

Nygaard Notes

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Things Are Changing

It was ‘way back in the year 2000 that I published a piece called *Wealth, and How To Share It*. (That’s so long ago that another headline in that issue was *Nygaard Notes Now On Line!*)

I wrote at the time of a three-part “Logic Problem”: 1. Wealth is power. 2. Wealth is highly concentrated in a very few people. 3. Power is concentrated in a very few people. I asked “Time for a Wealth Tax?”

There was a presidential campaign going on at the time, and I said “as the presidential and other campaigns shift into high gear in the coming months, listen to see if any candidate, anywhere, brings up the idea of a tax on wealth in the United States.” Noting that “the only person who has made any serious proposal along these lines in recent years is New York University professor Ed Wolff,” I nonetheless said “I think we should raise the issue with the candidates when we get the chance. But, campaign or no campaign, you may want to start bringing up the idea of a wealth tax with your friends and in your political organizations. If we do develop the populist political movement of which Professor Wolff speaks, we can transform today’s ‘radical’ ideas into tomorrow’s public policy.”

Lo and behold! It’s 20 years later and the idea of a wealth tax is on the national agenda. It is/was supported by two major Democratic candidates for president, and a Google search for “wealth tax” yields half a billion results!

It’s worth thinking about how this happened. There was no event, no magical moment, no press conference marking the transition of the idea of a wealth tax from

“crazy idea” to an idea worthy of debate. Yet, here we are. The formerly-fringe idea of a wealth tax has become respectable not because Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are magical creatures. No, it’s evidence of a change in consciousness among the population at large which finds its expression in the public square we call a presidential campaign. And this is the result of millions of conversations over many years, resulting in millions of people deciding that income and wealth inequality is a real problem that must be addressed.

It’s not just thinking and talking that puts things on the agenda. It’s organizing. When people are organized their voices are amplified and their demands are heard. As more and more people hear the voices of the formerly marginalized, seeds of hope start sprouting. More people join organized groups, groups get together and form coalitions, the coalitions start cooperating, and pretty soon we’ve got a movement! If conditions are just right, we go beyond getting on the agenda and we start setting the agenda: talking about system change.

The organizations featured in this issue of Nygaard Notes, and in the last issue, are doing the thinking, talking, and organizing that is needed to build a movement. It’s tremendously hopeful.

Now, in a time when hate and fear seem to be the dominant themes in our daily news cycle, I think we can all use a little hope. The coronavirus pandemic is a big deal. But a fundamental restructuring of the US economy and political culture is even bigger, and that vision will be around long after the current crisis has passed. ♦

“A Broad Common Understanding”

In the last issue of the Notes I said that I thought we might be seeing an “alternative economics movement” taking shape, and that there is lots of evidence for this optimistic statement. One piece of evidence is when we see different →→→

Greetings,

There's almost nothing about viruses in this issue of the Notes. I mean, really, what could I add?

Instead, in the last issue and now in this one I choose to highlight hope instead of fear. The building blocks of a post-capitalist world come in many forms. I myself worked in a cooperative for nearly 20 years. We were highly aware of being a part of a larger, transformative movement that aimed to put people before profit. I didn't know the term "Solidarity Economy" at the time, but that's what we were joyfully working toward.

May this issue of Nygaard Notes inspire and invigorate you, as it has me. Then later, when the coronavirus is under control, we can give each other a high five and a hug. Then we can get back to work replacing capitalism.

In solidarity,
Nygaard

Understanding *from page 1*

people in different places who are all expressing similar sentiments as to why we need a new economy and what it might look like.

Emily Kawano, writing for The Next System Project in 2018, said "Defining the solidarity economy can be challenging. Definitions vary across place, time, politics, and happenstance, though *there is increasingly a broad common understanding.*" [Emphasis is Nygaard's]

The three groups I mentioned in the last issue of the Notes all share this "broad common understanding."

The Center for Popular Economics puts it this way: "The solidarity economy is an alternative framework for economic development grounded in the following principles: Solidarity and cooperation; Equity in all dimensions (race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.); Social and economic democracy; Sustainability; Pluralism (not a one-size-fits-all approach); People and planet first. While some elements of the solidarity economy have existed for hundreds of years, the theoretical framework is very young and is still in the process of evolving and being defined. There's a growing global movement to advance it as an alternative to capitalism and its current form, the failed model of neoliberal corporate-dominated globalization."

The New Economy Coalition, you'll recall, says that they "are finding new ways to share skills and goods, measure success, and meet growing human needs on a finite planet."

Recall also that **The Next System Project** is working "to promote visions, models and pathways that point to a 'next system' radically different in fundamental ways from the failed systems of the past."

Now let's look at a few other groups that share a common understanding of a future Solidarity Economy.

"Grassroots Economic Organizing (GEO) is a decentralized collective of educators, researchers and grassroots activists working to promote an economy based on democratic participation, worker and community ownership, social and economic justice, and ecological sustainability—a 'solidarity economy'—through grassroots journalism, organizing support, cross-sector networking and movement-building, and the publication of educational and organizational resources." <https://geo.coop/>

United for a Fair Economy "exposes and challenges the deep-seated systemic causes of inequality: institutionalized racism, low wages, exorbitant CEO compensation, regressive tax policies, and more.

"UFE believes another world is possible. We envision a global society which respects the humanity, rights, and creativity of all people. Democracy, equity, inclusion, and cooperation are fundamental values guiding economic investments in our communities, states and nations. Corporations do not have the rights of people, and the rights and wellbeing of the community take precedence over the rights of private property. Larger corporate structures are regulated in the interest of shared societal aspirations. Smaller types of ↗↗↗

→→ business structures and worker cooperatives are given the advantage and incentive to flourish.”

www.faireconomy.org/what_we_believe

For almost 60 years a global network of governmental and non-governmental organizations have worked together in the **United Nations Research Institute for Social Development**. UNRISD “is an autonomous research institute within the UN system that undertakes interdisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues [and] aims to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.”

In 2013 was founded the UN Inter-Agency **Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy**. The TFSSE “was established to raise the visibility of the SSE in international knowledge and policy circles.” The members of the TFSSE “believe that SSE holds considerable promise for addressing the economic, social and environmental integrated approaches of sustainable development.”

Here are the words of Peter Utting, former Chair of UNTFSSSE and former UNRISD Deputy Director:

“Social and Solidarity Economy encompasses organizations and enterprises that: 1) have explicit economic and social (and often environmental) objectives; 2) involve varying degrees and forms of cooperative, associative and solidarity relations between workers, producers and consumers; 3) practice workplace democracy and self-management. SSE includes traditional forms of cooperatives and mutual

associations, as well as women’s self-help groups, community forestry groups, social provisioning organizations or ‘proximity services’, fair trade organizations, associations of informal sector workers, social enterprises, and community currency and alternative finance schemes”. <http://unsse.org/>

I’ll conclude my summary of “broad common understandings” of SSE with this paragraph:

“The Social Solidarity Economy is an alternative to capitalism and other authoritarian, state- dominated economic systems. In SSE ordinary people play an active role in shaping all of the dimensions of human life: economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental. SSE exists in all sectors of the economy: production, finance, distribution, exchange, consumption and governance. It also aims to transform the social and economic system that includes public, private and third sectors. SSE is not only about the poor, but strives to overcome inequalities, which includes all classes of society. SSE has the ability to take the best practices that exist in our present system (such as efficiency, use of technology and knowledge) and transform them to serve the welfare of the community based on different values and goals... [and] SSE seeks systemic transformation that goes beyond superficial change in which the root oppressive structures and fundamental issues remain intact.”

Those are the words of the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy, in answer to the question: “What is Social Solidarity Economy?” Let’s have a closer look at this global network. ♦

The Globalisation of Solidarity

Unknown to most USAmericans is the existence of a large international network that works on all kinds of levels to bring about what they call the Social Solidarity Economy, or the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE). The network is known as RIPESS, which is the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS are the initials in French: Réseau intercontinental de promotion de l’économie sociale solidaire) www.ripest.org/?lang=en

RIPESS is “a global network of continental networks

committed to the promotion of Social Solidarity Economy.” The member networks represent every inhabited continent on the planet: Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania.

RIPESS is all about changing consciousness, with the aim of knitting local initiatives all over the world—which often operate quite unaware of each other—into a *movement*. “The inherent nature of RIPESS includes the objective of to page 4

RIPESSE *from page 3*

contributing to systemic, transformative change. It does this by demonstrating how much SSE contributes in terms of real answers at the local level to the existing system that is clearly showing its limits. RIPESSE members believe in the importance of the globalisation of solidarity, and the ability to build and strengthen an economy that places people and planet at the centre of its activities.”

But, what does RIPESSE actually *do*? Honestly, it’s such a wide range of things that it’s hard to briefly summarize. They do a lot of education at all levels. They lobby, they agitate, they organize. “Since 1997, RIPESSE has organised international meetings to promote Social Solidarity Economy every four years. This has provided the network with a space to learn, exchange information and cooperate.”

But it’s not just learning for the sake of learning; it’s about changing things. For example: “Several national, regional and local governments have adopted legislation and public policies that support Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) in recent decades. ... In most cases, the legislation and policy on SSE was the outcome of deep work by grassroots and local and national SSE

networks.” This is solidarity at work. The old saying, “Think globally, act locally,” takes on real meaning here.

There’s so much more I could say! But I’m out of room, so I’ll leave you with one last resource for further learning about RIPESSE and the Social Solidarity Economy movement:

Everything you want to know (and then some!) about SSE and the many, many ways it is developing and growing around the world, can be found on the website of socioeco.org, the resource website for the Social and Solidarity Economy. There you’ll find thousands of documents, publications and videos, training courses and websites. It’s all a bit overwhelming, but thankfully they’re all classified according to ten themes, including “An Alternative Vision of the Economy”; “Redefining Wealth”; “Toward Ecological Transition” And; “Social Justice, Peace and Solidarity.” So just pick your theme and GO!

Rather than worrying about the global pandemic non-stop, I recommend you spend some time exploring socioeco.org. www.socioeco.org/index_en.html You’ll come away refreshed, as you’ll be reminded that another world is possible. And that another world is happening. ♦

“Quote” of the Week: *“The Strength of a Collectivist Ethos”*

Speaking about the global pandemic in a March 11th opinion piece in the NY Times, columnist Farhad Manjoo made a good point:

“There may be a silver lining here: What if the virus forces Americans and their elected representatives to recognize the strength of a collectivist ethos? The coronavirus, in fact, offers something like a preview of many of the threats we might face from the worst effects of climate change. Because the virus is coldly indiscriminate and nearly inescapable, it leaves us all, rich and poor, in the same boat: The only way any of us is truly protected is if the least among us is protected.”

People all over the world are organizing to create a world in which the least among us are protected. This issue of Nygaard Notes discusses a few of the most exciting efforts.

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Special note to paper subscribers: Due to a “shelter in place” order in effect in Minneapolis as of today, I can’t go to my workplace, which is where I normally print Nygaard Notes. So I improvised at home, with the result you see before you. We’ll be back to the standard format whenever we get the word from the Governor. Thanks for understanding. Good health to you!