

The primary purpose of the Maggie Phair Institute for Democracy and Human Rights

is to educate people, especially young people, about democracy and human rights. The purpose will be achieved through, but not limited to, such practices as hiring an educator, sponsoring projects, sponsoring forums and workshops, showing educational films, operating a library, and developing educational materials.

The Maggie Phair Institute

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An Economic Bill of Rights

For the People



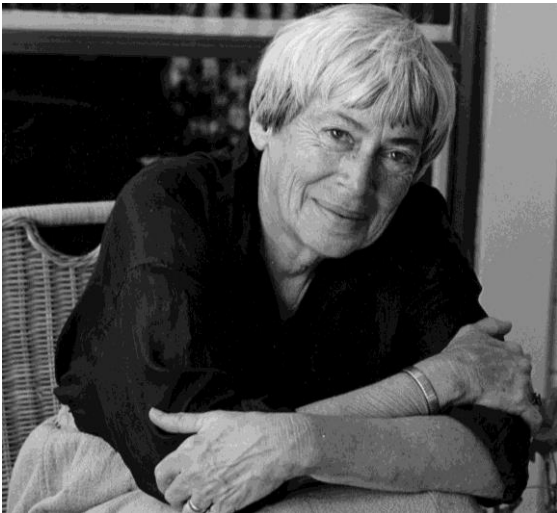
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We Can Change Systems

Capitalism can appear to be so firmly entrenched that the thought of dismantling it to replace it with something better, something that can deliver economic stability and a life of dignity, can be so overwhelming that it becomes an abstraction. Undoubtedly, dismantling a system this powerful would be an extraordinarily profound challenge. But, as author Ursula K. Le Guin once noted:

"We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings."

In a hypothetical scenario, if capitalism were to be replaced, what would take its place?:



Pictured: Ursula K. Le Guin
Photo Credit: Wikipedia

The first thing we'd look at is a living wage, which isn't to be confused with a minimum wage. A living wage is the minimum amount needed in any given area to guarantee that an individual's basic needs are met. From MIT's Living Wage Calculator, created by Dr. K. Glasmeier, a living wage is "a market-based approach that draws upon geographically specific expenditure data." If we take the city of Los Angeles, the Living Wage Calculator shows us that a single parent with one child would need to earn a minimum of \$30.27 to meet their most basic needs. With a \$15/hour minimum wage, that single parent with one child in Los Angeles falls over \$15 in the negative for every hour worked. In a socialist society where the workers owned and controlled production, that living wage would be guaranteed as a right.

Health care in the United States is the world's most expensive, yet it ranks far behind countries with either a single-payer system or a socialized system in terms of quality of care. In fact, health care is the leading cause of bankruptcy in this country. The extent of the problem is widespread. Earlier this year, CNBC reported that "A new study from academic researchers found that 66.5 percent of all bankruptcies were tied to medical issues...An estimated 530,000 families turn to bankruptcy each year because of medical issues and bills." In a socialist economic system, the people would have access to doctors of their choice with no out-of-pocket expense. Everyone would be covered.

Undoubtedly, some will ask how all of the above would be paid for.. Each year, the War Resisters League publishes a pie chart detailing specifically where our tax dollars are spent. For fiscal year 2019, the WRL reported that 47% of our income taxes are spent on the military, with 20% spent on past military expenses (644 billion dollars) and 27% spent on current military expenditures (857 billion dollars). In a capitalist system, the military paves the way for acquisition to resources, which in turn delivers profit. Very little of the military's function serves to defend the country from any sort of foreign threat. We can also look at our tax code. The U.S. tax code is regressive, meaning that, the less you earn, the heavier the tax burden. A shift to a steeply graduated income tax would go a long way toward providing the necessary funds to deliver our proposed economic bill of rights.

Under a capitalist economic system, profit reigns supreme. The economic well-being of the people necessarily plays second fiddle to profit. Progressive reforms to the system – reforms that will deliver much needed short-term relief and widen the scope of the country's social safety net – are consistently under attack by capital and are always subject to repeal or the potential of a diminished effect. For example, we might see a minimum wage increase implemented at a time where health care and cost-of-living costs outpace the wage increase.

The Maggie Phair Institute would suggest the reader consider: an economic system where the workers own and control production, where democracy is a core value, and where basic needs are met across the board. What would socialism deliver? What kinds of economic rights would the people have in a socialist society?

Delivering a humane and just economic bill of rights for the people is not a matter of resources. Delivering a humane and just economic bill of rights for the people is a matter of priorities and will. Asking capitalism to put people before profit is an exercise in futility. That's not how the system is designed to operate. We've been down this road for decades and decades, and the results are getting worse. The time to transition to an economic system – socialist – that places humanity over profit has come. Do we have the will?

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