

# UJPO News



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The United Jewish People's Order is a national, nonpartisan, socialist-oriented, secular organization, serving Canada's progressive Jews in individual organizations since 1926 and collectively as the UJPO since 1945.

**Volume #40, Issue #2**

Banner graphic by Avrom Yanovsky, 1911-1979

## Capitalism, COVID-19, and the "Gig" Economy

By David Abramowitz

*Ed. note: Due to seemingly temporary improvised daily government bailouts/bandaids, some aspects of this article may have changed.*

A gig is a job that is usually temporary or one that has an uncertain future. Musicians use it to describe their one-night bookings as they move from job to job.

It's applicable to senior care homes keeping their operating costs to a minimum while attempting to provide required services to meet the needs of their clients.

PSWs (Personal Support Workers) provide the majority of care to residents and they have traditionally been part-time employees. If their work were done by full-time staff, provincial employment standards legislation would require they receive sick leave, paid vacation leave (or 4% pay in lieu), time for meals and two daily breaks. These standard benefits amount to approximately 20% of their salary and increase the homes' costs accordingly.

There are a variety of such homes and we'll review those which are classified as Ontario's Long-Term Care (LTC) homes. LTCs do not hire PSWs. They apply to agencies which register PSWs and supply them to LTC homes and others for a fee.

In Ontario, standards were defined under the Homes For The Aged Act updated to the much improved The Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007 (LTCHA or the Act) which came into force on July 1, 2010. Under Inspections it states: "Each home will continue to be inspected annually by Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care inspectors." Of the 626 LTC homes licensed and approved to operate in Ontario last year, only nine were actually inspected because the province's investigators were busy responding to numerous reported complaints!

As March advanced and COVID-19 infections of LTC residents increased, the Ontario Premier appeared on TV and radio daily telling of how the LTC homes were coping with their residents, as if the issue were being addressed.

The province wasn't unaware that as COVID-19 progressed the situation in the homes was desperate. On March 29 a union statement from SEIU Healthcare (Services Employees International Union) President Sharleen Stewart was issued in response to the Ministry of Long-Term Care's emergency order allowing outside workers and volunteers to be temporarily hired at Ontario's nursing homes: "Ontario's government must do more to keep healthcare workers safe during the COVID-19 pandemic by enacting measures that hold long-term care operators



Cartoon by John Williams

accountable. Nursing homes were dangerously understaffed before today's crisis...

1. Immediately provide full personal protective equipment (PPE)...
2. Require long-term care corporations to sign attestations that they are fully responsible for the safety of both staff and residents...
3. Ensure all new hires are properly skilled, trained, and oriented...
4. Share updated personal care plans with resident's family..."

On April 7, 2020, SEIU Healthcare, CUPE, OPSEU, and Unifor, who together represent 250,000 health care workers in Ontario, issued the following open letter to Premier Ford:

"Dear Premier Ford,

Our unions represent 250,000 health care workers in Ontario who work in hospitals, long-term care and in the community... Ontario's hospital and long-term care staff have a rate of COVID-19 infection which is 4 times that of the public, although they make up just 3% of the population. Our members are falling ill with this virus because they are inadequately protected at work and some of them go on to infect their family members, other staff and the patients and residents whose frail immune systems are in no position to withstand this virus.

We have three urgent requests which we want to bring to your direct attention:

All of our members (as well as Ontario's physicians and many others) are excluded from the recent Directive issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Ontario. Directive #5 only refers to registered nurses, does not cover long term care and provides for only one union to be consulted about workplace shortages of personal protective equipment... We ask that you help facilitate a Directive, enacted and implemented today, that covers all healthcare staff and ensures that all unions are involved in consultations about... any shortages of personal protective equipment.

Ontario industry is capable of making testing kits, N95 masks, face shields, gloves and gowns and ventilators... We ask that your government immediately order Ontario industry to urgently produce these vital products.

Ontario has the lowest rate of COVID-19 testing of any province. Jurisdictions with aggressive COVID-19 testing have much lower levels of mortality... We ask that your government significantly step up its testing for COVID -19 and particularly amongst vulnerable populations...

Your urgent and immediate support for these urgent requests would be a strong signal to the healthcare

workforce that their advice as well as their sacrifice are valued by your government.

Yours sincerely,

Sharleen Stewart, President, SEIU Healthcare

Michael Hurley, President, Ontario Council of Hospital Unions/CUPE

Warren (Smokey) Thomas, President, Ontario Public Service Employees Union

Andy Savelle, Director of Health Care, UNIFOR"

The government subsequently acted on some of the unions' requests. On April 22 when the Premier disclosed his mother-in-law, in a LTC Home, was COVID-19 positive, he asked for the military to help in 5 long-term care facilities as Ontario's COVID-19 death toll then topped 700. This was followed on April 25 when he acknowledged the military would assist and for 15 weeks some 350,000 affected staffs would receive \$4.00 an hour above their pay rates and a \$250 weekly pay "premium" for up to four weeks if they worked 100 hours per month or more.

The Ontario Personal Support Worker Association (OPSWA) "...would like to thank Premier Ford and Minister Fullerton for recognizing all Personal Support Workers regardless of their place of work, their collective bargaining agents or their employer... and hope it begins a new era for health care in Ontario."

Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath said... "It's wrong that it took so long for this small wage top up to arrive, and I'm asking Doug Ford to make this additional pay retroactive to the day the State of Emergency was declared, so that people's sacrifice and hard work to keep us all safe is recognized."

Searching the web one finds a Personal Support Worker typically makes between \$13.69 and \$20.87 and the average PSW Hourly Pay in Toronto, Ontario is \$17.39!

Ford said that after the pandemic subsidies, a new conversation with the federal government must occur about "a sustained commitment on healthcare and long-term care," regarding funding.

How about proposing, for starters, that PSWs and related staff work only full-time shifts, are hired directly by the home/facility in which they work, and receive paid sick leave, paid vacation leave, meal and coffee breaks, etc.?

Our neoliberal federal government supports "the middle class and those working hard to join it." How about eliminating the slave-wage class and those working extremely hard to join the working class? ♦

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# NATIONAL UJPO NEWS

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## FROM WINNIPEG

*By Roz Usiskin*

In the last issue of UJPO News, Winnipeg reported the challenges that the organization faced in 2019. This included the death of our valued friend, choir member and Board member, Sherman Kreiner.

We have had several members resign and others have been dealing with health issues. We are grateful for their contributions and will miss them on the Board.

We have been fortunate to replenish the Board with individuals who are very committed to the work of the organization. They have undertaken important initiatives that hopefully will have future ramifications locally and for the national as well. We welcome to the Board Roberta Hechter and Diane Zack. Roberta has become our very efficient membership and communications person. Diane Zack is well connected with other progressive organizations in the city. These connections will help spread our involvement with others on projects of mutual interest.

Dr. Joel Kettner is an UJPO member who initiated and organized a Strategic Planning Committee whose task is to analyze the future needs of our organization, particularly focusing in on attracting a younger generation.

Unfortunately, we are all in the midst of this pandemic disaster and all our programs have been cancelled. That includes the Book Club, the choir and our scheduled programs. Especially difficult, this is the first year since 1946 that UJPO has not sponsored a memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

We look forward with anticipation to the October National Convention. We hope that we will see new initiatives, a renewal of purpose, an invigorated National Board that will lead us into the future.

Congratulations to our member, Harriet Zaidman, for making the short-list for the Western Canada Jewish Book Awards for her book "City on Strike". The winner will be announced in the Fall.

We wish all our members across the country to stay safe and healthy during this difficult time. Take Care. ♦

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## Choir Commemorates Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

*By Sharon Chisvin, Winnipeg Free Press, April 11, 2020*

Every spring for years, the Winnipeg Jewish community has marked Shoah (Holocaust) Week with a variety of

programs, film premières, concerts and speakers. The North End Jewish Folk Choir has been an integral part of that programming since the commemorative week started.

This year, of course, Shoah Week's commemorative public programming will either be moved online or cancelled, so the anticipated choir performance will not take place.

Once it is safe to do so, however, the 17-person choir, comprised mainly of Jewish seniors, will resume its weekly practices and performances.

After all, the North End Jewish Folk Choir, under the auspices of the United Jewish People's Order, has been practising and performing in Winnipeg on and off since 1946. The current version of the choir, conducted by Koren Kominski, has been together about a dozen years. Prior to becoming its conductor, Kominski was the choir's accompanist back in the 1950s.

Dora Rosenbaum's involvement with the choir goes back even further. The 91-year-old has been singing with the choir since its founding more than 70 years ago.

"Our main purpose in having a choir," she says, "is to keep the Yiddish language alive, because when people lose their language their culture is lost."

In addition to singing in Yiddish, the choir sings in Hebrew, Ladino, Spanish, English and French. It typically performs several times a year, usually for Jewish holiday celebrations and cultural events, and at retirement and nursing homes.

Its most anticipated performance each year, however, is the one that takes place during Shoah Week in commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. That uprising, which began on Passover eve in April 1943, is considered the most important act of resistance by European Jewry in the face of the Nazi's calculated attempt to decimate them.

"In 2015 one of our choir members created a song book entitled Songs of the Ghetto," Rosenbaum says.

All of the songs in that compilation, she continues, emphasize acts of resistance and refute the idea that during the Holocaust the Jews went to their deaths without a struggle.

"It is important to perform songs from the ghettos and camps," Rosenbaum says candidly. "If we did not sing songs of resistance it would be like killing those who resisted all over again."

Those songs – scribbled on scraps of paper, scrawled on train transports, and buried beneath ghetto walls – are alternately haunting, hopeful, courageous, rebellious and elegiac.

Probably the best known and widely performed of these songs is Zog Nit Keynmol, translated from Yiddish into English as Never Say That You Have Reached the Final Road. The song was written by Vilna Ghetto underground fighter Hirsh Glick when he heard about the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, and quickly became the official hymn of the Jewish partisan brigade. The Hebrew version of the song is still sung today at many Jewish summer camps.

“In performing the music of the ghettos, of the working Jews in the factories, the survivors of the Holocaust, the partisans and the bold fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto,” Koren Kominski says, “the North End Jewish Folk Choir is playing an integral part in preserving this unique culture for posterity.

“New music of all genres is being written and performed daily. But we must continue to perform and preserve the old and traditional store of world music for future generations.” ♦

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/life/faith/choir-commemorates-warsaw-ghetto-uprising-569562521.html>

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## FROM VANCOUVER

By Carl Rosenberg

Like many readers of *UJPO News*, I’ve spent most of my time since mid-March or so at home, pursuing my social and activist lives through e-mail and Zoom meetings.

The most recent face-to-face event I attended was a presentation on Feb. 9 at the 35th annual Cherie Smith JCC Jewish Book Festival by translator, professor and editor Goldie Morgentaler. A professor of English Literature at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Goldie is a dedicated translator of the work of her mother, the late Canadian Yiddish novelist Chava Rosenfarb (1923-2011). We often published material by and about her in *Outlook Magazine*, and I met both Chava and Goldie on their visits to Vancouver.

Goldie has recently translated and edited a collection of her mother’s essays, *Confessions of a Yiddish Writer and Other Essays* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2019), and read from it at her presentation. Anyone who appreciates Chava’s work – and those of other Yiddish writers – will enjoy this collection as well.

### In Memoriam: Mark Golden (1948-1920)

Like everyone in the UJPO community, I was terribly saddened by the passing on April 9 of Mark Golden. Many people knew him from various circles – UJPO, Independent Jewish Voices Canada – but I knew him mostly from *Outlook*. As Winnipeg Associate Editor of *Outlook* until it folded, Mark always had perceptive ideas and guidance.

We also appreciated his articles and reviews for *Outlook*, some of them drawing on his academic background as a professor at the Department of Classics at the University of Winnipeg, from which he retired in 2015 as Professor Emeritus.

I very much enjoyed Mark’s company the few times I met him, once when my wife and I heard him give a lecture at the University of British Columbia, and more recently when he and his brother looked me up on a visit to Vancouver. I liked his warmth and good humour as well as his knowledge and insight – he was a true mentsh.

My heartfelt condolences to his Mark’s family: his son Max (Stephanie), newborn grandson Owen Markus; partner Jo-Anne Douglas; mother Molly; nieces Julia (Joe), Darcy (Jordan), their children, and their mother Charlotte Bell. (Mark was predeceased by his father David, brother Peter, sister Sari and infant daughter Katie Rose.) ♦

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## FROM HAMILTON

By Paul Weinberg

“What is the state of intellectual engagement and conversation in Canada?” was the topic of discussion at the March 8 gathering of Hamilton UJPO.

This country used to have fairly prominent writers and thinkers like Pierre Berton, George Grant, Farley Mowat and Morley Callaghan, engaging people with fresh ideas of the direction of the country. The passing away of more contemporary critics like James Laxer and Mel Watkins shows us that even on the left there are fewer people who can be counted on to stimulate us.

There are of course people like Margaret Atwood and Rick Salutin who can shake us up with something new to say but they may be the exception. Blame it on the decline of magazine and newspapers and the rise of Facebook and Twitter as major sources of news. Yet, the counter argument is that we are still blessed with a new generation of writers and thinkers. It is just that their platforms to present their ideas are entirely different and fragmented. Plus, the best selling Jordan Peterson, the world’s most famous Canadian intellectual, is rather unappetizing because of his appeals to the toxic instincts of conservative males afraid of feminism and transgender rights.

For Canadians, the fragility of our culture continues unabated. Can Canadian publishers survive coming out with books about this country that nobody else will sponsor? What about the independent book store or the state of the CBC? We didn’t come up with any answers but it was all food for thought. ♦

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## FROM TORONTO

By Rachel Epstein

It seems like a lifetime ago when we were holding live events, sitting next to and hugging each other, and sharing food. On February 29 we held the Naivelt Midwinter Mingle and on March 8 the Morris Winchevsky Shule held its annual Purim party. We ate pizza and hamentaschen and danced to the live music provided by our pop-up musical guests!

Our world now is transformed. Like everyone, we are socially distancing, worrying about our loved ones and those most vulnerable to the virus, and adjusting to a new way of living. This crisis has made starkly visible what Rebecca Solnit calls the “obscenity of inequality” that exists in this world. And we are afraid that what might come from this disaster is more state control and a contraction of human and civil rights. But there is also hope that what might come is a new way of being, a new and more just economic order, and a real recognition of the realities of climate change. Many UJPO-Toronto members are engaged in caretaking and activist work to both alleviate current suffering and in the service of long-term change.

Here’s what’s going on within the organization:

1. **Communications & Check-Ins:** We have been holding bi-weekly community check-ins on Zoom, for anyone in the community who wants to participate. We say hello, share information, answer questions, and hang out a bit. The check-ins are usually under an hour.

We have compiled a list of community members who may be more vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus, and a small group of volunteers is doing phone check-ins. If you would like to volunteer and/or you know someone who could use a call, email sue at: [info@winchevskycentre.org](mailto:info@winchevskycentre.org). We continue to put out the weekly digest and *L’Khaim* will be published soon.

2. **Office & Staff:** Our office is basically closed up and all staff are working at home, aside from the occasional visit to check mail.

3. **Morris Winchevsky School:** The MWS is operating on line every Sunday. Lia and the teachers meet weekly to plan, and sue, instead of serving snack, is offering an online cooking experience! She is augmenting this with information about the origins of food, and other interesting food-related info. The B’nai Mitzvah students are planning to do their presentations online in early June. The Adult B’nai Mitzvah program has also continued to meet virtually, and will be wrapping up around the same time.



### Walk out like an Egyptian

Seriously, the first recorded strike started in 1159 B.C.E. in Egypt in the reign of Pharaoh Ramses III. After a series of ruinous wars, bad harvests and a lavish 30 year jubilee, tomb builders and artisans were stiffed for their wages. The workers walked out and confronted a corrupt system that violated an ancient pact between workers and government.

Cartoon by John Williams

4. **Camp Naivelt:** A joint ECAL/CC meeting was held on April 2 which resulted in a comprehensive document summarizing the things that were agreed to regarding access to Naivelt, and the areas in which there were differing opinions. A second meeting was held recently where it was agreed that the situation has not significantly changed. It is still unclear what things will look like at Camp this summer. The City of Brampton plans to turn the water on in the new few weeks.

5. **Third Seyder:** We held a very successful virtual Third Seyder on Saturday, April 18. Approximately 70 “devices” attended, approximately 150 people. David Wall and Marilyn Lerner joined us, the MWS students sent in a video of the Four Questions, Ely T. wowed us with the Ten Plagues Rap, and various people read poems and short pieces of writing. It was a celebration of life and community, and we received much positive feedback! The organizers were: Elka Guz, Marylin Kanee, Ely T., sue goldstein and myself. For a recap of the Seyder and a pdf of the songs and readings:

<https://www.winchevskycentre.org/post/third-seyder-recap>

We look forward to next year, In Person!

6. **Red Yiddish:** Like all our programs, Red Yiddish has transitioned to online. Zoom meetings are held on Monday evenings, every 2-3 weeks. A small and rotating cast of people are facilitating online breakout groups and experimenting with different formats. Invitations have been extended to non-Torontonians from online Yiddish communities, which has led to a number of new participants from across North America and beyond!

7. **Zing! Zing! Zing!** is temporarily on hold, due to the time lag on Zoom!

8. **Other Programming:** We will likely be turning our June 11 collaboration with the Noor Cultural Centre (panel on free speech/hate speech) into an online event. We will invite our panelists to reflect on the free speech issues raised by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Indigenous Solidarity Working Group continues to meet and are planning an event for May 29. More info to come.

Be well, be safe, and greetings from Toronto! ♦

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## HONOURABLE MENTSHN

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### In Memoriam: Mark Golden

August 6th 1948 – April 9th 2020

By Harold Shuster, April 16, 2020



Father. Professor.  
Partner. Friend. Son.  
Mentor. Ally. Scholar.  
Teacher. Uncle. Blue Jays fan. Music lover. Zaida. These are all words that could describe Mark Golden, who on April 9 died of pancreatic cancer, a disease he had been

stoically coping with for the past 17 months.

Mark taught classics at the University of Winnipeg for over 30 years before retiring in 2015. I did not know much of Mark's contribution to the academy, but from the accolades coming in from his academic colleges, it is no surprise they were significant. I was never a student of Mark's (at least in an academic sense) but I have no doubt that he would have made the old relevant, and the material presented in his classroom would have been delivered with the same wit, wisdom and clarity that he brought to all his conversations.

Mark was an avid Toronto Blue Jays fan. I remember on more than a few occasions when Mark would have to leave a meeting or gathering early to get home in time to watch a game. There were also annual pilgrimages to Toronto to see a game in person, often along with his brother Peter. Mark understood the beauty and majesty of the game. This was lost on me, perhaps because baseball triggered early memories of having absolutely no trust in an opposing pitcher's ability to keep the projectiles they were hurling at me inside the strike zone.

Mark loved music. I cannot remember a time when, having entered a room holding a piano, Mark would not

immediately sit down and start playing. It was never chopsticks. It was always beautiful. And while those occasions were rare I have no doubt that his repertoire was vast and that with music – as with most of the passions in his life – Mark's knowledge was both wide and deep.

We are all many things. To me Mark was a comrade, a friend, and a great provider of humour.

I first met Mark almost 20 years ago, when I became a member of the Sholem Aleichem Community, a secular humanist Jewish "congregation" where we practiced our Judaism. The community was, and is, a wonderful collection of mixed faith families, whose Jewish identity is shaped by the moral and ethical lessons that the stories from our history can teach about living in the world today. Mark was a member of the community from the very beginning and contributed greatly to its growth. Mark saw no place for religion in being Jewish, and would quietly leave the room at community shabbat dinners when the blessings were being said. Our holiday gatherings and celebrations were always pot-lucks and Mark's cheesecakes were legendary.

For many years, I looked forward to the annual United Jewish People's Order fundraiser for *Outlook* magazine, where Mark would serve as host. With no disrespect to any of the event speakers, Mark's welcoming remarks and introductions were always the highlight. They were filled with a collage of self-deprecation, crafty wordplay (much of which went right over my head) and general hilarity.

I came to know Mark better when I got involved in Palestinian solidarity work through Independent Jewish Voices. Mark had a strong commitment to social justice and fairness, and could always be called upon to assist in organizing events no matter how big or small the ask.

I sat on many panels and was part of a few presentations with Mark where it inevitably came down to us having to defend ourselves against claims of either being self-loathing or the wrong kind of Jew. Mark had the ability to always display a sense of calm even though his passion ran deep. And there was always a place for humour.

In this time of crisis, where we are forced to do our grieving in isolation, let us promise to get to know our friends and comrades a little better. I wish I had done that with Mark. ♦

*Mark was also president of UJPO Winnipeg.*

*Harold Shuster is an activist and former National Chair of Independent Jewish Voices.*

<https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/in-memoriam-mark-golden?fbclid=IwAR10CqS5huSbd7LMtZAQs7a1f08kbWSLf5VV4DoQU07wbtPhn3nUWrhiuo>

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## WHAT'S IN ORDER

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### Mazl tov to:

Henry Lowi on his marriage to Kate Azure.

Ronnee Jaeger who turns 80 on May 15.

### Heartfelt condolences to:

Hanna Novak and the family of Perl Reichman on her passing.

SandraLaya Ruch on the passing of her daughter, Tovah Natalie. ♦

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## GETTING TO KNOW OUR UJPO MEMBERS

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### Interview with Deb O'Rourke

*Interviewed by Sam Blatt,  
March 2020*

*Since when have you been a  
member of UJPO (Toronto)?*

John Williams and I joined  
UJPO in about 2011, I think.

*What brought you to UJPO?*



I'd met Ann Pohl through Indigenous solidarity work in 1990. In 1999, Ann invited me to do a presentation on my monarch butterfly art at Camp Naivelt. That weekend, John and I had a wonderful time. We ran into people we already knew through art, activism and alternative education. Elder Molly Myers educated us, and new friends offered to loan us their cabins. When we could afford to, we became members and bought a Naivelt cabin. So Camp Naivelt captured my heart, and activism drew me into deeper involvement with UJPO. My prairie Calvinist background is very repressed, and I enjoy and learn from the resistance, humor, humanity, insight and argumentativeness of UJPO's secular left, Yiddish Ashkenazi roots.

*In which boards and/or committees are you active?*

The Social Justice Committee and the Indigenous Solidarity Working Group.

*What are some of the projects or activities your committee or board has been or is involved in?*

Toronto's Social Justice Committee has many concerns: including labour, anti-racism, LGBTQ2S and gender issues, resistance to fascism, and Palestinian human and land rights. The Indigenous Solidarity Working Group

works on organizational education within UJPO, building links with our treaty partners the Mississauga of the Credit, and acting in solidarity with communities like the Wet'suwet'en in BC, who defend their land rights as they resist carbon dioxide-intensive development.

*What is your life outside UJPO, (that you are willing to share)?*

I write poetry and non-fiction, with stories appearing sometimes in *Now* weekly. I'm a life-long artist and democratic educator. Long ago, I moved from Calgary to Toronto with friends I'd been within the 1960s free school movement. I lost several in this chosen family through the first wave of the AIDS pandemic. My first major artwork had been about birth, and coincided with the midwifery movement. The next, an installation called Milkweed Patch, was about change and loss: linking the human journey with that of the threatened monarch butterfly. For money, I was a factory artist in the garment district, until those industries moved to China. I've been on social assistance, and I've worked for a tiny theatre. Lately, I worked for ten years at ALPHA Alternative School, wrote my MEd thesis on it, and am still trying to publish a book on it.

*Are you able to bring your non-UJPO activities and skills into a close relationship with your UJPO activities?*

Absolutely. Though there are differences in our stories, historical trajectories and cultural ways, people in UJPO share my commitments to the arts and to grassroots activism. I grew up feeling like a stranger in my very conservative Calgary community (generations of homesteaders from the 1820s to the 1920s, can't get more Settler than that!). In the free school movement; in the joyously outrageous and liberating gay community of the 1970s; at ALPHA School and at Camp Naivelt/UJPO I've been challenged but also accepted as myself.

*Are other members of your family involved in or members of UJPO?*

My husband John contributes his cartoon to the UJPO News.

*Have there been any changes in UJPO since you joined, that you would like to mention?*

I've seen some cycles at Camp Naivelt. In 2000 the presence of people like elder Molly Myers and musician Alan Merovitz helped it to feel culturally strong. Soon after, Camp went through a financial and electrical crisis, and some culturally active families left. In 2008, I saw cultural revival with the Jumblies production of Oy di Velt Vet Vern Yinger, and Martin van der Ven's annual summer music camp. At Naivelt, cultural strength and financial health are related. The existence of cohorts of young

families, which is organic but helped by cultural activity, always makes a big difference.

*Are there changes you would like to see over the coming years?*

Change happens. In the constant instability created by disaster capitalism, an organization can only influence the impact and direction of change, even as it resists and tries to be a positive influence on society at large. UJPO has the stewardship of a very special piece of land in Camp Naivelt, and I hope its future decisions take into account the land's biodiversity and colonial history. I also hope that UJPO will permanently direct some of its considerable activist energy toward Indigenous solidarity and decolonization. Indigenous activists whom I know, don't trust the Left because its activists still operate from a Eurocentric, colonialist paradigm, and don't authentically respect the realities of Indigenous thought-ways, territories and governances. Indigenous issues consistently sink to the bottom of their concerns. Secular humanists, labour and the Left were also very slow to tie human rights and equity to the health of the land and waters. But I think that working on these deep problems that all the European-based non-Indigenous communities share, may attract younger activists to UJPO.

*How do you see yourself contributing to the health of the organization?*

As a non-Jewish person, in this organization I'm twice a guest – on Indigenous land and in a Jewish community that formed from a need for mutual aid in a hostile, racist world. I'm willing to work on myself when there is a problem. As I've stated earlier, I feel a stranger in the places where I should belong. When I feel at home, it is among people whose critical perspectives create genuine openness, such as at UJPO. As a democratic educator, I deeply support UJPO's devotion to youth and their needs for safety, agency, freedom, respect, self-knowledge, and ties to history and identity. I try to be a good guest by supporting and protecting the needs and interests of youth, and by contributing to UJPO's efforts to be a good guest on colonized land.

*Last and not least – recent book and/or movie and/or play you recommend!*

Every October is the Imagine NATIVE film festival, of Indigenous films from all over the world. Highly, highly recommended, and very affordable! <https://imaginative.org/>  
*Anything you would like to add /comment/suggest...?*

Oh, and please visit my art website at <http://milkweedpatch.com/home.html> And read some of my work at *Now* online. Here is an interesting one: <https://nowtoronto.com/news/toronto-islands-indigenous-rights/> ♦

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## POETRY, SONGS & WRITINGS

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### From a Plague Year, by David Malouf

*Introduction by Harriet Lyons*

David Malouf was born in Brisbane, Australia in 1934, the child of a Lebanese father and English mother of Sephardic Jewish descent. He is one of Australia's leading authors, who has published many novels and books of poetry, and who has received multiple awards. He has long been openly gay, but not an activist. A major theme in his work has been the elusiveness of Australian identity, and of identity in general. He is the author of an imaginary biography of Ovid, the Roman poet who wrote of metamorphosis, a concept with the indeterminacy of boundaries at its core.

One of Malouf's most well-known novels, *Remembering Babylon* (1993) deals with a boy who, in the early days of the colonization of Queensland, is abandoned by aborigines, returning years later deeply suntanned with his hair bleached white by the sun. The white residents of Queensland cannot make up their mind who he is: is he one of them, one of the indigenous inhabitants they fear and despise, perhaps a spy sent to foment revolt? An important message in the novel is that in not knowing who he is, they reveal that they also don't know who they are, and that the categories they are so concerned to maintain are artificial at their core, not just their edges. Malouf has written elsewhere that as a child he was puzzled that people who had spent their entire lives in the beaches and Outback of Australia, and who had come there from many parts of the world, doggedly referred to England as "home."

"From a Plague Year" was written in the bad years of the AIDS epidemic. AIDS is not mentioned in the poem, and it could be about any of the famous plagues in history, including a recurring epidemic of Bubonic plague in Australia in the early years of the 20th century, during which 2000 people were sent into quarantine in remote areas. The themes of the poem could apply to any plague, including AIDS and the plague we are living with right now. The initial response to the plague is denial, accompanied by assurance that the plague can't happen to "nice" people. As the death count grows, the images in the poem become more horrifying. There are attempts to deflect responsibility for what can no longer be denied ("Blame the Jews"). Familiar loci of domestic and national order (suburbs, citizens, family gatherings) become tainted with "pits" and "privies". Madness, God and nature are invoked. (It was during the Australian episode of Bubonic plague that the vector through fleas was finally made clear.) Finally, the essential truth cannot longer be denied: the



barriers between us are no more substantial than breaths: It comes to this: *we kill our neighbours with the very prayers we sigh to Heaven.* ♦

*From a Plague Year, from Poems 1959-1989*

A sign first in the sky, then other tokens,  
but plainer, on the flesh. June's thirty suns  
flared and we were tinder. Flies appeared  
and bubbled in pools, their green gaze multiplied  
the dead. But we, the elected, all that term  
kept house, kept shop, kept silence, knowing no harm  
would come to us. We paid our taxes, served  
on juries, saw men punished or reprieved  
from death under the law. God's eye  
was on us. Like a red-hot cautery  
it pricked and burned. *Who keep His just commandments  
shall live. No terror can afflict the saints.*

But still each week the numbers swell, the needle  
glows. In a devil's covenant, through all  
the colours of the rainbow, pale flesh bruises  
black, then stinks and softens. We stop our noses,  
the death-cloud blooms. We find its dark seeds scattered  
like sunshine, everywhere.

And so we board  
our houses up, burn pitch, read in the Book  
and choke. By day no footfall, no wheel's creak  
in the cobbled square. At night the town's aswarm  
with cries, a fearful traffic. Dung-carts climb  
to where, in moonlit fields, whole families meet  
at the real pit's edge, new nameless suburbs greet  
new citizens; they seethe like privy holes.

Some say the plague's a rat, soft-bellied squeals  
in the rushes underfoot, a red-eyed fever  
that glares. Or blame the Jews. Or claim the air  
itself turns poisonous; where warm breath clouds  
a glass invisible armies spawn, one word's  
enough to quell a city. It is death  
we suck on now. The plague in our mouth.

No help! Gender of spiders on the tongue  
that preaches, curses, pleads, God's judgment wrung  
in black sweat from our limbs. Are we in Bedlam  
or is it Hell that rocks us with its flame?  
The sickness in this month is grown so general  
no man can judge. It comes to this: we kill  
our neighbours with the very prayers we sigh  
to Heaven. O my Lord, spare me, spare me. ♦

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## YIDDISH

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### Yiddish Words Going Viral

*Submitted by Sam Blatt. Source: Email from "League for Yiddish, March 9 2020, New York ([info@leagueforyiddish.org](mailto:info@leagueforyiddish.org))*

Coronavirus : DER KORÓNA-VÍRUS

Contagious : KLÉPIK; ÓNSHTEK(EVD)IK

It's contagious: ME KEN ZIKH ÓNNEMEN  
<ÓNSHTEKN/ZARÁZEN>

Coronavirus: DER KORÓNA-VÍRUS

cough (v.): [HUSTN; HISN]

cover one's mouth: [TSÚDEKN DOS MOYL]

face mask: [DI PÓNEM-MÁSKE, -S; DI MÁSKE AFN PÓNEM]

flu-like symptoms: [SIMPTÓMEN (VI) FUN A GRIP]

infection: [DI INFÉKTSYE, -S; DER ÓNRAYS, -N; DI ÓNSHTEKUNG, -EN]

pandemic: [DI PANDÉMYE, -S]

precaution: [DOS FARHÍT-MITL, -EN; DOS BAVÓRENISH, -N]

take precautions: [BAVÓRENEN ZIKH; ÓNNEMEN FARHÍT-MÍTLEN]

quarantine (n.): [DER KARANTÍN, -EN]

quarantine (v.): [SHTELN ÚNTER A KARANTÍN]

be short of breath: [NISHT KÉNEN ÓPKHAPN DEM ÓTEM]

transmission (of) : [DOS ÍBERTROGN (+ ak')]

wash one's hands: [VASHNZIKH DI HENT] ♦

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## CANADA

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### Where Karl Marx Met Shalom Aleichem

*By Harvey Starkman, Hamilton Jewish News, March 23, 2020*

There is a delightful YouTube video you should watch. It's called *A Day at Camp Naivelt*, shot in the 1940s. I'm guessing it is post war because of the joy in life and the physical energy you see in the children, young people, and families. There is no dialogue, only a banjo soundtrack. In the background of many of the outdoor shots, there is a primitive statue of the head of a male figure. Knowing what I did about Naivelt, I wanted to morph that unclear and unidentified image into a bust of Karl Marx, but it just wouldn't work. When I asked who it was, I was told it was Shalom Aleichem.

I wasn't surprised. Both of them belonged there.

Camp Naivelt was more than a summer camp for children. Naivelt means “new world,” embodying a belief that a new world could be created through human effort. It began as a summer residential colony for members of the Jewish Labour League Mutual Benefit Society, founded in 1926, which became the United Jewish People’s Order (UJPO) in 1945. The first-generation Naivelt members were for the most part unionized garment

factory workers, “single-generation proletarians” who slept in tents that over time became a cluster of cottages. Camp Kinder land, the children’s summer camp, ran until 1971.

The camp itself is an hour east of Hamilton, in Brampton. The original 100-acre property that straddled the Credit River with the children’s camp on one bank and the adult colony on the other, was purchased indirectly from the CNR in 1936. I say “indirectly” because the CNR was not keen to sell to Jews. However, being part of an “international” progressive fraternal movement had its advantages: the land was purchased by a member of a similar organization in the Ukrainian community, and transferred to its Jewish owners.

Because of its Marxist-oriented progressive values, expressed through actions targeted at achieving fair working conditions and social justice for all, Naivelt was known as the “Red Colony” – although I’m not sure if that was a name used affectionately by its supporters or derogatively by its critics. Naivelt was the country retreat where people could meet, discuss, and even argue while the children absorbed values and culture through play, story, and song. That’s where Marx meets Sholem Aleichem.

While the founders of Naivelt were Internationalist and secular in belief, they remained very consciously Jewish. If one could create a new world, one could also create a new Jewish culture whose values aligned with progressive values. That new culture was known as Yiddishkeit or secular cultural Yiddishism. As in all cultures, language is the glue. At Naivelt, as in the factories where the members toiled during the week, Yiddish was everywhere. There were discussions, readings, performances, and classes for children.

Mostly there were songs. Songs like “Ale Brider” with lyrics by the Jewish socialist poet Morris Winchevsky proclaiming the brotherhood of all men, the sisterhood of all women, and the unity of all. Or songs about the dehumanizing effects of factory labour ending in lines calling for action and change like, “Wake up, working



brother, wake up!” And there was the Toronto Jewish Choir, originally the Frayhayt Gezangs Fareyn or Freedom Choral Society whose early song selections mirrored these themes. In the early 1950s, another group emerged from Naivelt: The Travellers, whose Canadianized version of Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” celebrates inclusion, and the

determination to “walk the freedom highway.”

The Naivelt of today is much scaled down from its peak in the early 1950s. For some, political convictions changed after the shattering revelations of Soviet antisemitism under Stalin. For the second and succeeding generations, education and opportunity allowed them to leave the factories and enter the middle class. For younger generations, learning Yiddish lost its allure, especially when other summer camps offered more enticing attractions. Even the scale of the camp has changed: in the 1970s half of the property was sold to the City of Brampton to create public parkland – perhaps in exchange for heritage status that protects the cottages that remain.

But the spirit of Naivelt has endured. During his lifetime, the immigrant factory worker and unionist Max Tohn grew flowers in his downtown Toronto backyard while his more practical neighbours grew vegetables. For him, creating beauty for others to enjoy was a quintessential human act, a refusal to allow himself to become dehumanized by the repetitive mechanical work he did in his factory job. You see that spirit too in the life work of people like Drs. May and Gerry Cohen who met at Naivelt. The progressive Jewish labour movement that gave birth to Naivelt is gone, but its core values of equity, inclusion, and social justice resonate still with the values of the wider Jewish community of which we are a part. ♦

*Harvey Starkman is a freelance writer and HJN contributor.*

<https://hamiltonjewishnews.com/features/where-karl-marx-met-shalom-aleichem>

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## USA

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### CSJO Conference Postponement

Tayere khaveyrim, dear friends,

I am writing this with great disappointment. Listening closely to the news from the medical personnel and the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control and

Prevention, the Board of the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations has decided to postpone our 50th Anniversary Conference and Reunion until 2021.

This postponement is the safest action to take. We do not want to put anyone at risk. At this point the recommended restrictions are not projected to lift until less than two weeks before the scheduled date of the conference. This will leave very little time to put things together and will not allow for good organization.

We are still rejoicing that we are reaching our 50th Anniversary even though we cannot be together at this time. We look forward to seeing everyone next year. Until then, be safe and we will keep in touch.

Until next time, zayt gezunt, sano i rezio, be well!

Terry Waslow  
Executive Director, CSJO  
[congress@csjo.org](mailto:congress@csjo.org)  
267-625-2756 ♦



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## MIDDLE EAST

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### An Epidemic of Surveillance

*Haaretz Editorial, March 18, 2020*

Under the cover of the battle against the spread of the coronavirus, Interim Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is concentrating more and more power in his hands, with neither balances nor supervision, and each day he broadens the freedom of action of the security and law enforcement agencies at the expense of individual rights.

On Monday night, in a teleconference, behind the back of the Knesset and in violation of the promise of the attorney general regarding parliamentary oversight and restriction of the use of digital measures, the interim cabinet approved emergency regulations permitting the Shin Bet security service and the police to track the cellphone locations of coronavirus patients. The cabinet did this despite the fact that the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, whose chairman is Kahol Lavan co-chairman Gabi Ashkenazi, had discussed the regulations the previous day and concluded that they should not be approved without full deliberation as well as public and parliamentary supervision.

There is no dispute that the novel coronavirus pandemic has created exceptional circumstances that must be met with exceptional means, but both the emergency regulations that were approved by the cabinet and the manner in which this was done – by bypassing the legislature – should set off a warning light. All the more so given that Netanyahu holds the reins of power without having formed a government after the election, that the task

of forming the government was given to the man who hopes to replace him and that the move was made when the Knesset cannot convene for fear of spreading the virus.

In the dead of night, the cabinet allowed the police and the Shin Bet in practice to track citizens without a court order for the duration of the emergency regulations, which can be extended as dictated by the spread of the pandemic. In other words, in effect indefinitely.

The cabinet did not make do with giving these powers to the police, which is responsible for enforcing the law. It extended special authorities also to the Shin Bet, Israel's internal security agency, which specializes in anti-terror and anti-espionage activities. The Shin Bet is now free to apply everything it has learned in its fight against terror to the general public: At the height of a pandemic, every citizen is a "suspect" when it comes to the disease. Shin Bet chief Nadav Argaman did promise that the agency would step in "only as needed in order to cope with the spread of the pandemic and under clear and defined limitations and curbs that were agreed upon with the state's most senior jurists." But anyone can recognize this slippery slope: The moment the Shin Bet and the police were given permission to monitor citizens and access to personal information, a line was crossed from which retreat might not be possible.

Kahol Lavan Chairman Benny Gantz was right, therefore, when he said "It cannot be done like a midnight heist and without oversight." His promise to insist on the immediate convening of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, a special committee on COVID-19, the Knesset Finance Committee and other committees is commendable. At this time of emergency, and in order to keep from sliding down the slippery slope, it is critical to maintain proportionality and oversight. ♦

*The above article is Haaretz's lead editorial, as published in the Hebrew and English newspapers in Israel.*

[https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/an-epidemic-of-surveillance-1.8685396?utm\\_source=smartfocus&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=daily-brief&utm\\_content=https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/an-epidemic-of-surveillance-1.8685396](https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/an-epidemic-of-surveillance-1.8685396?utm_source=smartfocus&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=daily-brief&utm_content=https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/an-epidemic-of-surveillance-1.8685396)

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### Solidarity in the Age of Coronavirus: What the Arabs Must Do

*By Ramzy Baroud, Counterpunch, April 10, 2020*

While the Coronavirus continues to ravage almost every nation on earth, Arab countries remain unable, or unwilling, to formulate a collective strategy to help the poorest and most vulnerable Arabs survive the deadly virus and its economic fallout.

Worse, amid growing international solidarity, we are yet to see a pan-Arab initiative that aims to provide

material support to countries and regions that have been hit hardest by the COVID-19 disease.

The lack of collective Arab responsiveness is not unique as it mirrors Europe's own systematic failure, exhibiting 'solidarity' when it is financially convenient, and turning its back, sometimes at its own brethren, when there are no economic incentives.

For example, when Greece defaulted on its debt to international donors in 2015, Germany, and other European Union countries, pounced on the opportunity to dismantle the country's major financial institutions and to profit from Athens' mounting miseries.

All the talk of European solidarity, fraternity and community floundered at the altar of greed and unhindered profits.

That was not the first – nor will it be the last – occasion when the opportunistic EU showed its true colors. In truth, Europe is united, not by common history or unbreakable social bonds, but rather by the shared belief that a united Europe is a stronger economic unit.

The same sordid scenario was recently repeated. As Italy began buckling down under the unbearable burdens of the deadly Coronavirus, it immediately, and naturally, sought the help of its European sister states. To no avail.

Despite its sizable debt, Italy is a major player in the economic arena of Europe and, in fact, the world. Indeed, Italy is the world's 8th largest economy. But the country's economy is now experiencing a rare freefall, especially in the poorer regions of the South, where people are literally going hungry.

The first country to come to Italy's aid was neither France, nor, unsurprisingly, Germany, but China, followed by Russia, then Cuba, and others.

This palpable lack of solidarity among European countries has further empowered the ethnocentric view already prevailing in Europe, and championed by far-right movements like Italy's League Party of Matteo Salvini. For years, the latter has advocated against European integration.

It will take months, if not years, for the political fallout of the Coronavirus to be fully assessed. But what is already clear is that international and regional economic hubs are actively hedging their bets to consolidate their geopolitical positions in the post-Coronavirus world.

Despite bashful American attempts to join the politically-motivated international solidarity, US President Donald Trump's humble moves arrived too little, too late. In fact, a sign of the times is that Chinese and Russian aid

is pouring in to help the United States, which now has the world's largest number of COVID-19 cases.

A compelling question, however, is where are the Arabs in all of this?

Italy and Spain, in particular, share historical and cultural bonds, and broad political interests, with many Arab countries, interests that will remain long after the Coronavirus is eradicated. Failing to register on the radar of international solidarity with Italy and Spain will prove a strategic miscalculation.

Israel, on the other hand, is activating its aid agency, IsraAID, which has previously worked in Italy between 2016 and 2019, after a major earthquake killed nearly 300 people and left behind massive infrastructural damage.

Israel uses 'humanitarian aid' as a political and propaganda tool. Israeli missions are often under-funded and short-lasting, but their impact is greatly amplified by a powerful, official media machine that tries to project Israel as a 'peace-maker', not a war-monger.

The truth is, some Arab governments do, in fact, provide badly needed funds and aid to countries that are devastated by wars or natural disasters; alas, these efforts are often disorganized and self-centered – and frankly, not at all motivated by true solidarity.

That said, the absence of Arab initiatives in the field of international humanitarian solidarity dwarf in comparison to the lack of Arab solidarity within the Arab world itself.

According to United Nation estimates, there are "101.4 million (people) in the region who already live in poverty, according to official criteria, and around 52 million undernourished."

A new policy brief issued on April 1 by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), projects that an additional 8.3 million people are set to join the poor and undernourished masses throughout the Arab world.

Aside from empty rhetoric and useless press releases, we are yet to witness a major collective Arab initiative, championed by, for example, the Arab League, to provide an Arab equivalent to the many economic stimulus plans that have been set into motion in many other countries and regions around the world.

Late March, United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, issued a 'global ceasefire appeal', pleading to the world, especially to warring Middle Eastern nations, to cease fire and to unite all efforts in one single war against the Coronavirus.

Sadly, that call has so far gone unheeded. The war in Libya is escalating, not subsiding; Israeli killing of

Palestinians in the occupied West Bank continues unabated; the flood of refugees out of Syria, Turkey, and other Middle Eastern countries is yet to slow down.

Times of crisis, especially the kind that targets all of us regardless of race, religion, or geography, often constitute a wake-up call, present an opportunity for a new beginning, a new social contract so that we may resurrect from the ashes of our collective pain to build a better world.

Let COVID-19 be that opportunity that will allow all nations, especially in the Middle East, to take a stance against war, hunger and disease, to share their wealth and to extend the hand of solidarity to Africa and our historic allies throughout the world. ♦

*Ramzy Baroud is a journalist, author and editor of Palestine Chronicle. His latest book is The Last Earth: A Palestinian Story (Pluto Press, London, 2018). He earned a Ph.D. in Palestine Studies from the University of Exeter and is a Non-Resident Scholar at Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies, UCSB.*

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/04/10/solidarity-in-the-age-of-coronavirus-what-the-arabs-must-do/>

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## INTERNATIONAL

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### The Insanity of Making Sick People Work

*The Bullet, March 17, 2020 • By Mark Bergfeld*

Coronavirus is putting extra burdens on workers, from health professionals to low-paid cleaning staff at the front line of combating infection. Yet many of these same workers don't even have the right to sick pay – meaning they'll feel compelled to work even if it risks spreading the virus.

After the evacuation of its coronavirus-hit passengers, the Princess Diamond cruise ship needed thorough cleaning. An Australian contractor won the tender and duly sent its cleaners a text message offering a “great opportunity” for a week's work. The workers in question were school cleaners, inexperienced in dealing with such hazardous conditions. But given their low wages, the promised \$5,000 to \$6,000 for a week was bound to appeal.

Fortunately, the United Workers Union wasn't ready to stand for management's careless attitude. They held protests at company headquarters and urged cleaners not to accept the job. The working hours and working conditions remained anything but transparent – and the cleaners hadn't received specific training. The workers hadn't even been screened for their own preexisting health conditions, which could have left them particularly vulnerable.

This dispute over the Princess Diamond encapsulated a big problem with how media usually present the

coronavirus crisis. There's been lots of coverage about how governments and businesses have sought to cope with the outbreak. Rather less attention is paid to how it is reshaping the world of work – and the burden placed on workers themselves. But it really is making a difference, and not only for health professionals.

From low-wage service workers to delivery drivers in Wuhan keeping a quarantined population fed, it is workers who are having to deal with the effects of the crisis – and who are often put in most danger. Indeed, cleaners and janitors will, in many cases, be the first line of defense against the spread of the virus. This strikingly illustrates how absurd it is that they often count among the worst-paid workers.

Faced with this situation – and mounting changes to how even the lowest-wage jobs operate – we shouldn't just treat coronavirus as some sort of natural disaster. It urgently poses the need for unions to organize to protect workers' safety – and make sure that those on the front line have both the remuneration they deserve and the protections they need.

### “Presenteeism” Is Dangerous

Bosses will always decry absenteeism among their workers. However, in times of coronavirus, we should be more worried about the opposite – “presenteeism,” by those who ought to be resting or getting medical treatment but who feel forced to show up for work.

Take food service workers, who often earn so little that missing a day's work will leave them in the lurch. As one Twitter user commented, if such workers don't have sick pay, they'll continue showing up – possibly meaning they'll help spread the virus. Only 46 percent of service workers received sick-leave benefits in 2017, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In Britain, meanwhile, paid sick days often start after the third day missed. Nonetheless, the pub chain JD Wetherspoon – which counts more than 45,000 employees – has said that it will treat coronavirus like any other illness, meaning that ill workers who stay at home for fear of spreading the virus will be left out of pocket. The pub chain's part-time workforce will be hit particularly hard – workers in Britain are only entitled to sick pay at all if they earn at least £118 a week.

In China, the scene of the first mass outbreak, private-sector companies have cut workers' wages or delayed payments. In many cases, workers have been forced to use their vacation days and prepare for unpaid leave. At Apple supplier Foxconn, workers are returning to work on a third of their wages after returning from quarantine. Restaurant

workers, meanwhile, find themselves unemployed as clients stay away.

Some employers are making changes. London's Financial Times is advising white-collar professionals on the etiquette of working at home, and argues that the much-vaunted advent of remote working, outside the office, is finally becoming a reality. Traditional businesses are now moving toward smart and agile working, once exclusively performed in Silicon Valley and the tech industry, in order to prevent their employees from catching the virus and losing more working days. Oil company Chevron has asked its 300-odd London-based staff to work from home.

But these white-collar workers moving to remote working will make a tiny impact on the overall spread of the pandemic, for millions of service and manufacturing workers need to be present at the workplace to perform their jobs. Have workers turn up to work sick, and you risk infecting customers and clients; have them stay at home, and you might have to shut down your business altogether.

The problem is, the culture of "presenteeism" places the burden of the decision on workers – often meaning they'll turn up to work when they should be staying home. The balance of forces in the workplace – the tyranny of the boss and the worker's need for wages – thus imposes an irrational decision that endangers society as a whole. If showing up regardless counts as "loyalty to your job," it's not actually any good for your coworkers – or for customers.

### **The Jobs, They Are A-Changing**

Yet not only white-collar work cultures are changing. It is also changing workers' job content – and what our employment looks like. This is particularly the case for those who work in industries that might contribute to disease prevention, such as cleaners and healthcare workers; medical staff that can remedy the worst effects of the virus; as well as others who could potentially spread it.

In Nigeria, where the first coronavirus patient was identified this weekend, security guards are being mobilized to distribute sanitizer to people entering buildings. Using some of the lowest-paid workers to prevent an outbreak ought to go hand in hand with added benefits for risky work and, indeed, the right to sick leave so that they can actually do their job effectively. Sadly, this is far from necessarily the case – with the most under-pressure workers instead burdened with more responsibilities but not more remuneration.

This was brought to my attention at a recent museum visit in Brussels, where museum staff ended up having to sanitize visitors' audio guides. While this seems like a small task, workers rarely receive adequate training for

these impromptu tasks that suddenly become part of their job. Even more rarely are they paid anything extra for these additional tasks: it's all just "part of the job," bosses insist. Anyone working in these customer-facing service jobs knows only too well how such little tasks and activities quickly pile up to become unmanageable. This is especially the case as sickness exacerbates staff shortages.

In the cleaning industry, coronavirus is intensifying the work regimen, with the introduction of standardized work processes. These are set by standardization bodies dominated by companies that will often codify their own working methods to gain a competitive advantage in the market. But workers don't have any say in these standards – nor is it scientifically proven that these standards actually produce better outcomes.

Healthcare workers tasked with remedying the situation are no better off. A whistleblower at the US Department of Health and Human Services has revealed that the department didn't equip workers with sufficient protective gear. The lack of protective gear is only getting worse, as the general population is bulk-buying face masks. Thus, even the US Surgeon General has asked the public to refrain from buying the masks, so that healthcare professionals who actually need them can contain the coronavirus and treat workers without getting infected themselves.

The Chinese outbreak strikingly illustrates how overburdening hospital workers undermines the entire effort to combat the virus. Here, more than 3,000 Chinese healthcare workers have caught the coronavirus, with eight having died. In one case, a patient admitted to a hospital in Wuhan infected at least ten medical workers. The shortage of medical supplies, the increasingly high number of patients, and the high communicability of the virus twinned with stress, long hours, and understaffed hospitals are creating a vicious cycle for those who are meant to manage the crisis.

As coronavirus travels from country to country, there's little doubt that more workers are going to be responsible for dealing with its effects. What remains in doubt is if this extra burden will mean more remuneration, additional training and improved occupational health and safety. But all this is imperative if those on the front lines are going to be able to maintain basic dignity at work – and do the job they're meant to be doing.

### **The End of the Gig Economy?**

Workers in the gig economy are at particularly high risk of catching the virus – yet they have among the lowest workplace protections. In China and elsewhere, food delivery drivers might be at the forefront of keeping self-quarantined people fed. Yet they have no knowledge of

whether the person ordering food is sick or not. While tourism is slowing down, service workers who come into regular contact with tourists have been catching coronavirus, with sometimes deadly consequences. In Taiwan, a taxi driver who had picked up passengers from mainland China and Hong Kong died in February. As tourism has slowed, cab drivers in Thailand have had their livelihoods destroyed as their daily wages have fallen from \$30 to \$10 a day.

Those who feel ill have often resorted to using taxis or ridesharing apps rather than calling ambulances. In London, a coronavirus patient didn't call an ambulance when she fell ill but instead took an Uber to the closest emergency room, where she walked through the door and presented herself to reception staff. It was a short ride, and the driver didn't catch the virus. However, these stories highlight the dangers that gig workers are exposed to.

Independent contractors working in the gig economy have no right to sick leave or healthcare benefits. The Washington Post has reported that drivers have been scrubbing their cars. Of course, these drivers are not being paid for the time spent on cleaning. Unlike Lyft, Uber sent their drivers an in-app message detailing precautions they should be taking. This only underlines the reality that they are its employees – and should be treated as such.

The employment models of these companies, and their algorithmic management and control over workers, are unsustainable in times of coronavirus. The lack of transparency or basic workers' rights – with employers doing nothing to protect workers against the spread of the virus – is meanwhile contributing to anti-Asian racism, as some drivers refuse to pick up Asian-looking passengers.

### Workers' Demands, Unions' Responses

At present, it looks like coronavirus will continue to exacerbate existing labor-market inequalities. But the labor movement shouldn't let employers off the hook, as if they were just victims of the situation. Companies should be providing protective gear, offering more working from home, and providing additional paid sick days and healthcare benefits.

Britain's Trades Union Congress (TUC) is leading by example, as it argues for a change to sick pay. For the TUC, workers below the current £118-a-week threshold should be given sick pay – starting from the first day they fall ill. Such a legal change would benefit nearly 2 million workers. On March 3, prime minister Boris Johnson told the House of Commons that statutory sick pay (£94.25 a week) would be extended to the first day off, but he refused to answer Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's question on whether this would apply to part-timers.

Meanwhile, airport security workers at Frankfurt Airport in Germany have demanded that they be allowed to wear face masks. While face masks don't necessarily stop the virus from spreading, unions certainly should be demanding increased health and safety measures for workers on the front line.

Moreover, unions could demand more days of "home office" or remote working – a popular demand among today's workforce. While there are issues with working from at home, such as effectively working longer hours, this would particularly benefit women workers – who are more likely to have to balance caring for their children and/or parents.

Without doubt, the coronavirus crisis is bound to bring many changes to the world of work. But, as with any crisis, the question is who is going to foot the bill. For working people, one option is fatalism – just accepting bosses' claims that dealing with this is now "part of the job." Or, we can insist that employers take responsibility – and implement the changes needed to keep us and the general public safe. ♦

<https://socialistproject.ca/2020/03/the-insanity-of-making-sick-people-work/>

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## UNITED JEWISH PEOPLE'S ORDER

The United Jewish People's Order develops and perpetuates a progressive secular approach to social and cultural matters, our Jewish heritage, the Yiddish language and holiday and festival celebrations; we sponsor secular Jewish education, musical and cultural groups, concerts, lectures, public forums, and take part in social action and related community activities.

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