

An Injury to One Is Still an Injury to All

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With threats and forecasts of continued Trumpian political violence in the news, it is time to reframe public discussion about persistent poverty, racism, and inequality. In response to unrestrained expression of ugly and dangerous racism, xenophobia and misogyny, some are impelled to support a robust government response by appeals to morality and fairness. For others, the catalyst is reverential references to “who we are as Americans.” But in times of stress, too many of our neighbors park their better

nature when they perceive that their taxes payments are helping “them” rather than “me.” We are in a dangerous moment when such entreaties are insufficient to turn the tide of ripening hatred, escalating anger, and diminished expectations.

Progressives– and in fact, all people of good will– need to reassert and embrace the political, social and economic case for, “[An injury to one is an injury to all.](#)” We need to explicitly and loudly embrace a movement across the divides of race, religion, ethnicity, gender and sexual identity against hate and greed. Immediately.

Notwithstanding the continued popular appeal of Ronald Reagan’s “[government is the problem](#)” rhetoric, the vast majority of Americans believe in fairness, reject crass self-interest, abhor hate, and want government solutions and regulations that have widespread benefit: Social Security, Medicare, Interstate Highways, Centers for Disease Control, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Federal Aviation Administration, and the Federal Reserve Bank, to name a few.

These government solutions did not come into being without opposition from self-interested tax avoiders and evangelical ideologues with a “your on your own” mantra. American individualism has always been in tension with and balanced by a strong sense of community responsibility. As a result, tax-funded programs gained widespread advocacy and support because they represented “we’re in this together” common sense.

For decades, unions– always anathema to some business interests, but not always steadfastly anti-racist– represented the unifying ideal and force among working people. However, many have forgotten that without unions the eight-hour day, child labor laws,

workplace safety regulations, and employer-funded health and retirement benefits would not exist. While, these are accepted as benefits to all, too many Americans forget that without vigilance such common good measures are always subject to being taken away. The so-called hollowing out of the middle class over the last several decades and the Great Recession bring the need for a strong, multiracial coalition of working people into sharp focus. That is the sentiment that drives the appeal of Bernie Sanders. Public sector unions— a favorite bipartisan whipping post— are the last bastions of resistance to corporate domination across all areas of public life. Supporting and expanding unions is a prime, injury to one is an injury to all, unifying issue.

Unfortunately, the tremendous legal and social program advances that accompanied the civil rights movement did not enjoy widespread acceptance. Advocacy tended to be framed as finally giving disenfranchised and disrespected groups their rights and support for a “leg up.” In fact, the success of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s built upon moral repugnancy on the heels of the Holocaust and television images of fire-hosed African-Americans demanding to vote, attend integrated schools, and be seated at the lunch counter. However, it was all too easy for opponents to say out loud and in whispers, “Yea sure, but at your expense,” to those at the next rung up on the lower end of the economic ladder. Unfortunately, with dashed hopes for shared prosperity since 2008, divisive appeals to racism and xenophobia have once again successfully deflected attention from class-based explanations for growing inequality.

While Martin Luther King and others began to talk about social and economic justice in the late 1960’s, that multiracial class-based appeal never took hold. In fact, as time passed it was often abandoned. At the same time, automation, economic globalization, and deregulation began to eat away at working people's real income. Republicans have steadfastly remained the party of tax-cuts for the wealthy and deregulation supported politically by escalating anti-government rhetoric and stoking blame on “others.” Purposeful starving of federal, state and local government has exacerbated bureaucratic inefficiencies and undermined public confidence. While many mainstream Democrats challenged Republicans, they simultaneously embraced a move-to-the-center strategy that prioritized winning elections over substantive support for working people. By letting Republicans frame the issues, Democrats abetted voter cynicism. Continued use of phrases such as, “If you work hard and play by the rules,” unwittingly supported conservatives’ contention that too many people are “takers.”

Stark video images of Black men beaten and murdered by rogue policemen have once again catalyzed moral repugnancy, finally bringing long-standing racial disparity in the criminal justice into wider public consciousness. So too, inequality is drawing far more attention than at any time since the Great Depression. The advocacy for and acceptance of one core idea will determine how the United States emerges from the current volatile situation:

It is possible for everyone to lead a decent, secure life, but it will require limiting the privileges of the wealthy. Achieving that goal will not be easy or fast. It requires unity and trust across traditional religious, racial and ethnic divisions.

There are several public policy arenas in which to highlight the, “An injury to one is an injury to all principle.”

Education: Inequitable funding of schools through local taxes hurts all but the most privileged. In the United States, education is rationed based on community wealth. Families with increasing property values, but relatively stagnant or fixed income are punished with ever-higher local taxes. In many communities, continued and expanded funding for charter schools to provide “opportunity” for some students has drained limited revenue from the remainder of children. These inequities, a violation of basic democratic principles, lead to inequitable education that results in poorly prepared worker and gullible voters.

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Health Care: The Affordable Care Act was a tremendous advance for some people, but access to high-quality health care remains an economic burden for far too many people. Unaffordable medical insurance deductibles and co-payments and unconscionable prescription costs hurt us all. Staying healthy should not be a privilege. Delayed medical care drives up insurance costs for everyone. A single-payer Medicare for all system would change spending on health care from a program for them to a program for all of us.

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Fair Wages and Infrastructure Investment: No one should have to work for wages that fail to support a decent life. Everyone who works, those who are unemployed and underemployed, and those who are unable to work should be guaranteed a living wage. This would benefit everyone. Basic supply and demand economics implies that as long as employers can pay domestic or immigrant workers low wages, the income of everyone else is depressed. Substantial investment in research and infrastructure would boost living wage employment and the entire economy. The only reason we cannot afford to enact living wage laws is that significant tax increases on the wealthy have been off the table. This is a political choice, not an economic imperative.

Protecting the privilege of a few is an injury to all.

Campaign Finance: The wealthy spend billions of dollars every year to influence politicians. They do so to maintain their wealth. The Supreme Court ruled that doing so was an exercise in free speech. Essentially, this ruling asserted that protecting the privileges of wealth is more important than equal protection of the rights of democratic participation.

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