

#1593 Beyond Neoliberalism: Dreaming a new economic system into being

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:00:00] During today's episode, I'm going to be telling you about a show I think you should check out. It's the *Future Hindsight* podcast. So, take a moment to hear what I have to say about them in the middle of the show and listen wherever you get your podcasts.

And now welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of the Left* podcast in which we shall take a look at how the Supreme Court turned the tables on average working people back in the seventies, when they empowered wealthy individuals and corporations to have an outsized role in our politics. And now we are trapped in the reality that shift in power created, but are dreaming of a better way to manage our economic and political systems for the benefit of all people. Sources today include the *Thom Hartmann Program*, *Jim Hightower's Radio Lowdown*, the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, *Economic Update* with Professor Richard Wolff, *OFF-KILTER* with Rebecca Vallis, and the *Zero Hour* with RJ Eskow, with additional members-only clips from *Citations Needed* and *OFF-KILTER*.

How Things Work Congress's Revolving Door - Jim Hightower's Lowdown - Air Date 11-9-23

JIM HIGHTOWER - HOST, JIM HIGHTOWER'S LOWDOWN: Hear it? What's that [00:01:00] sound? Ooh, it's Washington's revolving door, allowing corporate interests to come directly inside Congress to pervert public policy. That door is now spinning fast because there's a new boss operator in Congress. He's Mike Johnson, who was recently unanimously chosen by Republicans to be their Speaker of the House.

He's a corporate wet dream, an affable ultra conservative from Shreveport who consistently backs the plutocratic agenda of big business over workers, the poor, consumers, and most other Americans. Moreover, Johnson maintains it was God who elevated him to his new position of authority, and that the Bible will guide

his policy views. Well, selected parts of the Bible. Don't expect much mercy, justice, and peacemaking from this hardcore *laissez faire* ideologue.

For example, guess who he's chosen to be his director of policy? Big Pharma's top Washington lobbyist. Dan [00:02:00] Ziegler has been the chief influence peddler for a dozen multi-billion-dollar drug giants, including Eli Lilly, Merck, and Pfizer. Ziegler has furiously opposed every legislative effort to stop the rampant price gouging, even though 90 percent of Americans are clamoring for Congress to clamp down on pharmaceutical rip offs. But we 90%ers don't control the revolving door. Mike does.

Johnson piously cloaks himself in both the Christian gospel and libertarian myth of free markets. Yet he has consistently pushed government action to restrict competition and protect drug monopolies. Now, in his first substantive action as Speaker, he is literally bringing Big Pharma inside to sit with him in the seat of legislative power.

This is Jim Hightower, saying drug pricing reform will soon come up for a vote in Congress. Before Mike's lobbyist buddy tells him what to do, let's demand that he re-read the Sermon on the Mount.

Citizens United Has Destroyed America Why Is Nobody Talking About It - Thom Hartmann Program - Air Date 10-27-23

THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM: This all started in 1976 [00:03:00] when James Buckley, William F. Buckley's older brother, he was the, I believe he's older, he was the senator from New York, the Republican senator from New York, and he wanted to be able to use, he was a multi-millionaire, he wanted to be able to use his own money and his campaign to basically wipe out his opponent. And federal election law at the time, in 1978, er, 1976, said, No, you can't do that. There are limits on how much money anybody can spend, including the candidate himself. So he took this to the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court said, Hey, it's your money, you can do whatever the hell you want with it. And the rationale that they used was that without billionaires being able to put money into politics - and get this, this is amazing - without billionaires putting money into politics, or let me rephrase that. The rationale was that restrictions on rich people behind political office, this is a quote from the Buckley case in 1976, "necessarily reduce the quantity of expression by restricting the number of issues [00:04:00] discussed, the depth of the exploration, and the size of the audience reached. This is because

virtually every means of communicating ideas in today's mass society requires the expenditure of money". In other words, the Supreme Court said, if you're a billionaire or a multi-millionaire and you want to pour money into politics, that's going to help politics, because, you know, you'll have, uh, we'll have a discussion, a more in depth discussion, more topics, because the money is going to expand political discussion.

Which raises the immediate question, okay? That's fine for the top 1, 2, 3 percent of Americans who can afford to, you know, throw thousands of dollars a year or millions of dollars a year into politics. But what about the 97%? What about the rest of us? Our free speech is pretty much limited to how loud we can stand out in front of our house and yell. It's limited to our ability, you know, our ability to vote, I [00:05:00] guess, is a form of speech. Our ability to say something on social media, but what about our right to have our political views aired? Well, the Supreme Court had no interest in discussing that in 1976. So, James Buckley won that case, and the Supreme Court, for the first time in the history of the United States, legalized rich people basically owning politics.

Two years later, in 1978, in *First National Bank [of Boston] v. Bellotti*, they did it again. They said this is true of corporations as well. If corporations want to put money into politics, no problem. And then in 2010, they tripled down on this and overturned hundreds of American laws nationwide, state and federal laws, and just gutted any protection that Americans have against rich people, against billionaires, basically owning our political systems. So now we have a [00:06:00] situation where every single Republican in the House of Representatives, and most of them in the Senate, frankly, are terrified of the billionaires in the industries that can harm them. And every Republican in the House of Representatives is there. I mean, they're just, like, you know, Please don't ask us to restrict guns. The gun manufacturers will pay for advertising for our primary opponents. Please don't ask us to do something about Medicare Advantage ripping people off. The health insurance companies will devastate us in the next primary. I mean, it doesn't take, you know, in a primary election for the House of Representatives, half a million dollars is enough to take a person down in most parts of the country. It doesn't take a lot of money. When you've got an industry, you know, the health insurance industry, for example, is making literally a billion dollars a week in profits, probably. I don't know the exact number, but I'd be amazed if it wasn't at least a billion dollars a week. They can easily peel off a half a [00:07:00] million bucks. Chump change. That's like pennies in the couch, right? They can easily peel off a half a million or a million dollars to take down some politician who decides he wants to do something about Medicare Advantage. Or guns. The gun industry is making billions. They can do the same thing. I mean, it just goes on and on, right? The fossil fuel industry, making billions. They own every Republican. In fact, Sheldon

Whitehouse, this is, I found this on his website last night. Sheldon Whitehouse points out that prior to 2010 - keep in mind, 2010 was *Citizens United* - prior to the *Citizens United* decision, Republicans were actually in favor of doing something about climate change. Seriously. John McCain ran for president on doing something about climate change. He said, "While we cannot say with 100 percent confidence what will happen in the future, we do know the emission of greenhouse gases is not healthy for the climate. As many of the top scientists throughout the world have stated, the sooner [00:08:00] we start to reduce these emissions, the better off we'll be in the future". He was the lead co sponsor for the Climate Stewardship Act, which had other Republican co-sponsors. The Clean Air Planning Act was supported by Republican Senators Lamar Alexander, Lindsey Graham, and Susan Collins. Republican Senator Olympia Snowe was the lead co sponsor of the Global Warming Reduction Act of 2007. Multiple Republicans supported the Low Carbon Economy Act and the Clean Air Climate Change Act. In 2009, Republicans supported the Raise Wages, Cut Carbon Act and the Waxman Markey Carbon Cut Cap and Trade Proposal. Maine Republican Susan Collins was the lead sponsor of the Carbon Limits and Energy for America's Renewal Act.

Republican Susan Collins said, "In the United States alone, emissions of the primary greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, have gone up more than 20 percent since 1990. Clearly, climate change is a daunting environmental challenge". And then came 2010, and everything [00:09:00] changed. Clarence Thomas, who'd been groomed for over a decade by right wing billionaires and fossil fuel billionaires, the Koch brothers, had been groomed for this, became the deciding vote on *Citizens United*, legalizing bribery of, not only politicians, but also federal judges like Clarence Thomas himself. And once the fossil fuel industry could pour unlimited amounts of money into either supporting Republicans who deny climate change, or destroying Republicans who assert climate change, once that happened, the entire Republican Party went silent on climate change. Sheldon Whitehouse, on the floor of the Senate, "I believe we lost the ability to address climate change in a bipartisan way because of the evils of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision". Amen.

RAPH NADER - HOST, RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR: So, if we want to do anything, if we want to do anything about student debt, if we want to do anything about the quality of our schools, if we want to do anything about health care, if we want to do anything [00:10:00] about climate change, if we want to do anything about, you know, banks and airlines ripping us off with fees and things, if we want to do anything that takes on any major industry, we have to overturn *Citizens United*. That has to be done first.

Corporate Bullsh*t Legal Bullsh*t - Ralph Nader Radio Hour - Air Date 11-11-23

RAPH NADER - HOST, RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR: Most individuals, throughout life, if they're accurately described as serial liars, people stop believing them. They just say that's another bit of magical thinking from Joe or something. Why is it that corporations and corporate executives never seem to lose credibility with the public, even after this is all publicized, they're proven wrong, the public benefits from these health and safety issues and other protections of consumers, environment, worker, children, patients, and the like. Why don't they lose credibility?

DONALD COHEN: It's the key \$64 million question, but I'd say a couple things. One of which is, in some cases, the things they say when they said them have the patina of plausibility. [00:11:00] Maybe jobs will get cut if we make auto and companies spend more money on something, things like that. So they sometimes have a patina of plausibility. But the second is we don't go back and say, you said that before and it didn't happen, you said that before and it didn't happen, said that before and it didn't happen. They just go forth. They've learned that you come up with your talking points, you say them, you hammer them, and they've been effective.

What we need to do is ridicule them. Say, listen, it's just a game. What you're playing here is a game, and you're playing a game with lives, and the planet, and all of that, which is, again, it's the purpose of the book. Every time they say something, our natural instinct is to debunk it, which means we're playing on their playing field.

We want to pre-bunk it. We say, that's bull. You're just playing a game, and listen to how you've done it in the past, because there's, many of the quotes in this book are hilarious, actually. We want to make fun of them, and we're hoping that this becomes a little bit of a vaccine going forward.

RAPH NADER - HOST, RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR: You talk about the sanction of shame, that you want to have people read this book and [00:12:00] then say, basically, shame to these corporations, and to shame them, ridicule them, expose them. Is that enough?

DONALD COHEN: I don't think it's enough, but first of all, the other word I would add is dismiss them, right? You remember Reagan used to say to his opponents, "Oh, there they go again." It was just the best dismissive line, right? So we want that. But no, it's not enough. You've got to have the power to take it all the way home in America. You've got to pass laws that expose their self-int-- not expose their lie, you could do that, but it's really expose their self-interest.

And, you talked about lead. The interesting thing about lead is, they say that, lead's healthy for you all the way from that period of time when it was in paint and when it was in gasoline, early part of the last century. And then finally more than halfway through the century, standards were established, where lead was taken out of paint and gasoline. They knew -- just as the fossil fuel companies, just as the opioid makers, just as the tobacco companies -- they knew the scientific truth.

So these were lies, and they were in [00:13:00] their self-interest, and lives were lost because of it. So I think that's part of the shame, is to say, it's not just a game, but it's a game that you're playing with people's lives, and you know it.

RAPH NADER - HOST, RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR: Millions of lives, we're talking, we're talking the denial of coal dust creates coal miner pneumoconiosis, that's a half a million lives in the last century of coal miners lost, horrible asphyxiation deaths. Then there's the 450,000 people who die from smoking-related, tobacco related diseases. Just add that up year after year. And then there's at least 300,000 people, workers mostly, who died from asbestos exposure. All of this was denied. "There's no proof asbestos creates cancer. Or mesothelioma. There's no proof that tobacco smoke creates cancer, heart disease" -- until the Surgeon General's report started coming out in the mid-1960s.

This is more than just lies, falsehoods, [00:14:00] off-the-wall predictive phony. It's more than that. It's deadly. In other words, it's not just rhetoric. It's not just craziness. It leads to the suppression of the society's response to foresee and forestall hazards, rip offs, and the like, and to engage in preventive activity, regulations, opening up for lawsuits under tort law, and deterrence.

So we're dealing here with not only malicious pattern of rhetoric, we're dealing here with deadly delays. A lot of these phony denials delayed the reaction, as you point out in the book, delayed the reaction of the public to correction.

By the way, readers should know that in this book, called *Corporate Bullshit: Exposing the Lies and Half Truths That Protect Profit, Power, and Wealth in*

America, it's not just corporations, it's not just their trade associations like the US Chamber of Commerce. It's academics, [00:15:00] it's publications like the National Review. It's reporters who should know better in terms of their reporting, it's headline writers that have inaccurate headlines because of their predisposition against the content of the story, like broadening healthcare protection in the country.

Here's an interesting transition, Donald, that you probably have thought of. People listening to Trump, starting out in 2015, his campaign, look at this guy. He just lies every day. Just in four years as president, he made 35,000 lies or false statements, according to the Washington Post, which tracked his rhetoric day by day, led by Glenn Kessler, the reporter. And people would ask me, how does he get away with this? Why do people believe this? I said one simple answer is that millions of people have been believing phony advertising for years. This product is good for your nutritional needs when it's [00:16:00] phony. This color product is pretty and it will attract your kiddies when it's bad for them, all kinds of phony assurances in the credit industry, in the auto industry, these pharmaceutical products, over-the-counter pills, they're safe and effective, and so people were predisposed in their consumer activity to believe these advertising lies.

So what Trump did was, he just took that kind of pattern and moved it big time into politics. And he had a constituency that was already programmed, so to speak, to be gullible enough or trustworthy enough to believe these corporate advertisers. And they took in his lies and his falsehoods. Any comments on that?

DONALD COHEN: A couple of things. I think we all know repetition is key to propaganda and advertising, right? We know that if somebody says something as many times long enough, it penetrates into a belief. It goes past the [00:17:00] intellect, and it just becomes a fact that we believe is true. I think that's part of what Trump is doing. He just says it over and over again. And then they decide they believe him. And once they decide they believe him, then everything he says is the truth as well. So I think that's really what's going on. Corporations have said it over and over again, and we go it must be true.

And then one other thing: part of the assault on the specific things that we've been talking about in terms of the laws and regulations and health and safety and all that, is in parallel, there's been an assault on government, on the idea that governments need to do things, the idea of government, the institution of government. There's this drumbeat for 50 years.

And so that's the sea you're swimming in. And when that's the sea we're swimming in politically, in public opinion. So if the next thing you say is, and

another regulation is going to be bad for all of us, it's not operating from scratch. It's operating on top of what have become negative attitudes towards government action.

How Media's Use of 'The Economy' Flattens Class Conflict - Citations Needed - Air Date 11-1-23

KIM KELLY: I'm really glad that the UAW president, Shawn Fain, [00:18:00] brought that up and really laid out that kind of contrast, the tension that I think a lot of normal people, you know, working class people, poor people feel when it comes to "the economy". For us, the economy is something that happens to us, and for the folks at the top, meaning, you know, politicians and corporations and the wealthy, the elite, whatever, that's something that they control. It's something that they feel very personally, because it's their money, it's their profit. Like, all of those billions, all that economic impact, all of these, you know, numbers and things that are bandied about in studies by well-funded think tanks, like, that is not my business. That is not something that normal people... it doesn't impact us really in the way that it impacts people that benefit from it do. We're just trying to survive "the economy". Now, that's a crucial difference. And I think that's something that just is not recognized by the people that do have that [00:19:00] economic privilege and are in those more rarified circles and have power over us.

Well, I'm glad that Shawn Fain brought it up, like, wrecking their economy. Like, the strike, the UAW strike, has cost the economy 4 billion dollars, allegedly. That's, I think, one of the latest headlines I saw. Who felt that pinch? It wasn't me. It wasn't my neighbor. It wasn't normal people throughout the country. It's the shareholders. It's the C suite. It's the people that are expecting to make that money. They are feeling it. They are upset about it. And we're supposed to care that this is a problem they now have. Meanwhile, you know, I live in Philadelphia, man. We're the poorest major city. Thousands of my neighbors are unhoused or are struggling with addiction or just struggling in general. The fact that the big three "lost" four billion dollars, that is not part of our reality. And I think it is very helpful and useful that Shawn [00:20:00] Fain just kind of brought it up as the idea that we're not all living in the same economy. We're not all trying to survive the same economy. For most of us, the economy is a bludgeon. It's not a tool. It's not something in which we engage. It's something that we try to survive.

NIMA SHIRAZI - CO-HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: So Kim, I love this idea that there are different economies or even that "The Economy" writ large - capital T, capital E - is something to be survived by the working class. But there's this corollary issue here, right, that the hardship and brutality of strikes themselves don't mostly fall on, as we've been saying, the economy, but actually is felt.... now, as you've been talking about your neighbors and you wrote a whole book on this, I'd love to talk about what you've seen being the hardship experienced first hand and how this " economic impact" is routinely ignored by the media, right? That workers lives, rather than The Economy writ large, are not [00:21:00] often discussed. So, can we talk about who is actually harmed by strikes that drag on and on when employers, when corporations don't allow for more worker rights, for more worker power, and how would maybe acknowledging this difference in what we understand as the economy versus what workers are actually experiencing, help reporters and those consuming media actually delineate the harm of, you know, corporate bosses refusing to negotiate in good faith, thereby demanding, really, through that refusal, that strikes go on and on, until the demands are met?

KIM KELLY: So, here's the thing, right? When workers go out on strike, they're not drawing a paycheck. Some of them, in some instances, they lose their health insurance. They're out in the cold, they're on strike, they're not at work. But the people in charge, the people who are refusing to negotiate in good faith, or refusing to meet their demands, or refusing to provide them with a safe working [00:22:00] environment, they're still getting paid. They're still at work. They're not feeling anything, but perhaps varying levels of annoyance or anger at the sheer audacity of the workers for daring to stand up for themselves.

To strike is to disrupt. It's supposed to cause problems. It's supposed to shut down production. It's not supposed to be easy for anybody. But the burden falls on the workers themselves. They're the ones taking the risk. They're the ones feeling the bite. They're the ones worrying about paying their bills. They're the ones who are taking on all of the risk for the hope of a reward. That is the thing.

And now, during this UAW strike, and during so many of the other high profile strikes we've seen over the past couple years especially, you will invariably hear from "the other side". Because the media, we love hearing both sides, and the other side is invariably some very angry old White guy [00:23:00] with more yachts and more money than God going on *Fox News* or going on *CNN* and talking about how the workers are hurting the company, about how they're greedy, they're unreasonable, like they told us during the writer's strike.

Meanwhile, this man's making millions of dollars. Or perhaps this woman is making millions of dollars, girl bossing her way into the corporate elite. There's

a disconnect there when we see headlines about how this strike is hurting companies or hurting the economy. Because you know who's feeling the pain? The workers who aren't getting a paycheck. The workers who are walking a picket line for eight hours a day and hoping that their health insurance doesn't get ripped away from them and, if it is, hoping that their union is able to cover them while they're out.

There is an example that I always return to because it's something that became a very big part of my life for several years, and I was just a bit player. You know? Imagine how it was for the people actually living through this. But for two years, twenty three months, [00:24:00] in Brookwood, Alabama, starting in April 2021, a thousand coal miners who are members of the UMWA, United Mine Workers of America, were on strike. And for almost two years, they held the line. They were able to continue existing and living a life because their auxiliary, which was led predominantly by spouses and retirees, were able to solicit donations and launch a mutual aid effort and keep the strike in the news and do everything they could to support their people who were on the picket line.

They were lucky, actually, to be part of a union that does furnish its members with strike checks. So, they got, you know, a few hundred bucks every couple weeks, which, sure, Alabama's not Park Avenue, but it didn't go nearly as far as it needed to for so many people, so a lot of people had to find side jobs, some of their spouses who had never worked before had to go to work.

It really just shattered the whole fabric of that community, and nobody really [00:25:00] cared about that. The people in charge of that company, Warrior Met Coal, they were very clear and explicit about their desire and their plan to starve them out. Local politicians abandoned them. The GOP, for which many of those folks voted, abandoned them. They were just left to starve. And eventually they had to go back to work, they're still trying to get the contract they deserve. There wasn't an easy, tidy end to that strike. And sometimes that happens. Sometimes strikes don't work. And who's left holding the bag? Who's left having to go back to work under a bad contract? The workers. The people at the top, they're going to keep getting their bonuses, they're going to keep making their money, they're going to keep being able to hold on to this reserve of sort of entitlement and opposite world class resentment at these workers that dared to challenge them and ask for more.

What Socialism Needs to Succeed - Economic Update - Air Date 10-31-23

PROF RICHARD WOLFF - HOST, ECONOMIC UPDATE: For thousands of [00:26:00] years, working people, whether they were villagers, or slaves, or serfs, or proletarian workers, have had dreams of a way of working radically different from what they were subjected to, a way of working that was a community of equals who got together to produce something the larger society needed. They wanted to do that as a community of equals. We have seen efforts to do that in every society, in every religion, as a noble effort to break out of the dichotomy master-slave, or the dichotomy lord-servant, or the dichotomy employer-employee.

What socialists could've and should've integrated into the core of what they're about is not just to bring the state and [00:27:00] society *in* to the economic decisions, to not let a small minority of capitalist owners, profit-driven, be the intermediary who decides everything. That's not enough.

And that's what the 21st century is teaching socialists. It's not enough. It was a big step. It was an important step. You made huge gains. You established an important law of society being directly involved. But society has to be directly involved inside every factory, office, and store, too.

It turns out that socialism faced a question it did not come to terms with. Here's that question. Maybe it's the case, and let's put it as a question: Can you sustain a socialist revolution that puts the state in a powerful position in society as a whole without putting workers in a powerful [00:28:00] position inside the workplace?

I think history's answer to that question is, you cannot. You cannot even sustain the socialism you were successful in establishing, starting with the Russian Revolution and spreading ever since. You weren't able to save it, to preserve it, to sustain it. And maybe, question, maybe was that because you didn't change the reality inside, where people work: the factory, the office, the store, and that other place where people work, the household, the family.

Maybe the revolutions that changed families when slavery gave way to feudalism, that changed families again from feudalism to capitalism -- maybe the whole concept of family has to be rethought, re-understood, questioned. Socialists have to have the [00:29:00] daring to recognize the omission of that level of society when the revolution was discussed.

Fix it. Bring the revolution into those areas from which it was excluded. If democracy is the central principle we want to uphold, then we have to democratize the workplace, too. Democracy in the workplace is the opposite of the autocratic dictatorship of the CEO in a business, of the owner, of the operator.

Either you live in a community and understand the community as necessarily democratic, or you don't. Socialism can reimagine itself, redefine itself, and become even more powerful in the 21st century, in my judge, if and to the [00:30:00] extent that it offers a vision of a new workday life. That's where most adults spend most of their lives: at work. And work can be a democratic community that you enjoy, that you want to go to, where you learn, where you are nurtured in your relationships with other people. Not a place of being a drudge, being a drone, and listening to the orders of employers whose only interest is making money versus building a society.

A socialism with that kind of vision, that will be a socialism that builds successfully on what it did in the 19th and 20th century, but also recognizes what it didn't do, what wasn't enough, and what will be necessary to win the support of the mass of working people in the years ahead.

Prof. Richard Wolff Why Not Democratize Big Auto Companies - The Zero Hour - Air Date 10-28-23

PROF RICHARD WOLFF: I mean, either you believe in democracy, in which everybody, you know, the [00:31:00] basic idea is if you're affected by a decision, then you have a *de facto* right to participate in it. Are there limits to that? Sure. But the basic principle is why we have elections. So that we have some input over the people whose decisions affect our life. If the mayor determines the tax rate, or if the city council determines the tax rate I have to pay, well then I have some input onto that process, and we don't allow that in the corporation. And we act as if that's a dictate that has to be.

I want to remind folks of a little historical lesson here. Under slavery, in various parts of the world where we've had slavery, sometimes for centuries, even if we took the example of the United States as a colony and then in, you know, up until the Civil War, we said that a slave, and [it] was enshrined in the law, [00:32:00] is a property of the master, of the owner of the slave. That's a relationship. And I can show you endless literature that said that this was the way God meant it to be, because otherwise, how could it be otherwise? You

know, God made the earth. Seven days. Works fast. And he got this all done. And it would last forever. It was a great system. It recognized that some people are masters, and other people aren't.

And in feudalism, we did the same game, only we changed the names, and we changed the relationship. It became lord and serf, and the serf wasn't owned by the lord, but entered into a mutual obligation. And then we come to capitalism, where we don't have masters and slaves, and we don't have lords and serfs, we have employers and employees.

But the point of the history is, nothing is forever. There's nothing written in the stars [00:33:00] that says it has to be this way or that way. And the irony of ironies, if you go back far enough... and as a key point here, to village economies and many examples in Asia and Africa, sizable groups of people lived without a hierarchy. They divided the labor, they divided the decision making, but to give a small number of people the outsized dominance that masters have over slaves, lords over serfs, and employers over employees was deemed inappropriate. And we acted on that basis.

Last little point. I know when people get into this conversation, they sometimes avoid it by saying, Oh these other arrangements, these democracies, can only work for little enterprises, they couldn't work for a big one like Ford or something else. This is wrong two ways. Number [00:34:00] one, when capitalism emerges from feudalism, it always starts with a little capitalist and a half a dozen workers. It took a long time for capitalism to figure out how to manage large corporations, and it invented the corporation along the way.

Right now, in the world, there is a worker co-op called the Mondragon Corporation in northern Spain. It's large, it's about, 130,000 people are part of that corporation. They've demonstrated, in the 75 years they've been going, that you can go from small - they began as a parish priest in northern Spain, with six parishioners as the workers - to the 130,000 that they are today. Tremendously successful economic growth. They're the seventh largest corporation in all of Spain. They're a family of worker co-ops.

So, we've done the [00:35:00] work. The marvelous thing is not to have an idea about it. That's easy. That's what I do. But I'm in a position of saying the realities are all around us. The examples are there. The history is documented. There's no possible excuse for tabooing it out of the conversation so that even workers who know they can run the enterprise, who know how badly they've been treated by their employer, do not think through with their leadership to put that issue on the table alongside the other issues that ought to be democratically decided.

RJ ESKROW - HOST, THE ZERO HOUR: A comment and a question. First of all, when it comes to autoworkers, I have a, you know, a pretty, I have a middle class car. I have a Subaru Forester. My Subaru Forester tells me when I'm drifting out of the lane. It tells, it shows me where I'm backing up into. It beeps if I'm [00:36:00] getting too close to something in the front and back. Seems to me if the auto industry is capable of finding these, developing these systems to navigate a car, then we as a society can develop systems for navigating a democratically run company. Because people say, Oh, it's too complicated. How would you do that? Well, no, we can, I'm pretty sure we're smart enough to figure that out.

I wanted to switch to another labor dispute. We have the strikes in Hollywood and the Writers Guild has come to an agreement, the actors have not yet, but in a piece I did, I worked on a lot and didn't publish, maybe I'll publish it anyway at some point, I looked at Netflix because I think this is an example of another problem with the way we govern companies. You read the business press, especially when the strike began, it was filled with all the trouble that Netflix was in, and Wall Street was down on it, and there were these problems. It goes up and down. It may have changed since then. And that's [00:37:00] why they couldn't give their creative workers what they needed, so I looked at it. Netflix's total revenue in 2022 was \$36.6 billion, 10 times more than it had been a decade earlier. Its net income was 4.492 billion, which to me is a lot of money, but its stock price took a dive that year. And why? Because the trend lines didn't look good enough for Wall Street. Now, there were reasons for that. People were going back to work and they weren't, you know, watching media as much, but, so it was down, 22, it's down a little bit from 2021, but its 2021 income was nearly double that of the year before.

So, over a two year basis, it was doing great. But the fact is, Wall Street, it seems to me, thinks in terms of trends, because that's where they make their money, right? It seems to me, but correct me if I'm wrong, [00:38:00] when stocks go up, and then the incentive packages for the small groups of people who run these companies are based on Wall Street's valuation, so they have no incentive under this system, the CEOs or their investors, to just let the company make a healthy profit and pay all its workers what they deserve.

If the workers took it over, I would think they don't have to worry about it all this crap. They can just say, you know, when it's up one year, down another year, but we're doing great. We're solid. We put out a good product. For the time being, we're good. Let's pay our workers what we need. And by the way, a democratically run Netflix would probably have better product.

AISHA NYANDORO: S

Redefining Wealth—with Aisha Nyandoro - OFF-KILTER - Air Date 11-2-2

o, the Magnolia Mother's Trust is a guaranteed income program that we really started dreaming about in 2017. And we started dreaming about it because as an organization, Springboard To Opportunities works directly with families that live in federally subsidized, affordable housing, and we pride ourselves on being a radical, [00:39:00] community driven, meaning that every program, every service, every activity that we provide is one that the residents within those communities have indicated they need in order to be successful in life, school, and work.

AISHA NYANDORO: In 2017, we became concerned that we weren't moving the needle on poverty. And what that meant for us was that we were not seeing a successful transition out of the affordable housing communities that these families live in. And it's not as if that was our goal, but for so many of the families that we work with, that is their goal. They either want to live in market rate housing because they want the privacy, or they want to move into home ownership. And so we realized that we weren't accomplishing that. So we went to families and we simply asked, what is it that we're missing? And everything that families indicated we needed was more money.

And so it really was, how do you go about giving individuals that live in affordable housing, mainly Black mothers, cash without restrictions? And that's where the Magnolia Mother's Trust came from. So, it's a guaranteed income program that provides [00:40:00] \$1,000 a month for 12 months, \$12,000 total. We are, in essence, doubling the income of the women that we work with. We've been doing this work now since 2018. We are on our fifth cohort of women. Not only do we provide a guaranteed income for the moms, we also provide 529 accounts for their kids, because we believe not only in investing in the moms now, but investing in the future of their kids.

And I tell people all the time that cash is important, and it's significant with the work that we do. But it is the least sexy part of what it is that we do within the Magnolia Mother's Trust. It's just one small piece of it. It's the changing the narrative on poverty, it's allowing these women to actually be able to show up in their full selves, their full abundance, the ability to show up and have their dreams actually be listened to and actualized.

And the fact that we have really had a small part on the play in how we talk about cash and the need for better cash-based benefits within this country, and

the fact that all of this started [00:41:00] right here in Jackson, Mississippi from an organization that is led by Black women working with other Black women has been an amazing testament to the power of community and the power of movement work.

REBECCA VALLAS - HOST, OFF-KILTER: And for anyone who's not familiar with the Magnolia Mother's Trust, and I feel like guaranteed minimum income, universal basic income, there's a lot of those buzzwords that have gotten a lot more visibility and a lot more play in recent years. The child tax credit expansion, for example, that was just a sadly one-year experiment. It was allowed to end in the earlier part of the pandemic because of pandemic legislation, and that was a piece of legislation that actually cut child poverty in half. These are things that have really raised the visibility of this idea, guaranteed minimum income. It's taken it from being a talking point, something we heard Martin Luther King and even President Nixon arguing for decades ago, but really took that idea and said, hey, actually, this is something that we really can do and this really is something that we should do.

[00:42:00] Your project, I feel like a lot of folks increasingly have heard about it. For anyone who hasn't and who is interested in the subject and wants to know more, we've had you on the podcast now several times talking in greater depth, so I'm going to put a few of those links in show notes so folks can go and check out the other episodes with you. Because what I'm really excited to get to do with you today is to actually really zoom out, and to ask that bigger picture question that you were asking in your TED Talk, which is, what does wealth mean to you? And as I mentioned, you're -- spoiler -- a big part of that talk and a big part of what we're going to be talking about today and the message that you're really getting out to the world is, it's time for us to redefine wealth as a country. And that's really important for us to do if we're in the business of talking about economic justice, economic liberation, and we want to do more than just tinker around the edges of the status quo. So I feel like the right place to kick off that conversation, and I'm excited to spend really the entire episode getting into this in depth [00:43:00] with you; this is going to be fun! But I want to ask, what was the story behind how you chose this as the theme and the lead for your talk: What does wealth mean to you?

AISHA NYANDORO: So, actually, the thing for my talk, really, I was thinking about, can we be brave enough to reimagine wealth? So that was really where I was coming at it from. But even with the reimagining wealth and having those conversations, it really is something that I've been thinking about for the last year and a half, last two years, and it's directly connected to the work that I do each day with the Magnolia Mother's Trust and the work that I get to do with the women of Springboard as a whole.

And so as we have been doing this work and as we see more women moving towards a place of income stability where they're not under the backdrop of financial scarcity, they were starting to talk about wealth, and I say that in my talk. And the way that they were talking about wealth was not the way that my colleagues and friends in the space of the economy, foreign economic justice talk about wealth.

[00:44:00] And it made me realize that we were missing, our language wasn't connecting, and so since our language wasn't connecting, that we were excluding from the conversation the very population that we need to be including if we are talking about how do we go about resolving for wealth in this country, and how do we go about making wealth accessible to everyone?

And so it really was, okay, we're thinking about the women that we work with, how do you define wealth? What is wealth to you? And how do we use that as the entry point to the conversation, recognizing that that definition of that of wealth is valid, recognizing that that definition of wealth has merit? And instead of saying that, okay, oh, how you define wealth isn't actually wealth, we meet you where you are. And we say, okay, you know what, that is wealth. And that's a reorientation for us rather than a reorientation for them.

But so many times we don't do that. We are coming into the conversation with this capitalistic frame that, okay, wealth has to be six months worth of savings. Wealth [00:45:00] has to be equity in your home. Wealth has to be XYZ. Well, for a population that's just moving from income instability and now saying that you have to have XYZ in order to have wealth, it continues to exclude them, and they continue to not feel as if they can actually be a part of the larger conversation that we actually should be centering in.

And so that's really where it came from, just thinking through how do we actually use the wisdom of community, and use the wisdom of these women to actually reorient our conversation into a conversation that actually, it's a conversation of equity, and it's a conversation that actually does get us to liberation, more so than this narrow frame that we have been using.

Inside West Virginias New Economic Bill of Rights—with Troy N. Miller - OFF-KILTER - Air Date 11-9-23

TROY N. MILLER: And so I see this, and I'll just read off the ten of them here: "The West Virginia Democratic Executive Committee affirms support for

a 21st Century economic bill of rights, affirming the right to a job that pays a living wage; the right to a voice in the workplace through a union and [00:46:00] collective bargaining; the right to comprehensive quality health care; the right to a complete cost free public education and access to broadband internet; the right to decent, safe, affordable housing; the right to a clean environment and a healthy planet; the right to meaningful resources at birth and a secure retirement; the right to sound banking and financial services; the right to an equitable and economically fair justice system; and the right to vote and otherwise participate in public life.

I think that these are all very sort of middle of the road thing... I think these are American values. I don't think that this should be at all a partisan thing. And I've seen some interesting responses where, you know, one sort of progressive Twitterer weighed in and said, Well, no wonder that the West Virginia Democrats support this. This is very moderate, right? This is just saying that they won't get in the way of you having a job that pays a living wage, right? And you and I can understand that there's two ways to understand rights. There's negative rights that say the government isn't going [00:47:00] to prevent you from having these things. The right to free speech, for instance, is really a negative right that says the state is not going to interfere with, it's not necessarily guaranteeing that the state is going to provide a platform for everyone, but, you know, it's not going to interfere there.

I think these are affirmative rights. I believe that these are absolutely not saying that the state won't interfere with your access to broadband, but will actually facilitate your access to broadband. These are, I think, as I was reading through these points, I could think of different episodes of this program where each of these things has been highlighted as an economic justice issue, a disability justice issue. You know, if you can't participate in public life, if right now, if you don't have broadband: Whew! Lord knows, through the pandemic, I don't know how you were going to school, and I know that there were people sitting in McDonald's parking lots and Starbucks parking lots using the free Wi Fi in order to get their education, which is also not necessarily fully guaranteed right now.

Now, [00:48:00] the other criticism I've seen from it is, Well, this is nice, this is a lot of nice words, is there any enforcement? And one has to go, Well, no, not at the moment. First of all, we're a state party, we can't actually create laws like that. Well, can you throw somebody out if they don't believe that? Maybe we can get there. We're not there yet. But what it is saying, and I haven't talked to a single person within the party who hasn't said, This is great. Thank you. Now we know what we're organizing around. Now we know how to make the conversation happen without having to respond to the "other size"

categorization of us. And I think part of this, part of the problem is that since the 1990s, Newt Gingrich and others within the Republican Party were very, very, very good about taking control of rhetoric nationally with the Contract for America and various other... um, the whole choose your topic. It's been colored by the Republican narrative. It's Obamacare. Okay, well that's been [00:49:00] turned around and he decided to make that an affirmative thing, but that was not how that was intended and we ended up with that as our rhetoric anyway, right? Same thing with death panels, right? And now, Joe Biden has started talking about any commission to discuss cutting Social Security benefits as a death panel and that's, I think, really brilliant rhetorically, but it's nonetheless, we had to take their rhetoric and turn it around.

The Democrats have been playing reactively for how they're defined, and I see this at every level of government, where the news cycle is, This side does this, and Democrats say this about it. And it's never the Democrats out ahead of an issue defining it on their own and forcing the other side to react to it. And so I really am looking forward to when Republicans start trying to attack these things and say - or anyone, I mean, whether it's a Republican, a Democrat, or anywhere in between - no, Americans don't have a right to a complete [00:50:00] cost free public education. You know, you don't have the right to medical care. You don't have these very basic rights that, to paraphrase Senator Sanders, the richest country at the richest time in our history, should be able to offer these things.

And, again, I go back to what I was saying earlier about this perverse sense of government services exist to make a profit or exist to make certain numbers go up, and if those numbers, if those measures, aren't going up, then we might as well cut the program. And it makes me think of Robert Kennedy Sr., before he was assassinated in 1968, who gave a great speech that I think about a lot, where he talks about what the gross national product can measure and it can measure the bombs that we drop, it can measure the ambulances on our roads, it can measure the quality of our roads, how much we're spending on textbooks, all of these types of things. But what it can't measure is the quality of our play. It can't measure the quality of our leisure. It can't measure the actual quality of [00:51:00] education and the civic leaders and civic participants that we are fostering through our expenditures on education. GDP and gross national product are both incredibly limiting measures. And if we use those alone to dictate our policies rather than, you know, asking the hard questions of, Well, what does it mean to have the right to a clean environment? Is it just what the parts per million concentration is of a given poison, whether it's PFAS or another one, or are we actually working not to just limit the poisons but to create a proactive, you know, so that we're not necessarily having to just measure things constantly to say, Oh, now that's too dangerous. But it was just

under too dangerous before, right? How do we proactively stop another Flint, Michigan from happening? How do we proactively say that, Hey, maybe our municipal water services shouldn't exist to make shareholder profits at all.

Bonus How Media's Use of 'The Economy' Flattens Class Conflict Part 2 - Citations Needed - Air Date 11-1-23

ADAM JOHNSON - CO-HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: This idea that it's just going to all be doom and gloom. Now, of course, [00:52:00] people don't strike for the left. They strike for a, it's a calculated risk towards another end. And one headline one never sees is "UPS strike could lead to 30 billion dollars in gains for workers", or "Threat of UAW strike could lead to billions more in the hands of the working class", or "Potential railroad strike could give workers much needed paid vacation to go to their kids plays and go to funerals and hospital visits". There's never a sense that the economic impact of a successful or semi-successful strike... and in many ways, I think it's born from a general misconception people have that workers' rights were handed down to them by like, do-good Protestant bureaucrats in the 1930s, right? There's no sense, like we completely erase labor history in this country. We've talked about this in the show before. Nobody has any idea about the radicalism of the '10s, '20s, '30s, like no idea. There was just like a bunch of nice Protestant members of the Roosevelt administration who one day woke up and decided to bestow workers' rights. And so there's no sense that like the struggle has "economic impact" for working people. So, if you could kind of talk [00:53:00] about the asymmetry of this idea that it's all doom and gloom and there's no sense that like this is a temporary form of medication for a larger cure or partial cure down the line.

KIM KELLY: Yeah, I think there's three little pieces here. The labor history piece, of course, like that's not something that you learn about in school. We don't learn, unless you are maybe in grad school or in a very specific program or have a really cool school, the lack of understanding of what it took for us to even get here in our current flawed state of affairs... I mean, kids don't necessarily learn about the Battle of Blair Mountain. They don't learn about the thousands upon thousands, ultimately millions, of workers that went on strike going back to 1824, when young women and girls in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, launched the first factory strike in American history, because they were being forced to work 14 hours a day and take a pay cut, instead of their usual 12. Like, the amount of work it's gone into to get us to even this [00:54:00] point, it's wild.

I mean, I wrote a whole book about it. Lots of other people that are much smarter, more educated than me have written very good books about it, too. It's really unfortunate that our own history is kind of either kept from us or just not made accessible to us. Because I think if we knew what it has taken, what it took, what people did to get us here, we might feel a little bit more agency over our own economic destinies, right? Like, Okay, knowing that someone just like me, 400 years ago, told their boss to take this job and shove it, might give me a little bit of the boost I need to tell my terrible supervisor to go F himself.

And people are surprised when they learn about labor history, about the history of these strikes, and these workers, and these leaders, about the fact that, you know, an anarchist couple led the first May Day parade in Chicago in 1886, shout out to Lucy and Albert Parsons, you know, like there's so much throughout our history that [00:55:00] is kept from us and I mean, that's kind of why I wrote a book about it, right? To make it more accessible, to bring it out into the sunlight.

But in terms of this issue where we're talking about the framing in the media specifically, there's two things that play there too, right? Like most of the media, especially the corporate media, it is not in their best interest to support workers and support unions, like, they're making money. They are part of the elite. They do not necessarily care about what poor and working people are dealing with, especially at places where they have a union. I mean, we've seen how the *New York Times* has treated its various unions. And we see the kind of headlines that run at the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*, we know who owns that. I think it's a little complicated when you're in that corporate media space, which also makes it so important to support independent and progressive media, whether it's *Labor Notes* who have been killing it with the UAW strike, or *In These Times*, or *The Real News*, like all of these other options who understand and who do embrace that framing and [00:56:00] do get it. They just have less money and less visibility because they are more dangerous. And some of it, I do think, comes down to the class composition in some of these newsrooms, too. Especially when you're talking about these elite, legacy places that tend to dominate the headlines, like whether it's in TV news or in corporate media.

I think a lot of the folks who are making the decisions about those headlines are not necessarily gonna be sympathetic to workers because it wouldn't occur to them. Fancy, wealthy, well educated, like, upper class people don't necessarily care about what people like me or people in the picket line, or people like my neighbors in Kensington are dealing with. It's alien to them. It's not in their interest to support what we want, what we need, because it's diametrically opposed to what they need. There's just a lack of understanding of unions and their import and class politics and class delineations in those newsrooms, you

know. At the risk of sounding self [00:57:00] aggrandizing, like, I think perhaps a few more people with my perspective in those spaces might shift the balance in ways that would be helpful for the rest of the normal people out there trying to get some goddamn attention.

ADAM JOHNSON - CO-HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: Well, that was one of the things about the whole, there was this whole 'Trump is going to go talk to autoworkers' media narrative that was completely fabricated. And people, to give some context for those listening, Trump announced he was going to like, in a very vague way, go to Detroit to talk to striking autoworkers. That was not true. It was never going to be true. Turned out, of course, not to be true. But for about 10 days, the media carried this narrative of, some even said he was going to join the picket line, which was never something that they even said through osmosis. And everyone said, Well, why, you know, why are they softballing Trump here? And then you realize that it's actually very much, it's about that, yes, but it's also very much about cultural, institutional elitism in newsrooms about the average autoworker as being a mindless sort of... because again, they perceive them as White, which is not true at all, by the way. The UAW is very much not just White, but there's, again, there's cultural [00:58:00] stereotypes about UAW workers that they're all just a bunch of like racist clapping seals who just will give in to any demagogue who pumps his fist, rather than a kind of well oiled union machine that is not going to be fooled by it, and they weren't fooled by it.

Bonus Redefining Wealth—with Aisha Nyandoro Part 2 - OFF-KILTER - Air Date 11-2-23

REBECCA VALLAS - HOST, OFF-KILTER: Wealth, you say, is about a sense of agency, a sense of freedom, the collective well being of the whole. It is not an individual pathological pursuit. Talk a little bit about that incredibly powerful line and unpack that for us.

AISHA NYANDORO: Yeah, no, I think it goes to what you were saying earlier about so many times we look at wealth as the consumer aspect of it. It is just capitalism. What can I buy for the betterment of myself? I, I, I, I, I, I. But in the conversations that I have with the women and the research that I've done, the way that they define wealth, it's about the collective whole. It is what does this allow, what is this sense of freedom allow for me to do for others? How does this allow my agency be able to show up differently? How does it [00:59:00] allow me the breathing room to be more imaginative? It is never a Well, if I

have more money, what will I do for myself? Or what can I buy myself? It's okay if I have more financial security, this will look like XYZ for my family. That will look like XYZ for my kids. It is a reframing that is beautiful and significant, and it's one that, if we're willing to take the lesson from, can get society as a whole to a place where we actually are operating as a society and not just a collection of individuals taking up space in the same physical location with each other.

REBECCA VALLAS - HOST, OFF-KILTER: I love all of that. And also, just to step back and acknowledge, this is a radical redefinition that you're arguing for. It is actually a massive paradigm shift and it's beautiful. But also this is a stepping onto a very different playing field when it comes to the imagination space that it takes us to.

I feel like part of where I want to take us next [01:00:00] is to give you the chance to talk a little bit about some of what you've heard from the mothers in the Mother's Magnolia Trust when you ask them the question, What wealth means to them? And that was some of what you did in prep for your talk, because you say some of how we do this, right? People might be like, oh yeah, redefining wealth, that sounds great, but like, where do we start? How do we do something that sounds that big? You say, well, how we do this is by listening to others and listening to ourselves. You started by listening to the mothers who are the co-designers of this project with you, what did you hear from mothers in the Mother's Magnolia Trust when you asked what wealth means to them?

AISHA NYANDORO: I've heard so many different things, and that's really where this reframing came from. Like I said, I've been thinking about this about a year and a half, two years. And it really was, as it relates to what are the next steps as it relates to our work? So we had done the hard work of getting people to income stability, and we had more and more colleagues and myself as well were thinking about, [01:01:00] okay, if you're now at income stability, let's begin to think about how you can go about building that wealth and that traditional definition of wealth. And as we were having conversations with our moms about, okay, well, what would that look like if we really helped you to deal wealth? Will that be --? And we were coming at it initially with the traditional set up, would that be helping you start a business? Would that be helping you learn more about the stock market and opening investment accounts and all of those pieces. And all of that was projected, quite frankly, blatantly by the women that we work with.

And it wasn't that it was rejected with the lack of understanding. They knew very well what those pieces were. It was rejected in a sense of, no, that's not what I need. That's not how I define wealth.

And I remember the conversation that like, I can see where I was and everything. I remember it that vividly, the conversation where I was having with one of our moms, where I first asked the question, well, how would you define wealth if what you're telling me is not making sense? And she said, okay, if something were to [01:02:00] happen to me, my family wouldn't have to set up a GoFundMe account. They would have the money to bury me. It punched me in my gut. And it took my breath away. And I was like, Oh!

And when I sat down and thought about it, I was like, that actually does make a lot of sense. Because when you look at the data, we know that people of color, typically when they pass, they leave debt, and so being able to think about what that does to that family and having that responsibility to shift to your family, again, it was not about her, it was, okay, making sure that my family wouldn't have that responsibility.

And so it was a reframe that I needed, and I was like, okay, let me come at this conversation in a way that I always come at this conversation, which is centering the wisdom of community, and not coming in with my research, economy, economist mindset, and so that's really where we started asking the question, and it was everything from the funerals, it was, I remember one mom saying, [01:03:00] I want to have a two-car garage, because I want to be able to come into my house and put my car in my garage, and nobody knows that I'm at home.

And so it was those very specific things that they talked about. They talked about the joy of being able to go on vacation annually with their kids -- and not some lavish vacation, talking about going down the road to the beach and those kinds of pieces.

And so it really was "We hear you. We're affirming what it is that you're saying." And not only I think it's important that it's, we hear you, but then also how do we reframe the conversation for ourselves as well? Because it's one thing to hear someone because then it's like, okay, oh, yes, poor you. That's how you're defining that. It's another thing when we then turn it inward and say, okay, actually, let me be brave enough to interrogate what I believe about wealth. Do I actually believe wealth to be all of these things that I'm working towards, [01:04:00] or have I just been caught up in a cycle of the status quo, doing what it is I feel like I have to do for respectability politics, or am I actually doing the thing that gives me joy and feeds my soul and actually aligns to my beliefs and my principles?

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:

Final comments on how a shifting baseline obscures the inequity of our economic system

We've just heard clips today, starting with Thom Hartmann, describing the shift in power, granted to the wealthy by the Supreme court. Jim Hightower on his radio *Lowdown* looked at the impacts of Washington's revolving door. The *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* discussed corporate bullshit. Richard Wolff on *Economic Update* described a forward-looking vision of socialism. *OFF-KILTER* discussed ideas of how and why to redefine wealth. *The Zero Hour* interviewed Richard Wolf about democratizing workforces. And *OFF-KILTER* looked at the new economic bill of rights from the democratic party of West Virginia. That's what everybody heard. But members also heard bonus clips from *Citations Needed* looking at media framing and rhetoric around recent worker strikes. [01:05:00] And *OFF-KILTER* continued their discussion about redefining wealth.

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: To hear that and have all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly to the new members only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com/support, or shoot me an email requesting a financial hardship membership, because we don't let a lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information.

For more on creating a positive vision for our economic future, I think it's really worth going back to the old classic that I just republished this year, "The Fight for the Four Freedoms", looking back at the four freedoms and economic bill of rights proposed, but ultimately unfulfilled, by FDR. The episode is originally from 2019, but you'll find it in the podcast feed around June 23rd of this year.

Now to wrap up, I just want to talk for a minute about shifting baseline syndrome. And I will get to the economics, but I first came across this term related to the environment and reductions in wildlife abundance. So, the "shifting" [01:06:00] refers to the change in the situation over time. Before there were such and such number of birds, and now there are this many fewer, or bears or insects or whatever. But the "baseline" of shifting baseline syndrome refers to us and our perception. Each generation of people comes along and is introduced to the world as it is at the time of their childhood and their formative years. And that becomes our baseline. So someone in their twenties may go out into the world and find it to be a wonder of plenty and natural beauty, while someone in their eighties may see the current world as a diminished version of

its past self and feel sorrow over that. So the shifting baseline syndrome is the difficulty of each succeeding generation in accurately placing themselves within the larger context that extends far back before their birth and their own personal experiences.

Now, [01:07:00] you know, as an example, like maybe you've been really, really lucky to have gone snorkeling near a tropical beach somewhere and you've been overjoyed to have seen a giant sea turtle swimming in the ocean. And that's great. It's an ancient creature that's still part of the natural world and our real thing of beauty. What a world of abundance we live in. But what is also true is that Christopher Columbus wrote in his journals that his sailors were kept awake at night by the thousands of turtles in the ocean bumping noisily into the hull of their ship. That kind of a shift is a lot harder to keep in our minds compared to what we experienced personally.

So, this brings us to economics. There's an endless debate about how much money is a good and moral amount of money for a person to be paid for their labor. Not to mention all the non-monetary resources we all have to ration out, like access to healthcare. [01:08:00] And as a side note, I do say that on purpose in that way, because it is a myth that we don't ration healthcare in the United States. We say that that's something that only happens in countries with socialized healthcare systems, but no, we ration care as well, but instead of rationing it by need, we ration it based on ability to pay. But back to the debate over how much people should actually be paid for their work. My point today is not just to argue that a higher percentage of corporate profits should be distributed to the workers rather than the management and the investors. Or that worker ownership is a better way to achieve that basic goal, of course, but to put that current debate into a larger context and expose how shifting baseline syndrome is playing a role.

There are plenty of people alive today who were born into a world in which a middle-class family with only one person earning a paycheck could build a more prosperous life for themselves than is possible today, by a long shot. And there are a [01:09:00] lot of reasons for that. But because that was the emerging norm at the time, there was no sense like these people were greedy or decadent or anything like that. But now we live in a time after decades of neo-liberalism has been relentlessly making incremental shifts in economic norms and corporate power in which people, both individually in their minds and collectively through how we interact with each other, have been taught to do more work and expect less compensation for it. And if you stand up and say that people should make more money or that we should get more time off, the response that we often get is an accusation of decadence or laziness. But rather than simply debate that point or argue back and forth about the right level of

work versus pay versus free time, et cetera, I would suggest that you within yourself sort of interrogate why you think what [01:10:00] you do and encourage others to do the same.

Have your opinions been shaped by short-term perspectives, hampered by shifting baseline syndrome? Or Do you have a larger historical perspective? There's a lot of evidence that the expectations of our current economic system is causing widespread burnout. Millennials have been called the burnout generation. All of this coincides with the rise of the gig economy and the grind set. The idea that to get ahead, one must simply work harder, claw and scrape at every opportunity to earn money. And it has gone so far that people who suffer from clinical burnout who needed desperately to take time away from work to rest and recuperate, feel like to do so would be selfish and decadent.

The culture of neo-liberalism, not just the economic policies, but the culture, the collective mindset, the judgment [01:11:00] from other people, has created this toxic stew where doing something that is healthy for ourselves is often looked down on. Hm, must be nice, someone might say, you know, dripping with judgment when a coworker suffering from crippling stress and anxiety finally decides to take an extended vacation. Meanwhile, the culture of neo-liberalism congratulates those who have amassed hundreds of unused vacation days. Good for you, never miss a day, grind it out, build that wealth, right? It is a cultural ratchet, but only turns one direction. And it's not just the rich and powerful who have somehow brainwashed everyone thinking that overwork and underpay are laudable. We now do it to ourselves and each other with every little judgemental comment, every suggestion that not taking that vacation is the path to promotion. And it all drives people to work ever harder and expect [01:12:00] ever less.

The only way to truly shift the economic system is to also shift the culture around it, to call bullshit on the premise that this is the best we can do, that corporate profits and the carrots of possible raises and promotions hung in front of us are things worth sacrificing our health for. It's a sort of mass delusion, but it's an understandable one because most people working today grew up in this environment and never knew anything different. They didn't live through the time of enormous union power that helped keep corporate profits and labor wages on track with one another. They've mostly lived through this period of corporate power, record profits, and flat wages.

It really is understandable that people would simply adjust to the new baseline, the same way we adjust our expectations about how many turtles we should see in the ocean. This is how the world is. This is how the world works. This is what I need to do to survive. Let's [01:13:00] get on with it. But history shows

that it's always worth trying to find ways to improve the situation for the vast majority of people on a structural level, not just by encouraging everyone to work harder and meditate more if they're stressed out. But we also need to use our imagination to strive for something better, even if the past is better than the present, why would we imagine that that's the best we could do? The past should be inspiration, not a blueprint. And we need to be guided by human needs more than any economic metric. Widespread burnout, stress, and anxiety: these are symptoms of the disease. Our economic system and the associated culture aren't the only problem, but they are a real big part of it. So, we have to work collectively on breaking the delusion that we've been doing things right for the past few decades and that any problems that may arise, you know, people being stressed out, people going bankrupt from healthcare costs, anything in between, that, [01:14:00] you know, these are just problems to be dealt with on an individual level that maybe you should have just worked harder and clocked a bit more time on that meditation app.

That is going to be it for today. As always keep the comments coming in. I would love to hear your thoughts or questions about this or anything else you can leave us a voicemail or send us a text 202-999-3991, or simply email me to jay@bestoftheleft.com. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to our Transcriptionist Trio, Ken Brian, and LaWendy, for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering, and bonus show co-hosting. And thanks to those who already support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at bestoftheleft.com/support. You can join them today by signing up. It would be greatly appreciated. You'll find that link in the show notes, along with a [01:15:00] link to our Discord community, where you can also continue the discussion.

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