

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 7 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.

Building Social Institutions That Embody Good Values

We hope we have convinced you that institutional change is needed. Our second stated goal is to conceive of institutions that will effectively implement the values to which we aspire, and devise means by which these institutions can be established and allowed to evolve. To echo David Graeber’s thoughts on challenging our current economic and political system, the only one many people know, the answers will take time, creativity, and open minds as we seek to find a better way of life.

Social change is like climbing a mountain ridge. Along the way there are secondary peaks and plateaus. As you approach them, you feel like you are getting to the top, because you cannot see past the local high point you are approaching. Only once you reach that local peak can you see the next one. We see a better way to organize society and struggle to get there; it feels like the end goal, but once we get there we are then able to begin seeing further forms of social organization to which we might aspire. It is the height of arro-

gant and myopic foolishness to think that any current social form is the ultimate and best one possible.

Don’t ask kids what they want to be when they grow up. Ask them what problems they want to solve. This changes the conversation from who do I want to work for to what do I need to learn in order to be able to do that.

— Jaime Casap

We Already Know How To Start

We already have a model for a better social structure: a democratic family. We reject the hierarchical family model of an autocratic father and submissive mother and children, which does not provide for full human development. In a healthy, nurturing family, not only is everyone cared for, but everyone participates in family decisions and family life. As children develop wants and needs and the

ability to articulate them, they have an appropriate say in what the family will do. What do they want for dinner? Should we go to a movie or to the park? Whereas parents guide children away from harmful desires, they recognize the equal rights of their children to have their needs and desires met and to be free to develop their own individuality. No one is an autocratic “boss.” Furthermore, children want to contribute to meeting the needs of the family and love to be included in family work, whether it is to feed the dog or unpack the groceries or help with cooking. No one needs to be punished for not doing their part, nor does anyone need the inducement of having to “earn their keep.”

Before large settlements arose, human communities basically functioned as large families, but the size of the units we consider as family has steadily narrowed since then, from the whole tribe to extended families to nuclear families. We need to enlarge it again, eventually seeing all of humanity, even all of life, as one family.

Most everyone can relate to caring for family members or close friends. Caring for others outside of our families is a natural extension of our family love. Helping others in the community actually helps our own family members by promoting a more caring society that supports everyone’s health and well-being. A community that cares about everyone makes sure no one is homeless or goes hungry. A community that cares about everyone promotes trust and increases security for all.

Imagine Democracy That Works

We need a political system in which power is neither divided nor centralized. In the current U.S. system power is divided among states and the federal government, the different branches of government with their “checks and balances,” etc. The result is a paralysis of government power, ceding control to those with economic power. On the other hand, if power is centralized, as in the

Soviet or Chinese system, much can be accomplished, but there is a tendency toward authoritarianism, to which our system seems somewhat more resistant. (Ironically, corporate boards of capitalist firms operate in much the same way as Communist Party Central Committees.) These are not the only options. What if we share power and people participate democratically, but we use this power in a coordinated way instead of having various interests pitted against each other. This type of structure would allow for decisions to be made in common at whatever level is appropriate (for example, a united and cooperative worldwide response to a pandemic).

That’s the standard technique of privatization: defund, make sure things don’t work, people get angry, you hand it over to private capital.

— Noam Chomsky

Some hints of what such a system might look like are found in a decision-making model already used by many organizations, for example Occupy Wall Street. In this model, small groups with good working relations act as spokes of a wheel, sending delegates to a council, which in turn can send delegates to a larger council, and so on. Delegates relay and discuss the views of the group they represent, then bring back the results of the discussion to their group, which then sends back ideas for further consideration, and so on. People have already developed some ways of relating to each other that allow decisions to be made with some level of consensus in groups of various sizes. These practices have a lot to teach us about how to act in a unified but democratic way, how to allow those who disagree to be heard but not block the process, and so forth.

Let’s start climbing that mountain!