

Put People First! PA

Health care is a human right!

From Elections to Politics

by Nijmie Zakkiyyah Dzurinko, with edits and contributions from Iaan Reynolds and Borja Gutiérrez

Every day it is more apparent that the world is both ripe with possibility and on the brink of destruction. We are living through an ecological collapse and we are at the beginning of a global pandemic.

The planet will survive in some form – but human beings have to come together before it is too late.

Millions of people around the country and the world have been waking up to the realities that 1) the economic and political system is currently organized around the needs and interests of a ruling class of billionaires, 2) the needs and interests of the billionaires are not the same as the needs and interests of everyday people, and, 3) it doesn't have to be this way. As we wake up to these truths, millions of us are beginning to seek clarity about how to change things.

Put another way: there is a fundamental divide between those who

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to survive, or otherwise starve and die.





Put People First! PA Leadership Institute in York, 2019

Not only must we work or perish, but the work we have to do often destroys our bodies and harms our planet and communities, only to profit those who live off of our labor. Instead of using our skills, talents, creativity and brilliance to solve society's problems and make life better for all people and the planet, we are forced to do mind-numbing, body-breaking and planet-killing work for the profits of a select few.

We don't need a conspiracy theory to explain this – it's playing out in front of us every day on the news when talking heads repeat their talking points about a "strong economy" while at the same time 700 people die every day in the U.S. from poverty. When schools have to be kept open despite the spread of the Coronavirus because students have no other place to eat. When medical fundraisers are keeping GoFundMe in business. When there are six empty homes for every unhoused person, but no one working full time at a minimum wage job can afford a two-bedroom apartment in any county in the country. 140 million people – or 43% of the U.S. population cannot afford a \$400 emergency bill. The number of people imprisoned by the state has grown eightfold in the last 40 years, and 66% of those in cages are people of color.

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Coronavirus) pandemic. You can't stay home if you don't have a home. You can't wash your hands if your water is shut off. You can't pay for more than a week's worth of food when you have no savings. You

can't protect your loved ones if they are locked away in prisons or detention centers. You can't "shelter in place" when you have to flee domestic abuse. You can't stay safe unless EVERYONE has healthcare.

And the majority of us believe that healthcare is a human right. We believe that education is a human right. That housing is a human right. That we need to keep fossil fuels in the ground, stop fracking and shift to renewable, clean energy. Raise wages. Cancel debt. Shut down prisons and detention centers. Move from a war economy to one based on meeting human needs that provides for all. Recognize the caregiving work done by millions of mothers and caregivers. Not only do we believe these things but we know they are necessary – and possible.

This is evidenced by the tens of thousands of people in 40 states and D.C. that have come together around a moral agenda to fight the evils of systemic racism, poverty, militarism, ecological devastation and the distorted moral narrative of white supremacist Christian nationalism through the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.



Members of the PA Poor People's Campaign at the Poor People's Moral Action Congress in D.C., 2019

It's evidenced by the millions of us activating around this election.

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people of color. There is a distorted media narrative telling us who is and is not "electable" and that the "experts" talking about the "strength" of the economy every day know better than we do. A

narrative that tries to convince us that there really aren't millions of us, and that the things we need – things in the best interest of the whole of society and not just the super-rich – are somehow “divisive” and unrealistic, while immediately injecting \$1.5 trillion into the financial system to salvage capitalism.

Since they are tools owned by and beholden to the ruling class, the major political parties and media conglomerates will try to suppress any attempts on the part of the poor and dispossessed to structure society around our own needs. That's why a coordinated assault on any semblance of democracy was launched at the first suggestion that the billionaires' “right” to infinite profit be curtailed. Those who run our society will stop at nothing to confuse, undermine and divide the multi-racial working class. History has proven this to be true, time and time again.

But it's too late for the oligarchs. The scales are dropping from our eyes. We are recognizing that it is not simply enough to have ideals and energy, that we must recognize what we are truly up against: an entire system that puts profits before people.

Participating in elections is important! But elections alone won't solve our problems. It's time to move into Politics.



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Medicaid
March in

March 11

Lancaster,

2019

Though they are related, Elections are only a part of Politics.

It's in the interest of the ruling class to limit our understanding of Politics to Elections. They pour billions every election cycle into the illusion of conflict. TV ratings soar, as pundits and the two mainstream parties carve up our communities before our eyes, dividing us by geography, race, age – all the identities we're told make us fundamentally different. *This is Politics*, they tell us, presenting us with a false choice between bad and worse. The choice between two arms of the same ruling class is disguised as an exercise of our autonomy — an expression of our “free will.” They depend on us believing them, believing that *Politics* is all about the one day a year that we order off their menu. But we'll never get what we need if we limit ourselves to what a few billionaires want us to think is possible. To structure our society around meeting our human rights, we need organization, unity, and the power to make our own future. That is Politics.

Politics is the process of uniting around our needs and learning to fight for them. It's the process of identifying, developing and uniting everyday leaders. It is building permanently organized communities. We need organization of the poor and dispossessed working class in every county, in every state in this country, building a politically independent program across race, age, ability, religion, region, nationality, language, sexuality and gender 365 days a year. It is difficult work, but not as difficult as the future we are facing if we don't organize now.

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We are not naive or unrealistic. We have the vision, we have the numbers. We are 140 million strong.



Put People First! PA Annual Membership Assembly, Pittsburgh 2019

We need organization. We need to advance from Elections to Politics.

Join the [Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival](#) in your state. In Pennsylvania, [join one of the militant organizations of the working class](#) active in over 50 counties across the state.

Nijmie Zakkiyyah Dzurinko and Borja Gutiérrez are co-chairs (as volunteers) of the PA Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. Nijmie is co-founder and co-coordinator (as a volunteer) with Put People First! PA and a member of the national steering committee of the Poor People's Campaign. Iaan Reynolds and Borja are also (volunteer) coordinators within Put People First! PA

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