn you away from emergency rooms and send you home to die. With more and more jobs performed without human labor, more considerable sections of the population are out of work with no means to survive in this system.

As pointed out in our editorial, "Millions Worldwide Decry George Floyd Murder: Something New is in Our Grasp," the ruling class is united in maintaining its power. The unity of the working class, expressed against police brutality under today's conditions of mounting unemployment, homelessness, hunger, and declining health, can advance our class's unity for the necessities of life.

"Healthcare Crisis: The Future is Up to Us" lays out both the problems exposed in this cri-

sis and the way forward. The private ownership of the necessary tools required to fight the coronavirus's spread has functioned to strangle the urgent need for mass testing and the protection of hospital workers. It's not only the private ownership of life-saving supplies that's putting us in jeopardy, but also the decisions about who gets Personal Protective Equipment or tests and who is deemed essential, that have been handed over to the chaos of a fractured for-profit only marketplace.

The immediate expansion of Medicaid and the passage of Improved Medicare for All are urgently needed in the face of 30 million newly unemployed and likely uninsured.

"Louisiana: Land of Beauty, and Crisis" brings to light the effects of chloroprene poisoning which are exactly the underlying conditions that have led to the people of St. John Parish having the highest death rate from the coronavirus in the country. St. John, which is majority African American and poor, is also where the Dupont/Denka petrochemical plant manufactures chloroprene, a known carcinogen used to create synthetic rubber. It is spewing poison into the air and environment at a rate of 25 to 100 times the safe rate. The elementary school of the Fifth Ward is only 1500 feet from the Dupont/Denka plant.

There is another side to this story: the workers of southern Louisiana are not cowed. They are in a fight for their very lives. And they are not alone. They are part of a growing response from all those workers across the country that have seen their lives wrecked, their access to even the most basic necessities of life blocked.

At the same time, COVID-19 is creating a rental housing time bomb that threatens to blow up the entire for-profit rental system as addressed in "COVID-19 Generates Housing Takeovers and Rent Strikes." Tenant groups across the country have called for a rent strike,

organizing car caravans, socially distant demonstrations, and actions at corporate landlord offices. Hundreds of localities have enacted eviction moratoriums to prevent people from being thrown out of their housing in the middle of the pandemic. Necessary as these moratoriums were, none of them included provisions to protect people from massive accumulated rent bills when the crisis is over. The reality of the situation is that millions of renters will be part of the "rent strike" whether they choose to or not because they will not have the money to pay.

Polarization is evident everywhere in society. It started with economic polarization, where the wealth of society is concentrated in ever fewer hands. Destitution is spread broadly to greater sections of the population. The government shutdown in 2019, the devastation of COVID 19, and the uprisings against the police exposed just how many people live paycheck to paycheck, or with no paycheck at all.

There is a growing sense that America is made up of classes whose interests are polarized. We embrace it. The transformation the world faces today is historic. The means to produce all the things we need has leapt forward, requiring less human labor. The economic revolution forces the beginnings of a social revolution. The disorganization of society pulls people into the struggle to reconstruct society based on the economic revolution. The participants belong to social classes and attempt to resolve the problem in favor of their class. Our class can unite around distribution of the economic wealth according to need and end homelessness, poverty and hunger.

Today, this transformation is so massive, it won't be an adjustment; it is completely changing the world as we know it. The end of work as we have known it, the end of exploitation, the end of classes, and the beginning of something new. **RC**

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EDITORIAL POLICY

Rally: to bring back together and put in a state of order, as retreating troops [to return to attack]

Comrade: a person with whom one is allied in a struggle or cause

Rally, Comrades! is the political paper of the League of Revolutionaries for a New America. In this period of growing motion and developing polarization, *Rally, Comrades!* provides a strategic outlook for the revolutionaries by indicating and illuminating the line of march of the revolutionary process. It presents a pole of scientific clarity, examines and analyzes the real problems of the revolutionary movement, and draws political conclusions for the tasks of revolutionaries at each stage of development in order to prepare for future stages. It is a vehicle to reach out and communicate with revolutionaries both within the League and outside of the League, to engage them in debate and discussion, and to provide a forum for these discussions. Articles represent the position and policies of the League of Revolutionaries for a New America.

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League of Revolutionaries for a New America

Today, whether through words or deeds, vast numbers of socially conscious people declare themselves revolutionaries in opposition to the degenerating social and economic conditions. The League's mission is to unite these scattered revolutionaries on the basis of the demands of the new class, to educate and win them over to the cooperative, communist resolution of the problem.

The demands of this new impoverished class for food, housing, education, healthcare and an opportunity to contribute to society are summed up as the demand for a cooperative society. Such a society must be based on the public ownership of the socially necessary means of production and the distribution of the social product according to need.

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Visit the *Rally, Comrades!* website!

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The *Rally, Comrades!* bilingual website provides online access to all issues of *Rally, Comrades!* It is a political resource for our readers, and provides up-to-date articles, statements and analysis of key questions of importance to revolutionaries.

The Elections and Beyond: The Outcome is Up to Us

President Donald Trump signed an executive order on April 28 to compel meat-processing plants like Tyson and Smithfield to remain open, despite thousands of their workers testing positive for COVID 19. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell demanded corporate immunity from liability for COVID 19 negligence. Governors warned workers if they did not show up on the job, they would be denied unemployment. Then the video circulated of Minneapolis police officers crushing the neck of George Floyd for nine minutes until he was dead, over a trivial violation that there was no evidence he even committed. Meanwhile, the billionaire class added \$308 billion to its wealth in the first four weeks of the pandemic alone.

The American people have begun to respond. On May 1, workers from Walmart, Amazon, Whole Foods refused to work, and others sent solidarity messages and held car caravan demonstrations. Tenants began organizing rent strikes. Nurses and hospital workers fought for protective gear. When the George Floyd video surfaced, millions of Americans rose up in nonviolent protests that were viciously attacked by police with tear gas and rubber bullets. Unlike past Black Lives Matter protests, this time 47 million people are unemployed, with little or nothing to lose.

The raging controversy over these issues makes up the backdrop for the 2020 elections, which many are describing as the most momentous since 1860. Where once our battle was between freedom and slavery, today we fight for the right of human beings to life itself against a corporate property system that values only private profit and power.

NIGHTMARE VISION OF THE RULING CLASS

The pandemic is opening a portal into what society could look like if the ruling class plan for a fascist America is not stopped. Armed protesters whom Trump calls “good people” invaded state capitols bearing confederate flags, lynch ropes, and Nazi symbols. Trump himself called for attacking nonviolent protesters with savage dogs and using the military to crush dissent. Now he declares “Black Lives Matter” to be a symbol of hate, and re-tweets videos of “white power” advocates.

Defeating Trump in November is the immediate task and the absolutely necessary first step, but not the whole story. The working class needs a proactive, long-range plan to defeat fascism. The multi-trillion-dollar bailout has consolidated the merger of corporations with the State. The ruling class is fully aware that America’s working class, especially its most impoverished, cannot accept an agenda of poverty, austerity, racial oppression, and destruction of the planet. Not without a fight for their very survival, and they cannot just give up and go home. The ruling class can, therefore, only move in the direction of a permanent installation of a corporate dictatorship. The role of the Trump presidency is to hasten

this process by consolidating a fascist social base and reconfiguring the legal and constitutional apparatus necessary to overthrow the limited democracy we have.

The November 2020 election itself will be a test of how far the rulers can go toward fascism, and how sharply people will resist. Elections are historically the fundamental bastion of American democracy. Trump is already sending deliberately conflicting signals about his intentions: talking about canceling the election, postponing it, invalidating results from Democrats that vote by mail, filing lawsuits to stop voting, and declaring curfews to close polling places. He is carefully gauging what he will be able to get away with. Will he steal the election through fraud and violence? If he loses, will he refuse to give up power? These very questions are the sign of a political system that cannot rule in the old way, and the intention of the ruling class to end any effective right to vote.

A BETTER IDEA OF WHAT IS NEEDED

This nightmare vision of the ruling class is not the only vision, however. The working class has a better one. To save lives, the people need testing, tracking, and treatment on demand. Justice for George Floyd, defunding the police, ending mass incarceration, and releasing children and adults from immigrant detention centers have become an inseparable part of our concept of freedom. The future of the planet itself has become a critical aspect of our vision of the future.

Shelter for the unhoused, canceling the rent, ending evictions and foreclosures, and taking over vacant homes have become battle cries across the country. Medicare for All and the expansion of Medicaid has become more urgent as unemployment strips people of their health insurance, and the pandemic death toll surpasses 125,000. Basic human needs are human rights.

The fascism that threatens us cannot be defeated without this working-class vision, one where life’s necessities are distributed according to need, and people can live safely and free from harm. The contribution of the Bernie Sanders campaign was to advance the program that the people’s scattered, separate battles were already fighting for. Although Sanders had to withdraw his candidacy, it was never about one election. It was about building a movement. Sanders unquestionably won the campaign policy debate, and the movement continues. Workers cannot give up fighting for health care, food, housing, and other necessities, especially with millions more unemployed every week.

DEFENDING THE RIGHT TO VOTE

We cannot fight for the new world we need without democracy. Our Constitution was written by slave owners and other capitalists who denied the vote to women, slaves, or men who did not own property. Every generation of Americans since then has had to fight to extend and protect the right to

vote, often with bloodshed and loss of life. In 2020 the vote is in grave danger. The US Supreme Court gave the state of Wisconsin permission to disqualify thousands of primary votes of people who did not receive their ballots until after the election. The seesaw battles over voter suppression in Wisconsin, Florida, and Georgia are initial skirmishes in the warfare expected to break out in November.

The fiascos during primaries in Wisconsin, Georgia, and Kentucky are a preview of what pandemic voter suppression can look like. People are demanding mail-in ballots to protect the elections against COVID-related polling place closures. Trump is aggressively resisting vote by mail, but only in Democratic states. He is blocking funds for election preparation because, he said, making voting easier means “you’d never have a Republican elected in this country again.” The Republican National Committee allocated \$20 million to sue Democrats “into oblivion,” restrict voting, and organize “poll watchers” to intimidate voters in working class areas.

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

This is war on our class. When November comes around, we likely will have a major party choice between pro-corporate politicians, Democrat Joe Biden and Republican Donald Trump. But it would be a fatal mistake to believe that workers have nothing at stake in defeating Donald Trump. We cannot participate in the electoral arena without taking a stand against a president who personifies the social face of the fascist movement.

A second Trump administration would lead to a scorched earth assault on the working class and a disaster for humanity. Trump has already filed a brief with the Supreme Court to eliminate health care for 20 million Americans in the middle of the pandemic. He vowed to deport over half a million DACA recipients and their families. He ended the centuries-old right of asylum. He called for

ten-year sentences for peaceful protesters and told police to not “be too nice”. He declared war on voting rights. He reversed 100 environmental regulations and appointed hundreds of judges to support his program. Finally, he has inspired scores of fascist and white nationalist organizations and militias to sprout up across the country.

Voting in this election is, therefore, a life or death question. Workers fighting for their basic needs will confront pro-corporate and pro-fascist leaders in the Democratic Party as well as Republicans, but Trump is the immediate danger right now. The defeat of Trump would allow some maneuvering room for the grassroots struggles for basic needs that have forced their way into Democratic Party electoral politics. But fighting fascism means continuing to hold government accountable to meet human needs regardless of which party is in power. It can also mean moving the battle into a third party when people learn that neither Democrats nor Republicans can defend them against corporate predators.

This election is different because these are different times. In the face of police terror, we must remember that modern fascism is more than just a political system hostile to democracy. It is more than monopoly capitalism without the restraints of democracy. It is the political attempt to maintain a system of class privilege by force and violence. The existence of corporate, private property depends on austerity for the workers and obscene wealth for the ruling class. Once people see and understand the incalculable abundance the modern productive forces can create, they will no longer tolerate the lives of misery and deprivation they are now condemned to by the system.

The fascist State we face today is one where the police, charged with protecting the social relations, become a law unto themselves and answerable to none. The danger is real, and it is near. But we are many, they are few, and the outcome depends on what we do. **RC**

Join the League of Revolutionaries for a New America!

Society can now create the abundance the new technology promises, and so create a new world: a cooperative society, with this abundance distributed according to need. In spite of worsening economic conditions, nothing can be accomplished until the American people hold a vision of where they want to go and what they want to be. Creating and imbuing them with such vision is the overriding task of revolutionaries and the foundation of our organization.

Join us! For more information or a free information packet, email LRNA at info@lrna.org, or call 773-486-0028, or write LRNA, P.O. Box 477113, Chicago, IL 60647. Sign up and stay informed at rallycomrades.lrna.org/contact-us.

Louisiana: Land of

Southern Louisiana, alongside the great Mississippi River, is where, from Baton Rouge to the Gulf of Mexico, a vast delta widens out, coursed with bayous, swamps, wetlands, and marshes. It is a land of ‘gators and crawdads, Spanish moss and cypress, and where the Huoma and Bayougoula marked their territories with a red-tipped cypress pole (the baton rouge).

Just as the ecology of southern Louisiana teems with a rich biodiversity, so do the people, representing a blending of cultures, from the original native peoples to the Spanish, and then the French, including émigrés from French Canadian Acadia (hence the name ‘Cajun), and also great numbers of Africans imported as slave labor to clear the lands and build the sugar and cotton plantations that formed the basis of the Southern economy. The shrimp-boat fishermen, who came to the Southern Gulf Coast from Vietnam after the end of the war, are another addition.

Creole cuisine, jambalaya, crawfish pie, oyster po’boys, and beignets. Jazz, blues, and zydeco. Mardi Gras. And voodoo. Southern Louisiana is a land that is unique, and yet it is so American, so Southern. For all the great cultural and historical contributions that have been made, it did not come without great pain, misery, and sacrifice.

IN THE SHADOW OF CANCER ALLEY

On April 11, 2020, the Concerned Citizens of St. John called an emergency demonstration in La Place to protest their exposure to carcinogens, while having to defend themselves against COVID-19. St. John Parish, which is majority African American and poor, is also where the Dupont/Denka petrochemical plant manufactures chloroprene, a known carcinogen used to create synthetic rubber. It is spewing poison into the air and environment at a rate of 25 to 100 times the safe rate. Chloroprene’s acute effects are cancer and damage to the liver, kidneys, lungs, central nervous systems, and respiratory and gastrointestinal systems. The elementary school of the Fifth Ward is only 1,500 feet from the Dupont/Denka plant.

The effects of chloroprene poisoning are exactly the underlying conditions that have led to the people of St. John having the highest death rate from the coronavirus in the country.

Nearby St. James Parish is also experiencing similar conditions. A coalition of grassroots groups has been organizing to resist the intrusions of poisonous chemicals into their communities from an expanding Cancer Alley, now renamed Death Alley. In October of last year, a march from St. James to the headquarters of the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI) in Baton Rouge was led by Rise St. James, Concerned Citizens of St. John’s, and the New Orleans-based Justice and Beyond. Several police officers invaded the gathering peacefully demonstrating at the headquarters. They threw one of the leaders, the Rev. Greg Manning, to the ground while kneeling him in the back, and arrested him for “inciting a riot.”

The protesters were there to bring atten-



May 29, 2019 March against Cancer Alley representing environmentalists, Civil Rights groups, Black Lives Matter, and Vietnamese fighting having a gas plant in their community. Photo: Ted Quant

tion to what they deemed as the environmental racism perpetrated upon the poor and African American community there by the petrochemical industries in close collusion with the state. Plans are in the works to expand Death Alley, already composed of more than 200 petrochemical plants, by 25 percent, utilizing the gas obtained from fracking in the U.S. to manufacture plastics. Transnational corporations from all over the globe are being lured to set up shop in Cancer Alley.

quences of the coronavirus on the southern Louisiana area are no accident. It is a man-made crisis. We will never forget the picture of the thousands perched on rooftops and abandoned at the New Orleans Superdome. The inhabitants of New Orleans Ninth Ward were inundated by a flood that didn’t have to happen. New Orleans is a city built below sea level, but it was well-known that the levees would not be able to withstand a storm of Katrina-level proportions. Even to this day, the

The effects of chloroprene poisoning are exactly the underlying conditions that have led to the people of St. John Parish having the highest death rate from the coronavirus in the country.

The state of Louisiana has promised the Formosa Plastics Group \$1.5 billion in tax breaks to come to Louisiana. Sharon Lavigne, president of Rise St. James, has said, “If this plant comes into our community, we won’t be able to breathe the air. We can’t live with this chemical plant, it’ll kill us.” It would emit up to 13 million tons of greenhouse gases into the air, says Anne Rolfes of the Louisiana Bucket Brigade. “The stupidity is mind-boggling. Louisiana is already sinking into the sea. Plastics have been accumulating in the ocean for decades, with an estimated eight million tons added each year, and it’s expected to outweigh all the fish in the sea by 2050.”

Diane Wilson, a fifth-generation shrimper, who is now the La Vaca Bay Estuarine Waterkeeper, took samples of the small plastic particles called nurdles that are being emitted into the water. “They attract toxic heavy metals like mercury to their surface,” she says, “rendering the water in which they are submerged, undrinkable, unswimmable and unfishable.”

Just as with Katrina, the tragic conse-

levees have not been built back to withstand another Katrina.

Adding insult to injury, the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico added to the growing dead zone in the Gulf. It destroyed miles of shoreline, particularly in the New Orleans and Mississippi delta area. The area is now even more vulnerable to invading storms, while land the size of a football field slips into the sea every day.

HOW THE SOUTH IS RULED

The situation that the people of St. James and St. John are faced with is deliberate, rooted in Southern history, in how the South is ruled, and how the Southern program is carried out. From the time of the ending of the Civil War and the emancipation of the slaves, followed by a brief but failed effort to construct a democratic South, the main question the ruling class faced was how to control the Black workers, and with that, the growing unity of Blacks and poor whites. The class that had ruled the South up to the time of the Civil

War was returned to power. In a reign of terror and with white supremacy as its banner, it attacked the newly emancipated Black workers and drove them back into near-slavery, denying them all rights – the right to vote, the right to an education, all labor rights. The class was divided along color lines, and a rigid segregation was imposed and enforced by the State.

The Southern states established a political order that can only be seen as fascist rule. Its sole purpose was to advance and protect the rule of the corporations, to defend private property. From then until now, the Southern program is the step-by-step implementation of that rule. Then, the South operated almost entirely as a colony of the North, as a source of raw materials for industry, and as a place of cheap labor ripe for exploitation. “Y’all come!” was not an exhibition of Southern hospitality, but a campaign to lure industry to extract its resources and exploit its people.

THE SOUTHERN PROGRAM

Today, if anything, the South is a colony of global capital. Death Alley, the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry and the Louisiana state government, are a case in point, a case study in how the Southern program operates and is carried out.

First, LABI began by breaking the backs of organized labor, with the passage of a Right-to-Work law in 1976. Right-to-Work, the law of the land in every Southern state, is itself an expression of State’s Rights, where the Southern ruling class gets to decide how its people are to be ruled. The denial of the expansion of Medicaid in the Southern states is another example, and how the coronavirus crisis management is deferred to the states is another painful reality.

The result is a workforce with the lowest wages, the least benefits, the most hazardous working conditions, and the greatest poverty rates of any region in the country. This is precisely the situation in southern Louisiana, in St. James and St. John. The South is open for business.

Second, low or no taxes on the rich and the corporations, and high sales taxes that are disproportionately levied on the poor, who can least afford it. We have already seen how the state of Louisiana provides additional tax breaks and credits to petrochemical companies that occupy Death Alley. The result is a tax base that is unable to provide basic services such as education and health care.

Third, voter suppression. With the ability of the workers to redress their grievances constrained by anti-labor, anti-union laws, the Southern states have also moved to limit access to the ballot box. With the aid of national organizations like ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council), Louisiana was one of the first states to pass Voter ID laws and other repressive restrictions designed to block ballot access to low-income, particularly African-American workers. Voter suppression has long been a feature of the Southern political scene, designed to maintain the ruling class’s unchallenged power.

Fourth, the power of a police state. The war on our class, especially the most improv-

Beauty and Crisis

erished Black workers, in the state of Louisiana is enforced by the brute power of the State itself. The arrest of Rev. Manning for inciting a riot is a graphic example of police power. Laws have been passed that have led to the mass incarceration of Blacks in Louisiana. Louisiana has the longest prison terms in the nation. “Three strikes” laws require mandatory life sentences without parole. Louisiana incarcerates more people per capita than any other place in the world.

Fifth, little to no regulation of corporations. Dupont/Denka, Formosa Plastics, Dow Chemical, and the more than 200 national and supra-national global corporations that make up Cancer Alley are free to do whatever they

want without consequence. Global corporations have merged with and become a part of the ruling apparatus of the state. What it means is that the people, the impoverished working class of Louisiana, the South, and the nation, have no rights to clean air, land, and water.

States’ Rights, anti-labor, anti-union, low-wage, entrenched poverty for the working class, voter suppression, state police power, no regulation of the corporations – these constitute the form of political rule in the South. They describe the substance of the Southern program, packaged and ready for distribution to all of America. This is life in Louisiana bayou country, and it, undoubtedly, is a micro-

cosm of America. This is what the coronavirus crisis makes more and more clear every day.

There is another side to this story: the workers of southern Louisiana are not cowed; they are not submissive. They will not just shut up and go away. They are in a fight for their very lives. And they are not alone. They are part of a growing response from all those workers across the country that have seen their lives wrecked, their access to even the most basic necessities of life blocked.

THE RISE OF OUR CLASS

The conditions that got us to where we are now is a Southern working class divided and enforced by a ruling class bound to use gov-

ernment for its own interests. Just so, working class unity is the necessary condition for an impoverished and oppressed class to move forward and resolve the crisis in its favor. An injury to one injures us all. An attack upon Black workers in Louisiana is an attack upon our class as a whole.

Our class has its own version of the role of the South: unite the Southern worker and control the South. A united Southern working class, in unity with the workers across the land, can build a new America, in which the government operates in our class’s interest, not the private for-profit corporations.

Rise St. James! Rise up, St. John! Rise up, America! **RC**

Health Care Crisis: The Future is Up to Us

A society that is governed in such a way that it fails to protect its people from the catastrophic harm of the COVID 19 pandemic is a society ripe for revolutionary transformation. The pandemic crisis exposes capitalism’s inability to solve the problems it has created for humankind and the earth. The future depends on our class’ capacity to implement the visionary transformation necessary to save our lives and the planet. The working class most impacted by the crisis.

From the outset, the U.S. response to the virus illuminated the chasm between the needs of the public’s health and safety and the core corporate character of the government. It isn’t just a case of botched lab tests or ramping up dwindling supplies. For decades the public healthcare system has been sidelined and intentionally underfunded. Public health has been forced to take a back seat to the corporate medicine of commercial insurance companies, private hospitals, big pharmaceuticals, and proprietary research, all of which sacrificed the public good for profitability.

Today, private laboratory corporations like Quest, Lab Corp, and Abbott are doing 85 percent of all the COVID 19 testing. Each of these corporations has its own proprietary testing supplies, reagents, and disrupted supply chains. It doesn’t take long to connect the dots about the current anarchy of coronavirus testing.

The failure of the federal government to coordinate or nationalize medical supply production and distribution defaulted everything to the laws of the market-place. Governors, mayors, hospitals, and clinics were thrown into an international bidding war to obtain everything from ventilators to masks and testing kits. The price of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) jumped more than 1000 percent. The essential N95 mask for the healthcare workforce went from 38 cents apiece to over \$5.75 each.

STRANGLER BY PRIVATE OWNERSHIP

The private ownership of the necessary tools required to fight the spread of the virus has functioned to strangle the urgent need for mass testing and the protection of hospital workers. It’s not only the private ownership of life-saving supplies that’s putting us in jeopar-

dy, but also the decisions about who gets PPE or tests and who is deemed essential, that have been handed over to the chaos of a fractured for-profit only marketplace.

Our best tools for slowing the spread of the novel coronavirus are our most primitive: physically distancing, face masks in public spaces, 20 second frequent hand washing, PPE where needed, and sheltering in place. Now, with Southern states leading the way, even those most basic protections are being stripped away as businesses are being encouraged to reopen.

Governors of Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina are opening gyms, restaurants, barbershops, movie theaters, beaches, and more. Governor Brian Kemp of Georgia, having stolen the mid-term election through massive voter fraud, is serving up all the people of Georgia, especially Black, Latinx, indigenous and immigrant communities as an experiment to see how much illness and death will be tolerated to “save” businesses. This is not a new formula but rather, an amplification of how Southern political structures have always worked and been dictated by Wall Street’s needs.

The stakes are higher now. The severe acute respiratory distress syndrome and multi-organ failure that COVID 19 can cause doesn’t limit itself to location, color, and nationality, international or state borders. It does have a special affinity for people with preexisting conditions like chronic lung and heart diseases, asthma, high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney diseases, and immunosuppressive conditions like AIDS and others. All of these, along with a high percentage of the elderly are conditions that disproportionately impact the South, especially the rural South. Southerners were experiencing dire health disparities long before the pandemic: Those inequities include the failure to expand Medicaid, a weak to non-existent public health infrastructure, the epicenter of rural hospital closures, and home to over 20 percent uninsured.

Dougherty County, nearly 70 percent Black, in southwest Georgia’s Black Belt, has more deaths and sickness per capita than any other county in the State, despite having less than one tenth the population of Atlanta’s Fulton County. A model shared by the CDC and created by a team at MIT projects the number

of deaths in Georgia to more than double to 4700 deaths by early August as social distancing is relaxed.

RISE OF DISRUPTION AND THE DISRUPTORS

It is not only the coronavirus that spreads exponentially. It is also the rise of the technology sector as the dominant force in the crisis of capitalism, especially in healthcare’s 18 percent of the GNP. Since the last decade’s introduction of electronic medical records, capable of holding vast amounts of big data, technology companies and their private equity investors have been gobbling up mountains of healthcare resources, and moving services away from hospitals to wearable apps and telemedicine. Once the Center for Medicare and Medicaid approved Medicare reimbursement for “telehealth” services this March, the genie was out of the bottle. It will not go back if and when the pandemic subsides.

The impact of this further corporate consolidation of healthcare will be enormous. It is estimated that by this June, 60,000 primary care practices will close or shrink permanently with a ripple effect of another 800,000 lost jobs. Even now, at the height of the pandemic, upwards of 50,000 healthcare workers have been laid off, and thousands more are facing pay cuts as profitable elective surgeries and procedures have been suspended by hospitals.

At the very time when primary care is crucial to health, its future is insecure. More disturbing trends are also emerging. Touting a watch that alerts the wearer when near a person who has tested positive for coronavirus is less about public health and more about surveillance. It’s likely that hundreds of hospitals will go bankrupt and close over the next months. Big university systems, whose revenues depend more on corporate, proprietary research funds boosted by federal grants and loose guidelines will likely survive along with enhanced virtual medicine. But what way forward for public health?

THE FUTURE IS UP TO US

The COVID 19 pandemic has brought into laser focus the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life on the planet. This novel virus and others such as SARS, MERS, Ebola, Zika, and HIV have largely emerged from hu-

man assaults on environmentally sensitive areas and fossil fuel driven climate change. The fragmentation and assault on wild species’ habitats are causing microbes that were harmlessly harbored in other species to jump to a humanity that lacks immunity to these new pathogens.

There is no cure for the coronavirus. Vaccines are under development, but there is no guarantee that they will be globally, universally, and freely administered once science confirms their efficacy and safety. It is capitalist relations that will bear the major responsibility for the massive viral spread, with its deadliest impact on the most poverty-stricken and health insecure global working class.

The demands emerging from the working class for guaranteed livable income, safe jobs, housing, hazard pay and PPE for essential workers, clean water, the end to mass incarceration and ICE detentions; and debt, rent, and mortgage forgiveness are not just necessary in a time of crisis but are integral to sustaining the public’s health all the time. The immediate expansion of Medicaid now and the passage of Improved Medicare for All are urgently needed in the face of 30 million newly unemployed and uninsured. Through workplace organizing and community actions like mutual aid teams and massive digital pressure, some of these are being implemented now, but all must be made permanent.

The COVID 19 pandemic has accelerated a digital restructuring in society that’s been underway for years. What is needed is a trusted, community-rooted, scientifically-robust and rapidly-responsive public health infrastructure that is universal, comprehensive, and capable of addressing the inequities that are not only built into the private commercial health system, but into all of class society. It’s not about having a private health system for the shrinking few that can afford it and a public health system for everyone else.

We see the outlines of what’s needed through the lens of this crisis. The free distribution of goods and services coordinated compassionately and cooperatively, and accountable to the demands of this new class of workers being created by this crisis. Distribution according to need, not for profit. A new society is demanding to be born. It’s our collective obligation to make it happen! **RC**

COVID-19 Generates Housing Takeovers and Rent Strikes

The coronavirus crisis has shifted the debate about housing and homelessness in America overnight. In February bipartisan plans to force homeless people into mass shelters were gaining traction, both locally and nationally. By the end of March, the narrative shifted completely to one about providing hotel rooms for homeless people and rent forgiveness for tenants. What happened? COVID-19 has dramatically exposed and sharpened the fundamental antagonism underlying the housing crisis and the massive housing movement that has arisen as a result.

The system was already collapsing, based on the rapid expansion of the new class of workers discarded by the tech economy. This new class already had no money (or not enough money) to pay rents that are unaffordable in virtually every American city. In an instant COVID-19 has increased the number of unemployed by over thirty million people. One-time stimulus payments and expanded unemployment benefits may help some people temporarily, but many are not receiving them. It is plunging millions of families into a long-term survival crisis in a relatively short period of time.

CRIMINALIZATION

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the government was moving rapidly down the road of isolating, criminalizing, and incarcerating homeless people as the solution to its housing problem. After complaining that homelessness is “disgusting” and reduces property values, in 2019 President Donald Trump expressed his intention to use police to raze tent cities and force homeless people into government facilities. In December, he confirmed his plan by appointing Robert Marbut as head of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness. Marbut is known as the “Joseph Mengele of the homeless” for his cruel experiments and his philosophy that the solution to homelessness is punishment, not housing. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson said that the solution was to “uncuff law enforcement so that people can be removed now and placed in transitional places.” (*Fox News* 12-30-19).

Although the rhetoric used in Democratic Party areas was less openly fascist, the reality of the plans being developed was equally harsh. California Governor Newsom established a Homelessness and Supportive Housing Advisory Task Force. It began to push for a “right to shelter” law that would require cities and counties to build large shelters, and then require houseless people to move into them, whether they wanted to or not. Plans were debated, such as the Citizens Again scheme by Duane Nason to build an entire city for 150,000 homeless people in a rural area and house them in a socially segregated setting.

If there is any positive aspect to the COVID pandemic, it was that these immediate plans were temporarily derailed. The immediate public health emergency caused many cities to stop their draconian sweeps of encampments. Since houseless people, by definition, could not shelter in place, they were

especially vulnerable to only not contracting the coronavirus, but to spreading it among the larger population. Some cities even installed toilets and wash stations in encampments for the first time in decades, because they figured out that they could not order people to wash their hands if they have no water.

The reality of the situation is that millions of renters will be part of rent strikes whether they choose to or not, because they simply will not have the money to pay.

In the meantime, COVID-19 is creating a rental housing time bomb that threatens to blow up the entire for-profit rental system. The Turner Center for Housing Innovation estimates that some 50 million people live in households that will not be able to afford to pay rent, because of virus-related job or income loss. Some 43 percent of them were already “cost-burdened,” paying over 30 percent of their income for rent, even before the pandemic.

Even for those eligible to receive unemployment payments, including the temporary \$600 a week federal benefit, many would still be unable to afford rent. And millions of people were not eligible for unemployment pay at all, while millions more were unable to access it due to overloaded state office systems.

RENT STRIKE

The result is a spontaneous pandemic response that is altogether new. Tenant groups across the country have called for a rent strike, organizing car caravans, socially distant demonstrations, and actions at corporate landlord offices. Hundreds of localities have enacted eviction moratoriums, to prevent people from being thrown out of their housing in the middle of the pandemic.

Necessary as these moratoriums were, none of them included provisions to protect people from massive accumulated rent bills when the crisis is over. The reality of the situation is that millions of renters will be part of the “rent strike,” whether they choose to or not, because they simply will not have the money to pay.

The rent strike is not primarily aimed at individual owners, and in fact leaders are calling for suspension of mortgage payments as well as rent. It is a political strike aimed at the government. If the government can order people not to earn income due to the COVID emergency, it can order landlords not to collect rent. It led to a bill that was introduced in the New York state legislature calling for suspension of rent and mortgage payments for the duration of the crisis.

It also inspired Congresswoman Ilhan Omar to introduce a similar bill at the na-

tional level, calling on the federal government to cover any losses by landlords. A letter to Gov. Newsom, calling for suspension of rent and mortgage payments in California, was signed by over 140 housing organizations, including Housing Now, Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), Housing is a Human Right, Homes

immediately. All publicly owned property and vacant units – including luxury units – need to be opened to house currently homeless people.

“No punitive action should be taken against unhoused families who move into vacant structures to protect their health and the public’s health. We demand the government and utility agencies to turn on the electricity, gas and water and make sure they can be healthy and safe there – including those that have moved into the state-owned properties in the El Sereno neighborhood of Los Angeles.”

NEXT STEPS

The housing takeovers and rent strikes are the foundation for a new and unprecedented stage in the housing movement. They are abandoning incrementalism (slow small reforms), because the crisis is too big for small solutions. They represent an aggressive new approach to organizing and to bringing demands into the political arena. They are transforming the inability to pay rent from a personal problem into a social force. They are bringing people who have been historically powerless into a confrontation with the levers of power. The coronavirus is throwing houseless people and low-income tenants into a common struggle. If renters fail to secure rent cancellation, they will become homeless themselves.

COVID-19 has transformed the national debate because, like Hurricane Katrina and other life-threatening disasters, it exposed (once again) the inhumanity and unsustainability of the private property system. Life and death crises demand community solidarity and the distribution of necessities based on need. Revolutionaries are called to strike when the iron is hot: we need to act now to teach that the system actually creates a *permanent* emergency for millions of people, requires *permanent* replacement of the private property system with a cooperative economy, and requires a revolutionary organization dedicated to making sure that it happens.

A cooperative economy would be built on the foundation of public ownership of land and the abolition of speculation. Free land and low-cost construction will make housing practically free. The aim of the rent strike is not just surviving the pandemic, but a social transformation that will provide not only housing for everyone, but the free distribution of all the earth’s abundance to all its people. **RC**

for All California, Tenants Together, PICO California, and others.

“The state must call on banks and lenders to suspend mortgages providing financial relief for homeowners and landlords,” the letter stated, “including supporting non-profit housing providers to remain sustainable, and, in turn, for all of their tenants. Mortgages and rents should be suspended and forgiven immediately and continuing for the duration of this crisis, including a recovery period after the state of emergency is lifted.”

Some organizations have called for a \$100 billion rental assistance bill instead of rent cancellation, but that would impose undue burden, stigma, and restrictions on tenants who apply for it, whereas rent cancellation would require landlords to apply for reimbursement instead.

VACANT UNITS FOR HOUSELESS PEOPLE

Numerous proposals were offered in March and early April to address the COVID crisis by housing homeless people in some of the hundreds of thousands of hotel rooms left vacant by the collapse of tourism. Homeless people have demanded the right to escape shelters described by the Center for Disease Control as coronavirus “tinderboxes,” and to shelter in place in the empty hotel rooms.

On March 19, the ACCE wrote an “Open Letter to all California Leaders.” “For the sake of humanity,” it stated, “everyone who wants to be brought indoors needs to be brought in

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