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Website of the Week #1: Portside

The news cycle these days is dominated by the daily details of the pandemic, as it should be. But this can be exhausting and it can evoke great anxiety and fear. So I'm highlighting here an information source that is empowering instead of terrifying. The website is called *Portside: Material of Interest to People on the Left*. Find it here: www.portside.org/

Portside is an aggregator website—meaning they mostly republish articles that originally appeared elsewhere. In their “FAQ” section, one of the questions is “How do you decide what to use and what not to use?” They answer that “We look for things that are topical. We also look for things that are analytical, probing and challenging. We look for things that are clear, and even better, entertaining.”

It's that “analytical, probing and challenging” bit that makes me recommend Portside. I'll offer a selection of recent articles that give a hint of what you'll find there.

At the end of last month they had an article from Jacobin called *Cuba's Coronavirus Response Is Putting Other Countries to Shame*. While Trump goes on about the anti-malaria drug Hydroxychloroquine—despite a lack of scientific evidence that it's effective against COVID-19—few readers of the US media likely know about a drug called Interferon Alfa-2B. This drug, developed by the thriving (despite the ongoing US blockade) Cuban biotechnology sector, has “proven effective for viruses with characteristics similar to those of COVID-19,” and is being used by China's National Health Commission. Newsweek reports that the World Health Organization will be studying the effectiveness of the Cuban “wonder drug” (as some have called it).

I've written about drug patents many times, most recently in 2014 (*Patent Protection: Friend of Profit, Enemy of Health*) when I said this: “Patents are a means of privatizing not only science, but knowledge itself, making life-saving drugs and the knowledge of how to

use them inaccessible to those who need them. The damage to human well-being caused by patent-protection in health care should be front-page news. Instead, the ‘success’ of the profits raked in by ‘health care’ companies is celebrated—on the Business pages. That's the Propaganda system at work.”

This may be old news to Nygaard Notes readers, but most people don't think about it, even in a pandemic. So it was refreshing when on April 2 Portside ran a piece from FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) entitled *Corporate Media Ignore International Cooperation as Shortcut to Coronavirus Vaccine*. Reporter Joshua Cho stated the issue early in the piece: “Despite the daily exponential growth in confirmed [Covid-19] cases, and death tolls putting the US on pace to be the epicenter of the pandemic, corporate media coverage of the global race for a coronavirus vaccine marginalizes the most effective and safe route to discovering one quickly: eschewing corporate profitability and intellectual property rights in favor of international cooperation through open and shared, publicly funded research.”

On April 7th in Portside, activist Isaiah J. Poole connected the virus crisis with the climate crisis, saying “those of us who care passionately about putting people back to work rebuilding America should be using the next few weeks to build a broad, powerful coalition for a ‘Green Stimulus.’”

An April 6 original piece by Howard Machtinger asks: “If we agree that Biden must be supported and organized for—and that is crucial for the avoidance of a re-invigorated Trumpian order—notwithstanding his backward-looking politics, then what will move the progressive movement forward?” (*An Empire in Disarray: Time for a New Party?*)

In a piece titled “In 1918 and 2020, Race Colors America's Response to to page 2

Greetings,

A number of people have asked me if I'm going to write about the coronavirus pandemic. I'm not planning to, mostly because there is so much being published right now that I'm not really inclined to add more drops to the flood.

I imagine many people are starting to feel anxious and worried as this crisis drags on. I believe that one remedy for the coronavirus blues is to take some action: making masks, zooming lonely friends, running errands for those in need; all of these things can help. But a time of crisis is also a good time to help push the response in a positive direction at the systems level. What would we like to be different in the wake of the 2020 Pandemic? And how can we support positive change going forward?

The first step is to start thinking about our post-virus future. The second step is to figure out how you can do your part. This issue offers some resources for thinking and for acting. No time like the present!

Thinking ahead,
Nygaard

Portside *from page 1*

Epidemics,” author Soraya Nadia McDonald makes a point that can't be made often enough or loudly enough: “As with the 1918 flu, responses, or lack thereof, to COVID-19 have become tied up with patriotism and xenophobia in ways that exacerbate the spread of disease.”

Other recent titles may entice you:

Will Covid-19 Virus Trigger A Voting Rights Crisis?
A Scholar of Pandemics and Inequality Peers Into
America's Future

'Never in my country': The COVID-19 Pandemic and
US exceptionalism

Check out Portside www.portside.org/. You'll be glad you did. ♦

Website of the Week #2: Organizing Upgrade

When talking about Trumpism, the question “What can I DO?” is often heard. The answer is: That depends. And the thing upon which it depends is strategy.

We each have our own ideas about the nature of what might be called “Trumpism.” Whatever your precise reason for resisting the rise of Trumpism, the decision about WHAT to do to resist Trumpism depends on HOW you want to do it. That is, the tactics you choose to employ will only be effective to the extent that they are part of a realistic strategy for turning back the Trumpist vision of the future, an amoral vision that I call Individualist and Competitive.

Many people skip the part about strategy, saying they just want to *do* something. But how much more effective that something will be if it fits into a larger strategy for a Trump-free future! Serious discussions of opposition strategy are mighty hard to find in the daily

news stream. That's why, if you are seeking original, creative, and activating information to fill in this gap, you would do well to check out the website *Organizing Upgrade: Engaging Left Organizers in Strategic Dialogue*. <https://organizingupgrade.com/>

The editors over at OU say that “Left organizers need a space for deep discussion and debate over strategic responses to [Trump-era] threats, and Organizing Upgrade will serve as one forum for that debate.” Even if you're not (yet) a left organizer, you'll benefit from reading the work of these folks. For instance, after listing some of the “grave threats” posed by the Trump administration, the editors make clear that “this is not a moment to only focus on defense. There are also a number of significant opportunities for expansion and real advance in this moment.” Pause right there and think: What opportunities do *you* see? Which ones excite you? What can you do to help ↗↗↗

→→ advance them?

More strategy: “Everywhere, from the base of progressive movements to progressive institutions and even well into the liberal world, there is new openness to left analyses and to radical race and class politics. And there are a lot of exciting new electoral initiatives, based on different versions of an ‘inside/outside’ strategy, that are developing around the country. The dynamics of our moment have created real possibilities for rebuilding a left based on multi-racial class solidarity, a holistic and internationalist vision and a determination to break out of the margins and get to the center of national politics.” (What do they mean by ‘inside/outside’ strategy? Visit their website to find out.)

When they talk about “getting to the center” of the public discourse they don’t mean via the standard popularity contest that we call electoral politics. Instead, these folks take on tough questions like this pair: “What are effective tactics for conducting the fight against corporate Democrats on Democratic Party terrain?” and “How do we do this while building the broadest possible front against Trump and Trumpism?”

In an OU piece entitled *Stepping into the Moment: The Corona-Crisis*, you’ll find GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO CRISIS. One guideline is “GO BOLD: In moments of crisis, it is more possible to advance bold demands for structural reform than it is in normal times.” Ask yourself: Who is supporting bold initiatives in this crisis environment, and what can I do to support them?

In a piece titled “We Can’t Stop Coronavirus Without Confronting Rightwing Nationalism,” author Tobita Chow says that, while it’s important to talk about things like Medicare For All, paid sick leave, and the Green New Deal, that’s not enough, because “A race-neutral

response focused only on the domestic economy will leave untouched the racism, xenophobia, and nationalism that are coming at us. Antiracism and internationalism must play a much more central role in our counter-narratives than they have so far... And we need to pick and escalate our own fights that demonstrate to the whole country where the real battle lines lie, fights that clarify that the greatest threat to us is not any other country, but our own unaccountable elites within the Trump administration and the corporations that seek to profit off of this crisis.”

You’ll find all kinds of challenging, action-stimulating pieces on this website. In a piece called simply “Essential Work,” moderator Stephanie Luce poses a question: “The crisis is exposing an alternative to the day-to-day world of work under capitalism. How do we seize it?...”

We seize this alternative, as well as a broader social alternative, by observing the public response to the pandemic.

As we take our never-before-available sick leave, as we cash our \$1,200 CARES Act checks, as we turn to publicly-funded health care after losing our private insurance, we need to demand that such examples of social solidarity continue in non-crisis times. As the “Quote” of the Week in this issue says: *We can do a lot more than we think we can.* More than that, the size and scope of the public response to the pandemic (so far) offers a small glimpse of a future in which we have evolved beyond the capitalist principles of Individualism and Competition to embrace the Social and Cooperative values the need for which has never been so clear.

One article featured on the Organizing Upgrade site on April 3rd was called “The People’s Bailout: New Center of Gravity for the Resistance.” Have you heard about it? I suspect many people have not, so let’s have a look at this People’s Bailout thing. ♦

Support The People’s Bailout

As the pandemic crisis grinds on, the federal government response continues to unfold – and the degree to which it serves the interests of the public (as opposed to corporate interests) will continue to be contested. A study just this week, for example, reveals that “Millionaires and billionaires are set to reap more than 80% of the benefits from a change to the tax law Republicans put in the coronavirus economic relief package,” costing taxpayers “nearly \$90 billion” according to reports.

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Fortunately there is a popular response to such thievery, a response that movement organizer Max Elbaum refers to as “The New Center of Gravity for the Resistance.” That response is called The People’s Bailout, and it calls on members of congress to “commit to five principles while putting forth COVID-19 relief and stimulus packages that contribute to a just recovery,” reports Jessica Corbett writing in Common Dreams.

The initial groups behind the People's Bailout were the Center for Popular Democracy, the Climate Justice Alliance, Greenpeace, Indigenous Environmental Network, Indivisible, It Takes Roots, MoveOn, People's Action, Sierra Club, the Sunrise Movement, the U.S. Climate Action Network, and the Working Families Party. The call has since been endorsed by literally hundreds of organizations from various wings of the growing movement.

Here are the five principles of The People’s Bailout:

1. Health is the top priority, for all people, with no exceptions.
2. Economic relief must be provided directly to the people.
3. Rescue workers and communities, not corporate executives.
4. Make a downpayment on a regenerative economy while preventing future crises.
5. Protect our democratic process while protecting each other.

These principles, and the context in which they came to be, are explained clearly on their simple website. Go there now, for information, but also to send a letter to your federal representative demanding that they act in accord with these principles as the federal response continues to evolve. And if you are not an active supporter of, or a financial contributor to, at least one of the endorsing organizations (they’re all listed on the website), now’s the time! ♦

“Quote” of the Week: *“If We Had the Will to Do It”*

A headline in the April 13th NY Times asked “Could the Pandemic Wind Up Fixing What’s Broken About Work in America?” The Times said “Already, Congress has given some workers paid sick and family leave for the first time. Companies have started to offer paid leave, subsidized child care and flexible work schedules... The policy changes that have already happened in response to the virus have come very quickly. They have illuminated how relatively easy it would be for workers to have these rights — employers or policymakers would just have to say so. It may be hard for them to take back benefits, analysts said, even those they’ve said are temporary.”

Then they quoted historian Patrick Wyman, who uttered the “Quote” of the Week:

“Once you make it clear that these things are within your capacity to do, people’s baseline expectations change. That was true of the New Deal, the Great Society, Obamacare. We can do a lot more than we think we can. Crises are a useful reminder, useful in a tragic kind of way, of what we can do if we wanted to, if we had the will to do it.”

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