

IMAGINE

... a system that is democratic and equitable, organized and carried out to fulfill human needs in ways that regenerate and maintain a healthy biosphere.

— Fred Magdoff & Chris Williams, *Creating an Ecological Society: toward a revolutionary transformation*

Welcome to Issue 2 of Imagine, an occasional pamphlet devoted to envisioning what a better world could be like and ways we can make it real. If we cannot imagine a better world, no path will take us there. This vision is a work in progress — we welcome your ideas for consideration and discussion (email is below). Future issues of Imagine will continue to expand on the vision and contemplate making it happen.

What is Important to Us?

Underlying the dismal failure of the U.S. federal administration to contain COVID-19 are some problematic characteristics of our society that we can and must change:

- Unwillingness to cooperate in following a consistent and effective plan, along with lack of concern by some for the well-being of others;
- Failure to establish priorities for the common good instead of wealth accumulation by the few;
- Mistrust of valid scientific knowledge by a significant portion of the population, whereas this same population uncritically accepts a variety of baseless speculations and manipulative lies.

Imagine how much better things would be if we all pitched in together, adapted our behavior to the best knowledge currently available, protected the vulnerable, and built our essential life support systems, such as those for food distribution and

health care, to maximize the public good. Local businesses could safely reopen and customers would not be afraid to patronize them. Children could safely return to school. Workers could return to their jobs without needlessly endangering themselves and their families.

“In a rational world, the federal government would help us test more people, faster; state and federal leaders would set an example by wearing masks correctly and consistently; local officials would strictly enforce quarantine rules; ... and our public health departments would be guided by health experts, not politicians.”

— Erin N. Marcus, professor of clinical medicine, University of Miami

It is ironic that we glorify competition and individual accomplishment when we all know from experience that, within any

enterprise, teamwork and open communication are the keys to progress! We simply need to broaden our perspective on the scope of cooperation, as well as cultivate empathy for all. Instead of weighing only the risk of COVID-19 to ourselves, we must also consider those whom we might unwittingly infect (who then put still others at risk). Our failure to work together to address the pandemic and provide for peoples' basic needs has harmed the livelihoods of ordinary people for longer than necessary and caused much unnecessary suffering and death; at the same time, the fortunes of billionaires have increased by over 20%.

Changing our priorities means changing the way we make economic decisions. Keeping people alive and safe is a moral imperative. Is it really more important to prop up profits for company shareholders than it is to save lives and provide money for people to live on? To bail out the largest corporations, but not the locally owned businesses so vital to communities? Many people are thinking about how production, consumption, and distribution can be organized in a better way. These are big questions and we will return to them in future issues.

Issue 1 of *Imagine* spoke of reclaiming the commons. The development and distribution of pharmaceuticals provides an example. The whole world is affected by the

pandemic and we should cooperate with the whole world to develop treatments and vaccines. The most effective should be available freely to everyone, rather than having the most profitable available to those who can pay. Let us follow the ethical example of Frederick Banting, who developed insulin in 1923, but refused to profit from it. He said, "Insulin does not belong to me, it belongs to the world."

Our response to the pandemic also reflects our society's inadequate understanding of science. Science allows us to anticipate negative consequences and avoid them, rather than having to experience them. Skepticism is healthy and, indeed, scientific, but only if accompanied by good judgment. Knowing what to believe depends on intellectual qualities such as reasoning logically, checking facts, scrutinizing details, vetting the qualifications of sources, and considering whether or not the assumptions made and consequences predicted accord with observation. It harms us all when people are misled by the specious claims of those who either seek to manipulate others for their own purposes or are themselves deluded (or both). Believing bullshit has consequences.

We need to think hard about how to live. This is a time of transformation. We can change, we must, and we will.

Face Masks – A Path to Freedom

Our actions have an impact. Since we can spread the virus without knowing we have it, one of the simplest actions everyone of us can take is to wear a face mask. Face masks keep others safe by keeping the virus from spewing through the air. They may even protect the wearer from breathing in the virus. The island of Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated areas in the

world, but the action of everyone wearing a mask helped slow the spread of COVID-19 enough to free them from major shutdowns. There may still be a second wave, but slowing down the virus keeps hospitals from being overwhelmed and gives us time to find better treatments, means of prevention, or a vaccine. We can give them that time by simply wearing a mask. Imagine if we all did that!

"Even the smallest person can change the course of the future." — J.R.R. Tolkien