

Our Society, Our Future!

Solidarity

Society is founded on solidarity and mutual aid. Without being able to trust and cooperate, humans would never have created writing, medicine, electricity or a host of other inventions to make our lives better. Humanity has also created catastrophes such as trans-Atlantic slavery and the world wars, which resulted from bitter, selfish competition and hatred of others. Most recently, irresponsible “leaders” have brought our climate to the brink of irreversible breakdown through their selfish and competitive actions. Solidarity and cooperation, on the other hand, have brought us all our greatest social achievements.

Recent decades have seen the creation of new modes of international economic warfare that involve huge loans, “national” debt and sanctions. Public figures pay lip service to “democracy,” but parliamentary democracy is impotent to stop communities and countries from being looted for resources by banks and other mega corporations. As German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble said (referring to Greece’s national debt), “Elections change nothing.” Vulnerable people are continually victimized under this global system of pillage. How can we overcome this nightmare? We need forms of solidarity and collective action capable of resisting and dismantling these systems of greed and oppression bit by bit.

Some inspiration can be found in older forms of solidarity such as labor unions and mutual aid societies. Horizontal, insurgent movements like the Underground Railroad were able to stand up to injustice and deal significant blows to a cruel status quo.

Many of us already put people before profit by helping out with free health clinics, childcare collectives, neighborhood gardens, fixit cafes and more. Community projects like these give us a glimpse of what a truly cooperative future might be like. When need takes priority over greed, acting with solidarity and cooperation can ensure that everyone has access to life’s basic necessities such as healthy food, housing and healthcare. Vital workplaces such as hospitals,



power plants, transit hubs, factories and farms could all be run cooperatively by the many rather than by an unaccountable few.

Resources

Everyday human generosity shows us that a social order based on solidarity is possible. If humans are naturally selfish, what explains the popularity of crowd funding or the outpouring of community care during disasters? When selfishness pervades, the entire community suffers, including those who are being selfish! There is no moral justification at all for crass selfishness. Nor is selfishness “rational” or “natural.” Evolution favors mutual aid over selfishness in the long run. If humans are not able to overcome selfishness through solidarity soon, we will destabilize the biosphere enough to face extinction.

Through industrialization, we’ve created mass transportation and mass communication. It’s entirely possible to power both of these through renewable power in the long run, but we as a species have been acting far outside of safe limitations on fossil fuels. We must correct course if we are to weather the coming climate cataclysms. Getting institutions to divest from fossil fuels is a vital step. Places where people contributed the least to destabilization are being hit the hardest by climate disasters. This is a continuation of centuries of imperial oppression that created the modern world and its injustices. What some call the “developed” nations get most of their wealth from hyper-exploiting communities around the globe. Alleged economic experts twist themselves into knots trying to deny a simple truth: the ruling class are rich because billions are kept poor and dependent. Communities are robbed of their labor and resources, and told this will really help them “develop” out of economic bondage. Development is just the hip new term for imperialism, a global system that robs communities in every country.

Getting rid of imperialism would make life better for all people. It would mean rejecting the competitive logic of “development” and instead cooperating within and across communities to confront and undermine the systems that are hurting us. Reactionary media and politicians feed us the lie that basic human needs are “too expensive” to pay for everyone to have. Considering that all humans really need is food, shelter, rest and mutual care, this is an absurd claim. All the basics of human health and education cost almost no resources to produce. Fire, water, fresh food, metallurgy and printing of texts were enough of a basis for our ancestors to build vast and complex societies. None of those things come close to the resource cost of a single battle tank or fighter jet. If the resources currently poured into building war machines were turned towards medicine, education and science, millions of deaths from starvation, disease and ecological breakdown would be prevented.

Labor

Everything we use on a daily basis was created by labor. In English, the word labor also means, “to give birth.” This is fitting. Our collective labor gives birth to the world we live in. This labor is both paid and unpaid. Unpaid labor includes things like taking care of others when they are suffering or unwell, cooking at home, cleaning up after and tons of other actions that make up informal networks of care and cooperation. Most of this unpaid labor of feeding and caring for all that makes society possible is done by women. The formal paid economy exists on top of this informal, feminized care network. Almost every job subjects people to a power relationship in which their wants, needs and ideas are totally disregarded. These hierarchical places of work create and rely on competitive, me-first attitudes to maintain control.



Profit stands opposed to labor. The less money a worker makes, the more money their employers make off their labor. As early as ancient Egypt, workers chose to cooperate and collectively force their bosses to improve their pay and living conditions. The model of collective strike action works because without work getting done, bosses have no power! All authority relies on obedience. Through refusing to work until demands are met, or just by slowing down work, workers are able to hold bosses accountable and assert their own control over their labor process. We can show solidarity on our free time, but that’s limited. Workplace solidarity threatens the core of the profit system. Solidarity in the workplace means sharing our concerns with our coworkers and addressing issues with management collectively, not individually.

All over the world, people already forge bonds of labor solidarity and bargain with their collective labor power. Some do this through unions. Unions can offer workers real power over their lives, but they can also become corrupt and unaccountable. Strong unions are always democratically accountable to their members. Some institutionalized unions take their members for granted and instead try to make deals with politicians, or even suppress members. For unions to truly unify all workers, they need to reject the backwards ideas and practices that divide us such as sexism, racism, ableism, ageism and nationalism. Only a diverse, passionate internationalist labor movement can topple the corrupt world-domination of private profit.

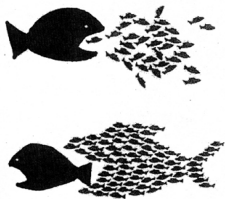
Democracy

The fulfillment of the ideal of democracy would be a society where all decisions are made accountably. In other words, everyone would get a say in any decision that would impact their lives and nobody would be able to cause harm to others and not answer for it. Democratic equality would mean providing everyone with a basic standard of living and would also let all major decisions be subject to public accountability. We might call this a “labor democracy,” in contrast to the current representative or parliamentary “democracies” that really only soften the dictatorship of private profit. True freedom would mean not being subjected to the control of others through their ownership over resources or by any other means. Private profit is a holdover from feudalism, and labor is it’s opposing force.

Hundreds of years after the fall of feudalism, random people are still granted access to massive wealth, and therefore power, merely by being born into certain families. So-called “democracies” continue to prop up cruel monarchies such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, which also makes a total mockery of everything that was fought for and won in past democratic revolutions. The US alone financially supports over two-thirds of the world’s dictatorships. The ideal of democracy, which was practiced in some form by societies all over the world, has become enslaved to private wealth.

All wealth is produced by labor. A democratic labor revolution would mean putting this massive wealth under democratic, cooperative community control rather than allowing it to be used to control our communities. This would mean nobody having to go without food or housing. There would also be better and more equal access to public resources such as health care centers, centers of learning, transport networks, gyms, entertainment centers and more. Community councils would be based around both area and certain needs, such as water, health, repairs and more.

Past social revolutions upheld the idea of “the consent of the governed.” When governing forces abuse their authority and cease to govern with consent, people have the right to overthrow them. This and all other rights and freedoms were established through the French, Haitian, Belgian, Mexican, Irish, Philippine, Chinese, Cuban, Portuguese, Nicaraguan, Korean, South African, and Tunisian revolutions and many other resistances and revolts.



Accountability

Because we are social animals, humans need connection with other humans. When humans strive to abuse, control and gain status over others, it creates a cycle of trauma. If we are to overcome the current stage of mass suffering, we must change the way we look at mental health. Individuals respond to the context around them, and sometimes when people are in continual pain the result is trauma and mental breakdown. Mental health is deeply influenced by social and ecological health. The external causes of mental problems are often neglected, and instead unwell people are looked at as though they simply need to adjust themselves to an abusive, unhealthy society. While external causes are definitely not the only factor, they play a much bigger role than they are often credited for. What constitutes “mental health” in the first place has been upended time and time again. Homosexuality, “mania” and “hysteria” in women, and being transgender were all once diagnosable disorders. We must always remember that mental health exists in a cultural and social context. On top of that, all too often the process of individually “fixing” mentally unwell people can itself be unhelpful, abusive and traumatizing.

Adopting solidarity as a guiding ethic is helpful in offering care to one another during hardship. This means not just being kind but also being willing to apologize for when we make mistakes that hurt others. Regularly offering genuine care to others is the only way to escape the cycle of coercion, trauma and abuse. The constant re-creation of abuse is a feature of a society based around status competition. When we are forced to view others as rivals rather than friends, we suffer mentally as a result. Young people are hit especially hard by depression and anxiety because society is constantly coercing them to fit into its abusive, competitive cycles.

Healing from these cycles also requires abandoning retributive justice in favor of restorative justice. We could reduce harm much better without formal prosecution, trials, police or prisons. The idea that these systems ensure safety is incorrect, and in fact the opposite is true because these forces focus on small crimes committed by desperate people, not on major selfish acts that upend communities. Most crimes are never reported, and the criminal justice system is particularly useless at curbing intimate & sexual violence. Getting people to take responsibility for the harm they’ve caused and agree to help reduce future harm is enough. Taking out our anger after harm has been done only results in more harm. Abusers, who thrive within the current hierarchical systems, can be confronted, exposed and disempowered without continuing a cycle of abuse.

Education

Learning can be very empowering, and has allowed humans to do incredible things. Sadly most current schools do not allow students to learn naturally by spending time the way they choose, but instead prioritize obedience and are designed to train students to compete for higher status via tests and grades. Because of the amount of homework and standardized tests, the current generation of children has less free time to learn socially than any previous generation of children. We are making children do unpaid, unenjoyable work under the guise of education. The result is more stress, more bullying and more depression at younger ages. This is not what childhood should be.

An education system that puts genuine learning and social solidarity first would give people their time back to learn what they are most interested in on any given day. It would not give students rankings that discount genuine learning and make them feel superior or inferior to others, and it would also not require the use of shame and punishment to make children feel subservient to adults.

To learn more about how we can achieve a future guided by solidarity, check out the following online resources:

Social movement info & videos – roarmag.org
Solution-focused journalism – yesmagazine.org
Research on news censorship – projectcensored.org
Green & indigenous reporting - intercontinentalcry.org
Internationalist, solidarity-based labor union – iww.org
Tenant’s Union Network (also in Spanish) - atun-rsia.org
Cooperation in the US south- cooperationjackson.org
Resource hub for ending violence – transformharm.org
Pan-African news & analysis – sfbayview.com
World labor news & analysis – libcom.org
Free repair guide for everything - ifixit.com
Top 100 climate solutions – drawdown.org
Legal rights for nature and community - celdf.org
Restorative gardening tips - permaculturenews.org
Bottom-up knowledge commons – p2pfoundation.net
Critical social commentary – currentaffairs.org
Transparent public discourse - theconversation.com
Resources for restorative justice – incite-national.org
Free vegan community meals - foodnotbombs.net
Critical, independent interviews – thisishell.com
Economic cooperation - participatoryeconomics.info
Cooperative development - cooperationworks.coop
Landless workers’ movement - mstbrazil.org
Network of intentional communities – ic.org