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“Blue Wave Breaks”

Concept by John O'Kane.

Design by Heli Swensson and S.A. Griffin.

Another one of the amazing things about this election cycle is the polling. We used to be able to rely on the polls to accurately predict outcomes within a certain percentage of error. The last election, in 2016, changed all that when Donald Trump won. He was predicted to lose by a substantial margin. In the just-completed election, Mr. Trump was predicted to lose by a substantial margin and Biden and the Democrats were expected to bring a blue wave, win overwhelmingly and kick-start a new direction in American politics. This obviously didn't happen. The Democrats lost seats in the House and could only break even in the Senate. Hence the reddish undercurrent of Republican power that will challenge the new government alliance going forward.

- John O'Kane

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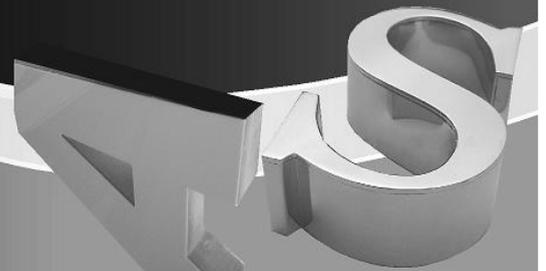


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IN A CRISIS, A COMPROMISE SOLUTION IS WORSE THAN NO SOLUTION AT ALL

T E D R A L L

The raging argument on the left between progressives who argue for radical change and centrists who advocate incrementalism is hardly new. Nearly a century ago, progressive titan and Wisconsin governor Robert La Follette and FDR were often at loggerheads over the same question.

Roosevelt, La Follette complained, was too quick to compromise with reactionaries. FDR insisted that “half a loaf is better than no bread.” While that might seem intuitively obvious, La Follette had a ready reply. “Half a loaf, as a rule, dulls the appetite, and destroys the keenness of interest in attaining the full loaf.” That can be dangerous. The average adult male requires approximately 2500 calories of nutrition per day. 1250 is better than 0, but 1250 is still malnutrition that would eventually kill him.

Even in a long-running crisis, the sustained agitation necessary to pressure the political classes into granting concessions doesn't usually occur before people's suffering has become acute. If the powers that be provide partial relief in the form of a half-measure that partly alleviates a problem, angry citizens can be persuaded to put down their pitchforks and go home peaceably. Yet the problem persists.

The Affordable Care Act is a perfect example. Obama became president at the peak of a major economic crisis, the subprime mortgage meltdown of 2007-09. With hundreds of thousands of people losing their jobs every month, the need for government intervention in the healthcare system was obvious to most Americans. So Obama campaigned on major change that included a public option. Two out of three people, including many

Republicans, favored a single-payer system similar to those in many other countries. Instead, we got the watered-down ACA.

As COVID-19 has made clear, the for-profit American healthcare system is even more scandalously dysfunctional than it was prior to the passage of Obamacare. The ACA “marketplace” has collapsed; many places only offer one “take it or leave it” insurance plan. Nevertheless, healthcare is no longer a top political issue. Support for a public option or Medicare For All has dropped to about 50%. The Democratic Party chose to nominate someone who promised to veto Medicare For All even if both houses of Congress were to pass it.

Tens of thousands of people are still dying every year because they can't afford to see a doctor. But in too many people's minds, healthcare was partly solved. So they are no longer demanding improvements. Though it might seem counterintuitive, the politics of the healthcare crisis would be vastly improved had the compromise ACA never been enacted. More people would be suffering. But

the absence of an existing, lame, plan would add urgency (and supporters) to the fight for a real, i.e. radical, solution. Half a loaf is killing us.

As Joe Biden fills his cabinet with Obama-era centrists and corporatists, many Democrats say they are satisfied with the improvement over Trump: officials with government experience replacing crazies and cronies, pledges to reverse the outgoing administration's attacks on the environment, fealty to science. They are falling into La Follette's “half a loaf” trap. Especially on existential issues like climate change but also regarding the precarious state of the post-lockdown economy, compromise will sate the appetite for meaningful

change without actually solving the problems. As with the ACA, voters will be deceived into thinking things are getting better when in fact they will still be getting worse, albeit perhaps at a slightly slower rate.

Climate scientists are divided between those who say we might be able to save human civilization if we achieve zero net carbon emissions within a decade (which is the goal of the Green New Deal pushed by progressives), and those who say it's already too late. A widely reported study predicts that human civilization will collapse by 2050, yet that's the year Biden is promising to begin zero net carbon emissions. So if we do what Biden wants, we

Even in a long-running crisis, the sustained agitation necessary to pressure the political classes into granting concessions doesn't usually occur before people's suffering has become acute.

– Ted Rall

are going to die.

Trump denied climate science, deregulated polluters and pulled the U.S. out of the Paris Accord. Biden appears to be an improvement. He talks about the urgency of the problem, promises to restore Obama-era regulations and to rejoin the Paris Agreement. Pro-environment Democratic voters are breathing a sigh of relief.

But if the goal is to slow the rate of global warming as much as we reasonably can, both Obama's regulations and the Paris Agreement are woefully inadequate. "Marginal cuts by the U.S. don't have a long-term overall big effect on the climate," Michael Oppenheimer, professor of geosciences and international affairs at Princeton University, told *Scientific American* in 2014.

A 2017 report by the United Nations Environment Program found that "if action to combat climate change is limited to just current pledges, the Earth will get at least 3C (5.4F) warmer by 2100 relative to preindustrial levels. This amount of warming would vastly exceed the Paris Agreement's goal, which is to limit global warming by the end of the century to 2C (3.6F)," reported *National Geographic*.

"[3C increase] would bring mass extinctions and large parts of the planet would be uninhabitable," the UNEP warned in 2019.

If liberals head back to brunch in a month thinking that the Biden Administration will move the needle in the right direction, if they stop being terrified, we are doomed. For as bizarre as it sounds, Donald Trump provided a valuable service when he scared the living daylights out of us.

Consider a more modern analogy than the loaf of bread: if a two-pill dose of antibiotics is required to cure an illness, taking one instead doesn't make you half better. It actually makes you worse because not only do you not get better, you destroy your immune system's ability to fight the disease.

This country is teetering on the verge of collapse. We can't afford to settle for the single-pill solutions of incremental Bidenism.

Ted Rall, syndicated writer and the cartoonist for ANewDomain.net, is the author of the book *Snowden*. Reprinted from *CounterPunch*.

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REVERB OF THE REPPRESSED: RACE AND CLASSLESSNESS

JOHN O'KANE

In an election that should've been a landslide, Joe Biden has merely survived. The lesser-of-evils option has triumphed against one of the most unpopular first-term presidents in history. This victory suggests, given the relatively narrow margin, that it was greatly dependent on Trump beating himself. Had he comported himself more presidentially, put a human face on the pandemic, stopped tweeting nonsense, been nicer to McCain and Arizona, and stopped calling everyone an idiot, he would likely have won handily.

But the pattern to the voting suggests that deficiencies in the Democratic Party were also a stimulus since Trump's support increased among the groups the Democrats have historically attracted, especially racial and ethnic minorities, the lower/working class, and the LGBT community. Comparing 2016 with 2020, it increased 6 points with black men; 5 points with black women; 4 points with Hispanic men; 5 points with Hispanic women; and 3 points with white women. The overall numbers showed a decrease in white support, a minus 1 point, mainly because of the decline in support by college-educated white men. But they show an increase for working-class white men. There is no comparable breakdown yet for the Asian population, but overall it increased for Trump by 7 points. Regarding class, Trump made gains among the non-college degreed population---Biden drew those with even some college---and those making under \$50,000 per year, by 3 points (Chris Alcantara et al, "How Voters Shifted From 2016 And Swung States For Biden And Trump," *Washington Post*, 11/12/2020).

And while voters banished the tweeter-in-chief---though just barely, contravening the 8-10 percentage points the polls predicted he would lose by---they retained

a conservative bulwark against "liberalism" in Congress (certainly not against progressivism, virtually banished from the Democratic platform). The Republicans made gains in the House, securing 7 more seats, and are likely to hold the Senate.

Is the electorate schizoid? They don't want Trump the person---reacting especially to his handling of the pandemic---but seem to support a sufficient number of legislators responsible for delivering the conservative agenda. But the question is whether they are morphing into diehard conservatives or latching onto a momentary affiliation, bolting from a Democratic Party that doesn't represent its interests. A protest versus a conversion.

Consider the issue of education and income inequality. It would seem the Democratic Party is becoming more elitist, a tendency well-documented over the past two generations. Despite the election-cycle rhetoric it has left the working class behind. But it would be a mistake to say that the Republican Party is becoming less elitist and more

populist---in a progressive sense at least---as an organization that genuinely absorbs the lower orders for the purpose of advancing them up the ladder of success. Trump captured voters making under \$50,000, as mentioned, but also increased his support relative to Biden among those making over \$100,000, and by a substantial margin (Biden increased his support over Hilary in 2016 among voters making between \$50,000 and \$100,000). The Republican Party is not likely, given its donor culture, to stop drawing the superrich; and the Democratic Party, given its quite similar funding base, is not likely to reverse its trajectory any time soon. While hardly mirrors of each other, their bases of elite support historically

have gradually dovetailed, lending credence to the suggestion that they're essentially two wings of one Party. The challenge by progressives to realign the Democratic Party promised to compound the choices, inject diversity into the mix. In the absence of this representation, Trump's new constituent base has thrown wrenches into the works.

As Matt Taibbi claims, Trump didn't deserve the support of these abdicators, but the "Democrats' conspicuous refusal to address economic inequality and other class issues in a meaningful way created an opening" filled by his loyalists. This doesn't mean that the Republican Party is the new locus for the representation of minorities and

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the working class. An emptying process is surely to soon form as the populace realizes what a skewed performance this was. But Biden's gesturing and proposed appointments thus far would suggest this outcome will likely not be an abrupt wake-up call that kickstarts the process to make the Democratic Party whole again either ("Which Is The Real 'Working Class Party' Now?" *TK News*, 11/5/2020).

Ben Jellis, head of the NAACP, explained the aborted landslide as a marketing fluke: The Republicans are simply better at using the media tools. Once the issues are better presented and framed, he suggested, the people will see the light (*DemocracyNow*, 11/4/2020). They will understand it was in their best interests to vote for a Party...that ignores them? This would require some serious sleight of rationalization, a troping through the thicket of electionese to assuage existing and potential voters to disavow all the deficits, reject the things that polls show they wanted: universal health care, higher wages, job and retirement protection, security from the violence wrought by market solutions, "law and order" protection from crime and street violence, etc. Advertising gets people to purchase what they don't need; to go against their rational interests. So do the ad managers in the Democratic Party want to indenture voters to go against their interests, hoping that over time they will convert to the...truth? Isn't this the formula for the construction of fake news?

Then there are those in the Democratic Party---particularly Heidi Heitkamp---who are claiming it was pushed too far to the left by the squad of progressives, fomenting a backlash. These six or seven "upstarts" may have changed

the discourse in the lead-up to the election, getting the slate of candidates for the nomination to at least give---mostly negative---lip service to issues raised by the squad. But the repression of the progressive platform proposals at the Convention, and Biden's virtual silence about them over the course of the campaign since, discredit this mythology. Biden's list of potential Cabinet picks is identity-politics-correct but could nearly double as Republican picks. Big Pharma, Wall Street, and military and deficit hawks are geared to structure his government, eerily reminiscent of Obama's choices.

The real tragedy is that the issues the progressives espouse are overwhelmingly supported by the voters. It's striking how many candidates won who ran on these issues, especially Medicare For All. The electorate seemed starved for an alternative (Jeffrey St. Clair, "Roaming Charges: After/Math," *CounterPunch*, 11/13/2020). The narrowing---the mainstreaming---of the election agenda as a result of the exclusion of progressive issues restricted the turnout for the Democrats, what would've helped stem the migration toward the Republicans (Briahna Joy, *DemocracyNow*, 11/5/2020).

The conventional wisdom ever since Sanders mounted his challenge was that to beat Trump and the Republicans the Democratic Party had to go mainstream, avoid being too "radical," move closer to what their adversary represents. A "socialist" candidate would never get the broad support to win. And since so much of the chatter during the intervening years was personal anyway, a slew of negative digs against Trump, being able to



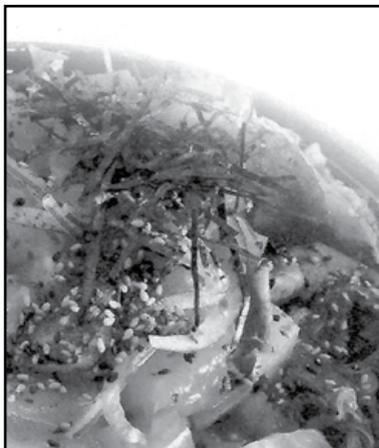
proffer the ameliorating kindness of Biden’s image as a replacement could seal the deal. The same argument was parlayed in 2016 in advancing Hilary ahead of Sanders, but polls showed that he would have easily beat Trump because he offered a real alternative.

Many Republicans were even more extreme than Heidy Heitkamp, saying that the Democrats mis-gauged the electorate’s hostility to socialism! Trump campaigned loudly about how the victory by the Democrats would bring “socialism,” the drumbeat of repetition effectively transforming this meme into a larger-than-life truth. Not unlike how the overkill of claims that the Russians influenced the 2016 election, stealing it from Hilary! How a volley of assertions that this Democratic Party on the eve of the election was too “radical”---threatening to turn this country into a socialist republic---could stick, speaks volumes about how the social media out-of-context snippet has been able to lodge itself into the minds of so many Americans.

If the institutional largesse only existed that would permit a debate about what socialism is, or what the substantive policies are that these elite co-caretakers of the one-Party state espouse! But the attraction to symbols, the attachment to simplistic substitutes, is mostly what drives the process in the absence of options that can lead to ideological clarity and specific improvements in people’s lives. This election’s outcomes are the result of the compounding of false claims, irrational attractions, and wrong choices about wrong candidates. They reveal



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a profound desire for content that couldn't be delivered. Was the election then symbolically nullified since too many apparently voted against their true interests?

But who can reliably say what someone's true interests are? What knowledge produces the assurance that any one person or group has chosen the correct path or articulated the truthful course? Don't people know what they want?

Any number of research-spawned angles can extrapolate motives and consistent narratives to separate the fantasy---the false consciousness---from the substance. The concept of false consciousness implies wrongness, that the perp utters or supports something that is unsustainable from one of these angles. But choices can express degrees of enlightenment and wrong-headedness, be functional for someone even if they don't have a full mastery of options and consequences, and potentially lead to at least some emotional satisfaction and even truth for them. Granted, an eruption of irrational forces can trump wizened urges, the basis for Wilhelm Reich's treatise on how German citizens ravaged by the Depression voted for the Nazis, the Party least likely to realize their interests (*The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, 1933).

Perhaps this is the same eruption we've witnessed in the red states over the past several years where the inequality gap is wider than in the blue states, but voters continue to legitimize the Republican Party's policies that sustain it.

Given limited choices, and confusing and even polarizing interpretations---framings---by intellectual gatekeepers, people will latch onto symbols. Like MAGA (Make America Great Again). Bonding with others in large groups who've not experienced a great deal of improvement in their lives---and can expect little help from the Democrats---can produce a libidinal charge, a rush of belongingness that transcends friction and difference. Such symbols are real for many who might even have enough truck with the relevant facts to evaluate how flimsy this slogan is. Most beings are a mesh of dispositions, the potential to express the insightful and the frightful, or even both together in some symptom that taxes the clinical mind.

No doubt there are some voters who appear lost in a sea of falsity and fakery, and there's no shortage of critics who conflate this malady with Trump's supporters. But others voted for specific reasons, aligning issues with interests, so passionate about their decision that Trump's

personal transgressions were erased from consciousness.

Iowa voters strongly supported Trump, especially in rural areas where the per capita income is lower than in the cities, and in counties that went big for Obama in 2008 and 2012. This shattered the image of the Republican Party, according to Chris McGreal, as a country club grouping. He contends this was not simply an example of successful manipulation by a false Republican populism, however. Farmers, hit hard in recent years economically, benefited significantly from Trump's policies on trade, particularly with China, getting grants the administration "claimed" were generated through tariffs on imports. Many voters felt abandoned and talked down to by the Democrats who treated them like gun-toting hicks. And they were uneasy about the riot-spawned violence. Interestingly, there was wide support among voters for the issues that Black Lives Matter expressed until the violence, and they felt the Democrats did little to authoritatively respond and explain it, mostly letting it happen and blaming Trump (Chris McGreal, "How Did Trump Manage To Boost His Support Among Rural Americans?" *The Guardian*, 11/20/2020).

The Democrats missed the opportunity to craft saner policies on trade. And with respect to the riots, since the violence hardly came from one source, they could've delivered a palatable version of the complex narrative unfolding over the course of the past several months to allay the fears of those threatened and expose their manipulation.

Did voters of color who bolted for Trump match their interests, or get befuddled by the messages? How could so many of those Trump was persistently accused of being racist toward for most of the year finally support him? Did they mistrust the accusers, or disregard the issue of color entirely? Obviously, the Democrats attracted large numbers of these voters, but in a climate of critical overkill against Trump this increment of support beyond 2016 sticks out.

Trump's toxic rhetoric against immigrants---or rather migrants and refugees, aspiring to become legal---was sufficient to turn many against him with charges of racism. But the ICE family separation policy notwithstanding, his record on deportations was less extreme than Obama's. Many voters surely saw through this contradiction and ignored the rhetoric. But many also were not sympathetic with the Democrats' open borders argument, feeling that they had worked hard to secure their legal status here and new arrivals were being advanced beyond the conven-

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tional process and often given benefits many of them, or even long-standing citizens, had not been given.

But there are other reasons why immigrants, particularly Hispanics and Asians, voted for Trump and the Republicans. They see themselves, according to Jay Caspian Kang, as living lives that have little to do with America's traditional racial hierarchy and were not receptive to the "antiracist and antixenophobic messaging" that came from the Democratic Party ("People of Color' Do Not Belong to the Democratic Party," *New York Times*, 11/20/2020)

Not that they're unsympathetic with antiracism--many having been victims of racism themselves---but in building their communities successfully from the bottom up they're demonstrating how the collective will can mitigate the effects of racism. Hence the sentiments in these communities against affirmative action. There is sympathy, Kang contends, for a reaching-out by either the Democrats or Republicans that attempts to build a multi-racial coalition that clarifies the common interests as well as the bases for division between groups, including lower class whites, a strategy that could help lift all together. The Republicans offered the semblance of doing so, whereas the Democrats mostly refused, endorsing the black-white binary.

One issue that can help focus these common interests is class. While not all cultures of color are equal, each has its own strikingly unequal hierarchy. In fact, this inequality has spiked in the past few decades in these cultures, trending in the same direction as the society overall. But the lens of class is mostly ignored, especially when it comes to analyzing exit poll data. The Asian and Hispanic

communities have improved their aggregate numbers in relation to the white majority as an elite, wealthy class has mushroomed in each. The black community hasn't favored as well in the aggregate, but there have been advances within its upper tiers---more later---that predate the Black Lives Matter engineered protests from earlier this year.

White wealth is greater in the aggregate---when factoring its percentage of the population---than that in all the other racial/ethnic groups. But despite these different overall levels, each racial group has basically the same level of inequality. According to the People's Policy Project, for each group the top 10% owns about 75% of the total wealth, while the bottom half owns virtually none of it. In between there is a modest "middle class" that owns the remaining 25%. Looking at the groups' interrelationship, we see that 88.5% of the top 10% of Americans are white and this segment owns over 77% of all the wealth. The propertyless lower class, which makes up the bottom half of the country, is disproportionately nonwhite but also thoroughly multi-racial with whites making up the slight majority at 55% (Matt Bruenig, "Wealth Inequality Across Class And Race," 3/5/2020).

Looking at race with a class lens reveals that skin color is not the whole picture. It's hard to imagine propertyless whites doing damage to people of color when they have no power to exert. The perpetrators of racism---as opposed to mere slurs---will likely be those in the upper tier of wealth accumulation who command the most influence to negatively impact lives for prejudicial reasons. And these perps can be nonwhites as well. We can say then that



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systemic classism operates across the racial/ethnic field. And class is a corrective to the tendency by politicians to compare aggregate data between groups, which can distort the real picture. Saying that people of color are many more times likely to die from Covid compared to whites, for example, which certainly contains truth, will be further from this truth when different class segments are isolated for analysis. One of the major contributors to Covid is obesity, which closely correlates with the lack of access to good health care, a malady that strikes those in all the lower classes disproportionately.

The extreme hierarchy of wealth and privilege in all ethnic groups constitutes a powerful fascism, one whose exclusion of so many from the avenues of success becomes a super-breeder of hostility and division that prevents the coming-together that the nation needs so badly to move beyond Trumpism. The propertyless fixated on their own survival become resentful of their masters at the top of the hierarchy, as well as those from other groups, especially whites who possess such a large portion of wealth. Every fascist order marginalizes some group and the propertyless are clearly that here. But it raises the question of what a minority is. The success of diversity policies targeted mostly at the top tier over the course of the past few decades have at least bronzed the worker mix, helped along in the wake of this past year's rise in antiracism consciousness. Though Trump drew increased support from lower income populations, as mentioned, his spike among minority groups will surely reveal that many of its members are from the upper tier. Minorities are defined culturally as Democratic liberal policies have pushed for more inclusion of the diverse. A reconfiguration, where minorities are defined economically, will help to build a multi-racial coalition that forces the propertyless in all groups to see their common interests. How did MLK's ideas get lost?

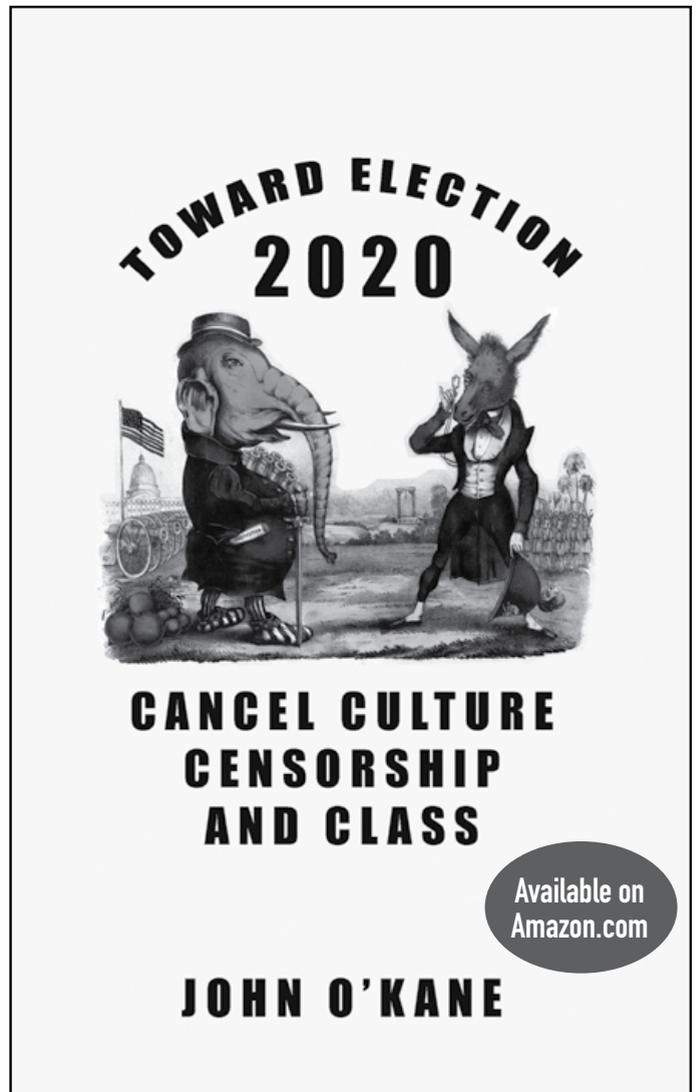
The effect of the absence of a class perspective is especially consequential for how the resources meant to combat black inequality are being channeled. Billions are being pledged by major corporations to support the cause with the bulk earmarked for advancing those aspiring to pursue the college course. Bank of America is granting multi-millions to the LA Community College District to fast-track blacks through the educational process and into the corporate hierarchy. An enlightening gesture indeed, yet B of A was one of the banking perps responsible prior to the Great Recession of 2008 for redlining blacks from mortgages---or giving them discriminatory mortgages guaranteed to fail---and then robo-foreclosing them without refinancing options.

More enlightened policies could have forestalled the spike in inequality in the aftermath of this economic catastrophe, keeping capital in the hands of those most in need. This could've helped alleviate the excess burden of the demand for college as the answer to catalyze the American Dream for blacks. In fact, why are we not seeing more support for the vocational track and programs that can help lift those who will never go to college, so they won't languish in minimum wage jobs? This under-targeted culture is the main locus of those who indeed bear the traces

of deprivation from the legacy of slavery. More attention to this sector can fast-track results for improving inequality, bridge more of the gap between them and upwardly mobile black men. Census data shows that slightly more than one-in-five---about 2.5 million---black men ages 18 to 64 have made it into the upper third of the income distribution (Bradford Wilcox et al, "2.5 Million Black Men Are in the Upper Class," Institute for Family Studies, 7/23/2019). Realistically this kind of upward movement will reach a limit, so the expansion of opportunity for the bulk of those with no college aspirations will help to ballast the system.

If systemic classism is operative in all groups---along with systemic racism---then the goal should be to expose how it works and use this knowledge to help more citizens of any color to break through its barriers and escape the propertyless category. This will help energize the repressed progressive agenda and align voters' interests with some semblance of rationality, hopefully leading to the transcendence of the one-Party system.

John O'Kane's recent book is, *Toward Election 2020: Cancel Culture, Censorship and Class. A Venice Quintet* (Wapshott Press) will be published in May.





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TACKLING THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND UNEMPLOYMENT CRISES

ELLEN BROWN

Millions of Americans have joined the ranks of the unemployed, and government relief checks and savings are running out; meanwhile, the country still needs trillions of dollars in infrastructure. Putting the unemployed to work on those infrastructure projects seems an obvious solution, especially given that the \$600 or \$700 stimulus checks Congress is planning on issuing will do little to address the growing crisis. Various plans for solving the infrastructure crisis involving public-private partnerships have been proposed, but they'll invariably result in private investors reaping the profits while the public bears the costs and liabilities. We have relied for too long on private, often global, capital, while the Chinese run circles around us building infrastructure with credit simply created on the books of their government-owned banks.

Earlier publicly-owned U.S. national banks and U.S. Treasuries pulled off similar feats, using what Sen. Henry Clay, U.S. statesman from 1806 to 1852, named the "American System" – funding national production simply with "sovereign" money and credit. They included the First (1791-1811) and Second (1816-1836) Banks of the United States, President Lincoln's federal treasury and banking system, and President Franklin Roosevelt's Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) (1932-1957). Chester Morrill, former Secretary of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, wrote of the RFC:

It became apparent almost immediately, to many Congressmen and Senators, that here was a device which would enable them to provide for activities that they

favored for which government funds would be required, but without any apparent increase in appropriations. . . . There need be no more appropriations and its activities could be enlarged indefinitely, as they were, almost to fantastic proportions.

Even the Federal Reserve with its "quantitative easing" cannot fund infrastructure without driving up federal expenditures or debt, at least without changes to the Federal Reserve Act. The Fed is not allowed to spend money directly into the economy or to lend directly to Congress. It must go through the private banking system and its "primary dealers." The Fed can create and pay only with "reserves" credited to the reserve accounts of banks. These reserves are a completely separate system from the deposits circulating in the real producer/consumer economy; and those deposits are chiefly created by banks when they make loans. (See the Bank of England's 2014 quarterly

report.) New liquidity gets into the real economy when banks make loans to local businesses and individuals; and in risky environments like that today, banks are not lending adequately even with massive reserves on their books.

A publicly-owned national infrastructure bank, on the other hand, would be mandated to lend into the real economy; and if the loans were of the "self funding" sort characterizing most infrastructure projects (generating fees to pay off the loans), they would be repaid, canceling out the debt by which the money was created. That is how China built 12,000 miles of high-speed rail in a decade: credit created on the books of government-owned banks was advanced to pay

for workers and materials, and the loans were repaid with profits from passenger fees.

Unlike the QE pumped into financial markets, which creates asset bubbles in stocks and housing, this sort of public credit mechanism is not inflationary. Credit money advanced for productive purposes balances the circulating money supply with new goods and services in the real economy. Supply and demand rise together, keeping prices stable. China increased its money supply by nearly 1800% over 24 years (from 1996 to 2020) without driving up price inflation, by increasing GDP in step with the money supply.

HR 6422, The National Infrastructure Bank Act of 2020

A promising new bill for a national infrastructure bank modeled on the RFC and the American System, H.R.

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6422, was filed by Rep. Danny Davis, D-Ill., in March. The National Infrastructure Bank of 2020 (NIB) is projected to create \$4 trillion or more in bank credit money to rebuild the nation's rusting bridges, roads, and power grid; relieve traffic congestion; and provide clean air and water, new schools, high-speed rail and affordable housing. It will do this while generating up to 25 million jobs paying union-level wages. The bill would provide flexible, lowest-cost financing to state and local governments and projects a net profit to the federal government of \$80 billion per year. The bill also provides for substantial investment in "disadvantaged communities," those defined by persistent poverty.

The NIB is designed to be a true depository bank, giving it the perks of those institutions for leverage and liquidity, including the ability to borrow at the Fed's discount window without penalty at 0.25% interest (almost interest-free). According to Alphecca Muttardy, a former macroeconomist for the International Monetary Fund and chief economist on the 2020 NIB team, the NIB will create the \$4 trillion it lends simply as deposits on its books, as the Bank of England attests all depository banks do. For liquidity to cover withdrawals, the NIB can either borrow from the Fed at 0.25% or issue and sell bonds.

Modeled on its American System predecessors, the NIB will be capitalized with existing federal government debt. According to the summary on the NIB Coalition website:

The NIB would be capitalized by purchasing up to \$500 billion in existing Treasury bonds held by the private sector (e.g., in pension and other savings funds), in exchange for an equivalent in shares of preferred [non-voting] stock in the NIB. The exchange would take place via a sales contract with the NIB/Federal Government that guarantees a preferred stock dividend of 2% more than private-holders currently earn on their Treasuries. The contract would form a binding obligation to provide the incremental 2%, or about \$10 billion per year, from the Budget. While temporarily appearing as mandatory spending under the Budget, the \$10 billion per year would ultimately be returned as a dividend paid to government from the NIB's earnings stream.

Since the federal government will be paying the interest on the bonds, the NIB needs to come up with only the 2% dividend to entice investors. The proposal is to make infrastructure loans at a very modest 2%, substantially lower than the rates now available to the state and local governments that create most of the nation's infrastructure. At a 10% capital requirement, the bonds can capitalize ten times their value in loans. The return will thus be 20% on a 2% dividend outlay from the NIB, for a net return on investment of 18% less operating costs. The U.S. Treasury will also be asked to deposit Treasury bonds with the bank as an "on-call" subscriber.

The American System: Sovereign Money and Credit

U.S. precedents for funding internal improvements with "sovereign credit" – credit issued by the national government rather than borrowed from the private banking system – go back to the American colonists' paper

scrip, colonial Pennsylvania's "land bank", and the First U.S. Bank of Alexander Hamilton, the first U.S. Treasury Secretary. Hamilton proposed to achieve the constitutional ideal of "promoting the general welfare" by nurturing the country's fledgling industries with federal subsidies for roads, canals, and other internal improvements; protective measures such as tariffs; and easy credit provided through a national bank. Production and the money to finance it would all be kept "in house," without incurring debt to foreign financiers. The national bank would promote a single currency, making trade easier, and would issue loans in the form of "sovereign credit."

Senator Henry Clay called this model the "American System" to distinguish it from the "British System" that left the market to the "invisible hand" of "free trade," allowing big monopolies to gobble up small entrepreneurs, and foreign bankers and industrialists to exploit the country's labor and materials. After the charter for the First US Bank expired in 1811, Congress created the Second Bank of the United States in 1816 on the American system model.

In 1836, Pres. Andrew Jackson shut down the Second U.S. Bank due to perceived corruption, leaving the country with no national currency and precipitating a recession. "Wildcat" banks issued their own banknotes – promissory notes allegedly backed by gold. But the banks often lacked the gold necessary to redeem the notes, and the era was beset with bank runs and banking crises.

Abraham Lincoln's economic advisor was Henry Carey, the son of Matthew Carey, a well-known printer and publisher who had been tutored by Benjamin Franklin and had tutored Henry Clay. Henry Carey proposed creating an independent national currency that was non-exportable, one that would remain at home to do the country's own work. He advocated a currency founded on "national credit," something he defined as "a national system based entirely on the credit of the government with the people, not liable to interference from abroad." It would simply be a paper unit of account that tallied work performed and goods delivered.

On that model, in 1862 Abraham Lincoln issued U.S. Notes or Greenbacks directly from the U.S. Treasury, allowing Lincoln's government not only to avoid an exorbitant debt to British bankers and win the Civil War, but to fund major economic development, including tying the country together with the transcontinental railroad – an investment that actually turned a profit for the government.

After Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, the Greenback program was discontinued; but Lincoln's government also passed the National Bank Act of 1863, supplemented by the National Bank Act of 1864. Originally known as the National Currency Act, its stated purpose was to stabilize the banking system by eradicating the problem of notes issued by multiple banks circulating at the same time. A single banker-issued national currency was created through chartered national banks, which could issue notes backed by the U.S. Treasury in a quantity proportional to the bank's level of capital (cash and federal bonds) deposited with the Comptroller of the Currency.

From Roosevelt’s Reconstruction Finance Corporation (1932-57) to HR 6422

The American president dealing with an economic situation most closely resembling that today, however, was Franklin D. Roosevelt. America’s 32nd president resolved massive unemployment and infrastructure problems by greatly expanding the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) set up by his predecessor Herbert Hoover. The RFC was a remarkable publicly-owned credit machine that allowed the government to finance the New Deal and World War II without turning to Congress or the taxpayers for appropriations. The RFC was not called an infrastructure bank and was not even a bank, but it served the same basic functions. It was continually enlarged and modified by Pres. Roosevelt to meet the crisis of the times until it became America’s largest corporation and the world’s largest financial organization. Its semi-independent status let it work quickly, allowing New Deal agencies to be financed as the need arose. According to Encyclopedia.com:

The RFC—by far the most influential of New Deal agencies—was an institution designed to save capitalism from the ravages of the Great Depression. Through the RFC, Roosevelt and the New Deal handed over \$10 billion to tens of thousands of private businesses, keeping them afloat when they would otherwise have gone under

A similar arrangement could save local economies from the ravages of the global shutdowns today.

The Banking Acts of 1932 provided the RFC with capital stock of \$500 million and the authority to extend credit up to \$1.5 billion (subsequently increased several times). The initial capital came from a stock sale to the U.S. Treasury. With those modest resources, from 1932 to 1957 the RFC loaned or invested more than \$40 billion. A small part of this came from its initial capitalization. The rest was financed with bonds sold to the Treasury, some of which were then sold to the public. The RFC ended up borrowing a total of \$51.3 billion from the Treasury and \$3.1 billion from the public.

Thus the Treasury was the lender, not the borrower, in this arrangement. As the self-funding loans were repaid, so were the bonds that were sold to the Treasury, leaving the RFC with a net profit. The RFC was the lender for thousands of infrastructure and small business projects that revitalized the economy, and these loans produced a total net income of over \$690 million on the RFC’s “normal” lending functions (omitting such things as extraordinary grants for wartime). The RFC financed roads, bridges, dams, post offices, universities, electrical power, mortgages, farms, and much more—all while generating income for the government.

HR 6422 proposes to mimic this feat. The National Infrastructure Bank of 2020 can rebuild crumbling infrastructure across America, pushing up long-term growth, not only without driving up taxes or the federal debt, but without hyperinflating the money supply or generating financial asset bubbles. The NIB has growing support across the country from labor leaders, elected officials, and grassroots organizations. It can generate real wealth in the

form of upgraded infrastructure and increased employment as well as federal and local taxes and GDP, paying for itself several times over without additional outlays from the federal government. With official unemployment at nearly double what it was a year ago and an economic crisis unlike the U.S. has seen in nearly a century, the NIB can trigger the sort of “economic miracle” the country desperately needs.

Ellen Brown is an attorney, chair of the Public Banking Institute, and author of thirteen books, including *Web of Debt*, *The Public Bank Solution*, and *Banking on the People*. EllenBrown.com.

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THE ECONOMY ISN'T WORKING

ROBERT FREEMAN

The reason everybody is so angst-ridden about the economy is because we all have the wrong idea about what it is supposed to do and how it's supposed to work.

Most of us have a quaint, 19th century idea about free markets and all that up-by-the-bootstraps Horatio Alger stuff. You know, work hard, play by the rules, keep your nose clean, and you'll do well. That is certainly the cultural myth our society bathes us in.

But that's not how things actually work. It's the dissonance between how we imagine things work and how they really work that causes our perplexity and angst, and rage. It is also that dissonance that has been so deftly manipulated by Donald Trump and given rise to Trumpism.

Forty years ago, around 1980, the uber-wealthy decided they wanted to get their money out of the economy. There was too much political turmoil (Vietnam, Watergate), too much economic turbulence (Arab oil embargos, stagflation), and too high of a cost of production (high wages, environmental and labor protections).

They wanted to take their money somewhere where they could pay people 1/20th what they paid here (less than \$1 an hour), where there were no environmental or labor laws, where the workforce was plentiful, hungry, and docile, and where politicians could be bought cheap. So, they engineered a controlled demolition of the U.S. economy. The plan had two elements.

In the first part, they began systematically de-industrializing what had been the mightiest economy in the history of the world—the same economy that had almost single-handedly won World War II, the greatest industrial enterprise ever undertaken. They dismantled tens of thousands of factories, creating what became known as the “Rust Belt.” They literally sent factory designs to east Asia, rebuilt them, and when they were ready to go, flipped the switch, shut down here, and opened up there. The consequences were devastating.

Tens of millions of white, working-class factory workers were put out of work, losing their high-paying jobs. Forever. With nothing to replace them. Major cities became hollowed out hulks of a once-glorious industrial past, bywords for decline. Think Detroit, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Buffalo, Toledo, and more. The data tell the story.

In 1980, manufacturing accounted for about 22% of the U.S. economy. By 2012, just 30 years later, it contributed only 12%, an astonishingly rapid decline in historical terms, effectively a controlled demolition. The U.S. trade deficit, where we buy more from other countries than we sell, went from \$19 billion in 1980—pretty close to a rounding error—to what looks to be almost \$1 trillion this year. That is money that is sent directly out of the country to buy other countries' goods. \$1 trillion.

The second element of the controlled demolition of the economy was that the U.S. embarked on a plan to shift massive shares of U.S. income and wealth from the working and middle classes to the already wealthy. This is what was called “supply side economics.” It was

Ronald Reagan's signature economic policy when he ran for president in 1980.

The mythical story was that if we all gave more of our money to the already wealthy, they would invest it for us and the resulting economic boom would more than pay back the transfer, even after taxes and inflation. It sounded too good to be true. It was.

Taxes on the highest income brackets were lowered from 71% to 38%, essentially cut in half. Importantly, there was no requirement that the beneficiaries actually invest their new-found gains in the U.S. So, they didn't. They invested them in the those east-Asian countries that were the beneficiaries of the deindustrialization

discussed above. What happened?

In the first full year under Reagan's plan, the economy shrunk by 2.1%, the greatest shrinkage since the Great Depression. Factory workers were out of work, so they weren't paying taxes. And, because the wealthy were paying so much fewer taxes, the government didn't have enough income to cover its expenses. It had to make up the difference by borrowing. That is what is called a “budget deficit.”

Jimmy Carter's last budget deficit was \$78 billion. Reagan's first full-year budget deficit, after his supply side tax cuts were put in place, was \$128 billion,

Today, average working-class wages, adjusted for taxes and inflation, are the same as they were in the 1970s.

– Robert Freeman

a 64% increase. The next year, 1983, the deficit exploded again, to \$208 billion, another 63% increase. By 1992, when Reagan's vice president, George H.W. Bush finished office, the deficits were running \$300 billion a year.

Of course, annual deficits accumulate into the national debt. When Reagan took office in 1981, the national debt (the accumulation of all the annual deficits since the country began) was \$1 trillion. In 1993, just 12 years later, when George H.W. Bush left office, it was \$4 trillion. Think about that.

Over 204 years, paying off the costs of the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Civil War, building out the entire continent, fighting World War I, surviving the Great Depression, fighting and winning World War II, and winning the better part of the Cold War, the country only had to borrow \$1 trillion. Then, in the next 12 years, years of peace and prosperity, that debt quadrupled, to \$4 trillion.

These deficits and this debt benefit the very wealthy, because it is they who fund them, who loan the money to the government, at interest, that it has to borrow because it can't pay its bills from the taxes it's no longer bringing in. As with the deindustrializing of the economy, this was exactly the plan: to benefit the wealthiest people in the world.

Today, average working-class wages, adjusted for taxes and inflation, are the same as they were in the 1970s. For a stark comparison, average incomes in China are up more than 10 FOLD over the same period. This is why the U.S. has massive civil tension among its people and record distrust of the government while the people of China are ferociously loyal to their government.

The annual trade deficit—that money we ship out of the country to buy things we don't make anymore—is on track to exceed \$1 trillion this year. That's \$1 trillion taken straight off the top of what would otherwise be available national income, and shipped abroad. The national debt has exploded beyond belief, to over \$27 trillion. This year's increment, the annual budget deficit, will exceed \$4 trillion. That's four times as much as was incurred in the first 204 years of the country, combined. This is not a picture of economic vibrancy.

For the past forty years, the government has had to run average budget deficits of \$675 billion a year just to keep the holes in the economy plugged. Otherwise, it would have fallen into recession, or depression. And the borrowing is going vertical.

This is a tremendous boon to the very wealthy because, as mentioned above, it is they who loan the government all that money. And importantly, they do so at higher interest rates because when anything is in higher demand, in this case, borrowed money, its price goes up. The price of borrowed money is the interest rate. But wait, it gets better—or worse—depending on whether you are a borrower or a lender.

Higher interest rates in one part of the economy mean higher rates in all of the economy, because the pool of loanable funds is essentially the same pool for all. That means that when budget deficits rise, the interest rates on

mortgages, credit cards, automobiles, student loans—anything bought on borrowed money—goes up, too. This is a stealth way for the government to transfer still more money to the already wealthy, but with the appearance that it's an arms-length private transaction, between borrowers and lenders, involving interest rates. What does all of this add up to?

For the four decades between 1940 and 1980, the share of national income that went to the top 10% of income earners was remarkably stable, around 34%. This included those decades that are generally regarded as “the golden age of capitalism.”

But in the four decades since 1980, the share of the same top 10% has skyrocketed to 47%, a breathtaking upward shift in national income to those who are already the richest. The upward distribution of wealth over the same period is actually even greater.

It's a cliché, but like so many clichés, it is grounded in reality. The rich are getting richer and everyone else is getting poorer. That is exactly the plan, and the plan is working exactly as intended. In fact, it is accelerating, as every new crisis becomes a new pretext for ladling more and more and more of the nation's wealth into the coffers of the already wealthy.

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Inequality is reaching feudal proportions, where very few own almost everything, and everyone else is crushed under the wheel of engineered destitution. This directly degrades democracy, because since it costs so much to run for office, office seekers pay attention to those who can write big checks. Have you written a \$50,000 check to an office seeker lately? No? Again, that is exactly the plan. They don't want to hear from you because you can't help fund their expensive campaigns. But write a big check and you'd be amazed at how fast the doors fly open.

Two last, quick words on the politics of this all. Donald Trump has been stunningly successful for the very wealthy which is part of the reason they have backed him. He passed massive tax cuts that accelerated the upward transfer of wealth. But that is actually the lesser part of what makes him so valuable to the wealthy.

The far greater part is that he has re-directed the rage of the dispossessed, downwardly-mobile working class from the economic system that has caused their distress—those intentional policies mentioned above—to the subsidiary factor of race. This has shielded the wealthy from being held accountable for having engineered and built an economy that has intentionally shafted the vast majority of its own citizens.

The mainstream media has been altogether complicit in this deception, focusing, laser-like, on the racist dimensions of Trump's issuances, but almost never on the much more legitimate economic origins of his base's rage. This is perfectly understandable because the mainstream media is owned by the very wealthy. They use it to condition cultural awareness of vital issues in ways

that benefit them, like when they laundered the idiocy of supply side economics as some kind of divination come down from the mountain on stone tablets that would save the country.

The second political point is that we would be worse than naïve, even worse than stupid if we imagine that Joe Biden is going to do anything at all about this. We would be deceitful. Biden is one of the doyens, the stewards, the consiglieres of the neo-liberal order described here. He has spent almost five decades servicing the interests of the very wealthy who put him in power and kept him there and recalled him to service when it became apparent that Trump's utility had been exhausted. They didn't use to call him "The Senator from MasterCard" for nothing.

Biden is already discovering that there's not enough in the coffer to afford the kind of stimulus needed to simply feed people, to keep them housed, to help small businesses stay alive, to help schools reopen. But watch, he'll find plenty of money for weapons makers, for the Federal Reserve to buy the garbage debt of over-leveraged corporations, money for hospital chains and pharmaceutical companies, and for banks, and for all the members of the neo-feudal aristocracy that he helped build and who are our new masters!

Robert Freeman is the author of *The Interwar Years*, *The Vietnam War*, and other titles. He is also the founder of The Global Uplift Project which builds small-scale infrastructure projects in the developing world to improve humanity's capacity for self-development. He writes in *Common Dreams* and other publications.

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EFFECTS OF ENHANCED UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

J O H N M I L L E R

A Republican cabal in the U.S. Senate has pledged to never renew the weekly \$600 unemployment bonus that offered a lifeline to more than 25 million Americans as they weathered the economic devastation of the Covid-19 crisis. In the words of Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, the only way an extension of the \$600 benefit would make it through the Senate is “over my dead body.” The House of Representatives passed the extension of the \$600 benefit in May (as part of the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Solutions, or HEROES, Act).

Republican opposition to \$600 a week in enhanced unemployment benefits is fueled by their unwillingness to ease the draconian effects of the false choice between working and not working when there is no job to be had, and reinforced by the supposed “common sense” propagated by the *Wall Street Journal* editors, among others.

This is all pretty rich, especially coming from Graham, a senator who voted to raise his own salary three times (and who currently receives an annual salary of \$174,000) and from the editors of the *Wall Street Journal*, who are far removed from the everyday world of Main Street common sense. The editors’ “bedtime story”—to use a phrase from former Senior Advisor to the Treasury Department Ernie Tedeschi—makes little sense in an economy mired in the worst economic collapse since the Great Depression of the 1930s. And the loss of much-needed benefits only adds to the sleepless nights of those who are suffering the worst.

Overwhelming evidence supports quite a different bedtime story—one that calls for far more humane unemployment policies.

What Republican Nightmares Are Made Of

It is true. Many of the unemployed workers who received an extra \$600 a week through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which was passed by Congress in March 2020, received more money than they had earned while working. Peter Ganong and two other University of Chicago economists found that was the case for about three-quarters (76%) of workers receiving weekly \$600 payments and full state unemployment compensation from April through July. But Marokey Sawo and Michelle Evermore of the National Employment Law Project calculated that for just 40% of unemployed workers their benefits were greater than their previous total compensation (the sum of their wages and benefits). The intent of the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program was to provide unemployment benefits that would fully replace the missing wages of unemployed workers. State unemployment compensation typically replaces about 40% to 45% of an unemployed worker’s prior earnings, though benefits vary from state to state. With state employment agencies not up to the task of determining and distributing

benefits that would match an unemployed worker’s lost wages, Congress settled on adding a fixed benefit of \$600 a week. The \$600 weekly bonus payment (along with regular unemployment insurance benefits) would just replace the median weekly pay of U.S. workers, which is around \$1,000. But the weekly \$600 payment also pushed the total benefits of lower-income workers above their previous wages (or replaced more than 100% of their wages).

The FPUC benefits were critical to the survival of a range of workers. While the bulk of the \$600 bonus went to unemployed workers receiving state unemployment benefits, workers who had exhausted

their state unemployment benefits also received FPUC payments. So, too, did business owners and the self-employed, who received additional assistance from other CARES Act programs. But the \$600 weekly FPUC payments ceased at the end of July and have yet to be renewed.

At Odds with the Evidence

The study conducted by the Yale economists that caught the attention of the *Wall Street Journal* editors is more credible than they suggest. The economists’ conclusion that enhanced unemployment benefits have not

**The major cause
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left jobs unfilled.**

– John Miller

led to fewer people looking for work has not been “contradicted by other data” as the editors claim. Multiple studies, using a variety of data sets, have confirmed that enhanced unemployment benefits, even those that exceeded the previous wages of the recipient, have not led to a decrease in the number of people looking for work, or increased the number of the unemployed. (Vice Chair of the Congressional Joint Economic Committee (JEC), Representative Don Beyer of Virginia, has summarized five of these studies, including the Yale Study, on the JEC website, jec.senate.gov.)

Let’s look at a few of these studies, beginning with the Yale Study. Economists Dana Scott and Joseph Atlonji and several of their colleagues examined the weekly data from Homebase, a scheduling and timesheet system used by restaurants, bars, retail stores, and other service-sector businesses. They conclude that “the expansion in UI [Unemployment Insurance] replacement rates did not increase layoffs at the outset of the pandemic or discourage workers from returning to their jobs over time.” The *Wall Street Journal* editors have clearly misread the Yale study, for the authors never claimed that their findings hold in all economic settings. The Yale authors emphasize that, “our results do not speak to the disemployment effects of UI generosity during more normal times, which is the subject of a vast literature.”

In another study, Ernie Tedeschi, now Managing Director and Policy Economist at Evercore ISI, a financial consulting firm, examined Current Population Survey data (which is a key source for labor force statistics) for evidence that the effects of the ratio of unemployment

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benefits to previous wages had affected the likelihood that workers left a job or accepted a new one. He found no such evidence. Like the authors of the Yale Study, Tedeschi makes clear that his results are specific to the pandemic economy. He writes: “If the economy were at full employment, if there was no pandemic, and if the FPUC were permanent rather than a temporary component of the UI system, I’d expect an effect.”

Finally, Ioana Marinescu, an economist at the University of Pennsylvania, and her co-authors, examined data on job listings and applications from the online platform Glassdoor from January to June 2020. They found that, after the unemployment bonus began in March, job applications stayed “relatively stable,” job openings continued to decrease, and the ratio of applications per vacancy rose. They concluded that, “Employers who rely on online applications are not experiencing increased difficulties in finding applicants for their jobs after the CARES Act, which was a key concern with increasing benefits by \$600 a week.”

An Alternative Bedtime Story

Our alternative bedtime story begins this way: No matter how hard they search, unemployed workers can’t find jobs that don’t exist. The major cause of today’s high unemployment is the lack of jobs, not workers who have stopped searching for work and have left jobs unfilled. By the end of July, there were still 11.1 million fewer jobs in the U.S. economy than there had been prior to the pandemic in January 2020.

Renewing the FPUC supplemental unemployment benefits would boost spending and create jobs. Economist Mark Zandi from Moody’s Analytics estimates that \$1 of renewed unemployment benefits would increase economic output by \$1.64—a multiplier effect or bang for the buck that exceeds that of most forms of government spending. Harvard economists Marco Di Maggio and Amir Kerman calculate an even bigger effect, a \$1.90 increase in output for each dollar of additional unemployment benefits. Extending the \$600 a week enhanced benefit would have protected 1.7 to 2.8 million jobs and lowered the unemployment rate by between 1.1 and 1.8 percentage points, according to rough estimates from the JEC. Workers will continue to return to work even if their unemployment

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benefits with the \$600 a week FPUC supplement exceeds their previous wages. Tedeschi found that 70% of the unemployment insurance recipients who returned to work in June had been receiving unemployment benefits that were greater than their prior wages.

It makes sense, daresay, common sense: A job, even in today's economy, is more secure than enhanced unemployment benefits, and over time will pay more than unemployment insurance benefits. State unemployment benefits expire in less than a year, and in most states they expire within 39 weeks. Our bedtime story, unlike the *Wall Street Journal* editors' "common sense," is consistent with the available evidence. And it supports generous unemployment insurance benefits that will contribute to a more robust economic recovery and actually help people get a good night's sleep.

Sources: Dana Scott and Joseph Altonji et al., "Employment Effects of Unemployment Insurance Generosity During the Pandemic," Yale University, July 14, 2020; Arindrajit Dube, "The Impact of the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation on Employment: Evidence from the Household Pulse Survey," Working Paper, July 31, 2020; Ioana Elena Marinescu, Daphné Skandalis, and Daniel Zhao, "Job search, job posting and unemployment insurance during the COVID-19 crisis," Social Science Research Network, July 20, 2020; Alexander W. Bartik et al., "Measuring the labor market at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis," NBER Working Paper No. 27613, July 2020; Ernie Tedeschi, "A short thread on the emergency \$600 per week unemployment insurance payment, more formally known as Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC)," July 26, 2020 (twitter.com/ernietedeschi); Peter Ganong, et al., "US Unemployment Insurance Replacement Rates During the Pandemic," Becker Friedman Institute, University of Chicago, August 24, 2020; Marokey Sawo and Michele Evermore, "Unemployed Workers and Benefit 'Replacement Rate,'" National Employment Law Project and The Groundwork Collaborative, August 2020; Kate Davidson, "Is \$600 a Week in Extra Unemployment Aid Detering People From Seeking Work?," *Wall Street Journal*, July 29, 2020 ([wsj.com](https://www.wsj.com)); Patricia Cohen, "Do Jobless Benefits Deter Workers? Some Employers Say Yes. Studies Don't," *New York*

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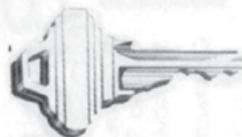
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TOM VILSACK IS EVERYTHING THAT'S WRONG WITH THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

CLAIRE KELLOWAY

After some public tokenizing and horse trading, President-elect Joe Biden's transition team crowned dairy industry lobbyist and former Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to lead the Department of Agriculture. Vilsack won out over House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn's pick, Rep. Marcia Fudge, who was also backed by progressives. Whereas Fudge represented an opportunity to unite the USDA's rural and urban constituents and address the agency's long history of racial discrimination, Vilsack is a rerun of pro-corporate policies that continue to drive rural communities away from the Democratic Party.

The secretary of agriculture is an underrated and important Cabinet member whose work intersects with climate change, workers' safety, racial justice, antitrust, rural development, and of course, feeding the country.

The Covid-19 pandemic put America's fragile and destructive food system on display. Massive plant closures threatened the food supply, front-line food workers fell sick and died in large (and growing) numbers, and nearly 1 in 4 households experienced food insecurity. The next agriculture secretary has an unprecedented moment to enact much needed systemic changes in how we grow and distribute food.

If Vilsack repeats his Obama-era strategy, we won't see that progress. This is because Vilsack doesn't actually speak to the totality and needs of rural people. In

his work at the Department of Agriculture and as a dairy lobbyist, Vilsack represents the powerful few of Big Ag.

As Agriculture Secretary, Vilsack let down independent family farmers when he failed to take on agribusiness domination. Food production is concentrated in the hands of a shrinking number of giant multinational corporations who hold immense power over farmers, workers, consumers, and policymakers. As a candidate, Barack Obama promised to take on Big Ag during the 2008 Iowa caucuses and reiterated the goal at the start of his presidency. Starting in 2010, Vilsack's USDA along with the Department of Justice held a series of hearings across the country where farmers shared stories of abuse and anti-competitive conduct by dominant meatpackers, such as Tyson or Smithfield, and seed and chemical goliaths, such as Monsanto.

This listening tour culminated in promising new rules to reinvigorate and update the 1921 Packers and Stockyards Act, a Progressive Era anti-monopoly law that established fair codes of conduct in the livestock industry. Vilsack had complete authority to finalize these rules, but

in the face of industry and congressional pressure, he decided to expand their comment period from the usual 60 days to 150 days, which pushed any finalization past the 2010 midterms. At that point, Republicans took the House in a tea party insurgency and proceeded to pass funding riders that blocked the Department of Agriculture from passing the rule.

Vilsack eventually introduced watered-down regulations of meatpacker mistreatment in his very last days in office, but at this point many farmers who spoke out at risk of retaliation had lost faith. The Trump administration promptly blocked and withdrew these modest reforms, and even dissolved

the independent office that enforced the Packers and Stockyards Act

Vilsack's USDA also put meatpacker profits over worker and food safety by implementing a new poultry inspection system that, among other changes, opened a door for plants to run at faster speeds and transferred some inspection duties from USDA staff to meatpacking employees. While the department contended this new system would improve food safety, a report by the Government Accountability Office questioned the data behind their claims. In a public comment on the rules, one concerned USDA consumer safety inspector wrote, "If

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– Claire Kelloway

this proposal goes through and inspectors are cut, I would not feel safe enough to feed [poultry] to my family.”

This proposal also threatened to lift maximum poultry processing speeds from 140 birds per minute to 75. Numerous studies show that faster line speeds increase meatpacking workers’ risk of injury, and labor advocates successfully fought to keep speeds down — or so it seemed. Select plants kept loopholes to operate at faster speeds which the Trump administration later expanded. Trump’s USDA has granted waivers for poultry and beef plants to operate at faster speeds even during the pandemic. Meatpackers need to slow line speeds to reconfigure plants and allow for distancing, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between front-line processing workers, but few have budged.

Slaughter deregulation is just one example of the ways the Department of Agriculture’s policies intersect with broader issues of worker safety and racial inequity, as the majority of meatpacking workers are immigrants and people of color. Historically, the USDA has driven racial wealth disparities by systemically denying Black farmers loans or access to other farm supports. These actions contributed to a 98 percent decrease in the number of Black farmers from 1920 to 1997, as well as mass land dispossession that affected 98 percent of Black agricultural landowners.

While Vilsack has touted his civil rights record at the department, an investigation by The Counter found Vilsack’s USDA promoted misleading and inaccurate claims about an increase in Black farmers and a record low in civil rights complaints. Racial lending disparities also persisted under Vilsack’s tenure and Vilsack personally failed to prioritize civil rights, according to accounts from USDA employees. In one case, a longtime civil servant and Black farmer, Lloyd Wright, asked Vilsack to rally Senate support for a bill that would have extended the statute of limitations on several valid USDA civil rights complaints that had expired during the Bush years. Vilsack allegedly did nothing, and the bill died in the Senate despite passing the House. “I’m convinced he was never committed,” Wright said of Vilsack.

The USDA eventually foreclosed on some Black farmers with cases still under review. In fact, between 2006 and 2016, the USDA was six times more likely to foreclose on a Black farmer than a white farmer. To top it all off, Vilsack ousted Georgia’s USDA rural development director and civil rights leader, Shirley Sherrod, based on false claims circulated by right-wing platform Breitbart. Civil rights leaders recently told Biden that Vilsack’s association with this incident could jeopardize Democrats’ prospects in the Georgia’s Senate runoff elections.

Another critical issue of justice the USDA must address during the Biden administration is climate change. Biden has signaled that he wants to make agriculture a key part of his climate policy and floated ideas such as a carbon market to pay farmers for sequestering carbon (a solution industry has started to line up behind and some scientists have started to doubt). Here, too, environmentalists fear Vilsack will favor technical corporate-friendly

tweaks to fundamentally flawed systems.

Vilsack, along with most of the Democratic establishment, strongly supports ethanol as a renewable biofuel and a market for excess commodity corn. Some 30 million acres of U.S. corn will turn into ethanol this year. But many environmentalists now believe the pollution, chemical use, and soil degradation associated with growing more corn outweighs any benefits of replacing oil-culture corn and soybeans will eventually ruin America’s farmland, especially in Vilsack’s home state of Iowa. However, agribusinesses profit off artificially cheap corn and soy in the form of animal feed or derivatives like high fructose corn syrup, and they lobby hard for federal subsidies and policies that keep overproduction in place.

Vilsack himself lobbied for such policies in the dairy industry, promoting exports as a way to deal with the persistent milk surplus that has collapsed milk prices below the cost of production and pushed small dairy farmers to get big or get out. Shifting milk production to a handful of massive industrial farms may benefit milk processors, who profit off lower milk prices, but just as in consolidated livestock production, these growing factory farms are an environmental disaster.

Vilsack is a solidly establishment choice, which tells you everything you need to know about the Democratic establishment. The former Iowa governor went on to become Obama’s longest-serving Cabinet member. Only a few weeks after leaving the USDA in 2017, he became president and CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council, a dairy industry trade group; he made nearly \$1 million a year from Dairy Management Inc., the council’s parent organization. He is also a longtime supporter of Biden; Vilsack endorsed Biden’s first campaign for president in 1988 and advised Biden’s 2020 campaign on rural policy.

Many in the Democratic establishment routinely look to Vilsack for advice on how to win back rural voters. But in all the time that Vilsack oversaw America’s central rural development agency and guided party strategy in the wake of the 2016 election, Democrats only lost ground with rural voters. This year, the result for Biden in Iowa was as good as it was for small farmers under Vilsack’s regime: He finished an embarrassing fourth in the Iowa caucuses and then was beaten badly by Donald Trump in

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the general election there — an election that additionally saw Democrats lose a key Senate race in Iowa. Freshman Democratic Rep. Abby Finkenauer was also ousted, as the party's rural erosion progressed.

One poll found more than 88 percent of young people and 82 percent of independent voters in rural areas support “a moratorium on factory farms and corporate monopolies in food and agriculture.” But Vilsack would rather mitigate some of the worst environmental hazards of factory farms than invest in a safer model of meat and dairy production.

As secretary, Vilsack unveiled a plan to reduce 25 percent of U.S. dairy emissions by promoting anaerobic digesters. These machines capture methane and other greenhouse gas emission emitted by livestock manure lagoons, a growing source of agricultural pollution as industrial animal farms drive out small ones. Opponents argue this imperfect technology is an expensive workaround to accommodate a dirty industry, rather than meaningfully regulate it.

Rural communities, the Democratic Party, and our planet cannot afford another four years of the corporatist agriculture status quo. Vilsack had eight years and numerous opportunities to right historic wrongs within the USDA and put protecting farmers, workers, and the environment ahead of agribusiness profiteering, but he

chose not to. Knowing this, constituents do not need to “wait and see” if Vilsack will deliver on big promises; they will need to push the agency hard from day one. During the pandemic, there have been some fledgling bright spots of farmer-labor solidarity against corporate power, and these alliances need to expand and incorporate rural communities harmed by industrial agriculture, environmentalists, and, frankly, everyone who eats.

Claire Kelloway writes for *The Intercept* and other publications.



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President-elect Joe Biden's choice to be treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, collected more than \$7 million in speaking fees in 2019 and 2020 from major financial firms and tech giants including Citi, Goldman Sachs and Google, according to disclosure forms filed as part of her nomination.

Yellen's was one of three financial disclosures filed by Biden transition officials that were made public last week by the Office of Government Ethics. In a separate filing, Yellen listed firms and banks where she had received speaking fees and said she intended to "seek written authorization" from ethics officials to "participate

personally and substantially" in matters involving them.

Yellen was the Federal Reserve chair from 2014 to 2018. Her term was not renewed by President Donald Trump.

Her selection by Biden to lead the Treasury Department has been cheered by progressive Democrats, who support Yellen's work as a labor economist who has long prioritized combating economic inequality.

Since her nomination was announced, Yellen has pledged to work to combat systemic racism and climate change.

But receiving steep payments from Wall Street bankers and other powerful corporations could become an issue as her nomination works its way through a closely divided and potentially contentious Senate. Hillary Clinton faced criticism from the left wing of the Democratic Party while running for president in 2016 for having received past, lucrative speaking fees at Wall Street firms.

Also released Thursday were disclosure forms from Biden's choice to be secretary of state, Antony Blinken, who detailed advising clients including Bank of America and Facebook as part of a consulting firm he co-founded. Avril Haines, Biden's choice to be national intelligence director, disclosed being a consultant at the same firm, WestExec Advisors.

Her selection by Biden to lead the Treasury Department has been cheered by progressive Democrats, who support Yellen's work as a labor economist who has long prioritized combating economic inequality.

- AP Wire



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RICHARD LACHMANN

It's common sense: Democratic politicians who support “radical” notions like Medicare for All, free college, or preserving a habitable planet via a Green New Deal guarantee their own defeat. A recent *New York Times* interview with Pennsylvania Congressman and corporate Democrat Conor Lamb states simply that Medicare for All is “unpopular in swing districts,” an idea presumably so obvious that it requires no documentation. Lamb asserts that opposition to Medicare for All and other progressive policies “separates a winner from a loser in a [swing] district like mine.”

The Democratic Party's army of political strategists has used this logic for decades, to explain both victories and defeats. Wunderkind party consultant David Shor, for example, assures us that “boring, moderate” Democrats systematically outperform the “ideological extremists.”

This mantra been internalized by much of the Democratic electorate. Millions of voters in the 2016 and 2020 primaries voted for the “moderate” choices largely because they thought Bernie Sanders and other progressives were not electable. “I might like Medicare for All,” the thinking goes, “but most of the country is inalterably opposed, so someone like Sanders just can't win.”

It may be common sense, but it's wrong. Every single Congressional co-sponsor of the “Medicare for All” bills in the House and Senate who were up for reelection beat their Republican opponents in 2020. And in 2018. And in 2016. And every Democrat who

lost reelection to a Republican had campaigned on the “boring, moderate” platform that Shor contends is the formula for success.

In fact, you have to go back a full decade to find a single Democratic incumbent who co-sponsored a Medicare for All bill and lost their reelection bid. One lost in 2010, when 52 total House Democrats lost reelection in the Republican blowout. For the entire period from 2002 to 2020, there were two. During that time Medicare for All has had between 38 and 124 co-sponsors in the House.

In 2003, Rep. John Conyers (D-MI) first introduced his “Expanded and Improved Medicare for All” bill

Democrats to Congress. The Medicare for All advocates could be elected and reelected only in overwhelmingly Democratic districts with a strongly progressive population, exemplified by Jayapal's 7th Washington district in Seattle.

Taking Lamb's challenge, we identified the 147 Congressional swing districts which flipped from Republican to Democrat in a House election in 2002 or later. We then looked at which of those Democrats won reelection the next time around, comparing the 12 Democrats from those districts who became co-sponsors of Medicare for All with the 135 “moderates” who did not support the bill.

All 12 Medicare for All sponsors won reelection, despite the fact that their seats had been held by Republicans just two years before. On the other hand, 30% (40 out of 135) of the moderates lost re-election in the next cycle.

This pattern was particularly striking in 2020, when Democrats were surprised by their loss of 10 seats in the House despite Joe Biden's victory at the presidential level. Of the 12 Medicare for All sponsors previously elected in swing districts, 9 were running for reelection in

2020. All 9 won. Four of these districts had even leaned Republican in the prior two presidential elections. By contrast, 30 percent (11 of 37) of the moderate Democrats from swing districts lost their reelection bids.

These results refute Conor Lamb's maxim that progressives can't win election or reelection “in a [swing] district like mine,” as well as David Shor's proclamation that “boring, moderate” Democrats systematically outperform the “ideological extremists.” The simple truth is that progressives have a better record of winning reelection, even in the swing districts.

Is Medicare for All just an exception? That is, do other

All 12 Medicare for All sponsors won reelection, despite the fact that their seats had been held by Republicans just two years before.

– Richard Lachmann

(H.R. 676). He reintroduced the bill in each session until 2019, when Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) introduced a successor (H.R. 1384), the “Medicare for All Act of 2019.” (In the meantime, Bernie Sanders first introduced a Senate version in 2017.) Starting with the election of 2004, therefore, many voters could express their opinion about this prototypical progressive measure by voting for or against the co-sponsor of a Medicare for All bill. And, if Conor Lamb, David Shor, and the other Democratic establishment gurus are correct, the “ideological extremists” who sponsored those bills should have performed poorly in swing districts, which are only willing to send “boring, moderate”

progressive policies still alienate the “moderate” voter, as Lamb and Shor argue? To test this possibility, we looked at what is likely the most polarizing of prominent issues in the 2020 election: the willingness of candidates to support systemic reform to curb racist violence by the police. We considered the electoral fate of the eight swing-district Democrats who co-sponsored H.R. 7120, the “George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020.” We found that all had won reelection, despite the unanimous common sense among establishment Democrats that supporting the demands of the Movement for Black Lives was electoral poison.

These results support the argument that the left has long been making: that there is a real appetite for progressive, anti-corporate policies among the U.S. public—even in swing states like Lamb’s Pennsylvania, and even among the white voters who are so often dismissed and misunderstood by Democratic leaders and hotshot consultants. If those policies are framed clearly and honestly in terms that are intelligible to the average person (e.g., “Medicare for All”), they often garner wide support even in swing districts. And they gain more support than the idea of returning to the pre-Trump status quo and the hollow promises of establishment Democrats.

It’s difficult to believe that Democratic Party gurus really misunderstand this reality. All the data we’ve presented above is easily available online. We collected and analyzed it in about 48 hours. They study this stuff full-time. If they don’t see it by now, it’s because they and their bosses—and their real bosses, the corporate overlords—are committed not to seeing it. As Upton Sinclair said, “It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.”

Richard Lachmann is professor of sociology at the State University of New York, Albany, and writes in *Common Dreams*, *New Left Review* and other publications.

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HOW SCI-FI
SHAPED
SOCIALISM

NICK HUBBLE

Kim Stanley Robinson’s latest novel, *The Ministry for the Future*, challenges the dominance of capitalist realism in the Global North by setting out a speculative future history in which collective action brings capitalism to an end and saves the world from climate change. In imagining an alternative to the status quo, Robinson continues a long, honorable tradition of science fiction authors writing utopian fiction.

The tradition stretches back at least to William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890), which tells of a proletarian revolution leading to an ideal society without poverty or oppression. In their different ways, Robinson and Morris share a vision of humanity living through labor as a social activity that operates both in and against nature. All such works, and those of other famous utopian novelists from H. G. Wells to Iain M. Banks, further the cause of socialism by providing readers with radical depictions of post-capitalist life that rarely exist elsewhere in the media.

Utopian science fiction doesn’t just present us with a blueprint for the future: it also offers a new way of thinking about history. The back cover of *Tribune’s* latest issue quotes Marx to the effect that “World history would indeed be easy to make, if the struggle were taken up only under favorable circumstances.” So what if there were a conceptual way of reframing the circumstances we find ourselves in? What if we stopped thinking so much about history

in relation to the past, and started thinking about it from the perspective of the future?

In his *Imagined Futures* (2019), Max Saunders describes the emergence in interwar Britain of a “future history,” by which he means a history of the present and its immediate future, written from the point of view of the imagined distant future. The scientist and public intellectual J. B. S. Haldane wrote a section of his book *Daedalus; or, Science and the Future* (1923) in the form of a student essay

my own times,” implies that she was also thinking about her present from the perspective of a more progressive society in the future. The novel’s depiction of a fascist takeover of England warned readers of the need for a transformation of class and gender relations in order to avoid that fate and instead bring about an anticipated future in which all would be equal.

This idea – that the needs of the future society outweigh those of past and current societies – was developed into an ethical principal through an analogy with industrial action. Mitchison noted that there was a public tendency to view ongoing strikes or political campaigns as aggressive or hostile acts against the existing social order; such struggles only became retrospectively legitimate through the common realization that an improvement in living conditions had resulted. Therefore, it was argued, socialists should represent the values of the utopian future as ethically good, and the practices of the capitalist class as a hostile act against that “good society” of the

future. That science-fictional sense of a future worth fighting for, celebrated by the cultural politics of the 1930s, underpinned British workers’ decisive contribution to the Second World War and led in part to the election of the 1945 Labor government.

The model for this progressive future in much fiction of the interwar years was the pre-show-trial Soviet Union, which is represented in *We Have Been Warned* from the perspective of emancipated women workers enjoying the right to control whether and with whom they have children. (Mitchison’s contributions to conversations about liberation and birth control, however, should be caveated by an awareness

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from 2073 describing how biological developments, like the growth of embryos outside the mother’s body, had become a widespread practice. Haldane presented a prediction of the complete transformation of conventional sexual relations as a simple matter of fact; by taking a future perspective, and seeing his present as a stage of history that would be superseded, he freed himself from the restrictive moral compass of tradition and the past.

Haldane’s sister, Naomi Mitchison, applied a similar logic to her feminist science fiction. Her description of *We Have Been Warned* (1935) as a “historical novel about



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of her involvement with the Eugenics Society.) In her non-fiction book, *The Moral Basis of Politics* (1938), Mitchison argued that traditional sexual morality was rooted in an economics of scarcity and that freedom and equality would only become the norm when all material needs were satisfied. She therefore predicted the final success or failure of the Soviet Union would depend on its capacity to establish a post-scarcity society.

Ultimately, the USSR failed, but the story of that failure is far more interesting and instructive than has ever been acknowledged by its opponents. Francis Spufford's creative documentary account of this Soviet attempt to meet all needs scientifically, *Red Plenty* (2010), has been described as the equivalent of a science fiction novel by Robinson or Ursula Le Guin.

More generally, the idea of a post-scarcity utopian society forms the framework for the most sustained body of science fiction in recent years: Iain M Banks's *Culture* series (1987-2012). Together, these novels are an extended examination of the ethics of intervention by forces designed to

maneuver traditionally hierarchical states into emancipating their peoples. By writing from the future-history perspective of AI "Minds," Banks decenters the classical liberal ideology that dominates discussions of humanitarian interventions today and replaces it with a reasoned analysis of the political values at stake.

The scope of this kind of space opera also functions to demonstrate the limitations of ruling-class values. As Fredric Jameson has pointed out, the traditional novel is a bourgeois literary form which is structurally dependent on a formal resolution, like the entry of one of Jane Austen's heroines into a marriage contract, which upholds property relations and the social order. In contrast, science fiction is a genre that desires to boldly go beyond those kinds of constraints. By shifting the scale of action from the confines of modern life, defined by birth circumstances and job opportunities, to an infinite universe, it opens up an exploration of individual and social possibility without limits; once you've watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate, there's no going

back to passive late-capitalist life.

What we find in more than a century's worth of socialist science fiction is a guide to some of the necessary perspective shifts for us to break free from the constraints of the present and get on with the task of making history. These novels offer not only hope and inspiration for troubled times, but also a renewed sense of wonder at what a true society of equals could achieve.

Nick Hubble teaches English at Brunel University. His recent book is *Growing Old with the Welfare State*.

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– George Orwell**

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ARE PLANT-BASED MEATS SUSTAINABLE?

MARC FAWCETT-ATKINSON

Driven by skyrocketing demand from consumers striving to cut back on meat and companies facing increasing pressure to reduce their environmental footprint, the market is anticipated to reach \$23.1 billion by 2025.

And major meat companies have been racing to meet demand, with big players such as McDonald's and Maple Leaf Foods recently launching a suite of plant-based meats.

Meat contributes up to eight billion tons of CO₂ per year, roughly equivalent to the annual emissions of 1.6 billion cars, and according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a global shift to diets that contain less meat is essential to keep global warming under the 1.5 C limit agreed to in the 2015 Paris Agreement.

"It's well-known that eating lower down the food chain is more environmentally efficient," said Navin Ramankutty, professor of global environmental change and food security at the University of British Columbia.

That's because plants require far fewer resources — water, land, fossil fuels — to produce, per calorie, than meat. It's also healthier, the IPCC report notes, with excessive meat consumption linked to numerous health issues.

Those factors have fuelled a booming market in alternative proteins, meat and dairy-like products that are usually manufactured from soy or pea protein, with about 10 per cent of Canadians saying they eat little

or no meat, according to research by Dalhousie University's Agri-Food Analytics Lab.

Companies in their infancy a decade ago, such as Beyond Meat, have become household names. Now, major meat companies have jumped in the fray.

For instance, in the past three years, Maple Leaf Foods has purchased two venerable alternative meat companies — Lightlife Foods and the Field Roast Grain Meat Co. — and announced plans to build a \$401-million pea-protein processing plant in the U.S.

Companies in their infancy a decade ago, such as Beyond Meat, have become household names. Now, major meat companies have jumped in the fray.

— Marc Fawcett-Atkinson

This year, the company launched a line of products made from a blend of plant and animal proteins, a "direct response to Canadians' desire to eat sustainably," said Michael McCain, Maple Leaf Foods' CEO, in a written statement.

Maple Leaf Foods isn't alone in banking on sustained consumer interest in plant-based meats. In the first half of 2020 alone, more than \$1.4 billion was invested in alternative protein companies. That's more than twice the total amount spent last year, according to Collier Capital, an international private equity investment company. The organization regularly publishes an index evaluating social,

environmental and governance risk factors for 60 major meat and protein companies as a guide for sustainability-minded investors.

For Sylvain Charlebois, director of Dalhousie University's Agri-Food Analytics Lab, those numbers aren't surprising.

"I don't think (consumer demand) is going to go away ... COVID may have stalled the momentum a little bit, but I am expecting the momentum to come back," he said, citing Canadians' concerns about the environment, their health and the ethical treatment of farm animals.

Even veganism, one of the more challenging plant-centric diets to follow, is on the rise, he noted, with about 600,000 Canadians saying they were vegans this year compared to 400,000 in 2019.

Still, some researchers say that despite the hype, plant-based meats might be less sustainable than they appear.

"That question of sustainability has to be asked in a much wider context than just the production of these plant-based (meats)," said Élisabeth Abergel, professor of sociology and environmental studies at the Université

du Québec à Montréal.

Especially when it comes to evaluating industrially produced, plant-based proteins. Simply measuring the number of resources used to produce plant protein and comparing that against the number used to produce an equivalent volume of animal protein doesn't give an accurate picture of the food's overall impact. Plant-based meats remain a small part of the major meat companies' total production, she said. That makes it difficult for plant-based meats to significantly impact these companies' environmental footprint without additional, supply-chain-wide changes to how they produce and distribute food.



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For instance, only four per cent of Maple Leaf Foods' sales revenue last year — about \$176 million — came from plant-based products. However, the company has invested in a suite of initiatives to reduce its overall environmental footprint by fifty per cent (compared to 2014) by 2025.

Abergel said an environmentally conscientious consumer should also consider how the base ingredients for plant-based meats are produced.

"Certain companies use soy, other companies use pea protein. In (both cases), are these grown organically or are they grown in monocultures? Are they part of the

same supply chain ... used for feeding cattle?" she said.

"If the soy protein or the pea protein come from monocultures, and the soy is genetically modified, I think that sustainability measures have to take these into account."

Industrial agriculture is associated with myriad environmental impacts, from nitrous oxide emissions tied to excessive fertilizer use to hurting pollinators through habitat destruction.

Not only that, the economic model that underpins both industrial agriculture and meat production is dominated by a handful of large processing and retail companies. As a result, farmers often have little choice

but to sell their crops at an unsustainably low price that isn't reflected in the prices paid by consumers, according to Cathy Holtslander, director of research and policy at the National Farmers Union.

Farm debt has risen exponentially in the past 20 years, more than doubling since 2000 to reach \$115 billion this year. Meanwhile, Canadian farmers' net incomes have steadily dropped, hovering around \$10 billion annually since the mid-1980s, rates unseen since the Great Depression.

That has pushed many out of business — the number of farms in Canada dropped 25 per cent between 1991 and 2011 — and has made it more difficult for those who remain to innovate with more sustainable farming techniques, such as cover cropping to absorb excess nitrogen or interspersing pollinator habitats in their fields.

Abergel also pointed out that many large food processors have also seen other concerns in their supply chains, everything from working conditions to food safety. Those challenges speak to the need for a definition of food sustainability that is broader than just an environmental footprint, she said.

"If you're somebody who is really concerned about sustainability, you need to go deeper."

Marc Fawcett-Atkinson writes for the *National Observer* and other publications.



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and many never will
but still believe in
that there is still
time enough for whatever it is
you have yet to accomplish on your
list of things left to do
that more than likely
will never get done
and only remember
that you are not alone
never were
never will be
no matter who or what you think you are
that within the darkest chambers of the heart
there is the possibility of light
that within the biggest tightest asshole
that leaves the biggest foulest footprint upon the blue blue morning of the globe
there exists something so small and physically imperceptible inside that asshole
with the ability to send that rage tumbling
back into the earth
something renewable
something still with the ability to
unravel government plots
stifle corporate will
unexplain the gods
and cause joy inside this tortured
world of war all the time

there is a flower that can't be stopped
there is laughter that must be heard
there is someone's love song with your eyes inside of it looking out
there is another moment left before the last
before the next
there is still time for love if you so desire
even if you don't
there is
regardless of what you think or feel or don't
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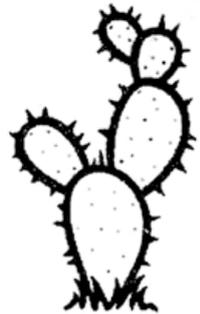
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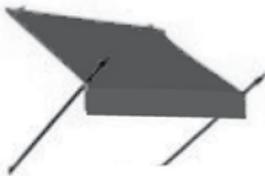
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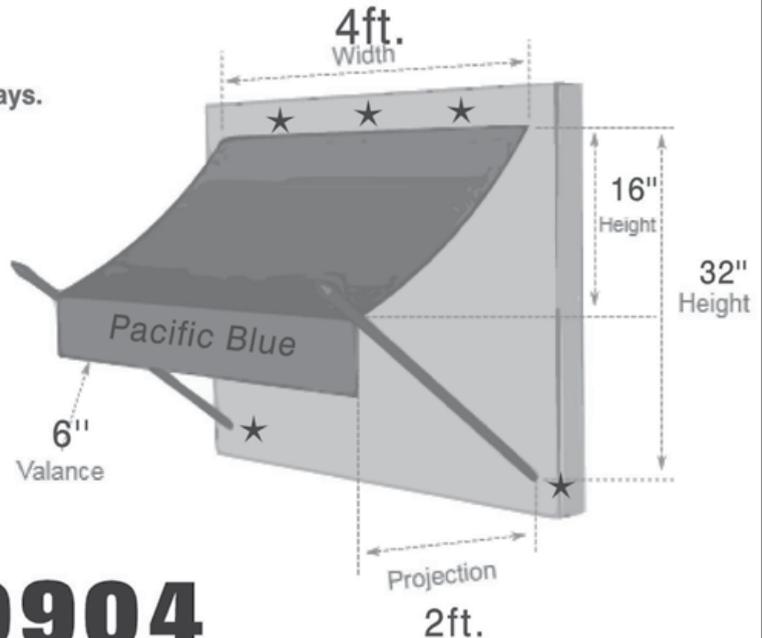
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