Behind the scenes in the business of medicine

How our profit-driven medical system fails to deliver healthcare

Bethany Weidner

The advent of a pandemic virus showed us in vivid terms that our healthcare system is a mess. The US response to the coronavirus has been disorganized, characterized by misinformation and confusion—and resulted in more deaths and infections than in any other developed country. And it’s not over yet.

We have learned a lot about what’s essential in an epidemic—because it was missing. Diagnostic tests, high filtration masks, shields, gloves, ventilators: nonexistent in some locations, in short supply in others, or available only for prices 5 to 10 times the normal rate.

Also missing: a coordinated, system-wide approach from public health and political authorities. Will tests for the infection be free? Will treatment of Covid19 be free or covered by insurance? No one is certain.

Several thousand medical workers responding to the outbreak in the United States have been infected. Dozens have died. Those who spoke out have been threatened, punished or fired.

Many people are now focused on creating a system that promotes health and provides care for all who need it because the need is so apparent. Our existing system is deadly. To plan a future that is better, however, we need to understand the past actions that led to our current system. How did we get to this place?

In 2019, the medical industry accounted for $3.65 trillion dollars of spending nationally. That bill keeps growing as players in the health business find additional ways to cash in on the lucrative medical market.

The search for maximum profit leads to abandonment of areas where there is no wealth to extract, even as medical costs everywhere continue to grow. Most of us know nothing about the companies that drive the costs and therefore determine who is able to access health care—and who isn’t.

What we have isn’t a healthcare system. It’s a marketplace. It prioritizes profitability, not health, and directs both its services and its rewards to the rich and powerful. Executives command multimillion dollar salaries; investors reap dividends.

The result is a destructive mix of deprivation and excess. The current public health crisis has simply resulted in more deaths and infections than in any other developed country. And it’s not over yet.

Some key sectors of the medical business:

Pharmaceutical and biotech companies raked in almost a half-trillion dollars in 2018. They protect this income stream in a number of ways. They proliferate patents to extend their monopoly on various drugs. This prevents development of generic versions that could be offered for a lower price. They raise prices on their most-prescribed drugs (44-78% in a recent 4-year period). They promote profitable specialty and “life-style” drugs while doubling or tripling the price of essential medications.

Consider insulin: some diabetics pay as much as $400 a month despite the fact that even “new versions” of insulin are cheap to produce.

At the same time, biotech companies scorn research into vaccines and antibiotics that support public health but promise little profit. Work on the uniting vaccine that could begin to stem as we move away from the coronavirus peak is being done by universities and research institutes. (Once that work is complete, Big Pharma will be there to sell it.)

Medical device and equipment companies

These are another important profit-driven cost generator in the medical industry. Typically, they focus on complex devices that use advanced technology and generate high profit margins. (See sidebar.) In the last few years, consolidation among device companies helped them maintain control over pricing. As one analyst noted, “2016 was a fantastic year, with at least a dozen medical device companies racking up stock gains of more than 25%.”

Hospitals and hospital systems

As in other sectors, hospitals are consolidating to shore up profit margins. More than three fourths of US hospitals are “non-profit” but they are not different from for-profit hospitals in our money-oriented medical system. Both systems are driven by the same motives: expand in size and visibility, increase market share, drive costs lower, make those realities more visible.

Farmworker Unions sue over COVID–19 “garbled and non mandatory” protections

Farmworkers, continued on page 6
Another world is possible:
Valuing memory and imagination

Enrique Quintero

The splinter in the eye

Life on Earth and this nation cannot continue in this way. The prospect of four more years of Trump leaves us like a bad omen, threatening all life. This calamitous prediction not only presages disaster to come, but is also directly connected to the policies of the past and the present. Our fate is linked by our past and our present. Our past and current policies have placed the interests of big capital and corporate entities ahead of the interests of the people and the well-being of the planet. They have favored parasitical profits rather than rewarding those who labor in order to survive. We know to be concerned about nuclear annihilation. We now see, more clearly than ever, the intertwining of ecological and economic hardships.

Thinking Out Loud

We must do something to change the Zeitgeist of our time or we will be destroyed.

Luckily, we have irony, the peculiar sense of humor for times such as ours. For example, the Trump administration’s English response to COVID-19 in an obscene way has validated the Republican war cry to MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN! The US tops the chart of confirmed cases and deaths worldwide (98,889 and 3,000, respectively at the moment of this writing).

The Covidiots in the White House appear to be on course to perpetuate this questionable distinction. Theodore Adorno once stated that the “splitter in the eye is the best magnifying glass.” Ironically, the virus that has infected more than two million people and claimed over a hundred thousand lives has become the ‘splitter in the eye’ needed to magnify the unsolvable contradictions that were somewhat masked in pre-COVID–19 pandemic times.

History, as Marx reminds us, is the history of class struggle. People around the world have carried on heroic fights against capitalism and for social justice, human rights, and democracy. Nonetheless, capitalism—through a series of legitimate and illegitimate, many times violent measures—reigns as the dominant economic system throughout the world. Ironically, some of capitalism’s strength lies in our acceptance of the very ideology that perpetuates our current conditions, which helps maintain much-needed social change. Conspiracy, apoliticism, the overemphasis of consumerism, and tacit tolerance of the shrinking space for political discourse among citizens Paradoxically, the cruel reality of existing living conditions, unviolated and unviolating by the current pandemic, offers us a new possibility for imagining and implementing a richer interpretation of human solidarity, spreading and accelerating, like the virus itself, widespread recognition of the fundamental in-difference to human suffering that is built into our current economic system. A better world is possible, but to get there, we need both memory and imagination.

Memory

Memory needs to be understood as something more than the enumeration of past crimes against the people. ‘To be sure, names and events must not be forgotten; ni perdón ni olvido’, as Latin Americans say in reference to the pro-dastardly sub-continent. More important than enumeration is the realization that the suffering of the people could have been lessened had we organized society differently.

Memory helps us understand our present situation too. It is a splitter in the eye, so to speak, that magnifies our view, connecting the past, present and future. In this historical moment, the COVID–19 pandemic has exposed the irrelevancy of the paramilitary and the vital importance of other forms of labor. First responders, health care and hospital workers, truck drivers, crop pickers, grocery store workers, postal workers, among others are reminding us that labor constitutes the heart and muscle of society.

Corporations, hedge funds managers, bankers, financial speculators, conservative politicians and other free marketeers are revealed in their true condition of social irrelevancy. This was true before COVID–19—memory reminds us of this. And memory gives us the image of those who remember, who know that in the present we have struggled and are struggling at supporting the well-being of the largest possible number of humans. Only a future that we put in for will reflect the deep memory of humanity.

Imagination

Reality is always richer than imagination. To imagine what a better world will look like, we first must determine, as David Harvey puts it, ‘who is who?’ The world we want to be, the kind of social relations we seek, the relations with nature we will cherish, the style of life we desire, and the aesthetic values we will hold. Moreover, a better world will not be the same as an arbitrary metaphysical desire.

A better world will only materialize through human actions within the laboratory of society, which requires elements of control and prediction. In addition, we need to raise a question that makes the world better than another. Following David Harvey again, a better world is also a humanistic tradition—both secular and religious—based on dignity, tolerance, compassion, and as he puts it, liberation of human potentials.

We know how the right vision when the world we are imagining and working towards is designed to satisfy the needs and promote the well-being of the largest possible number of people.

1. Neither forgiveness nor forget-tess.

Upcoming themes

We chose to replace our scheduled May theme with another more urgent focus. Another world is possible. Consequently, we will be focusing for June and July on these themes, which seem to have a somewhat different meaning given the current pandemic, social distancing and our unknown exit conditions.

June: Linkages What things connect us to one another? (especially when we can’t be in proximity to one another?) Beyond the physical, what is the relational, social or political question. How are our issues and political causes linked and how can we express that in narratives and organizing?

Deadline May 15.

July: Unintended consequences That’s a pretty suggestive topic given our current situation. We hope that many of you might have some thoughts about this. We invite you to think about “unintended” consequences that could have been, should have been predicted. The handling of any crisis offers many opportunities for reflection—as does intervening in other countries, prioritizing profit over people, etc., and then there are merely instances of unintended consequences of our own individual actions. We would love to hear from you.

Deadline June 17.

In this issue...

Our profit-driven medical system fails to deliver .................................................. 1
Farmworker Unions sue over COVID-19 ................................................................. 1
Celebrating 30 years of Works in Progress ......................................................... 3
Proposal would create new prison in Grand Mound ........................................ 4
Fox News sued for calling coronavirus a hoax ...................................................... 5
“Housing Options Plan” ......................................................................................... 5
In Wisconsin the aim was to limit who voted .......................................................... 6
The Republican’s attempt to end majority rule ...................................................... 7
The Epicenter of COVID–19 in South America ..................................................... 8
El Epicentro del COVID–19 en America del Sur ................................................ 9
In Norway, an egalitarian social democracy ......................................................... 10
Workers are essential, CEOs are not ..................................................................... 11
The bugs are in the system ..................................................................................... 11
An open letter to Joe Biden ................................................................................... 12
The bigger picture behind the virus ................................................................. 15
Looking back to celebrate 30 years of Works in Progress

About the cover
Olympians are finding ways to connect with each other, despite the Covid-19 quarantine: a musician shares accordion music on the west side, Japanese hackers pull off a hackathon along the zigzag path near the Capitol, and “Friar Leahy” offers drive-by confessional via his tin-can communication system. Our theme, Another World is Possible, is inspired by the World Social Forum.

Photos by Lori Lively, Bethany Weidner, and Arístides Pappidas.

You write to WIP
Hello President,
I just want to tell you that I don’t think very much of you as president. You are destroying this country. You promise people things, necessary things like test kits for the coronavirus. You don’t send them anything—and people are suffering and dying. Considering the seriousness of this virus, you should be working full-time, not just talking about nothing. It is obvious that you are not capable of doing anything morally right, and I would very much appreciate your stepping down and admitting that you are a fool and an idiot. It is heartbreaking to know that all those people are suffering because you would not act in a responsible way.

Also, quit belittling the women journalists. They are smarter than you.
Mary Kasimor

Then this happened…
...Olympia planners told developer Jerry Mahan he has to comply with city requirements, even though he has a powerful attorney — or rather the lack of them.

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The focus of Marable’s critique, 1996’s Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act which was proposed by Republicans and signed into law by former president Bill Clinton, made thousands of families ineligible for income assistance.

Some things haven’t changed. In 2020, President Trump’s sweeping changes to requirements for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) made nearly 700,000 people ineligible for some assistance. As Maggie Dickinson, faculty member at Guttman Community College in NYC, explained, it’s the same argument: “If we cut people off of benefits, fine. Stamps or Medicaid or cash assistance, they’ll go into the workplace, and that’s a path out of poverty. But in reality, that has never actually worked.”

Marable concluded his piece by advocating that the “solution to the crisis of the working poor is the pursuit of the fight for jobs and justice.” Twenty-three years later, his solution still holds.

Emily Lardner

Highlighting past issues that remain critical
During this, our anniversary year, WIP each month will highlight an issue that concerned WIP writers over the years, and still are a concern for us today.

In 1997, WIP ran a piece by Dr. Manning Marable called “The plight of the working poor.” Marable was writing about the crisis of jobs for low-income people — or rather the lack of them.

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Emily Lardner
Perspective

Incarcerating more people is not a solution

Proposal would create a new prison in Grand Mound

Lea Kronenberg

The Department of Corrections (DOC) is planning to open a new women’s prison at the site of the closed Maple Lake youth detention center in Grand Mound. This prison expansion is opposed by many area residents, and No New Women’s Prison, a group of criminal justice advocates with experiences in Washington prisons that formed in Fall 2019, is trying to stop it.

The proposed DOC project aims to renovate the existing 64 bed juvenile facility, which served 126 minimum custody female beds at a cost of $4.38 million, budgeted by the State Legislature. The new prison is being presented as a potential solution to overcrowding at the Washington Corrections Center for Women which has a capacity of 738 inmates. Since 2014, women inmates have been transferred to Yakima County Jail, a site with its own overcrowding problems, allowing DOC to frame the new prison as a “humane” re-entry solution. There is also some secrecy about how many beds are planned. DOC’s website says 128, but a legal analyst hired by the Vera Institute of Justice noted that “between 1989 and 2009… the arrest rate for drug possession or use tripled for women… the arrest rate for men doubled.” Sentences for drug crimes became much longer due to mandatory minimums, “three strikes” laws and conspiracy laws that deliver harsh sentences to even peripheral players in drug offenses. Because women are more likely to engage in low-level, rather than serious offenses, they fell victim to a criminal justice system whose response was incarceration.

Another reason for the increase in women’s incarceration is the “tough on crime” policies of the 1980’s and 90’s that were responsive to the documented inequities of mass incarceration on low-income communities and people of color. People with little means cannot rely on the overburdened public defender system and are often the focus of law enforcement. People of color are disproportionately incarcerated and given harsher sentences for the same crimes as their white peers. But women’s incarceration fails women and families in distinct ways.

According to a 2008 report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 73% of women in state prisons had mental health problems. Of these 73%, 37% reported substance abuse issues and 68% had a history of physical or sexual abuse. A 2005 study by Northwestern University found that 98% of women in jails had been exposed to trauma during their lifetime. More than two-thirds of women in state prisons are drug dependent or drug abusers, much of which is driven by a need to self-medicate in response to trauma and victimization. Also, women living in poverty often resort to illegal activities just to survive, especially given the gender inequalities in pay that a majority of women experience. Unfortunately, treatment for women in prison is usually inadequate to address these needs, being the exception rather than the rule. In fact, prisons are more likely to be the site of significant sexual, emotional and physical violence that compounds the suffering of these women and does nothing for public safety.

Another reason for the increase in women’s incarceration is the “war on Drugs”. Starting in the mid-80’s, in fact, prisons are more likely to address these needs, being the exception rather than the rule. In fact, prisons are more likely to be the site of significant sexual, emotional and physical violence that compounds the suffering of these women and does nothing for public safety.

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Who's afraid of the big, bad Fox?

Fox News sued for calling coronavirus a hoax

Esther Kronenberg

Open government watchdog and advocate, Arthur West and his local group, WASHLITE (Washington League for Transparency and Ethics) have gained international media coverage for a lawsuit filed against Fox News and Rupert Murdoch for their repeated labeling of the COVID-19 virus a “hoax.” The story was first covered by the Times of San Diego on April 3, and has since been picked up by news outlets across the world, including Vanity Fair, the Daily Beast, the Seattle Times, Forbes, and several law-oriented news letters, and papers in Germany, France, Spain and Holland.

The lawsuit, filed April 2 under the Consumer Protection Act al-leges that Fox News violated the act by “falsely and deceptively dis-simulating of news and other cable news contracts downplaying the dangers to the public of the coronavirus as a ‘hoax’. The City claims that it knowingly disseminated false, erroneous, and incomplete information, which was reasonably relied upon by the public and which had the effect of delaying and interfering with the implementation of otherwise effective medi-cation and countermeasures against the virus, “the League said in the complaint. The suit does not seek monetary damages, but only seeks an injunction to stop Fox News from claiming that the pandemic is a hoax, along with reasonable attorney fees. The claim has been found cognizable by Forbes’ lead attorney Bryan Sullivan, writ-ten in Forbes magazine.

The lawsuit closely followed the publication of an open letter to Fox News signed by 74 journalism profes-sors stating its coverage was “de- serting its public duty,” and urged the networks to “help protect the lives of all Americans—including your elderly viewers—by ensuring that the information you deliver is based on scientific facts.”

Fox News’ first reaction was to dismiss the lawsuit as frivolous. “Wrong on the facts, frivolous on the law,” said Lily Fl Claffey, general counsel for Fox News Media. A Murdoch executive told The Daily Beast “The strategy is no settlement, even if it costs way more to fight the lawsuit and seek sanctions for those law-chasing lawyers.” But within a few days, Vanity Fair reported that Fox insid-ers had expressed “real concern… that their early downplaying of the coronavirus actually exposes Fox News to potential legal action by viewers who maybe were misled and actually have died from this, especially since Rupert Murdoch cancelled his 86th birthday party on March 11 at the same time top hosts like Sean Hannity and Trish Regan were telling viewers that it was all a hoax.

Since the WASHLITE lawsuit was filed, Fox has called for big guns, hiring Donald Trump’s favorite law firm, Jones Day. One of the four named attorneys hired in the case was a lead lawyer, and “argued before the Florida Supreme Court on behalf of George W. Bush in the 2000 presidential election Florida recount controversy. “President Trump’s White House counsel, Don McGahn, was a partner in the firm. Forbes’ Bryan Sullivan writes WASHLITE does pose a cogniz-able threat of liability. Washington’s law only requires modest rather than having to prove actual damages.

The Consumer Protection Act pro-vides “Unfair methods of competi-tion and unfair or deceptive acts or practices in the conduct of any trade or commerce are hereby de-clared unlawful.” It references tele-communication, and it doesn’t apply to those entities that distribute information “in good faith, without knowing any false, deceptive or misleading character.” The lawsuit cites two examples of misconduct, that impacts far more will be uncovered during discovery. In one, Sean Hannity comments “Oh, let’s bludgeon Trump again with this new hoax.”

In the second example, “Trish Regan opines next to a graphic that reads “Coronavirus Impeachment Scam.” At last count, Fox News viewers were taking the virus less seriously. WASHLITE was at first represented by lawyer Ron C. Cole, and then by the beeswax and honeycomb of Washington’s Republican League for Transparency and Ethics. The League’s chief lobbyist, regrettably, is a former aide to Senator Chuck Grassley. Ms. Cole was a lead lawyer, and “argued before the Florida Supreme Court on behalf of George W. Bush in the 2000 presidential election Florida recount controversy. “President Trump’s White House counsel, Don McGahn, was a partner in the firm. Forbes’ Bryan Sullivan writes WASHLITE does pose a cogniz-able threat of liability. Washington’s law only requires modest rather than having to prove actual damages.

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“Housing Options Plan” would gentrify older, modest neighborhoods

Olympia’s Planning and Develop-ment Department has decided that its new Housing Options Plan will have no significant impact on our environment and our neighbor-hoods. The plan does not add duplexes, triplexes, and apart-ments, along with larger and taller ADUs (Accessory Dwelling Units) a.k.a. “back-yard cottages”, along with relief from parking, on-site owner and other current ADU requirements.

The City’s position is that there are no immediate impacts from the plan, because of the cumulative impacts. It would un-leash these by allowing “up to 890 additional, primarily market rate, infill development housing units in existing neighborhoods.”

The reality is that these added units will not be spread evenly across the city’s low density housing zones. Certain neighborhoods will be unaffected or very lightly affected. Subdivisions completed over the past 20 or so years, during which time minimum lot sizes have been repeatedly reduced, leave little space for free-standing ADUs. Subdivisions consisting of Homeowner Associations typically have restrictions that limit con-struction to single-family detached houses -- the City plan leaves these unaffected. Neighborhoods of high-property value residences would be prohibitively expensive for con-version and replacement.

That leaves older, lower income areas as targets. Specifically prop-erties characterized by large lots with small, inexpensive houses that lend themselves to being torn down and replaced by the multi-plex structures newly permitted under the City plan. These are primarily on the eastside, north-east, and northwest. The bottom line is that the units will be con-cen-trated in a limited number of neighborhoods, and will therefore be likely to have significant effects on those neighborhoods and their city services.

These effects reflect the entire range of impacts that the Environ-mental checklist (SEPA) claims will not occur in the category of neigh-borhood factors such as noise, loss of green space, loss of tree cover, and loss of solar energy capacity. The checklist also denies any im-pact due to environmental factors like increased impervious surface area, groundwater levels and qual-ity, and stormwater runoff. Any impacts on public infrastructure like school capacity, street capac-i-ty, parking, sewer and water infra-structure, and stormwater convey-ance capacity, some of which are already overburdened are also said to be nonexistent.

The City claims that structures will not be demolished and residents will not be displaced. The check-list says clearly that the intention of these policy changes is to add primarily market-rate infill hous-ing in existing residential areas, a primary effect of which is demoli-tion and displacement.

Another problem with the check-list responses is that they confuse likely actual impacts with allowed impacts. This is apparent in com-ments regarding expected actual impacts on plants and marine life, the amount of impervious and hard-surface, etc. The SEPA checklist is supposed to deal with impacts on the community, not impacts relative to regulatory limits, which is a very different matter.

A similar problem exists when the City states there will be no change in “available utilities”, but does not mention impacts on these utilities. The response to a question about negative impacts on transportation or public services and utilities is similarly problematic when it says that existing providers will con-tinue to provide services, but fails to address potential impacts on those providers.

Other responses are actually er-ro-neous, as when the checklist states the “checklist developers will not affect parking requirements. The proposed ADU defini-tion explicitly includes such changes. The statement hinges on the increase need for public services like fire, police, transit, and schools ignores the fact that increases will be needed to serve the increased population moving into the new housing options.”

A final concern not mentioned by the City is the fact that the “housing options” changes would, under state law, not be appealable. “Compliance with democratic norms” is not an exclusion of those norms, presumably because it is gener-ally understood that in democracies the people are able to challenge actions by their elected officials. To state that appeals will not be allowed is to take a step away from democratic government toward author-tarianism. This is intolerable. This proposition should be put to a vote unless a way can be found to allow normal appeals.

This is an edited version of official comments submitted by Bob Jacobs to the Olympia Planning Department. Bob is a long-time resident and former Mayor of Olympia.
Outside the office has been working with the union. “Their efforts continue.”

As the growing season ramps up, farms have to implement social distancing for their workers, says Erik Nicholson, a national vice president of the United Farm Workers (UFW), tells Eater Seattle. “They have been given no information at all. They are going to be living in employer-owned housing, bunking in close quarters, and traveling back and forth to farms in cramped busses,” he says.

Civil Eats also recently published a report about this issue, noting that Washington isn’t alone in falling short of providing protections—farmworkers in California and Oregon are among those on the frontlines with few protections against the coronavirus. As that piece notes, a recent poll conducted by UFW on its Spanish-language social media platform showed more than 90 percent of the farmworkers who responded had not been advised by their employers on best practices to resist the virus, and many had been given no information at all.

But this is the first time that organized legal action has been taken to address these issues within the West Coast agriculture industry during the pandemic. “Farmworkers need clear, specific, enforceable protections from COVID, and they needed them weeks ago, when we first started asking [Gov. Inslee] for help,” said Andrea Schmitt, attorney and advocate from Columbia Legal Services, one of the firms that filed the lawsuit on behalf of the unions. “The state has to act decisively to protect the workers who bring us our food—and the communities where they live.”

Gabe Guarante is the editor of Seattle Eater, a restaurant-focused digital media platform. This article was posted on April 17, 2020 at www.seattleeater.com.
The Republicans' systematic attempt to put an end to majority rule

Gary Murrell

At this country's founding, members of the ruling class in most states granted the vote only to property-owning white men—themselves. A right to vote was expanded during the nineteenth century, first to include all white men, then black men (although that right was obliterated by the end of the century and had to be regained in the struggle for civil rights in the 1960s). After 1960 women, Indians, and Puerto Ricans who lived on the mainland were able to vote. The only citizens legally denied the vote were felons (who can vote in some states), people who live in US Territories and those below age 18.

Briefly, one person one vote

In 1965, passage of the Voting Rights Act ensured that state and local governments could not deny American citizens the equal right to vote based on their race, color, or membership in a minority language group. Or so we thought.

Minority rule

The fact that more citizens call themselves Democrats indicated to Republicans that one-person-one-vote put them at a disadvantage—the more people who voted, the less likely it was that Republicans could win elections.

With that in mind, Republicans devised strategies to circumvent voting rights. After a decade or two focused on winning in state legislatures, the Republicans turned to a tactic as old as the republic to disenfranchise voters: gerrymandering.

Gerrymandering. Once in power in statehouses, Republicans were able to redraw legislative district boundaries to favor Republican candidates. As one example, Wisconsin Republicans engineered an election map that resulted in Democrat candidates in the last election getting the most votes overall, but losing in a majority of the districts. The result is that Republicans dominate the legislature with a super-majority.

Gerrymandering isn’t the only tool in the Republican disenfranchisement toolbox. From President Trump on down, Republicans claimed, falsely, but convincingly to their base, that Democrats across the country were engaged in extensive voting fraud. Ironically, the major documented case of fraud was carried out by North Carolina Republicans.

In states around the country Republican legislatures have enacted measures to discourage voting among groups presumed likely to vote Democratic. Voter ID laws target black people, other rules deny the vote to students living away from home. Several states have wiped thousands of names from the voting rolls. A new challenge to robust voter turnout came in April when the Wisconsin and US Supreme Courts declared null the governor’s executive order extending the deadline for mail-in ballots, with the result that voters had to risk their lives at a limited number of overcrowded polling places.

Who will get to vote in the 2020 election?

In this time of Covid19, where does the Republican project to disenfranchise voters leave us? We will have a presidential election in November. How will we conduct that election will, in all likelihood, determine the outcome of an election that is among the most crucial in our history.

There is no doubt Republicans will attempt to disrupt the election and eliminate as many votes as possible. “I don’t want everybody to vote,” declared influential conservative activist Paul Weyrich. “As a matter of fact, our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down.”

Congressional Democrats proposed a national vote-by-mail program in the first Covid19 stimulus package. Without it, tens of millions of Americans could be compelled to stand in line at polling places in close proximity to one another just to participate in the democratic process. Or they might stay home.

“Trump and Republicans opposed the funding for nationwide mail-in-balloting. On Fox and Friends, Trump complained about the proposal, “They had things, levels of voting that if you’d ever agreed to it, you’d never have a Republican elected in this country again.” He pressed the issue in one of his daily campaign events masquerading as a Covid19 news conference. “Mail ballots, they cheat. Mail ballots are very dangerous for this country because of cheaters. They go collect them. They are fraudulent in many cases. They have to vote. They should have voter ID, by the way.”

Yet, as elections expert Charles Stewart of MIT reminded us, “voting fraud in the United States is rare.” The US military has used absentee voting successfully since the Civil War. Five states, including Washington, vote exclusively by mail. Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia have systems in place for no-excuse-necessary absentee voting. Another seventeen states allow mail-in ballots, but require an excuse to vote absentee. According to the rules in most of those states, if you’re ill you can get an absentee ballot. Does the possibility of being infected by a virus in a pandemic meet that requirement? Unless some miraculous cure appears before the election, it seems likely that we will find out.

If Congress adopts universal mail-in voting it might mean that more voters come to the polls and the disarray of Republicans. A massive defeat of Trump and a sweeping rejection of Republican minority rule could, if voters demand it and Democrats allow the progressive wing to lead their party, signal a turn for the better. In a country altered irrevocably by the pandemic we might see movement toward a more just and equitable society: health care for all, fully funded public education, income equality, worker’s rights, a substantial social safety net, and most importantly, since this pandemic is certainly a rehearsal for what awaits us if we continue to ignore it, focused attention on climate change.

A worse world is also possible

But even with an election that turns out Trump’s corrupt regime there is a dark side. Trump and his minions will not accept defeat with equanimity. Trump will tear the nation apart when he loses. He will support and condone violence in the streets as he did with his tweets supporting protests against state governors in April. As we contemplate how to hold an election in November, we must also contemplate the consequences that are sure to follow. Gary Murrell lives and is sheltering in place in Hoquiam.

The Olympia Farmer’s Market

The Olympia Farmer’s Market is open Saturdays and Sundays from 10 am to 3 pm with farm produce, plant starts, prepared foods and more. For more information about shopping during the Corona virus and social distancing, go to www.olympiafarmersmarket.com.

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May 2020
Works In Progress
In Norway, an egalitarian social democracy is thriving

Ed note: At the beginning of last year, Donald Trump lamented the lack of immigration to the US from "places like Norway." This excerpt from a Nation magazine interview with Ann Jones about her stay in that country explains why.

The US has a long history of displaying grasping self-interest as the "key to individual freedom." Norway, on the other hand, created itself as an egalitarian social democracy, and that makes all the difference.

Billionaire capitalists aren’t in the driver’s seat

In Norway, for the most part, self-interest and the public interest coincide. Like the US, it’s a capitalist country. But unlike the US, Norway regulates capitalist ventures and is the major shareholder in some private enterprises of public concern. Wages and working conditions are not dictated by billionaire owners but negotiated once a year by national confederations of enterprise and labor, for labor retains the power to set the standards of work.

Promoting the general welfare

To ensure equality—without which democracy is not possible—the government also oversees a universal welfare system. It collects high but fair progressive income taxes to support universal health care, almost free education from preschool through university, full unemployment compensation, affordable housing, public transport, and the like. This result is one of the most equal, democratic, highly educated, innovative, modern, technically advanced, and happy societies on the planet.

Public resources held for public benefit

You may have heard that this remarkable success owes itself to Norway’s “oil wealth” drawn, since the 1970s, from the North Sea. It’s a tale that Congressional columnists flummox to dismiss the obvious advantages of a welfare state. In fact, Norway’s oil money is stashed in a sovereign wealth fund, officially, the Government Pension Fund, now valued above $1 trillion.

With only 4 percent of a year’s income available to the government in case of emergency—and rarely used—the fund invested largely in oil producers until 2017. After that year, it began a popular transition to investments in solar and wind power.

The real source of economic—

and individual—development

And here’s a fact that these Conservative columnists never mention: According to Norway’s Ministry of Finance, the real source of new money expanding the welfare state was not oil but the income taxes paid by women who entered the workforce, on a par with men, just about the time the oil came in [the mid-1980s].

The welfare state, in turn, enabled women by taking on some of their traditional jobs in the home: health care, child care, elder care, and primary education. Norwegian women liked these arrangements so much that by 1985 they chose their first woman prime minister, Gro Har-lem Bruntland, who later went on to head the World Health Organization.

Pressures from the coronavirus emergency

Over the last few days, the oil fund has become a bone of contention in Norway, with the government taping into the surplus to meet the coronavirus emergency and economists protesting that the emergency should be met by additional progressive taxation so the fund would be preserved for its original intention: providing old-age pensions to future generations.

Covid19: similar issues, different impacts on people

These days, Norwegian enter-prises—the oil industry, the industry—feel the same pain as those in other nations afflicted by Covid-19. Shops close, businesses struggle, the currency loses value. But in Norway, the sick are well cared for by the state. Health workers are still paid by employ-ers or through national insurance, and in, a changing job market, some workers may choose to be retrained at public expense. Few, if any, are homeless. None will go hungry. Covered by the welfare system, Norwegians can focus on family, friends, the future: what matters most to them.

A Conservative government, led by a woman

Incidentally, the current govern-ment is not Communist or even Socialist, as Americans may fear, but Conservative and led by women. When Trump met Prime Minister Erna Solberg in 2018, he marveled that she spoke English, and then announced the first delivery on Norway’s $16 billion purchase of American fighter jets: F-35s and F-52s, though the latter exist only in the video game Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare.

As conditions worsen around the world, Solberg has asked Norwe-gian students abroad to consider coming home. And on March 14, the Norwegian University of Sci-ence and Technology urged the return of its students studying in countries “with poorly developed health services and infrastructure...like the United States.”

Ann Jones, a Distinguished Fellow at the Quincy Institute, was interviewed by James W. Carden in the April 2 Nation magazine. The full interview at https://www.thenation.com goes beyond this description of Norway to critique the economic and social policies that have failed the US. Read it online or, better yet, subscribe to The Nation for their unique coverage.
Workers are essential, CEOs are not

Mindy Isser

Low-wage workers are on the front line in the battle against coronavirus. While many workers have started telecommuting and many others have unfortunately been laid off — low-wage workers are busy cleaning our streets, making sure we have enough to eat, and, of course, nursing us back to health if we get COVID-19. Despite being linchpins of a functional society, these workers are often treated as expendable or dismissed as “unskilled.” But over the past few weeks, we’ve seen just how irreplaceable they are.

In California, New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and elsewhere, state governments have rolled out increasingly strict orders to enforce social distancing and close all businesses except those deemed “essential” or “life-sustaining.” While these lists vary from state to state, each includes grocery stores, laundromats, restaurants (depending on takeout and delivery), factories that produce foodstuffs and other products, gas stations, pharmacies, and other services. What do all of these businesses have in common? They rely on the labor of low-wage workers who, in many cases, toil without benefits, unions, and workplace protections. Public workers are still on the clock, too, cleaning and delivering our streets, delivering our mail, and making sure we have access to utilities and other social services.

While many individuals have expressed appreciation for these frontline workers — leaving hand sanitizer out for their letter carrier; calling for an increase in teachers’ salaries after having to homeschool their kids for a few days — our society has long undervalued them, both monetarily and otherwise. The current domestic and international economy has turned the heat on social inequality. Governments around the globe have taken a variety of measures to reinforce social distancing and ensure that more people stay home, some of which are more effective than others. Now is the time to make public health a priority. Unlike other epidemics before it, coronavirus is a threat compounded by capitalist greed and callousness. As disease ecologist Peter Daszak recently put it, “Unprecedented road-building, deforestation, land clearing, and agricultural development, as well as globalized travel and trade” make pandemics likelier than ever, especially when “between outbreaks, the will to spend money on prevention wanes.” Global warming and nuclear proliferation have shown that capitalists will always trade to-morrow’s welfare for today’s dollar if we let them.

To address this crisis, the Freedom Socialist Party raises these demands:

- A universal, free, nonprofit, nationalized medical industry, including pharmaceuticals, managed by healthcare workers and patients
- Free testing, treatment and vaccines
- International cooperation on the virus treatment and vaccine research; outlaw profit-making from the crisis
- Unlimited paid sick leave for all workers, with government assistance as necessary plus full compensation for lost wages due to closures or quarantines
- Free laptops and computers and free lunch programs for all students when schools close, free childcare for parents who have to work
- Emergency financial assistance for small businesses hurt by the epidemic, including subsidies for paid sick leave
- Increase public and private staffing levels to perform the intensified cleaning required
- Train all at-risk workers and provide proper protective equipment
- Stop the racist scapegoating of Chinese and all Asians and immigrant communities

Many of them work for minimum wage or close to it — and without health benefits — meaning that they could contract coronavirus and get stuck with either a massive bill or no health care at all. Meanwhile, with many school districts closed indefinitely, parents are missing the critical and challenging work done every day by nannies, childcare workers, and educators of all kinds.

These workers have a right to higher wages, full benefits, health and safety guarantees, and strong unions — just like every other worker.

Hopefully, this crisis will not only elevate the status of low-wage workers but spark a new wave of organizing to boost standards and build power across these “essential” industries.

Urban Shaman rap

Rodhivatara vow:
living to help others.
We are all Sisters and Brothers.
Within you are the Yogi Siddhi X-men mutant Superpowers.
Heal the humble bees with medicinal flowers.
Power animal and human Shaman alliance.
Capitol building dome constructed according to Sufi Spiritual Science.
Who can understand the Olympia Vortex energy?
The Human race is sick.
Love and kindness are the remedies.
You can do anything...
And Mahatma Gandhi said:
“Become the change you wish to see in the world.”
Olympia magic armor clothing style.
Create a better future: when you see a stranger, give them a smile.
Crazy Monk is an Olympia street poet, teacher and musician. He can be reached at gsgnymonk1@gmail.com.

Coronavirus, epidemics and capitalism: The bugs are in the system

Governments around the globe have had since December to prepare for this novel coronavirus. And while some countries have done better than others with their response, here in the U.S. the for-profit medical industry is practically ensuring that more people snatch the virus and more die from it. As with other disasters and emergencies, capitalism makes things worse. Now is the time to mobilize our unions and community organizations, along with small businesses, to take immediate and effective action to protect public health. Like other epidemics before it, coronavirus is a threat compounded by capitalist greed and callousness. As disease ecologist Peter Daszak recently put it, “Unprecedented road-building, deforestation, land clearing, and agricultural development, as well as globalized travel and trade” make pandemics likelier than ever, especially when “between outbreaks, the will to spend money on prevention wanes.” Global warming and nuclear proliferation have shown that capitalists will always trade tomorrow’s welfare for today’s dollar if we let them.

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- Train all at-risk workers and provide proper protective equipment
- Stop the racist scapegoating of Chinese and all Asians and immigrant communities

No abridgement of civil liberties
- Redirect military spending and border wall funding to coronavirus response, prevention and cure

This is an excerpt from the statement issued by the Seattle/Puget Sound Freedom Socialist Party. Read the full statement and related articles about the situation locally at https://socialism.com/freedom-socialist-newspaper

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Dear Vice President Joe Biden,

We write to you as leaders from a diverse array of organizations building political power for young people in the United States. We are all Americans who believe in the promise of our democracy. As hopes for our next president’s electoral victory fade in the face of the pandemic, we are poised to play a critical role deciding the next President. You need to have the votes of the vast majority of Americans. For so many young people, going back to the way things were “before Trump” isn’t a motivating enough reason to cast a ballot in November. And now, as the Biden Administration has exposed not only the failure of Trump, but how decades of policy neglect have recorded a rougher social safety net for the vast majority of Americans.

The views of younger Americans are the future of our democracy, a future that took hold when we came of political age, and flow from bad decisions made by those in power that fits their needs, and never have their right to vote taken away for any reason. Get big money out of politics and make the passage of HR 1 a top priority.

Policy:
Climate change: Adopt the framework of the Green New Deal and the following commitments are necessary to bolster the recovery and protect our democracy. The leadership of the office should demonstrate an urgent commitment to achieving 100% Clean Energy by 2030 and 100% clean energy by 2050.

Democracy: Commit to seek the establishment of a national democratic amendment to the Constitution. Ensure the right to vote is secure for all Americans. Every voter should be automatically registered to vote, get to cast their ballot in a secure, accessible way that works for all Americans. Every citizen should be automatically registered to vote, get to cast their ballot in a secure, accessible way that works for all Americans. Every citizen should be automatically registered to vote, get to cast their ballot in a secure, accessible way that fits their needs, and never have their right to vote taken away for any reason. Get big money out of politics and make the passage of HR 1 a top priority.

Personnel and Future Administration:
Commit to appointing progressive candidates to the key posts of the Cabinet. Commit to appointing progressive candidates to the key posts of the Cabinet. Commit to appointing progressive candidates to the key posts of the Cabinet. Commit to appointing progressive candidates to the key posts of the Cabinet.

During these difficult times, we are uniquely suited to help ensure that the government works for the people. We are uniquely suited to help ensure that the government works for the people. We are uniquely suited to help ensure that the government works for the people. We are uniquely suited to help ensure that the government works for the people.

Unfortunately, the current problem of our democracy is that the voices of wealthy lobbyists and big corporations are the only voices our political leaders prioritize. This is a pragmatic thing to do. We want respect, and that’s what we believe in. We believe in the principles of the Green New Deal. We are uniquely suited to help ensure that the government works for the people. We are uniquely suited to help ensure that the government works for the people. We are uniquely suited to help ensure that the government works for the people.

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In praise of print
Deep River
by Karl Marlantes

Veronica Atkinson

Deep River is a story rich with historical detail spanning the decade from the July 1917 Armistice in America and told through the eyes of three siblings, immigrants from Finland, settling in a logging community in southern Washington. At over seven hundred pages, Marlantes has time to give the reader a long view of each character's development and their intertwined relationships over the years. The book addresses Finnish culture and the immigrant experience but primarily focuses on the labor movement in the Pacific Northwest.

The novel begins in Finland at the time of World War I. When the eldest brother, Ilmari, flees Finland he acquires a plot of land and starts a blacksmithing business, providing a steady base for the family throughout the story. Four years later the youngest brother, Matti, escapes to America after an altercation with a Russian soldier and finds work in the logging camp near his brother's home. Aino, who had early exposure to Marxist theory and subsequent activism with a Finnish resistance cell results in a prison term, is the last to arrive in the Pacific Northwest. She rejects her brother's early efforts to secure her future by way of marriage to a neighbor and sets off to the logging camp, finding work with a group of women in the company's cookhouse.

The descriptions of the landscape, rivers, and old growth forests give a vivid picture of these early settler's lives. Marlantes details the technical aspects of things like the firs, the mechanics of cutting and moving the timber, the massive saws, the thick steel cables, and the harsh and dangerous work of the men in the trees and operations around the machinery.

Working “dark to dark” six days a week for less than two dollars a day, the loggers are put up in bunkhouses with nearly straw to make beds and allowed “all you can eat” although a fee for room and board are deducted from their pay. As the owner pushes them to work faster, accidents happen. A gruesome death occurs. From this point the novel depicts Aino’s development as a labor activist. She practices her English language skills by making speeches and organizing the workers to come together in asking for better conditions and fair wages. Early success in this first endeavor propels her to take the message to surrounding towns, crossing paths with Joe Hill along the way and eventually becoming a prominent speaker for the IWW.

Interspersed with Aino’s story are actual accounts of the struggles and sense of the labor movement at the time in Washington and across the nation, including the impact of the first world war. Many businessmen and politicians saw the war as a way for the country to expand its influence abroad but there was also broad support for the impact of the first world war. Many businessmen and politicians saw the war as a way for the country to expand its influence abroad but there was also broad support for the construction of a prison. In summary, we see that the construction of a prison was to silence and persecute the labor movements’ efforts to organizing the labor movements' efforts to achieve worker rights.

Viewed through such a long lens, the progress of the labor movement is evident although the progress is often “two steps forward, one step back.” The present social division, the push against unions, the wealth inequality, the disinformation campaigns and extreme nationalism para doxically illustrate that even after a century of growth and progress, the struggle for social justice continues to be a work in progress.

Veronica Atkinson is a retired Registered Nurse, and reader and advocate of worker’s rights.

Prison

Demic has precipitated the release of many held in prison with no effect on public safety. After all, if prisoners reduced crime, the United States would be the safest country in the world, but this is far from true.

For Maple Lane to be converted to a women's prison, Thurston County was asked to amend the zoning to allow for a correctional facility. In July, 2019, DOC signed a contract with Thurston County to fund an analysis of a draft Development Code Amendment to do just that. The zoning change has been on Thurston County’s radar since the DOC first proposed it in 2015, and was on the “docket” (list of projects they are working on) in 2017, but was never completed.

Over the past several months, No New Women's Prison has encouraged opposition from the community. Sarah Nagy, staff attorney at Columbia Legal Services, wrote in her public comment: “...we believe there is an opportunity for the Commission to take a step back and consider the broader implications of this proposal before deciding whether to include it in your agenda... Moreover, we ask that you take time to more closely examine the impacts that the construction of a prison has on the local community and the communities of those who are housed in prisons. In summary, we ask that you choose not to add the DOC zoning request.*

On April 22, County Commissioners rejected the rezoning, acknowlédging strong opposition from the Rochester community, the facility’s proximity to Rochester medical and social services. They also recognized the strong arguments that activist groups had sent in opposition.

It is not certain what next steps the DOC might take. But what we can continue to pursue our goal of ending excessive incarceration of women.

Lea Kronenberg works as a re-entry case manager and instructor for people in prison. She is the daughter of WFP contributing writer Esther Kronenberg.

I'm not asking why
I'm not asking why but I'm asking what now and what next?

This is global a matter of high volume and limited capacity like how traffic used to be on I-5 or the security lines at the airport systems have jams and breaking points. So much is broken cracked, beyond capacity this now though is liminal time.

Space. Let’s watch as the CO2 curves flatten as the air and canals clear. Clarity to organize and re-organize our lives against the domination of the capitalist system

What we don't need cruise ships familiar flyers elders in housed children in confined classrooms my own brother's job to arrange promotions for processed and packaged food. He's got nothing to do as he works from home.

Teachers on the other hand are re-tooling learning Zoom and Screencastomatic rewriting curriculum to be relevant for our students’ lives now in pandemic in isolation and holding hopes in the kids who aren't getting sick but will know this time in memory. Keepers of history and future. Why, is not a question for me, but What? we need farmers in the neighborhood a new kind of learning A knowledge born of solidarity not of individualism or identity. re-distribute the wealth re-imagine the future re-tool for the new world evolving from the old one.

Kathleen Byrd

May 2020

Works In Progress

13
Healthcare

From page 1

lay off staff, drive up executive compensation. Cofounding hospital systems has produced ex- ecutive compensation in the multi- millions, while paying no one else. The original intent of these agreements was to create jobs, and then close it in order to sell the land for development Hospitals in rural areas and small towns aren’t options for merger—they struggle merely to stay afloat, cut- ting staff and parking lots. Hundreds of rural hospitals have closed in recent years, leaving mil- lions of people without necessary health services.

Hospital billing practices are also shaped by profit concerns. Rates for the same treatment vary wildly across the US and the actual amount charged is a function of who is paying. Hospitals have found an art form that accounts for 18% of hospital costs—and allows for difer- ential collections: Medicare, Medicaid, private insurers and individuals—Hospitals include non-payors in their collections. Insurers spend 20% of their pre- ventative collections from Medicare, Medicaid, private insurers and individuals—Hospitals pursue unpaid bills aggressively, even putting liens on patients’ homes. Not surprisingly, medical expenses are the leading cause of bankruptcy in the US.

A recent development in hospi- tal management is the advent of “physician staffing companies” who, in effect, rent out doctors to hospi- tals—for a profit. About a third of hospitals in the US are staffed by doctors on the payrolls of two companies owned by Wall Street investment firms. (The Bell- ington doctor fired for speaking to the press was an employee of one of these companies.)

Doctors

Given the role of money outlined above, it shouldn’t be surprising that the US medical industry skews toward specialties, not general practitioners. Most medical school graduates in the US practice as specialists. About 33% become primary care physicians, a number that has declined over time.

Orthopedic and plastic surgeons are at the top of the medical spe- cialty income scale, with earnings at almost $600,000 annually. Public health preventive medicine and family practice are at the bottom, earning around $200,000 or less. The availability of primary care is further limited by the uneven dis-tribution of practitioners, by lack of insurance to help pay for visits, by lack of coverage for preventive care, and by practices that are not open to new patients because those pa- tients have government insurance.

Insurers

Our private/public/employer system of “insurance” as a way to pay for all of the above (and more) isn’t working. As more entities enter the medical market, more cost and more profit is built in, and insurance premiums go up. Priv- ate insurers constantly redesign their products to limit coverage and reduce health care spending of benefits to reduce payouts.

Insurers spend 20% of their pre- mium dollars on administration—determining eligibility, utilization controls (e.g., prior authorization of particular procedures), claims pro- cessing, and negotiating fees with each and every physician, hospital, surgical centers among other facil- ities. By comparison, Medicare and Medicaid have administrative costs in the 2-3% range.

More expensive but not better

We are told that our system is more expensive than any other country because it’s better. In the recent words of President Trump, “the vi- rus isn’t the problem so much as we have the most advanced health- care.” Not true. The US now has more deaths from the coronavirus than any other coun- try. Beyond the crisis, the US ranks below other developed countries in terms of key health indicators. Repeated studies by the Common- wealth Fund put the US last or near last of all systems in health access, afordability and efciency. Life expectancy in the US is lower than that of many other countries and infant mortality, notably, high- er. Disaggregated by race, US infant mortality has worsen. We are told that we spend more than any other country because we overuse the healthcare system.

Another world is possible

We can identify the elements of a healthcare system that would make us better than the medical industry we rely on now. Health care would be available to all, a consumer good, but provided as a public good. That’s what the coronavirus has made clear: all members of the society have the right to care, and every member has ready access to care that will keep them healthy. A health care system would prioritize health; it would not ration care by price; and it would be widely accessible.

There are indications that pursu- ing healthcare as a public good is becoming possible. Obama care as originally proposed included a public option that could have been a first step toward a single-payer system. In 1996, Congress created Federally Qualified Health Centers, com- munity-based clinics that provide comprehensive primary care and preventive care, including health, oral and mental health/substance abuse services to everyone regard- less of age, ability to pay or health insurance status. These centers became the center of a system that supports health and the people who deliver care.

Bethany Weidner served as Deputy Commissioner for Health Policy in the Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner from 1983 to 2000, and as manager of Seamar Community Health Centers in 1983 to 1990. She was appointed by Governor Marchi to the Washington State Ombudsman’s Office, and chairs the Washington State Ombudsman’s Advisory Committee.

Sources.

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It’s about the money

Even life and death matters can’t override the profit dynamic

Around 2007 federal ofcials decided to ensure that the US medical system wouldn’t have to buy the ventilators needed in a predict- able epidemic. They wrote specifi- cations for a one-use-device that would cost $300 each. In 2008, Newport, an independent company in California won the contract, expected to sell 40,000 ventilators to the government and more on the commercial market, where the standard ventilator then cost about $10,000. Things went smoothly with ofcials from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) monitoring progress. Newport shipped 3 working pro- totypes in 2011. The plan was to apply for clearance from the FDA to sell the device in 2012. That didn’t happen. In May of 2012, Newport was bought by Coviden, a multimillion dollar de- vice company. Coviden shelved the project (”unprofitable”) and was released from the contract in 2014.

In 2015, HHS tried again, this time contracting with the subsid- iary of a multimillion dollar Dutch company. An American made ven- tilator was approved for market in July 2019 and HHS ordered 10,000. None of those have been deliv- ered. Instead, Phillips began sell- ing a commercial version of the ventilator developed with federal funds, for about $17,000 per unit. And in April, the Trump Admin- istration signed a new contract with Phillips to buy 2,500 of the ventilators at $15,000 each. They also signed a contract with General Motors to buy 30,000 ventilators for $16,000 each—to replenish the national stockpile, probably in August.

This story was uncovered by ProPublica. More information is available at www.propublica.org

It’s not “profit” it’s “executive compensation”

St Peter’s in Olympia is a not-for- profit hospital managed by the Sisters of Providence until 1979. As the community grew smaller, the Sisters spent on outside manage- ment but kept the hospital’ s com- mitment to service. That changed in 2012, when Dr. Rod Hochman moved over from Swedish Hospital to head the Providence System.

Hochman oversaw the afiliation of Swedish (which was hav- ing financial difficulties) with Providence and then arranged a merger with California-based St. Joseph’s Hospitals.

With that Hochman embarked on a cost-cutting campaign that included layoffs—but Hochman and 14 other top executives in the Providence System gave themselves raises. Hochman’s compensation jumped from $4.1 million in 2016 to $10.5 million in 2017. The provi- sions for an easy-to-use device went on in May, 2020.

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Rethinking everything

Lesson #10: Another world

In Cuba, health care is considered a human right for all citizens and therefore a national priority. Cuba’s health policy emphasizes prevention, primary care, services in the community, and the active participation of citizens. The backbone of the system is the community-based polyclinic, each of the 498 nationwide serving a catchment area of between 30,000 and 60,000 people. These clinics act also as an area national hub for 20 to 40 neighborhood-based family doctor-and-nurse offices, and as accredited research and teaching centers for medical, nursing and allied health science students. This system has produced an impressively high ranking on major health indicators, despite economic handicaps. The Cuban experience challenges the assumption that high-quality care for all citizens is too expensive. With the financial investment and suggests that the equitable distribution of health care services in the United States requires a national health insurance and service delivery system.

—Quoted from the World Health Organization and from PubMed, a publication of the US National Library of Medicine
The bigger picture behind the virus

Jonathan Cook
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Things often look the way they do because someone claiming authority tells us they look that way. If that sounds too cynical, pause for a moment and reflect on what we all thought important to us just a year ago, or even a few weeks ago.

Then, you may have been thinking that Russian interference in western politics was a vitally important issue, and something that we needed to invest much of our emotional and political energy in countering. Or maybe a few weeks ago you felt that everything would be fine if we could just get Donald Trump out of the White House. Or maybe you imagined that Brexit was the panacea to Britain’s problems—or, conversely, that it would bring about the UK’s downfall.

Still feel that way?
After all, much as we might want to (and doubtless some will try), we can’t really blame Vladimir Putin, or Russian trolls spending a few thousand dollars on Facebook advertising, for the coronavirus pandemic. Much as we might want to, we can’t really blame Trump for the catastrophic condition of the privatised American auto industry, which was not equipped and unprepared for a nationwide health emergency. And as tempting as it is for some of us, we can’t really blame Europe’s soft borders and immigrants for the rising death toll in the UK. It was the global economy and cheap travel that brought the virus here, and it was the Brexit-obsessed prime minister Boris Johnson who dithered as the epidemic took hold.

The bigger picture
Is it possible that only a few weeks ago our priorities were so shallow, or our attention so narrow, that we were already enduring a crisis that was far more important, pressing matters—systemic ones like the threat of a pandemic of the very kind we are currently enduring?

Because while we were all thinking about Russia or Trump or Brexit, there were lots of experts—even the Pentagon, it seems—warning of a new calamity and urging that preparations be made to avoid it. We are in the current mess precisely because those warning were ignored or given no attention—not because the science was doubted, but because there was no will to do something to avert the threat.

If we reflect, it is possible to get a sense of two things. First, that our attention rarely belongs to us; it is the playing-out of others. And second, that the ‘real world’, as it is presented to us, rarely reflects anything we might usefully be able to label as objective reality. It is a set of political, economic and social priorities that have been manufactured for us.

Agents outside our control with their own vested interests—politicians, the media, big business and media owned by big business are manufacturing the reality we are consuming by the virus, but it is, in a truly awful way, entirely manufactured for us.

Strangely, we think of the coronavirus pandemic as an event that is not the product of human activity. But it is. It was the result of two things. First, that our attention rarely belongs to us; it is the playing-out of others. And second, that the ‘real world’, as it is presented to us, rarely reflects anything we might usefully be able to label as objective reality. It is a set of political, economic and social priorities that have been manufactured for us.

A critical perspective
At a moment like this of real crisis, one that overshadows all else, we have a chance—though only a chance—to recognise this truth and develop a critical perspective. A perspective that truly belongs to us, and not to others.

Think back to the old you, the pre-coronavirus you. Were your priorities the same as your current ones?

This is not to say that the things you prioritise now—in this crisis—are necessarily any more ‘yours’ than the old set of priorities. If you’re reading this, you probably feel scared, either for yourself or for your loved ones. All you can think about is the coronavirus. You may also feel serious, perhaps not exactly scared, but certainly concerned that you are at a greater risk than you think. But that’s not objectively the ‘real world’ either. Terrified as the coronavirus is, and as right as anyone is to be afraid of the threat it poses, those ‘agents of authority’ are again directing and controlling our gaze, though at least this time those in authority include doctors and scientists. And they are guiding our attention in ways that serve their interests—for good or bad.

Endless tales of infections and deaths, rocketing graphs, stories of young people, along with the story of the battle for survival serve a purpose. To make sure we stick to the lockdown, that we maintain social distancing, that we don’t lose our grip on a pandemic. Here our interests—survival, preventing hospitals from being overwhelmed—coincide with those of the establishment, the ‘agents of authority’. Those who are saying that we ‘can control the virus’ are those who are trying to persuade us to do precisely what they want.

Crowded out by detail
But again the object of our attention is not as much ours as we may believe. While we focus on graphs, while we twitch the curtains to see if our neighbours are going for a second run or whether families are out in the garden celebrating a birthday distantly from an elderly parent, our attention is being crowded out by detail.

We are much less likely to be thinking about how well the crisis is being handled. Filled with detail, the mundane is again crowding out the important, the big picture.

Our current fear is an enemy to our developing and maintaining a critical perspective. The more we are frightened by graphs, by deaths, the more we are likely to submit to whatever we are told will keep us safe.

There are many other dramatic changes being introduced, almost too many and too rapidly for us to follow them properly. Bans on movement. Internationall prohibition. Censorship. The transfer of draconian powers to the police, and preparations for the deployment of soldiers on streets. Intensified surveillance. Censorship. The public’s right to know is being swallowed by the media owned by big business forever. Intensified surveillance. Censorship. The more we need to control and dominate, the more we need to control and disguise the nature of our rule.

The point is not just that things are far more provisional than most of us are ready to contemplate; it’s that our viewpoint—what we think of as ‘the real world’, as ‘normal’, is almost entirely manufactured for us.

Distracted by the virus
Strange as this may sound right now, in the midst of our fear and our panic, I don’t think the virus is not really the big picture either. Our attention is consumed by the virus, but it is, in a truly awful way, a distraction too.

In a few more years, maybe sooner than we imagine, we will look back on the virus—with the benefit of distance and hindsight—and feel the same way about it we do now about Putin, or Trump, or Brexit.

It will feel part of our old selves, our old priorities, a crisis to where we return, a story we can try to get to grips with. But we won’t notice the big picture that has been manufactured for us.

The evidence is there in the fires, the floods and the disease, in the insects that have disappeared, in the你要填的句子。
grocery clerks & truck drivers
medical professionals & hospital staff
food processors & restaurant workers
neighbors & friends
warehouse workers
farmers & farm workers
letter carriers & mail sorters
janitors and sanitation workers

thank you

Join the call for essential workers to get the protection and pay they deserve at
www.firelandswa.org/rescue-plan
(www.firelandswa.org/plan-de-rescate)