

The Retiree **ADVOCATE**

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PSARA EDUCATION FUND
“Uniting Generations for a Secure Future”

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June 2020

**Social Security 2020:
Is the Trust Fund
Healthy?**

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Sing-Along with Lou, June 14

By Amy Davis

Through all the tumult and the strife
I hear that music ringing;
It sounds an echo in my soul--
How can I keep from singing?
from the song “How Can I Keep From Singing” by Robert Wadsworth Lowry

Please join PSARA member Lou Truskoff for our first virtual sing-along. A founding member of the Seattle Labor Chorus, Lou has brought music to countless demonstrations and picket lines -- and now brings it right into your living room. You are invited to tune in and sing with Lou and other PSARA members, or just sit back, listen, and enjoy the music. Wherever you are, we hope this gathering will raise your spirits and inspire you to keep fighting for social justice. Lou will sing favorites old and new -- and may even take some requests.

The event will take place on Zoom at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 14. Watch your email for the link with ID and password information about a week before the event. The gathering has room for only 100 people, so be sure to tune in on time.

The sing-along is free and available to all our members, but for those who are able, we will gladly accept donations, either electronically or by mail. All donations will go directly to fund the critical work PSARA continues to do. Be sure to mark your calendar for June 14, and watch your email for further details. We’re looking forward to an afternoon of high spirits and rousing music. We hope you can join us.

Amy Davis is a member of PSARA and one of our team of proofreaders.



*PSARA member Lou Truskoff leads us in song. Lou is also a member of the Seattle Labor Chorus.
(Photo: Gareth Munger)*

“Do you want to be Queen for a Day?”

By Pam Lux

For over 20 years ending in 1964, this question could be heard in American households five days a week. Just think about all the prizes that were awarded to the queen. Now is your chance to ask for things that will improve your life.

IF YOU WERE QUEEN OR KING FOR A DAY WHAT WOULD YOU DO TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS IN OUR SENIOR HOUSING AND NURSING HOMES?

We will be listening and doing what we do best – advocating and lobbying. As PSARA begins setting our legislative agenda for the 2021 session we are in the middle of a pandemic that is impacting seniors disproportionately. Each of us has experienced this virus differently. We all have noticed things that might need to be changed. We want to listen to what you need. We will do our best to advocate for them.

Zoom in for our virtual coffee hour, Thursday, June 25, from 3 – 5 p.m. Share your stories, concerns, and needs with us. We will do our best to fight for them.

We will provide more details and a zoom link closer to the date. You can provide your own coffee.

Pam Lux is President of PSARA.



The Retiree ADVOCATE

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Thank You!

By Robby Stern

Many thanks to PSARA members, including the Executive Boards, for your generosity during the GiveBIG campaign. One hundred and thirty-five PSARA households participated, and more than \$25,600 was raised. As a result of your generosity we will continue working to make retirement security a reality for present and future generations, spreading our message as far and wide as we can. We will continue to expand our education and advocacy to help build a movement for a better and more humane community, state, country, and world. Thank you PSARA members!

Robby Stern is President of the PSARA Education Fund and a member of PSARA's Executive Board.

Thank You Bobby and Michael Righi

Your *May Retiree Advocate* came to you courtesy of Bobby and Michael Righi, who stepped up to take care of labeling and mailing the *Advocate* while our mailing parties are on hiatus due to COVID-19 precautions.

Thank you Bobby and Michael for keeping us in circulation!

June Membership Meeting Canceled

Our June membership meeting has been canceled as we observe coronavirus precautions. Stay tuned for a possible Zoom meeting in the future. We look forward to seeing you virtually at least, until it's safe to see you again face-to-face.

What a Coincidence!

Donald Trump on notorious anti-Semite Henry Ford: "Good bloodlines. If you believe in that stuff, you've got good blood."

Trump is not the only Henry Ford fan in the world...

"I regard Henry Ford as my inspiration," Adolf Hitler told a *Detroit News* reporter two years before becoming the German chancellor in 1933, explaining why he kept a life-size portrait of the American automaker next to his desk.



Henry Ford

Social Security 2020: Is the Trust Fund Healthy?

By Linda Peterson

To answer this question, one needs to consider the 2020 Social Security Trustees Report as well as the implications of the coronavirus recession and our nation's political response.

On April 22, the 2020 Social Security Trustees Report was issued, and it was similar to the 2019 report. The combined Old Age and Survivors Insurance and the Disability Insurance (OASDI) trust fund had increased slightly, from \$2.8 trillion to \$2.9 trillion. The report projected that the fund would be able to pay full benefits till about 2035, after which payouts would be limited to the income coming in, resulting in an estimated 21 percent cut in benefits. No surprise here.

But the report was not able to take into account the coronavirus recession, which has longer-term financial implications for the trust fund, and is shining a spotlight on political challenges.

Financially, with unemployment increasing, there will be less income coming into the fund than the report assumed, because the majority of the income received by the fund is from payroll taxes paid 50-50 by employees and their employers. In addition, there is likely to be an increase in eligible adults applying for early benefits. Both of these occurred a decade ago in the Great Recession.

This is not an immediate problem, and current beneficiaries have no need to worry. The trust fund carries a surplus specifically to provide the additional cushion when the cost of benefits exceeds the income coming in. (Indeed, the trust fund was built up over the past 35 years specifically to address the current boomer retirement wave.) What it could mean, though, is that the fund might be able to pay full benefits only through 2034, not 2035, as Social Security Works projects. Or possibly only through 2029, as the Bipartisan Policy Institute, a Washington, DC think tank, projects. It will depend on the length and depth of the recession,

as well as the political response.

Politically, President Trump continues to propose a payroll tax cut as part of any future assistance package, in addition to the recently enacted "deferral" of the employers' share of payroll taxes. This is terrible for the Social Security Trust Fund, and would hasten the date. Payroll taxes are Social Security's dedicated funding source. It is nothing less than a stealth attack on Social Security (and Medicare), despite his vow to never cut it. Some of his advisors are even pushing a plan that would let people borrow from "their" future Social Security, as if it weren't an insurance fund but a private retirement account or piggy bank people could raid for current expenses.

So far Democrats have held firm against these ideas, but the possibility of the fund running short as early as 2029 may be sparking more interest in Congress to address the long-term health of the fund. Republicans, predictably, prefer reducing benefits (raising the retirement age even further,

reducing cost-of-living adjustments), or hiding behind a commission to "study" the issue and make recommendations.

Democrats, meanwhile, have a solution ready to go: Rep. John Larson's Social Security 2100 Bill has over 208 co-sponsors in the House, including all seven of Washington's Democrats. It would increase the income to the fund by (eventually) scrapping the cap, and there would be no need for any future benefit reductions at all. Senate Democrats have been slow to take up the issue though, with only one sponsor of the companion bill, S269. Neither Senator Murray nor Senator Cantwell has yet signed on.

Perhaps Senators Murray and Cantwell need to hear from constituents. Call Sen. Murray at (202) 224-2621 and Sen. Cantwell at (202) 224-3441. Thank them for their long-term support of Social Security, and ask them to show their current support by signing on to S269.

Linda Peterson is Chair of PSARA's Education Committee.

\$434 Billion...

That's how much US billionaires have made during the COVID-19 pandemic.

That's right, while the official unemployment rate neared 25 percent – the highest since the Great Depression – a handful of Americans were raking in big bucks.

A study by the Americans for Tax Fairness and the Institute for Policy Studies' Program for Inequality concluded that the net worth of America's billionaires grew 15 percent between mid-March and mid-May, to \$3.382 trillion from \$2.948 trillion.

The biggest gains were at the top of the billionaire pyramid, with the richest five billionaires – Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Warren Buffett, and Larry Ellison – seeing combined wealth gains of \$76 billion.

Elon Musk, Mr. Open-the-Economy-Now!, had among the largest percentage gain of billionaires during the two months, seeing his net worth jump by 48 percent in the two months to \$36 billion.



Telephone Conversations with Our PSARA Members

By Karen Richter

The coronavirus has changed our world. We are staying home, only going out for exercise, grocery shopping or the pharmacy. Many of us are having food delivered if we can, so we don't take unnecessary risks. This virus is particularly devastating to seniors with underlying health conditions. Either we are or we know someone at risk.

The PSARA Executive Committee discussed the possible effects of the virus on our membership. We decided to ask for volunteers to reach out to our members and check in with them to see how they are weathering this crisis.

PSARA members Pam Lux, Vanetta Molson, Steve Bauck, Mindi Lee, Sam Hazenbeler, Jeff Johnson, Tim Wheeler, Robby Stern, Maureen Bo, Angie Bartels, Ruth Egger, Becky Gibbons, and I made calls to our 1,350 members during April. We left a lot of phone and email messages and were able to have some conversations with members who answered their phones. We connected with old friends and made some new friends. Our members are remarkable people.

Our phone volunteers offered the following thoughts on their calls:

"Members that I spoke to expressed thanks and were happy that a PSARA member had called to find out if they are OK. To me it was great to realize that the warm PSARA family/community spirit is alive and well and will continue." Maureen Bo

"I enjoyed doing community check-in calls to PSARA members. It's so important for us all to rely on one another and check in on each other during this difficult time. I got to meet a bunch of new members I hadn't met before by doing these calls. Most people seemed to be doing well and keeping in good spirits, and I was able to share some resources to assist people." Sam Hazenbeler



Karen Richter talking to PSARA members at our 35th Birthday celebration (Photo: Garett Munger)

"When I called a number of our members I found most were doing fairly well. Many had either family and/or close friends nearby for assistance, although frequently they were feeling lonely as a result of the social isolation.

"Several were alone with some outside help, and for them it was difficult. Several are working from home and taking care of kids or other family members at the same time. Others had grown kids who were back living at home. A few were having to deal with illness or trauma in their lives unrelated to COVID-19 but made much more difficult by the pandemic. I did not hear back from everyone I called and/or emailed, but I heard back from most, and almost without exception the members said they appreciated the call.

"One of our members had just brought home from the hospital his wife of 60 years who had suffered a grievous injury. She was coming home to receive palliative care. It was a sad and difficult time in their lives. That was one of the several heart-wrenching stories a few of our members chose to share with me." Robby Stern

"Many of our members, because of their age, were self-isolating and enjoyed talking to someone other than a family member or their cat. After identifying myself from PSARA the conversation became lively, upbeat, and fun.

"The Advocate was a big topic. They mentioned several times that the monthly articles keep them informed and acknowledged that the events sound interesting so maybe they will attend more.

"At the conclusion of the conversation I felt a renewed connection, and both the member and I had a resurgence of respect for the organization." Mindi Lee

"My conversations with our members were positive after I told them I was calling from PSARA. We talked about our PSARA family and how our friends and loved ones were doing during difficult times. Some conversations were emotional because of travel restrictions keeping loved ones apart." Karen Richter

Based on these conversations with our members, overall they seemed to be riding out this crisis fairly well. But as a Board we want to continue our conversations and outreach during this critical period. Keep your eyes on the Advocate and PSARA emails about Zoom webinars, our Zoom sing-along with Lou Truskoff, and other opportunities until we can be together again in person.

Karen Richter is PSARA's Membership VP and Chair of PSARA's Fundraising Committee.

How Many Crises Can We Handle at Once?

By Bobby Righi

It has been two months since the World Health Organization declared a pandemic as the illness, COVID-19, swept over 110 countries. We were already in a climate crisis but now we have two going on – five if you count the real crises of racism, inequality, and militarism in this country.

The climate crisis, like the coronavirus crisis and racism and inequality, is much more obvious to some folks. They suffer through floods, fires, drought, and see their lives erased. Their children breathe polluted air, drink leaded water, and have little access to health care. These are the same people mourning family members and friends who are dying from the virus after suffering from treatable diseases because they have little access to health care. These are also the people doing most of the essential jobs for very low pay.

Both COVID-19 and the climate crises have the same sacrifice zones and sacrifice people. Who are these people? They are predominantly black, brown, and indigenous. These are the throwaway people in our system of white supremacy. Who deserves to die? Who can be sacrificed so a few can live in luxury and keep their profits up? Most of us, and in particular, black, brown, and indigenous people.

The United States has 4 percent of the world's population, but we have 27 percent of all of the deaths from the coronavirus. How could this happen in "the wealthiest country in the world"? The wealth is astronomical. But it is in the hands of a very few so it doesn't do much good. Those people have now fled on their private yachts and private jets to their private tropical islands to wait out the virus, while being waited on by their private chefs.

The COVID-19 and climate crises are both made much worse because of the strangulation of the public sphere.

Public health, education, transportation, housing, and utilities, all are being squeezed dry for profit.

Even now during the COVID-19 crisis the government is giving massive tax breaks to oil and gas companies as part of the bailout bills. Trump and his Justice Department are now pushing to "start up" the economy and are threatening to punish anyone who doesn't go back to work in crowded plants.

They, and their backers in the American Enterprise Institute and Koch's Americans for Prosperity, are busy organizing what "getting back to normal" means for them: fewer regulations, more tax breaks, an end to Social Security, and, of course, they say that there is no money for a Green New Deal or health care for all.

For them, the economy is a mechanism for increasing profits. For us, the economy is a social network which provides necessities, jobs, and social well-being. The two views are diametrically opposed.

We have been sheltering and taking time to walk, talk to neighbors, and think about what jobs are truly "essential" – the care givers, the food growers and processors, the builders and repairers. We have also seen that the government can come up with trillions of dollars in a flash. That happened in 2008 to bail out the banks, and now we have been through several cycles of bailouts in the trillions.

We know that they can come up with the money to put thousands of people to work on clean energy, decaying infrastructure, new schools, health care for all, safe and efficient public transportation, and high quality housing for everyone. This is not a pipe dream. Other countries have been doing this for years. There are many ways to pay for this, and even *Forbes*, the business magazine, says that we need to cut



*Bobby Righi in action
(Photo: Garet Munger)*

military spending by 10 percent and use the funds to pay for jobs in a green energy economy.

The people in power refuse to act for the common good, and they tell white people that their interests are different from those of people of color. So basically, there is no "common good." But we have a different vision and will support laws and political candidates that do care about building a just society.

Right now, we can take a small step and demand that our Congressional representatives and our Senators co-sponsor the "ReWIND" Act: (HR6707/S3611), co-sponsored by Rep. Jayapal and 29 other democratic representatives in the house and Sen. Jeff Merkley and nine other senators. It will assure that funds meant to help struggling workers and small businesses do not go to large corporations and big banks for paying bonuses and upholding stock prices.

Bobby Righi is Co-Chair of PSARA's Climate and Environmental Justice Committee and a member of PSARA's Executive Board.

Harder and More Hazardous: Grocery Work in a Time of COVID-19

By Kristen Beifus

Grocery store work has always been physically and mentally demanding. It's a public relations job that involves serving whoever comes in, at all hours of the day or night, using your body for your entire shift, stocking, cleaning, cooking, serving, checking etc. There is risk of exposure to chemicals, sickness, violence, and other environmental hazards.

We have always known that grocery workers are essential, as are farmworkers, ranchers, and those who process and transport food. Our food chain workers are vital to our very existence, working through snow, hurricanes, record heat, unprecedented air pollution, and now in a worldwide pandemic.

Then why, at a time of record grocery store profits, with Kroger CEO Rodney McMullen reporting total compensation of over \$20 million, are these hazardous, essential jobs compensated at some of the lowest rates with limited safety and security?

Maria Rouse-Williams and her colleagues at the Burien Fred Meyer know that after three months working in a pandemic, essential workers need to be heard. On May 15 they were out in front of their store, wearing face masks, joined by community and media, demanding that Kroger maintain the \$2 per hour "Hero Pay" that they threatened to stop mid-May. "We're all pretty terrified still," she said. "I have coworkers who don't want to come into work, and I'm one of them. I was contemplating quitting a couple weeks ago, because this is getting out of hand."

Rouse-Williams, who has been with the company for six months, doesn't see Kroger monitoring how many people are in her store, despite Governor Inslee's order to maintain 30 percent or less capacity. "Consistently, every single day that I have worked at my store, this store has been packed," she said.



A hero: Mia Soto Rosas, courtesy clerk

With so many customers, "We don't have enough downtime to clean or even sanitize our hands," she explained.

In addition to more safety, the so-called "Hero Pay" gives her needed resources to do her job because she's working longer hours than usual. "We are actually paying more money for babysitters, and that hero bonus has been paying for babysitters so I can come into work," she said.

Grocery workers are not only advocating for themselves; they care for their whole community. "We wear the masks to protect other people from us because we are exposed in our work and have a higher chance of contracting the virus and not even know it and give it to those who are vulnerable... however, some of our customers don't do the same for us," noted Sue Wilmot, UFCW 21 E-board member and Safeway worker for 39 years.

When the CDC guidelines came out, Sue took it upon herself to close down half of the self-checkouts in her store. "It's impossible to social distance with check-stands that face in and not enough staff to clean between customers." Her managers complained about the lines and tried to compel her to open them. However she held strong, and as a leader in her store, she was respected. Unfortunately, new hires don't have just-cause protection for the first 90 days so are intimidated into opening additional self-checkouts, and forced to put themselves and customers at risk.

Sue also shared information about the heightened tensions in her store. "Many people are not dealing well in the pandemic. They are either scared or angry, hot with masks, yelling at those who are not wearing masks, buying huge loads of groceries, causing long lines, upset when the store doesn't have what they want, and taking their frustrations out on us."

She also shared how union and non-union workers have come together to advocate for safety protections such as facemasks. "It doesn't matter anyone's political affiliation or where we work in the store, we all want to keep our community safe. We also see customers as part of our team. So please wear your mask and social distance. It shows that you respect us."

Take action:

-Report stores that are more than 30% capacity: bit.ly/covid-compliance

-Tell Kroger and all grocery companies that they need to pay hazard pay to their workers: bit.ly/MessageKroger

Kristen Beifus is a member of PSARA's Executive Board and a community organizer with United Food and Commercial Workers Local 21.

Budgets Reflect What We Value

By Michael Righi

The zombies are back. Today's *New York Times* (May 21) has an editorial by former (voted out) union-busting Wisconsin governor, Scott Walker. He is arguing against "bailouts" for states in the next coronavirus depression stimulus plan.

Walker, a Koch-backed Republican, when in office, blamed public sector unions, such as teachers', and their earned pension plans, for Wisconsin's budget shortfalls. This was after the super-wealthy had plunged the global economy into crisis after 2008, and employment and state revenues plunged. Walker, of course, advocated tax cuts and weakening union voices during the crisis. Typical right-wing policy.

Republicans, and some Democrats for that matter, are always whining about federal budget deficits. That has been muted lately, as the Treasury shovels money to their corporate buddies, but it was sure to come shuffling back. Sure enough, Walker does not disappoint. He croaks, "We need officials in the federal government to get serious about balancing the federal budget, and we need state leaders to do the same."

You know what Walker means. He is not talking about the defense budget, and he is not advocating tax increases on the Koch brothers to "balance the budget." McConnell and friends have in their sights food stamps, unemployment benefits, Medicare and Medicaid, and even Social Security.

Notice how Walker tries to conflate two very different phenomena, state budgets and the federal government budget. It is true that states must balance their budgets; most have constitutional requirements to do so. But that most emphatically does not apply to the US federal budget. It would be a crime (a moral crime, I guess) if the federal government did not run budget deficits when the economy and its people needed them to.

Federal budget deficits are needed now to support people and counteract

the looming depression. They will be needed in the future for Green New Deal projects to get us off fossil fuels. The US federal government right now can borrow funds at almost zero interest rates, incurring very little interest cost. If needed, the Federal Reserve can create money to lend to the government, just as they are doing now to support corporate financial markets and wealthy investors.

What about state budgets? Washington is projecting about a \$7 billion shortfall in revenue over the next couple of years (spending is running at \$26 billion or so). Inslee has called for state programs to figure out how to cut 15 percent. I hope \$7 billion is close. We have a 15 percent unemployment rate in official figures, but it is probably closer to 25 percent, as the official rate counts only people "actively looking for work."

But the point is that the federal government could cover states' budget shortfalls as part of a next stimulus bill. Trump wants to "wait and see" for the economic magic to happen (is this thinking a result of those pills he's taking?). More seriously, McConnell wants to give corporations immunity from lawsuits about their negligent virus behavior. And he wants to give governors the right to declare state bankruptcy (which means they could ignore union contracts and slash pension funds). This is not about "red states" and "blue states," that's for the twitter feeds. It is about power and democracy for unions and working people.

After the 2008 crash, inadequate aid to the states meant that they did not stop slashing jobs for five years. Those are teachers and firefighters we are talking about -- 220,000 fewer teachers. Public employment has recovered a little after those years of austerity, but Republican claims of "profligate state spending" are nonsense, as usual. State and local spending has grown more slowly in the last 20 years than in any other time since 1945.



Michael Righi

We do not need another round of austerity. From 2009 to 2012, Washington cut \$13 billion. Thousands lost basic health, dental, prescription, and home health care services. We know that the present administration wants to use the crisis to impose further austerity and savage public services. They do not want to help anyone not in a business suit.

But Washington has a tremendous amount of wealth being accumulated by the few. While agitating for federal funds, and preparing for the budget battles to come, we can act locally. We cannot allow depression and austerity to result in a downward spiral of job loss, small business closures, and impoverishment. The state must invest, in education and child care and clean energy and public services.

We will have to get creative tax-wise, to tap into the pockets of affluence. A capital gains tax? An executive excess compensation tax on corporations? A wealth or estate tax? Maybe a corona excess-profits tax? Don't let the zombie clowns confuse us into inaction. We need to protect working people and the jobs that serve us all and keep us well.

Michael Righi is a retired economics professor and a member of the Retiree Advocate Editorial Board.

Book Review: *Radical Seattle: The General Strike of 1919*, by Cal Winslow

Lessons from a Workers' Movement

By Jeff Johnson

"The General Strike ... of Seattle filled with hope and happiness the hearts of millions of people in all places of the earth You demonstrated the possibility of that loyal solidarity of the working class which is the sole remaining hope of liberty for mankind."
Max Eastman, Editor of the *Liberator*

Cal Winslow vividly brings to life the workers' movement of the early twentieth century in the Pacific Northwest. Through organizing in the mines, woods, mills, shipyards, farms, and from street corner soap boxes and mass meetings at the Dreamland Rink, reporting from worker and socialist newspapers, the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), Socialist Party, and Seattle Central Labor Council built a working-class consciousness and radical political infrastructure laying the foundation for the Seattle General Strike of 1919.

This General Strike was not just an event in labor's history but rather a testament to what workers can do when they organize for social and economic justice. It provides a teaching moment for the crises that face the working class today.

Built Through Struggle

Organizing at the turn of the twentieth century was happening at a fever pitch -- for decent wages, safe and humane working conditions, adequate food and lodging, industrial unionism, the closed shop, the eight-hour day, and, for the IWW, "one big union." Wages were low and precarious, working conditions dangerous and harsh, and the owners of capital, along with their political handmaidens, were vicious in their attack on unions and workers.

From capital's perspective not only were unions bad but they were anti-American. Those who sided with workers' organizations were demonized, brutally attacked, and locked up.



Seattle General Strike: Longshore workers march

Membership in the IWW grew rapidly as paid organizers were sent to the labor camps to agitate, educate, and organize. It was through strikes and bloody conflicts in the woods and sawmills, on the waterfront, and through outrageous massacres in Everett and Centralia that, as Winslow notes, working class consciousness grew in "fits and starts."

At the same time Seattle offered fertile ground for organizing. Seasonal employment in logging, fishing, the canneries, and agriculture brought thousands of unemployed workers to the city looking for shelter, food, work, and comradeship. The city was growing by leaps and bounds with a manufacturing workforce of over 50,000 strong. By the end of World War I, Seattle had become the leading port on the West Coast.

Seattle also leaned progressive. There was general public support for women's suffrage, direct democracy (initiatives, referendums, and recalls), municipal ownership of utilities and ports, worker cooperatives, and a history of utopian communities in the state.

In addition, workers had available to them multiple progressive and socialist newspapers bringing news of workers struggles and victories from all around the world. The *Union Record*, the first labor-owned daily newspaper in the country and published by the Central Labor Council, had a circulation of 120,000 after the Seattle General Strike.

After a decade of challenging local authorities and taking repeated arrests the Free Speech Movement prevailed in Spokane, and throughout the state. This provided a wealth of skilled orators on city corners, civic and union halls, and parks, speaking on a range of progressive issues and solidarity. The voices of Emma Goldman, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Kate Sadler, and Eugene Debs were familiar to workers in Seattle.

The labor movement in Seattle was also unique in many ways. The Central Labor Council (CLC) had strong cooperative leadership that worked well with socialists and the IWW. The CLC differed from the AFL and eastern unions in its strong support for industrial unions over craft unions, its support for a closed

Continued on Page 11

This Pandemic Didn't Have to Be This Bad, Part II

By Mark M. McDermott

A TALE OF TWO COUNTRIES

South Korea and the United States both reported their first coronavirus case on January 20. The contrast in the responses are damning proof of Trump's incompetence and negligence.

The South Korean response

Their government took swift action and convened an emergency meeting with governmental leaders and medical companies even though only 4 cases had been reported. A leading infectious disease expert said:

"We were very nervous. We believed that it could develop into a pandemic. We acted like an army."

The United States response

On January 22, 2020, President Trump was asked: "Are there worries about a pandemic at this point?" His response: "No. Not at all. And we have it totally under control."

January 30th: "We have it well under control."

February 19th: "I think the numbers are going to get progressively better as we go along."

February 27th: "It's going to disappear. One day it's like a miracle – it will disappear."

February 29th: Vaccine "very quickly" and his actions are "the most aggressive taken by any country."

March 7th: "I'm not concerned at all."

March 10th: "It will go away. Just stay calm. It will go away."

Alex Azar, Secretary of Health and Human Services: "There is no testing kit shortage, nor has there ever been."

Trump, while touring the CDC on March 6, said, "Anybody that wants a test can get a test."

The Results

By April 3rd, the reported infection rate in the US was almost 4 times higher than South Korea's. The death rate in the US was 5 ½ times higher than South Korea's.

Trump's inept leadership is highlighted by the Center for Disease Control's current guidelines about personal protective equipment (PPE) for use by health care staff:

"In settings where facemasks are not available, health care providers (HCP) might use homemade masks (e.g., bandana, scarf) for care of patients with COVID-19 as a last resort. However, homemade masks are not considered PPE, since their capability to protect HCP is unknown. Caution should be exercised."

On March 23rd, Washington State's epidemiologist reported: "We have health care workers wearing bandanas at this point."

Our nation owes all health care workers, all patients, and other front-line workers the personal protective equipment and medical equipment they need.

MY REFLECTIONS – LEADERSHIP REALLY MATTERS.

We spend more on health care per person than any country. We are the richest country in the world. We have 6 times the population of South Korea. Our annual Gross Domestic Product is 13 times larger than South Korea. South Korea has been testing their population at 19 times the rate of our country.

Why has South Korea been so successful in their response to the pandemic? Why has our response been so tragically inept?

The answer is leadership. South Korea's government was prepared in advance, listened to the experts, and mobilized accordingly. Trump and



Mark McDermott

his team systematically ignored the advice of experts for years, refused to recognize the truth of the pandemic, and failed to act as a competent leader conveying clear consistent messages. This is not a failure due to a lack of resources. It is not due to a lack of skilled hard working medical workers. It is a colossal failure of leadership. How many people will die or be sickened in our country due to this failure of leadership. This is a key question for the 2020 election.

In closing, I have deep compassion and empathy for those who suffer and die whether they are patients or workers on the front lines. I take my hat off to the health care workers, grocery workers, first responders and so many others who are working hard in these most trying times. We can do better as a nation.

My next articles on the pandemic will discuss it from a longer historical perspective and its potential effects on the elections.

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Mark McDermott is a member of PSARA's Executive Board. Part I of this article was printed in the May issue of the Retiree Advocate.

Reflections from a Funeral

By Robby Stern

During the first week of May I attended via Facebook Live the funeral of Laura Stern. Laura was married to my deceased first cousin, Herb. She was 92, living in Chicago, had pre-existing health conditions, and died from COVID-19. She was a refugee from Germany and came to the US with her parents as an 11-year-old.

I was a child when Laura and Herb moved to Charlotte. Our family spent significant time with Herb, Laura, and their kids, Sheryl and Glenn, who were younger than me. After I left to attend college, I had little contact with their family until I reconnected with Glenn approximately 20 years ago.

Glenn informed Jacob, our son, of Laura's illness, and a few days later Laura died. Dina and I wanted to honor Laura and support Glenn and the rest of the family. We attended the funeral anticipating it would be a very disconnected experience. Glenn thought it would be like viewing a security camera video.

We were surprised at how moving the experience of the funeral was. It was a windy day in the Chicago cemetery when the Rabbi began the graveside service. Traditional Jewish mourning prayers were said in English and Hebrew. Glenn's sister Sheryl, her husband Marty, and their kids were present at the cemetery. The Rabbi, while holding onto her notes which were blowing in the wind, delivered a beautiful recounting of Laura's life and the struggles of her immigrant family when they came to the US fleeing the Nazi regime. She spoke of the devoted marriage between Herb and Laura and the transitions that occurred in their lives. There were moments during the service when I wept, one of which was when we stood to say the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer of mourning.

The funeral was surreal and emotional, with the wind, the facemasks, and cemetery workers standing by to rapidly fill the grave. The traditional practice of

family members shoveling dirt into the grave could not happen, so there were little cups of dirt family members could throw into the grave along with flowers.

After it was over and we "clicked" off, Dina and I sat for a few minutes taking in what we had just experienced. Dina expressed anger that it had to happen this way, and I totally agreed as I moved from sadness to anger. The incredible failure of leadership by the Trump administration, a failure for which we all will pay for many years to come, is nothing less than criminal.

My mind wandered to the parallel failure of our federal government to prepare and respond to the threat to humanity of climate change. Global warming and the disasters that ensue have already cost jobs, homes, and the lives of millions of people -- disproportionately brown and black. This failure will continue to cause havoc and death, first and foremost among the most vulnerable. It will literally kill billions across our planet. We are witnessing in our country a simultaneous and monumental failure to respond to the climate crisis and a devastating failure to respond comprehensively to the pandemic.

The Obama administration seriously considered the threat of a pandemic and took preparatory steps, including the creation of a National Security Council team on pandemic preparedness. There is a 69-page handbook for preparedness that was totally ignored. The cavalier and self-promoting responses of the Trump administration in failing to protect the residents of this country is widely known both in this country and around the world.

Now Trump and his allies are demanding the opening of business as usual (including support for the fossil fuel industry) and couching the increased death and illness that will result as a "necessary sacrifice" that must be made to preserve the "American way of life," i.e. profit over people. Their goal is



Robby Stern

to make sure that wealth is preserved for the rich and that the means to add to their wealth proceed unimpeded.

Recently, Chris Christy, former Governor of New Jersey and a strong Trump ally, voiced an appeal to patriotism when he said on CNN: "We sent our young men during World War Two over to Europe, out to the Pacific knowing that many of them would not come home alive." He added, "And we decided to make that sacrifice because what we were standing up for was the American way of life. In the very same way now, we have to stand up for the American way of life." Christy failed to mention that the government has the resources to protect the people of this country and reduce their suffering. The comparison to the fight against fascism and the attack on Pearl Harbor is outrageous.

We have to defeat Trump in November and help defeat as many of his supporters running for office as we can. We need and will advocate for structural changes to how our economy is organized. Trump, Christy, and their allies do not speak for the American way of life. Their words and actions promote inequality, racism, ultra-nationalism, and xenophobia. They speak for keeping things as they are as opposed to how humanity needs them to be.

Book Review: Radical Seattle: The General Strike of 1919

Continued From Page 8

shop, and the use of secondary boycotts to support organizing and contract fights of other unions.

Between 1916 and 1918 union membership grew in Seattle by 300 percent, bringing total union membership to 60,000. As rank and file CLC members and leadership worked with IWW members and socialists, Winslow writes about the growing "radical consensus" and "radicalized militant majority" in Seattle's labor movement.

Perhaps the single most important event leading to this radical consensus was the brutality of the Everett Massacre, where workers arriving on a steamer to test a free speech event were savagely attacked by the sheriff and a citizen's mob. At least five people died, upwards of 30 people were injured, and 74 jailed.

"Nothing Moved but the Tides"

On Thursday, February 6, 1919, waitresses, laundry workers, street car workers -- 65 thousand union workers in all -- walked off the job in support of striking shipyard workers engaged in a long-term struggle with the shipping companies.

For five days workers ran the city. People were fed at 21 different locations, milk distribution was organized at 35 locations throughout the city, garbage was picked up, hospitals were supplied with what they needed, and public safety was secured by volunteer union patrols. No crime was reported during these five days.

Thousands of workers volunteered to perform the tasks to keep Seattle's essential services operating. On Sunday, February 9, it was reported that volunteers served over 30,000 meals.

In spite of condemnation by capital, political leaders, and the AFL, Seattle union members through a strong sense of class consciousness, solidarity, and a vision of a more just world had the confidence to take control of the city and arguably run it better, though certainly more justly, than it had ever been run before.

Time to be Bold Again

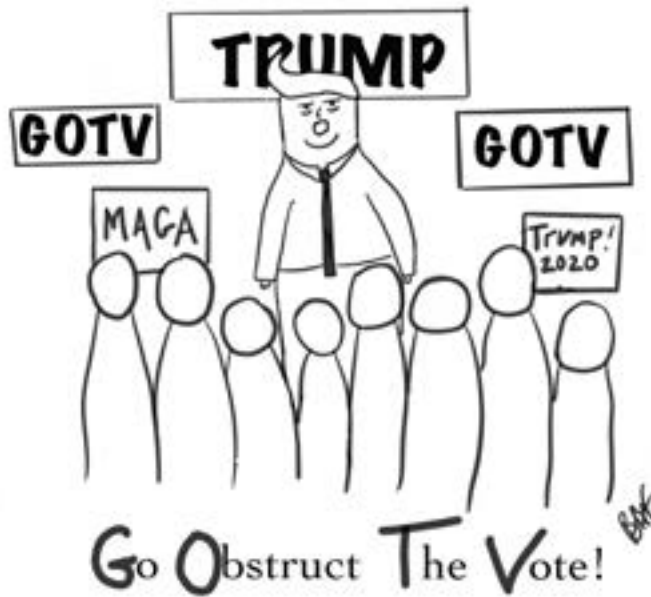
As workers today face the existential crises of climate disaster, income inequality, and global health pandemic, the failures of capitalism have been dramatically laid bare. Workers today need to have the confidence of those in Seattle, 1919.

Through solidarity between labor, communities of color, tribes, and other allies we can develop a vision of a just and sustainable economy. We must build a new economic paradigm based in equity.

Jeff Johnson is a retired President of the Washington State Labor Council and a member of PSARA's Executive Board.

The Barbed Wire

By Barbara Flye



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- Basic contribution: \$20
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Meetings and Events

Out of concern for the health and safety of our members, in-person meetings and events have been canceled because of COVID-19 precautions. The following regular scheduled meetings will be held online.

To attend any of these meetings, email organizer@psara.org for the links.

West Seattle Hot Topics for Seniors & Senior Wannabes: Noon – 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, June 3, Topic: *Should we return to "normal?"*

PSARA Climate and Environmental Justice Committee: 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m., Thursday, June 4.

PSARA Government Relations Committee: Noon – 1:30 p.m., Thursday, June 4.

PSARA Fundraising Committee: 11:00 a.m. - Noon, Monday, June 8.

PSARA Education Committee: 2 p.m., Tuesday, June 9.

PSARA Southend Committee: 1:00 p.m., Thursday, June 11.

Sing-Along with Lou: 2:00 p.m., Sunday, June 14, details on Page 1.

PSARA Race and Gender Equity Committee: 11 a.m.–Noon, Thursday, June 18.

PSARA Executive Board: 12:30 p.m. – 3 p.m., Thursday, June 18.

Do You Want to be Queen for a Day? Thursday, June 25, 3:00-5:00 p.m., details on Page 1.

See you online, till it's safe to see each other in person once again.