

America's Crisis is Rooted in the Fact that the Economy Is Rigged for the Wealthiest

By [Margaret Flowers](#) and [Kevin Zeese](#)

Global Research, January 27, 2014
PopularResistance.org

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

We owe it to MLK to carry his torch and create an economy for all.

A paradigm shift is taking place. It is coming from the awareness that all of our crises are connected to an economy rigged for the wealthiest. The symptoms of big finance capitalism create the poverty, low wages, economic insecurity and environmental destruction so a handful can profit. While these facts have been hidden by political leaders and corporate mass media, now people are seeing them and understand the task we have before us.

The Radical Dr. King

This past Monday, we celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. History books and the new Memorial in DC commemorate Dr. King for his 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech and his work for civil rights. Most people have been led to celebrate this limited version of Dr. King's life. In fact, there has been an [attempt to erase](#) the last 5 years of his life, a time when he espoused a deeper political analysis, dared to [question capitalism](#) and militarism; and broke with the status quo groups.

Glen Ford of Black Agenda Report [tells us](#) that Dr. King did not "break with the legacy of grass roots organizing and direct action" as some of his Lieutenants did when they entered business and the Democratic Party. He understood that direct action "meant bringing a social institution or the society itself locally to a halt, to make the system scream, just like its victims screamed, to bring contradictions to a head, so that everyone could see what the real problem was, that is, to confront authority."

Some reclaimed the celebration of this Dr. King. In Portland, day laborers and people without housing marched on Dr. King's birthday to [honor his radical legacy](#). In Washington State, peace activists honored Dr. King's day through direct action by [protesting a naval base](#) that deploys the Trident nuclear submarine. Kellogg's workers in Birmingham, AL remembered Dr. King and are still fighting for their rights. They've been [locked out](#) since October.

Dr. King would have turned 85 on January 15 if he had not been assassinated. In a wrongful death suit brought by King's family [the jury found the murder was a conspiracy involving the Memphis police as well as federal agencies](#). He was assassinated in part because he was a powerful leader who threatened the power structure. The [Poor People's Campaign](#) he was organizing when he died would have brought waves of thousands of people to Washington, DC in the longest lasting occupation the city had ever seen to highlight poverty and economic injustice. Using the [Stratfor system](#), King would have been classified as a "radical" and when marginalization doesn't work to stop radicals, elimination is the next step.

What was radical about Dr. King is that he called for independent politics and he made the connections between racism, poverty and militarism. He was calling not just for a few concessions and improvements, but for change of the whole system. In his 1967 speech at Riverside Baptist Church, Dr. King said, "But one day, we must ask the question of whether an edifice which produces beggars must not be restructured and refurbished." The work the social justice movement is doing today is the unfinished work of Dr. King's last campaign.

What Is The Edifice That Creates Beggars?

This is the question that people are asking. As we wrote in "[Our Tasks for 2014](#)," during this phase of the social movement, deep political education is essential. Activists must understand that 'their issue' is a symptom of a fundamental disease, a system that creates these crises. Without changing the system, the crises cannot be resolved. Through reforms, some may be reduced and perhaps delayed such as the current health care law is doing for the ongoing health care crisis. But some will continue to worsen such as climate change and the growing wealth divide.

Professor C. J. Polychroniou calls the current system "[Predatory Capitalism](#)." We have passed the era of industrial capitalism and have entered finance capitalism based on expansion of the neoliberal economic model globally. This is fundamental to understand because it is this model that is driving all of our crises.

Neoliberal economics is not related to liberalism in ideological terms, but liberalism in terms of a freeing of the market from any regulation and a freeing up of our resources to be used by private corporations for profit. In this model, government actively serves the financial elite, as Polychroniou describes: "Policies that increase the upward flows of income and the availability of public property for private exploitation rest at the core of the global neoliberal project, where predatory capitalism reigns supreme. So does privatizing profits and socializing losses."

It is predatory capitalism that drives the race to the bottom in worker rights and wages and that drives the dismantling of our public institutions and privatization of education, transportation, health care, the postal service, prisons and more. Predatory capitalism sells our resources to the highest bidder without regard for destruction of the planet, displacement of families or poisoning of communities.

The United States is in the Driver's Seat

The United States, through trade policy, is a lead driver of the neoliberal march across the planet. We have written frequently about [the Trans-Pacific Partnership](#) because it will destroy sovereignty, placing governments, even down to the local level, at the service of transnational corporations. Leaked Wikileaks documents from the TPP reveal that the US is the most extreme nation advocating for corporate power and neoliberal economies.

This week, the [EU announced](#) that it will delay negotiation of a key section, the Investor State Dispute Settlement, of the Atlantic version of the TPP known as TAFTA. They are concerned that giving corporations the power to sue governments for loss of expected profits will undermine their laws to protect the health of people and the planet and are seeking greater public input. Contrast that with a case that is going forward in Mora County, NM in which [Shell Oil](#) is suing a community over its fracking ban. If Shell is able to sue a community for loss of expected profits, that community would never be able to afford that

and would have to change its law; and other communities will be afraid to enact laws in the public interest or to protect the planet.

Momentum is building to stop the TPP. Organizations from across the spectrum and across the continent are working together to stop the President from being given authority to Fast Track the TPP through Congress and to unite in a day of action. Visit StopFastTrack.org to join the [Ten Days of Action to Stop Fast Track](#) which culminates in a day of protest on [January 31](#).

Systems to Control the Masses

Predatory capitalism is directly linked to the growing national security state and militarism. As poverty and suffering increase, so does resistance by the people and those in power fear mass revolt. As corporations require access to resources around the world, the military is necessary to secure them. And it also happens that the national security and military industrial complexes profit greatly by finding new markets for their weapons and security products.

Spying on people in the US and around the world continues to become more sophisticated. The [New York Times reports](#) that the NSA can retrieve data stored in computers or USB cards using radio waves even when the computer is turned off. In Kiev this week, the government used [cell phone technology](#) to locate people and send them a text message warning them that they were considered to be part of a mass protest, which has now been deemed illegal.

The overreach of the state is starting to backfire. Recently, an [independent federal review board concluded](#) that the collection of cell phone calls by the NSA is illegal and must be stopped. Obama's own [review board](#) called for an overhaul of the NSA, but last week the President announced only minimal reforms that protect the surveillance program. Instead of announcing real changes, he worked to [reassure the public](#) that spying is perfectly normal and acceptable. Chris Hedges [interpreted](#) his speech for us describing how faux reforms were designed to mollify Americans while "as our intelligence and law enforcement agencies, along with our courts, continue to eviscerate those rights." And the [Electronic Frontier Foundation](#) decoded the proposed reforms, giving Obama a 3.5 out of a possible score of 12 for what is considered the bare minimum of necessary overhaul.

The expansion of the security state is a boon for the corporations that produce scanners and other technology. In order to profit and grow, they must find new markets. Perhaps this is behind the announcement that all entrances to [Major League Baseball stadiums](#) will be equipped with metal detectors in 2015. We wonder what is next.

At some point, we as the public must draw the line. Concerted action to protest this encroachment through boycotts of places that use them is one effective way to stand up for our rights.

Protesting War, Pipelines and Wealth Inequality

This week, so-called peace talks for Syria are taking place in Switzerland. Ajamu Baraka explains the politics behind the talks. [He writes](#) that "it would be more accurate to call a 'war conference' rather than a 'peace conference' due to U.S. Secretary of State Kerry's insistence on keeping the scope of the agenda confined to the terms of the Geneva I

communiqué, which calls for a political transition in Syria.”

It is doubtful that real solutions to address the crises in Syria will come from the talks. Relief from the extreme violence and displacement are not part of the conversation. This is all about regime change and as expected, the propaganda is rolling out. Human Rights Watch released a report this week on Syria that [lacks all credibility](#), as described by Dan Murphy of the Christian Science Monitor.

To raise the urgent need for peace and support for the 3 million Syrian refugees, [CODEPINK and allies](#) brought a delegation of women to Switzerland. They are demanding an immediate ceasefire and that women be included in the talks. They [demonstrated outside](#) of the talks on Wednesday.

Also this week, tar sands bitumen started flowing in the Southern leg of the Keystone XL pipeline. There has been strong opposition to the tar sands and pipeline for years now. It brought together a broad coalition which has used the courts, blockades and protests to try to stop this project, which James Hansen calls ‘Game Over’ for the planet, from proceeding. There was an urgent action at the [White House](#) and a protest at a [TD Bank](#), a major financier, in Maine to express solidarity with communities like Manchester, TX that are being poisoned by oil processing and [others protested megaloads](#) traveling through Montana to the Alberta tar sands. A [new study](#) was released that also showed increased cancer rates in a community downstream from the tar sands.

And the World Economic Forum is taking place this week at a Swiss resort in Davos. One of the main topics is wealth inequality. Bill Gates, who is attending, doesn’t think wealth inequality is a problem as long as poverty is decreasing, but the [majority of Americans](#), and we suspect the world population, disagree. [Oxfam reports](#) that 85 of the richest people have the same wealth as 3.5 billion of the poorest people. And there is [no confidence](#) that real solutions to reduce wealth inequality will come out of the meeting of the wealthy at Davos.

Organizers from around the world are calling for a Commission for Truth and Justice in Switzerland. [Sign the petition here](#). They write, “This is not asking for charity, we are demanding justice and to create the conditions that ensure equal opportunities for all.” Charity is not the solution, though it is likely the only solution that the wealthy can come up with.

Solidarity not Charity

Charity undermines the peoples’ rights to self-determination and allows the status quo to continue. Polychroniou makes the point that “philanthropy serv[es] as a means to disguise the exploitation of the poor and deny the structural problems of the capitalist system.” Further, charity is arbitrary and anti-democratic. Those with the wealth decide who receives and can use their wealth to divide communities against each other and further disempower them.

The people of the world are rejecting this ‘plantation politics’ and are uniting instead. We see this in all of the circles in which we exist. This past weekend in Chicago, activists from across the country and from different areas of advocacy met to organize “Earth Day to May Day - Ten Days to Change Course” actions as part of a Global Climate Convergence. In addition to connecting our struggles and showing that the system is the problem, one of the goals is to reclaim the meaning of these holidays.

This convergence is also in line with the tasks of this moment in history. In joining our efforts and maintaining a position of what is necessary, not what we are told is on the table, we shift the realm of the possible. And as we shift the cultural acceptance of what is possible, those who have operated within the current system will shift as well and more will join the new effort. Why? Because those who stand for justice in all of its forms represent what the majority of people already want.

A task of the day is solidarity. And the new economy that is emerging to replace predatory capitalism is a solidarity economy, which we call [economic democracy](#). In a [democratized economy](#), people have more input into decisions about the economy and more benefit from it as well. This is an economic model that will solve the crises of our era and prevent them from returning.

The new economy is taking shape on a number of different levels from communities that are putting democratic economic institutions in place to students who are recreating their economic curriculum to economists who are working together to define the new economy more concretely.

Completing the Campaign for Economic Justice

The centerpiece of so many of the issues that confront us stem from an economy that works for only the wealthiest. The poverty of tens of millions, the low-pay of hundreds of millions, and economic insecurity of virtually all but the wealthiest, as well as the destruction of the environment all stem from this rigged economy of predatory capitalism.

While Occupy made “We are the 99%” famous, this wealth divide is not new. In fact, in [a 1956 sermon, Dr. King said](#):

“The misuse of Capitalism can also lead to tragic exploitation. This has so often happened in your nation. They tell me that one tenth of one percent of the population controls more than forty percent of the wealth. Oh America, how often have you taken necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes. If you are to be a truly Christian nation you must solve this problem.”

Now, the task falls to all of us, we must educate and mobilize people to create a broad national consensus that recognizes the unacceptable injustice of the rigged economy and the need to transform to economic democracy that brings economic fairness and leads to a government that functions with the participation of the people and is not dominated by the ‘rule of money’. The transformation is before us, it is our task to achieve it.

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This article is produced by [PopularResistance.org](#) in conjunction with [AlterNet](#). It is based on [PopularResistance.org’s weekly newsletter](#) reviewing the activities of the resistance movement.

Kevin Zeese, JD and Margaret Flowers, MD are participants in [PopularResistance.org](#); they co-direct [It’s Our Economy](#) and co-host [Clearing the FOG](#). Their twitters are [@KBZeese](#) and [MFlowers8](#).

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Articles by: [Margaret Flowers](#)
and [Kevin Zeese](#)

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