

# Capitalism, Courage and Justice

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The re-sponse of the United States to the confrontation with the COVID-19 virus has been



Image: mronline.org

revealing. The strengths and weaknesses of America's core values of freedom, justice and courage have been exposed, along with the blatant immorality of capitalism and white racism. Little has changed since the famous "Tale of Two Cities" speech by Mario Cuomo in 1984 about how the economy leaves so many poor and fearful.

The continued collapse of our central government has been stunning. This crisis needed leadership and fast decisive action in Washington; but leadership is impossible if you cannot face the basic truths of a pandemic. Lost in angry narcissism, the president tried to hide his irresponsibility and incompetence by lying and blaming others, from Democrats to the Chinese to the World Health Organization.

Simultaneously, the pandemic exposed the cruel nature of unregulated capitalism, which exploits everyone and life on Earth for profit. Nurses, doctors and underpaid essential workers showed up with courage to work, but the central government, which had trashed the virus emergency plans left by the previous administration, was useless. Hospitals had little personal protective gear for the emergency, and capitalism had outsourced manufacturing to wherever in the world it could be made more cheaply, and supply chains had collapsed. To avoid responsibility, the government said: "Let the free mar-

ket provide." In coded capitalist language, this means someone should be able to make a profit out of all these people dying. True, I have not been properly trained in polite euphemisms. But under the cover of COVID-19, the government greedily cancelled as many clean air, clean water and clean car regulations it possibly could to encourage corporate polluters to send more money for the reelection of the present Administration. In reality hundreds of thousands will die; but money trumps everything, and the right-wing will not be held responsible for those that perish – an echo of the tobacco companies' playbook.

Meanwhile, the U.S. consumer economy, which was clearly not essential, collapsed in less than a month. The Earth breathed a sigh of relief as air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions plummeted with the reduced burning of fossil fuel. But tens of millions of people have become unemployed. They have received some payments, and economic incentive money has been sent to many citizens, while more than a trillion dollars has flowed to rich corporations to prop up the stock market.

To keep profits high, we have long refused to pay a living wage to all Americans, so few have savings. Minorities, poorly paid and living in polluted areas of

cities, have suffered the most. As minorities, they have been treated as expendable by rich white capitalist society, which clings to its racist roots. As murders by police exposed the truth, the rebellion demanding justice has rightly spread across America. Yet the president, backed by his racist supporters, thinks troops should be sent to gun down protesters, and crush free speech protected by the Constitution. Pathetically, a president who lies every day is furious that Twitter is now fact-checking his lying tweets that endanger and threaten Americans.

The other dark side is that America is the only rich country that refuses to provide health care for all. We have a health care system that is the most expensive in the world. However, for much of it the key unspoken goal is not to optimize the health of the nation, but to maximize profit for hospitals, drug companies and insurance companies. The political right keeps trying to destroy the limited effort to expand health coverage with Obamacare, because providing health-care to the underpaid is not profitable. Unfortunately, their guiding rule that the poor must work to serve us, even if they are sick, is a problem in a pandemic.

When COVID-19 struck, hospitals started losing money when they lost their profitable elective surgery, and they laid off nurses, staff and doctors. What they could not do with their surplus capacity was provide critical healthcare for the hard-working poor, the unemployed and for minorities. Right-wing politicians just continued to insist that the

state should not provide healthcare for them.

Many have died in our nursing homes in this crisis, which were also unprepared. The American Health Care Association opposed 'burdensome regulations' for emergency preparedness for pandemics, for the simple reason that these reduce profits. Again, we see this conflict between profit and people's lives in unregulated capitalism. Capitalism cannot prepare for future emergencies, whether a pandemic or climate change, since it places no value on the future. So, building resilience is viewed as simply reducing current profits. And with deregulation, current profit for shareholders is their prime responsibility, not justice for people or for the Earth itself.

It will take courage to shake and reframe this immoral world, but now is the time. We all deserve better.

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