# 1AC

### Contention 1: Squid Game

#### Capitalism has produced shocking global inequality, and the public is ready for action.

Abdelmahmoud 10-1-21

(Elamin, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/elaminabdelmahmoud/squid-game-netflix-review-lupin-international)

The dizzying success of Squid Game and the triumph of other non-English shows may finally kill the unfounded idea that North American viewers — the largest share of Netflix’s audience — are not interested in watching foreign shows. That is significant by itself. But these shows also share a common throughline: They all deal with inequality, capture the despair of poverty, and dissect class anxiety. Regardless of the country or language, capitalism is the shared villain in Netflix’s global successes. It’s a villain viewers everywhere can identify. In case you’re among the eight people who have yet to watch Squid Game, the premise is simple: Hundreds of people living with oppressive debt are approached to take part in a series of games — all variations of childhood favorites like Red Light, Green Light, but with, uh, deadly modifications — with the promise of a cash prize that might change their lives. It’s like if the playground games you played as a kid suddenly turned into the Hunger Games. Squid Game is effective at pulling you in. By the middle of the first episode, viewers are plunged into a world that’s as repulsive as it is gripping, complete with masked villains and hapless antiheroes who do not know what’s in store for them. The “game” sequences are breathtaking — in creator Hwang Dong-hyuk’s hands, a game as familiar as tug of war is transformed into an exhilarating, high-stakes contest. At the center of it all is Seong Gi-hun, a chauffeur addicted to gambling and self-sabotage, played brilliantly by Lee Jung-jae. In Lee’s performance, we see all the big and small humiliations of capitalism: the feeling of your worth being tethered to your productivity; the magical thinking that once you’re rich, you’ll be a different person; the embarrassments we are willing to endure to afford what we think we deserve. As we become invested in Gi-hun, we watch him as he lets us down over and over again. He steals from his mother and forgets his daughter’s birthday. When he is handed a financial lifeline, he gambles it away. The first episode sets up the tension by slowly luring you into its shocking climax, when players discover the true cost of playing. No matter how much you read about it, you will not be ready for the rules of the game. But Squid Game is at its most effective in the second episode, where the contestants briefly find themselves back in their regular lives. Here, the show cycles through the horrors they all exist in: the pickpocket desperate to secure enough money to rescue her little brother; the business graduate who can’t confront the ways he has let down his mother; the young migrant worker who cannot provide for his wife and his newborn. And in the case of Gi-hun, the reality that his debt has not only driven his daughter away, but also put him in a position where he is unable to help his sick mother. Through the course of the episode — aptly entitled “Hell” — we learn of the various chokeholds these characters are in, which are cruel enough that they might even prefer to go back to wagering with their lives. Their debts — and circumstances — are treated with tenderness and compassion. These are desperate people, willing to do anything to get out of their own personal hells. Their desperation may be familiar to viewers in Korea, where household debts are snowballing, but it is universal, too: in the US, Americans have more debt than ever before. In Canada, household debts are at worrying levels. Beyond the indignities of working only to keep your head above water, debt has devastating health consequences like depression and anxiety. Forty percent of Americans would struggle to handle an unexpected $400 expense because of debt. Meanwhile, even though inequality was already high, the pandemic made it even worse. Hell, that cuts both ways, and inequality made the pandemic worse, too. That growing wealth gap is not an accidental outcome of capitalism — it is rather predictable. The games are made up, the pot of money is fictional, and Squid Game is a drama, but its honest exploration of the weight of debt and inequality could not be more timely. Squid Game fully understands the crushing consequences of being in debt, and it’s easy for viewers to see themselves in it. “We are simply here to give you a chance,” the masked villains say, and you understand their meaning to be more sinister than that. Squid Game deals with these themes explicitly, but it is hardly the only Netflix property to dive into the horrors of capitalism. In Lupin, Assane Diop, the noble thief, is struggling to pay the bills and is forced to rely on loan sharks in order to pull off an elaborate heist. We see Tokyo, the protagonist of Money Heist, begin from a place of desperation too as she is left shattered after a botched robbery before she’s taken in by the mysterious Professor. Even the Spanish-language hit Elite takes on class anxiety, as three lower-income students begin life at a wealthy school and struggle to fit in with their new classmates. In all of these shows, the poverty and precariousness of the protagonists are the entry points for viewers, the vectors of relatability. We cheer for them because we understand that they are up against the same forces as the rest of us. All of these shows are thrilling and well paced, with impeccable writing. But more to the point, the fact that it is these shows that Netflix viewers have gravitated to suggests a universal center of gravity. No matter the language or location, capitalism makes us all desperate. ●

#### Income inequality undermines democracy, making action on existential problems like climate change impossible—it’s the biggest global risk and the US is the worst example.

Lingis, PhD, 9-29-21

(Alphonso Lingis, a professor emeritus of philosophy at Pennsylvania State University, https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/465571/Inequality-of-wealth-is-greater-in-the-U-S-than-in-any-other)

“Inequality of wealth is greater by far in the United States than in any other developed country and increasing,” Lingis tells the Tehran Times. “One percent of the population in the United States holds 42.5 percent of the national wealth. Just three men—Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Microsoft founder Bill Gates, and investor Warren Buffett—hold combined fortunes worth more than the total wealth of the poorest half of Americans.” Since wealth means political power in the United States, the gap between tycoons and ordinary people reflects a defect in the political system. Critics say capitalism in the U.S. is going to marginalize democracy. Mass media plays a key role in this regard. “As wealth becomes increasingly concentrated in an ever smaller number of individuals and corporations, so does the potential political power of the wealthiest,” Lingis notes. Meanwhile “the median White family has 10 times more wealth than the median Black family and 7.5 times more wealth than the median Latino family. This increasing economic inequality is damaging to the health, education, job opportunities, and home ownerless possibilities of a growing number of people in the nation,” the professor of philosophy adds. Following is the text of the interview: Q: How do you see the political fallout of Trump's presidency in America and its impact on U.S. democracy? A: Lawyers for President Trump identified 62 incidences of alleged voter fraud in the 2020 election, which the courts individually examined and rejected. Nonetheless, Trump continues to claim that massive voter fraud invalidated the election, a claim shared by more than half of Republican voters. This does undermine public trust in the essential institutions of democracy in the country. Q: U.S. officials claim to defend democratic values, but apparently giant corporations, lobbies, and money have a big influence on U.S. democracy. Is American democracy in favor of the majority or just a tool in the hands of the elites? A: As wealth becomes increasingly concentrated in an ever-smaller number of individuals and corporations, so does the potential political power of the wealthiest. In 2020 candidates for the U.S. Congress spent $8,703,050,547 on their campaigns. Individual candidates spent up to $270 million on a campaign. The greater part of the money spent was donated by a small number of very rich individuals and corporations. One-fifth of the money spent on campaigns was donated by just 2635 individuals. Their influence makes President Trump’s numerous actions against climate change control, environmental protection, and his massive tax reduction for the rich difficult to reverse. Q: What is your comment on Republicans' efforts to restrict voting rights in some states? Do you think the American establishment can protect democracy? A: Since the 2020 election, nine Republican-dominated states have passed new laws that restrict access to voting for poorer people and minorities. Seventeen states have passed laws to expand access to voting for their citizens. A national voting rights law is presently being blocked by Republicans in Congress. Q: Is there any correlation between defending democracy at home and supporting democracy abroad? Apparently, the U.S. has failed to realize this goal in foreign policy. For example, America is a great sponsor of tyrannical regimes in the Persian Gulf. A: President Trump openly admired authoritarian regimes, and leaders such as Bolsonaro in Brazil, Duterte in the Philippines, and Orban in Hungary copied Trump’s rhetoric and domestic policies. President Biden, addressing the United Nations General Assembly, affirmed that his government will exercise “relentless diplomacy” in favor of democratic regimes. He called for international cooperation to address the coronavirus pandemic, global climate change, and cyber threats. He said the United States will double its financial commitment to climate aid and spend $10 billion to fight hunger. He also announced a donation of 1.1 billion doses of the Covid vaccine to poor countries, “for everyone shot we’ve administered to date in America we have now committed to doing three shots to the rest of the world.” Q: Some critics like Bernie Sanders believe that capitalism may push the U.S. and its democracy towards an abyss. What is your comment? A: Inequality of wealth is greater by far in the United States than in any other developed country and increasing. One percent of the population in the United States holds 42.5 percent of the national wealth. Just three men—Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Microsoft founder Bill Gates, and investor Warren Buffett—hold combined fortunes worth more than the total wealth of the poorest half of Americans. The median White family has 10 times more wealth than the median Black family and 7.5 times more wealth than the median Latino family. This increasing economic inequality is damaging to the health, education, job opportunities, and home ownerless possibilities of a growing number of people in the nation. In 2014, The World Economic Forum based in Davos, Switzerland released its “Global Risks 2014” report, listing income disparity first of the most likely five global risks, followed by extreme weather events, unemployment and underemployment, climate change, and cyber-attacks. Noted economist Thomas Piketty and others have argued that the growing economic inequality is also economically unsustainable.

#### *Striketober* has seen a massive increase in labor activity, but it’s not sustainable.

Greenhouse 10-23-21

(Steven, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/oct/23/striketober-unions-strikes-workers-lasting-change)

US labor unions have been on the defensive for decades but this October there has been a surprising burst of worker militancy and strikes as workers have gone on the offensive to demand more. Experts are predicting more actions to come but whether “Striketober” can lead to permanent change remains an open question. The scale of industrial action is truly remarkable. Ten thousand John Deere workers have gone on strike, 1,400 Kellogg workers have walked out, as well as a walkout threatened by more than 30,000 Kaiser Permanente workers, all inflamed by a profound disconnect between labor and management. Many frontline workers – after working so hard and risking their lives during the pandemic – say they deserve substantial raises along with lots of gratitude. With this in mind and with myriad employers complaining of a labor shortage, many workers believe it’s an opportune time to demand more and go on strike. It doesn’t hurt that there’s a strongly pro-union president in the White House and there’s more public support for unions than in decades. But some corporations are acting as if nothing has changed and they can continue corporate America’s decades-long practice of squeezing workers and demanding concessions, even after corporate profits have soared. This attitude doesn’t sit well with Chris Laursen, who earns $20.82 an hour after 19 years at Deere’s farm equipment factory in Ottumwa, Iowa. Laursen is upset that Deere is offering just a one-dollar-an-hour raise and wants to eliminate pensions for future hires even when Deere anticipates a record $5.7bn in profits this year, more than double last year’s earnings. “We were deemed essential workers right out of the gate,” Laursen said, noting that many workers racked up lots of overtime during the pandemic. “But then they came with an offer that was appallingly low. It was a slap in the face of the workers who created all the wealth for them.” Many Deere workers complain that the company offered only a 12% raise over six years, which they say won’t keep pace with inflation, even as the CEO’s pay rose 160% last year to $16m and dividends were raised 17%. Deere’s workers voted down the company’s offer by 90% before they went on strike at 14 factories on 14 October, their first walkout in 35 years. “We really showed up during the pandemic and kept building equipment for them,” Laursen said. “Now we want something back. The stars are finally lined up for us, and we had to bring the fight.” Thomas Kochan, an MIT professor of industrial relations, agreed that it was a favorable time for workers – many corporations have substantially increased pay in response to the labor shortage. “It’s clear that workers are much more empowered,” he said. “They’re empowered because of the labor shortage.” Kochan added: “These strikes could easily trigger more strike activity if several are successful or perceived to be successful.” Robert Bruno, a labor relations professor at the University of Illinois, said workers have built up a lot of grievances and anger during the pandemic, after years of seeing scant improvement in pay and benefits. Bruno pointed to a big reason for the growing worker frustration: “You can definitely see that American capitalism has reigned supreme over workers, and as a result, the incentive for companies is to continue to do what’s been working for them. It’s likely that an arrogance sets in where companies think that’s going to last for ever, and maybe they don’t read the times properly.” Kevin Bradshaw, a striker at Kellogg’s factory in Memphis, said the cereal maker was being arrogant and unappreciative. During the pandemic, he said, Kellogg employees often worked 30 days in a row, often in 12-hour or 16-hour shifts. In light of this hard work, he derided Kellogg’s contract offer, which calls for a far lower scale for new hires. “Kellogg is offering a $13 cut in top pay for new workers,” Bradshaw said. “They want a permanent two-tier. New employees will no longer receive the same amount of money and benefits we do.” That, he said, is bad for the next generation of workers. Bradshaw, vice-president of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers union local, noted that it made painful concessions to Kellogg in 2015. “We gave so many concessions, and now they’re saying they need more,” he said. “This is a real smack in the face during the pandemic. Everyone knows that they’re greedy and not needy.” Kellogg said its compensation is among the industry’s best and its offer will help the company meet competitive challenges. Deere said it was determined to reach an agreement and continue to make its workers “the highest paid employees in the agriculture industry”. There are many strikes beyond Deere and Kellogg. More than 400 workers at the Heaven Hill bourbon distillery in Kentucky have been on strike for six weeks, while roughly 1,000 Warrior Met coalminers in Alabama have been on strike since April. Hundreds of nurses at Mercy hospital in Buffalo went on strike on 1 October, and 450 steelworkers at Special Metals in Huntington, West Virginia, also walked out that day. More than 30,000 nurses and other healthcare professionals at Kaiser Permanente on the west coast have voted to authorize a strike. Sixty thousand Hollywood production employees threatened to go on strike last Monday, unhappy that film and TV companies were not taking their concerns about overwork and exhaustion seriously. But seeing that the union was serious about staging its first-ever strike, Hollywood producers flinched, agreed to compromises, and the two sides reached a settlement. Noting that Kaiser Permanente, a non-profit, had amassed $45bn in reserves, Belinda Redding, a Kaiser nurse in Woodland Hills, California, said, “We’ve been going all out during the pandemic. We’ve been working extra shifts. Our lives have been turned upside down. The signs were up all over saying, ‘Heroes Work Here’. And the pandemic isn’t even over for us, and then for them to offer us a 1% raise, it’s almost a slap in the face.” Redding is also fuming that management has proposed hiring new nurses at 26% less pay than current ones earn – which she said would ensure a shortage of nurses. “It’s hard to imagine a nurse giving her all when she’s paid far less than other nurses,” Redding said. Kaiser said that its employees earn 26% more than average market wages and that its services would become unaffordable unless it restrains labor costs. On a smaller scale but in an industry in increasing demand, striking workers at one of the world’s largest bourbon producers were scheduled to vote on a new contract on Saturday, a day after announcing a tentative agreement with Heaven Hill, the producer of Evan Williams bourbon. About 420 members of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 23D went on strike about six weeks ago, forming picket lines at the company’s operations in Bardstown, Kentucky, with the dispute revolving around healthcare and scheduling. Meanwhile, many non-union workers – frequently dismayed with low pay, volatile schedules and poor treatment – have quit their jobs or refused to return to their old ones after being laid off during the pandemic. In August, 4.2 million workers quit their jobs, part of what has been called the Great Resignation. Some economists have suggested this is a quiet general strike with workers demanding better pay and conditions. “People are using exit from their jobs as a source of power,” Kochan said. As for unionized workers, some labor experts see parallels between today’s burst of strikes and the much larger wave of strikes after the first and second world wars. As with the pandemic, those catastrophic wars caused many Americans to reassess their lives and jobs and ask: after what we’ve been through, don’t we deserve better pay and conditions? Professor Bruno said that in light of today’s increased worker militancy, unionized employers would have to rethink their approach to bargaining “and take the rank and file pretty seriously”. They can no longer expect workers to roll over or to strong-arm them into swallowing concessions, often by threatening to move operations overseas. Bruno questioned whether the surge in strikes will be long-lasting. He predicts that the improvements in pay and job quality will be long-lasting, adding that that was more likely than unions substantially increasing their membership. He said that if workers see others winning better wages and conditions through strikes, that will raise unions’ visibility and lead to more workers voting to join unions. Despite the recent turbulence, Ruth Milkman, a sociologist of labor at City University of New York, foresees a return to the status quo. “I think things will go back to where they were once things settle down,” she said. “The labor shortage is not necessarily going to last.” She sees the number of strikes declining once the labor shortage ends. In her view, union membership isn’t likely to increase markedly because “they’re not doing that much organizing. “There’s a little” – like the unionization efforts at Starbucks in Buffalo and at Amazon – “but it’s not as if there’s some big push.” A big question, Milkman said, was how can today’s labor momentum be sustained? She said it would help if Congress passed the Protecting the Right to Organize Act, which would make it easier to unionize workers. That law would spur unions to do more organizing and increase their chances of winning union drives. “That would be a real shot in the arm,” Milkman said.

#### The right to strike is crucial to stop decline of labor unions, the vital internal link to economic inequality.

Pope et al. 17

(James Gray Pope Professor of Law and Sidney Reitman Scholar at Rutgers University.Ed Bruno is the former director of the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers of America, Peter Kellman is past president of the Southern Maine Labor Council and is currently working with the Movement Building/Education Committee of the Maine AFL-CIO https://bostonreview.net/forum/james-gray-pope-ed-bruno-peter-kellman-right-strike , 5-22)

In December 2005 more than 30,000 New York City transit workers walked out over economic issues despite the state of New York’s Taylor Law, which prohibits all public sector strikes. Not only did the workers face the loss of two days’ pay for each day on strike, but a court ordered that the union be fined $1 million per day. Union president Roger Toussaint held firm, likening the strikers to Rosa Parks. “There is a higher calling than the law,” he declared. “That is justice and equality.” The transit strike exemplified labor civil disobedience at its most effective. The workers were not staging a symbolic event; they brought the city’s transit system to a halt. They claimed their fundamental right to collective action despite a statute that outlawed it. For a precious moment, public attention was riveted on the drama of workers defying a draconian strike ban. How did national labor leaders react? AFL-CIO president John Sweeney issued a routine statement of support, while most others did nothing at all. To anybody watching the drama unfold, the message was clear: there is no right to strike, even in the House of Labor. About a decade earlier in 1996, Stephen Lerner, fresh from a successful campaign to organize Los Angeles janitors, had warned in Boston Review that private sector unions faced an existential crisis: density could soon drop from 10.3 percent to 5 percent if unions did not expand their activity beyond the limits imposed by American law. He called for unions to develop broad organizing strategies—industry-wide and regional—and to engage in civil disobedience. Few embraced these radical strategies. Today private sector union density is about 6.5 percent, not quite as low as Lerner predicted, but down from a high of over 30 percent in the mid-1950s. Union decline matters. For half a century, it has moved in lock step with the increase in income inequality. According to an International Monetary Fund study of twenty advanced economies, . In the heyday of American unionism, CEOs made about 25 times the annual compensation of the average worker; today, the multiple is more than 350. Meanwhile, as Thomas Edsell and others have warned for decades, the decline of unions has deprived the Democratic Party of its strongest link to white workers. The overwhelming majority of unions continue to endorse Democratic candidates (including Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election), but with ever-diminishing effect. Until two decades ago it was possible to blame union decline on backward labor leaders, such as George Meany, who were so steeped in business unionism that they could not see the need to organize broadly, much less to ally with other social movements across lines of race, gender, and immigration status. Since then, however, we have seen continued shrinkage under leaders who are, for the most part, well intentioned and savvy. The problem is structural. National union officials are not well positioned to lead a challenge to corporate power. Institutions with big treasuries and tit-for-tat relations with establishment politicians cannot be expected to undertake risky and polarizing actions. Although leaders might see the need to build working-class power, the immediate incentives all point toward the narrow needs of their particular union’s members. This constraint is rooted in the American system of exclusive representation, which divides workers into thousands of bargaining unit boxes, gives unions property interests in particular boxes, and penalizes unions for doing anything other than defending existing boxes and acquiring new ones. The prospects for union revival may seem bleaker than ever during the Trump administration, even as the triumph of right-wing populism makes more urgent what was already apparent: the need to build a labor movement that can fight for the interests of the working class in the face of corporate power. But prospects are not as grim as they appear. Over the past decade, there has been an undeniable shift toward class politics, most visibly evidenced by Occupy Wall Street, the Bernie Sanders campaign, the Fight for Fifteen, and the rise of a Black Lives Matter movement that supports economic justice demands, including the right to organize. Building the labor movement in this period of danger and opportunity will require not only heeding Lerner’s call for a strategic shift and extralegal action; labor must also reclaim the right to strike and confront the deep structural disabilities that impede unions from challenging corporate power.

#### Statistically, economic inequality outweighs war.

Richter, PhD/EMT, 15

(Roxane, *Disaster Types and their Consequences for Women* in Medical Outcasts: Gendered and Institutionalized Xenophobia in Undocumented Forced Migrant’s Emergency Health Care)

As we see above in Galtung’s “Typology of Violence" from 1969 (Table 2.1), the “need groups” may be disadvantaged to such an extent that they starve, become terminally ill from the result of illness or disease, or die. The second category. Exploitation B, leaves the underprivileged in a constant involuntary state of poverty, usually comprising malnutrition and illness. These effects all occur within and at the culmination of multifaceted social and economic structures, and obscured legislative cycles. A noted successor of Galtung’s benchmark work in structural violence, James Gilligan began a quest to look closely at the ties between structural violence and its effects on individuals' health, violent behavior, and society. As a prison psychiatrist and director of the Center for the Study of Violence at Harvard Medical School. Gilligan observed that structural violence differs from behavioral violence in three major respects: In addition to its virtual invisibility, structural violence functions more or less independently of individual behaviors: further, its problematic effects operate continuously, not just sporadically (1996). In his book Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic. James Gilligan defines structural violence as “the increased rates of death and disability suffered by those who occupy the bottom rungs of society, as contrasted with the relatively lower death rates experienced by those who are above them” (1996, 192). Gilligan largely describes these “excess deaths” as “non-natural" and attributes them to the stress, shame, discrimination, and denigration that results from lower status. Gilligan paralleled the worldwide summations of structural violence to direct (armed conflict, military or political wars) violence thusly: Every fifteen years, on the average, as many people die because of relative poverty as would he killed in a nuclear war that caused 232 million deaths: and every single year, two to three times as many people die from poverty throughout the world as were killed by the Nazi genocide of the Jews over a six-year period. This is. in effect, the equivalent of an ongoing, unending, in fact accelerating, thermonuclear war. or genocide on the weak and poor every year of every decade, throughout the world. .. . The question as to which of the two forms of violence—structural or behavioral—is more important, dangerous, or lethal is moot, for they are inextricably related to each other, as cause to effect. (Gilligan 1996. 195-96) When we fix and focus our view on structural violence through the lens of healthcare, we see that every country is marked by suffering, illnesses, and death, to one extent of another. But it is the distribution of the preventable and manageable illnesses and diseases in underprivileged countries that tip the scales of parity in suffering. It is these “social conditions"—these imbalances of influence—if you will, that affect and influence social justice in healthcare, and creates a poverty of lifesaving access to medication, supplies, treatment, training, and equipment to stave off human suffering from avoidable and unnecessary illness and disease. Didier Fassin in his book Humanitarian Reason quotes Margaret Lock concerning social sentiment on human suffering: “Efforts to reduce suffering have habitually focused on control and repair of individual bodies. The social origins of suffering and distress, including poverty and discrimination, even if fleetingly recognized, are set aside” (2012, 21). (24-5)

## Contention 2: Rattlesnakes and Alligators

#### Economic inequality causes US civil war—this card answers every 1NC response.

Aldhous 10-24-20

(Peter, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/peteraldhous/political-violence-inequality-us-election)4r

Many Americans are clinging to the idea that if Joe Biden wins the presidential election, calm can return to a nation riven by protests and rattled by President Donald Trump’s authoritarian rhetoric. Not so fast, caution two academics who claim they have devised a measure of political instability that shows that the nation will still be a powder keg that is waiting to blow, even if a Biden landslide means that Trump has little choice but to step aside. “The tendency is to blame Trump, but I don’t really agree with that,” Peter Turchin, an evolutionary anthropologist at the University of Connecticut who studies the forces that drive political instability, told BuzzFeed News. “Trump is really not the deep structural cause.” The most dangerous element in the mix, argue Turchin and George Mason University sociologist Jack Goldstone, is the corrosive effect of inequality on society. They believe they have a model that explains how inequality escalates and leads to political instability: Worsened by elites who monopolize economic gains, narrow the path to social mobility, and resist taxation, inequality ends up undermining state institutions while fomenting distrust and resentment. Building on Goldstone’s work showing that revolutions tend to follow periods of population growth and urbanization, Turchin has developed a statistic called the political stress indicator, or PSI. It incorporates measures of wage stagnation, national debt, competition between elites, distrust in government, urbanization, and the age structure of the population. Turchin raised warning signs of a coming storm a decade ago, predicting that instability would peak in the years around 2020. “In the United States, we have stagnating or declining real wages, a growing gap between rich and poor, overproduction of young graduates with advanced degrees, and exploding public debt,” he wrote, in a letter to the journal Nature. “Historically, such developments have served as leading indicators of looming political instability.” Today, with the nation in turmoil, Turchin’s prediction seems remarkably prescient. We live in a pandemic hellscape that has disproportionately harmed Black and brown Americans and those living in poverty. We have widespread civil unrest over racial injustice. And we are hurtling toward an election in which Trump is stoking unfounded fears of voter fraud and refusing to commit to a peaceful transition of power. In August, Turchin gave himself a pat on the back for his predictive ability with an analysis showing a significant rise in political demonstrations and violent riots over the last 10 years. But he and Goldstone fear that much worse is to come. The political stress indicator for the US is rising rapidly, much like it did before the Civil War. Charts show a similar rise in the political stress indicator in the buildup to the Civil War and today When Goldstone talks about America’s darkest days in the 1860s, he provocatively calls it the “First Civil War.” He fears that we may be on the way to a second one, with the 2020 election serving as a potential “fire-starter” event. Goldstone has some credentials in predicting conflict. In 1994, shortly after the US military’s ill-fated efforts to support UN intervention in Somalia’s civil war, which led to the downing of two Black Hawk helicopters and the gruesome spectacle of a dead US soldier being dragged through the streets, Goldstone was tapped by the CIA to help lead the State Failure Task Force. This group of academic social scientists was asked to identify factors that predict when a nation is likely to spiral into chaos. The task force’s initial report, published in 1995, identified three risk factors that seemed to predict whether a state would fail within the next two years in about two-thirds of cases: high infant mortality, low openness to international trade, and level of democracy. On the last measure, partial democracies were more vulnerable to collapse than fully democratic states or autocratic regimes. Goldstone continued to work on the project, later renamed the Political Instability Task Force, until 2012, tweaking its statistical model to predict both civil wars and democratic collapses with about 80% accuracy over the same two-year lead time. He didn’t think of applying a similar approach to assess the risk of political conflict in the US until Turchin got in touch in 2015. “I didn’t expect political violence because I believed the US was a strong and flexible democracy,” Goldstone said. But he is now convinced that Turchin’s PSI heralds a disturbing future for the US that won’t be solved by politics as usual after the 2020 election, even if Trump is defeated and goes quietly. “If those trends continue after Trump departs, then the risks and the occurrence of violence will likely continue,” Goldstone told BuzzFeed News. “I’m worried about that no matter who wins,” he added. “The social problems are the gasoline. Trump is throwing matches.” The PSI doesn’t explicitly address America’s deep divisions over racial justice. “Race has been an enduring faultline, ever since the founding of the Republic,” Turchin said. But he argued that it’s the additional dynamics captured by the PSI that explain why tensions are boiling over right now. One key concern, according to Goldstone, is that people across the political spectrum have lost faith in government and political institutions. “In short, given the accumulated grievances, anger and distrust fanned for the last two decades, almost any election scenario this fall is likely to lead to popular protests on a scale we have not seen this century,” he and Turchin wrote in a recent article published by the Berggruen Institute, a think tank based in Los Angeles. This would hurtle the US into a period of political instability the researchers dubbed “the turbulent twenties.” “Given the Black Lives Matter protests and cascading clashes between competing armed factions in cities across the United States, from Portland, Oregon, to Kenosha, Wisconsin, we are already well on our way there,” the article said. “But worse likely lies ahead.” “The social problems are the gasoline. Trump is throwing matches.” Turchin said people who rule out the possibility of serious political violence in the US based on “the strength of American institutions” are being “unduly optimistic.” “The social system that we live in is extremely fragile, Turchin said. Other social scientists consulted by BuzzFeed News were skeptical that the US is on the brink of a civil war. But they were concerned about the trends highlighted by Goldstone and Turchin, and worried about the potential for violence around the coming election — especially from right-wing militia groups if Trump loses and contests the result. “No matter what the outcome is, it is going to be disputed by some components of the other side,” Craig Jenkins, a sociologist at Ohio State University who studies political violence, told BuzzFeed News. “The difference is that the Trump forces have militia that have some capacity for violence and mayhem.” One reason that most experts in conflict studies don’t predict an outright civil war as a consequence of the US’s gap between rich and poor is that inequality hasn’t emerged as a major driving factor in studies of such conflicts in the modern era. “Civil war has been predominantly a phenomenon in low-income countries,” James Fearon, a political scientist at Stanford University and coauthor of a 2003 paper that identified national poverty as an important condition that can lead to violent insurgency, told BuzzFeed News. Another influential study, published in 2000 by the economists Paul Collier of the University of Oxford and Anke Hoeffler, now at the University of Konstanz in Germany, suggested that an armed group’s ability to seize control over significant economic resources — such as diamonds in several conflict-prone African nations and drug crops in Colombia — was a key driver of modern civil wars. As a rich nation with a diverse and robust economy, the US should have a fairly low chance of falling into civil war according to these theories. And if push comes to shove and order needs to be restored by force, few experts in political conflict expect even a well-armed militia to be a match for federal law enforcement or the National Guard. The circumstances in the 19th century that led the US into the bloodiest conflict in its history were also unusual. The young nation was growing, adding states that either opposed or supported slavery, creating a fundamental economic and moral divide that couldn’t easily be resolved. “That was an irreconcilable dynamic,” Jenkins said. “I think you need the accumulation of irresolvable conflicts to get a true civil war.” But recent events, notably the plot by a group of right-wing militants to kidnap and potentially kill the Democratic governor of Michigan, Gretchen Whitmer, over her policies to limit the spread of the coronavirus, have shocked even skeptics of the idea that the US is teetering on the brink of civil conflict. “This is really concerning,” Fearon said. The PSI isn’t the only indicator that has set alarm bells ringing about the stability of the US. The Fund for Peace, a nonprofit based in Washington, DC, has developed a measure called the Fragile States Index (FSI) that, like the work of the State Failure Task Force, seeks to identify nations that are at risk of violence and instability from a range of underlying pressures including economic distress, refugee flows, and their record on human rights. Overall, the US looks reasonably healthy on the FSI, ranked 149th out of 178 countries for its potential for instability. But there are worrying signs for the US on a component of the FSI labeled “cohesion,” according to Fund for Peace programs manager Natalie Fiertz. “Over the past decade-plus, we’ve seen very rapid worsening of the score for those dimensions,” she told BuzzFeed News. The Fragile States Index shows that the US is becoming a less cohesive society. Chart showing how the cohesion component of the Fragile States Index for the US rose from the second best in the G7 in 2005 to the worst in 2019 Peter Aldhous / BuzzFeed News / Via fragilestatesindex.org ADVERTISEMENT This chart shows change in the average score across the three cohesion components of the FSI for the members of the G7 group of rich democracies. These measure security threats including terrorism and organized crime, factionalization of a nation’s elites, and schisms between different groups in society. Not surprisingly, given the intense and growing political polarization in the US, it is the last two measures that explain why the nation’s cohesion score has gone from the second best among the G7 to the worst in just 15 years. (In recent years, the UK has closely followed the US on this measure, driven by its own political divisions over Brexit.) But political polarization may be just another consequence of the economic inequality that Goldstone and Turchin argue lies at the heart of the US’s current vulnerability to political violence. Political scientists have put a great deal of energy into identifying why polarization in the US is escalating. But factors including the influence of partisan cable TV news and congressional redistricting don’t seem to provide the answer — the latter, for instance, can’t explain why the Senate has become increasingly divided. What is clear is that polarization in Congress has historically tracked closely with income inequality. And recent studies have shown that states with greater income inequality tend to have more polarized state legislatures — supporting the idea that inequality is a fundamental cause of America’s deep political divisions. “The social system that we live in is extremely fragile.” Even the International Monetary Fund has weighed in, warning nations of the corrosive effects of inequality in a 2017 publication: “While some inequality is inevitable in a market-based economic system, excessive inequality can erode social cohesion, lead to political polarization, and ultimately lower economic growth.” Inequality can also damage public health. In their 2009 book The Spirit Level, the British epidemiologists Kate Pickett of the University of York and Richard Wilkinson of the University of Nottingham looked at differences across rich nations for an index of health and social outcomes including infant mortality, life expectancy, mental illness, incarceration, and literacy. They could find no correlation with gross national income per person, but found a strong relationship between poor outcomes and inequality, measured by the gap in incomes between the top and bottom 20% of a country’s earners. “Inequality is a social stressor,” Wilkinson told BuzzFeed News. “One of the big changes in our understanding of social determinants of health is the role of chronic stress.” The pandemic has made inequality much worse — but it may also be a catalyst for change. Given all of the evidence linking inequality to a raft of bad outcomes, it should come as no surprise that unrest has surged during the coronavirus pandemic. Americans living in poverty and people of color have not only been disproportionately sickened and killed by the virus, but they have also been hit harder by the recession it has caused — which has further widened the gulf between rich and poor. “What we need is a new social contract that will enable us to get past extreme polarization to find consensus, tip the shares of economic growth back toward workers and improve government funding for public health, education and infrastructure,” Goldstone and Turchin wrote in their Berggruen Institute article. Can that really happen in today’s combat zone of weaponized social media, in which even modest proposals to ratchet back inequality are framed as “communism”? One hopeful sign is that the US has pulled back from the brink of chaos before through similar reforms, within the lifetime of its oldest citizens. In the 1930s, as parts of Europe slid into fascism, the US went in a different direction, electing Franklin D. Roosevelt to drag the nation out of the Great Depression by ushering in the New Deal. At least some social scientists think the US could pull off a similar feat again. “You can reform your way out of dramatically polarized societies,” said George Lawson of the Australian National University in Canberra, who has studied societal transformations including the peaceful transition to majority rule in South Africa. Even given Trump’s flouting of democratic norms and the current upsurge in civil unrest, Lawson believes the US, by and large, has withstood a political “stress test.” “I would err on the side that the system has shown to be more robust than fragile,” Lawson said. “One thing to come out of the past few years is an energization of political engagement that is healthy.”

#### Civil war causes nuclear war—other powers get drawn in and cause WWIII.

Michael Laitman, PhD, 8-25-17 [Professor of Ontology and Theory of Knowledge, PhD in Philosophy, MSc in Medical Bio-Cybernetics] "There Will Be No Winners in the Second Civil War," Newsmax, https://www.newsmax.com/MichaelLaitman/america-civil-war-newt-gingrich-don-lemon/2017/08/25/id/809867/

Earlier this week, CNN news anchor Don Lemon stated that the president “is clearly trying to ignite a civil war in this country.” In response to Lemon’s words, historian and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich said in an interview on "Tucker Carlson Tonight": “I think we should take the threat of civil war very seriously.” Referencing Dennis Prager’s piece, “America's Second Civil War,” Gingrich added, “What you’re seeing with Antifa, what you’re seeing on college campuses, what you’re seeing, to some extent, in the bureaucracy, is a real division of the country. …I wish we could all sing Kumbaya and come together but I don’t think that’s what’s gonna happen. …As a historian, my view is pretty straightforward: one side or the other wins.” America is already so rife with extremists on both sides of the political aisle that many people see war not only as imminent, but as virtually inevitable. If that’s the case, we’d better get busy digging ourselves bunkers… and graves. And not just in the U.S. A civil war in America will not end in America. If the country plunges into battle, many will be vying for the loot. China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, and others will destroy whatever the war doesn’t, the American empire will become history, and a third world war, with multiple nuclear powers, will follow. There will be no winners because, to quote Machiavelli, “Wars begin when you will, but they do not end when you please.” Is there really no alternative? I think there is, or I wouldn’t be writing here. In my previous column, I noted that President Trump needs to take a more appeasing tone in order to start building national cohesion. It’s great to state, “No matter our color, creed, religion or political party, we are ALL AMERICANS FIRST,” but doing so right after the Charlottesville murderous car ramming is the epitome of poor timing. Such statements should be part of the president’s routine, not rare occasions. Trump excels in using social media. If he uses it to broadcast a constant stream of unifying messages, notwithstanding the cynicism of the press, he will win over the American people’s hearts regardless of their political affiliation. I wholly agree that America requires massive infrastructure projects. But the real infrastructure of the country is its people, not its asphalt roads or railroads. The administration needs to implement ASAP solidarity programs that will create a uniform American identity. People need to learn that an ideology that undermines freedom of speech, freedom of religious practice, and freedom of the press, cannot use the First Amendment to legitimize itself. Even more importantly, people need to learn that plurality of views is not a recipe for war; it is precisely what has made America great in the first place. When people of different approaches and views strive for the same goal, they are far more likely to achieve it. If the goal is the well-being of all Americans, the entire country will benefit from it, and this goal should top the priority list of every American. It might not seem possible to patch up the divided United States, but 1) no one has ever sincerely tried, and 2) the other option is war. With my students, I have developed simple and easily applicable techniques that create a sense of unity and connection even among the most unlikely populations, such as Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, ultra-Orthodox and devout agnostics, and affluent and needy. These techniques work wonders wherever we have tried them: North America, Western and Eastern Europe, and in Israel. Today’s world is pushing toward connection. The interconnectedness of reality requires that we learn how to work in a world where everyone is dependent on everyone else. When we think in terms of “one side or the other wins,” we cannot succeed because we are perpetuating a mindset of separation. This will inevitably create unions of extremists that will feed on hatred of the other side, which in turn will lead to war. The only way to avoid this route is to make unity mainstream. If this seems unrealistic, think of your own body. Without the unity of radically different organs all working in unison for the common cause of sustaining you and keeping you healthy, you would not exist. Therefore, unity is not unrealistic; it is the only realistic option for society. The sooner we make American solidarity the prime value of America, the better it is for the entire country. Any decision that Trump’s administration and Congress make from here on should first and foremost promote unity and solidarity because this is truly the only realistic option.

**Nuclear war causes nuclear winter and fallout that kills all life on earth.**

**Starr, MT, 15**

(Steven, UMissouri, SeniorScientist@PSR, Nuclear War: An Unrecognized Mass Extinction Event Waiting To Happen, Symposium: The Dynamics of Possible Nuclear Extinction)

A war fought with 21st century strategic nuclear weapons would be more than just a great catastrophe in human history. If we allow it to happen, such a war would **be a mass extinction event that ends human history**. **There is a profound difference between extinction and “an unprecedented disaster,” or even “the end of civilization,”** because even after such an immense catastrophe, human life would go on. But extinction, by definition, is an event of utter finality, and a nuclear war that could cause human extinction should really be considered as the ultimate criminal act. It certainly would be the crime to end all crimes. **The world’s leading climatologists** now tell us that nuclear war **threatens our continued existence as a species**. Their studies predict that a large nuclear war, especially one fought with strategic nuclear weapons, would create a post-war environment in which for many years it would be too cold and dark to even grow food. Their findings make it clear that not only humans, but most large animals and many other forms of complex life would likely vanish forever in a nuclear darkness of our own making. The environmental consequences of nuclear war would attack the ecological support systems of life at every level. Radioactive fallout, produced not only by nuclear bombs, but also by the destruction of nuclear power plants and their spent fuel pools, would poison the biosphere. Millions of tons of smoke would act to destroy Earth’s protective ozone layer and block most sunlight from reaching Earth’s surface, creating **Ice Age weather conditions that would last for decades.**

## Contention 3: The Strike is Right

#### Plan: The United States ought to recognize an unconditional right to strike

#### The right to strike is a radical political statement that rejects the commodification of human labor—this is the vital internal link.

Burns , JD, 11

(Joe, veteran union negotiator and labor lawyer, Reviving the Strike: How Working People Can Regain Power and Transform America)

For the traditional labor movement, the notion that human beings were like objects, to be used up during the production process, was highly offensive. As Samuel Gompers melodramatically stated, “You cannot weigh the human soul in the same scales with a piece of pork. You cannot weigh the heart and soul of a child with the same scales upon with you weigh any commodity.”10 Traditional trade unionists believed that workers had rights unrelated to the price they could command on the open market for their labor. This view was supported by the Clayton Act, passed in 1914 after years of agitation by the labor movement, which contained the simple declaration that, “The labor of a human being is not a commodity or article of commerce.”11 When signing the Act into law, then President Woodrow Wilson declared that “a man’s labor is not a commodity but a part of his life, and that, therefore, the courts must treat it as if it were a part of his life. I am sorry that there were any judges in the United States who had to be told that.”12 As James Pope explains, the idea that labor is not a commodity is vital one for the labor movement, as it provides the intellectual justification for successful strike tactics: The treatment of labor as a commodity subject to the rules of the marketplace is a defining feature of capitalism. The claim of a constitutional right to strike—a right to interdict the free competition of individuals in the buying and selling of labor power— obviously imperiled the ideology and practice of commodity labor. The right to strike could not be justified without addressing the question of labor liberty per se.13 Well into the 1950s, labor leaders defended union activity based on the assertion that labor was not a commodity. For example, with employers complaining of national pattern or multi-employer agreements, and conservative members of Congress investigating whether labor unions were a monopoly, Arthur Goldberg, the legal counsel for the CIO and later a Supreme Court Justice, testified in 1955 that The charge that national or regional or pattern bargaining is “monopolistic” and “a restraint of trade” reverts, of course, to the basic fallacy that human labor is to be treated as a commodity, and that organizations of those who have nothing to sell but the use of their minds and bodies constitute restraints of trade.14 Likewise, Walter Reuther, the leader of the United Autoworkers, testifying at a congressional hearing in 1953, bristled at the notion that labor could be considered a commodity: Well, you see, labor is not a commodity which you go and shop for in the free market place. Labor is something different than a commodity, and if you want to give American labor the status of another commodity you can go out and shop for on the free market place, you have missed the whole point.”15 The fiery words of Goldberg and Reuther reveal the belief, held by generations of trade unionists, that treating labor as a commodity would undermine the very foundation of the labor movement, and lead to a number of conclusions favoring management. First, if labor is just like any other commodity, then it logically follows that the “free market” should determine the price of a worker’s labor, just as it does with any other input into the production process. However, one of the main tenets of traditional trade unionism was that workers could not allow the market to determine wages and working conditions, as the market, unrestrained, will continually drive workers toward poverty, injury, and even death. Part of the reason for this attitude was that traditional trade unionists had witnessed firsthand how the courts applied laws intended to regulate commerce to trade union activity. For example, while Congress passed the Sherman Antitrust Act in 1890 to regulate the power of massive corporations, the Courts soon subverted the intent of the Act, using it instead to justify sweeping injunctions against trade unionists, including an injunction in 1894 against Eugene Debs during the great Pullman railroad strike.16 As Samuel Gompers said, “Labor power is a human attribute. … Both the injunction and the anti-trust law were intended to apply only to property. When courts put human labor power and commodities in the same category, they laid the foundation for serious injustice.”17 If a worker’s labor is treated like commerce, than it can be “sold” as with any other commodity, with management becoming the “owner” of that labor. Then, just as management owns a pile of lumber for example, once the purchase of human labor is complete, the employer would theoretically control the mind and body of the worker for the period of time they were on the job. Legal scholar Karl Klare expands on this idea, explaining how a labor contract is “more than a legal relationship” because it …establishes an entire system of social relations in the workplace whereby the employer is entitled to control the worker’s actions and choices during the major portions of his waking hours. Thus, labor contractualism functions as the institutional basis of domination in the workplace.18 To the extent that the labor movement accepts this “wagebargain” as the natural order, the more difficult it becomes to justify the fight for power on the shop floor, as once the commodity (whether oil or pork or human labor) has been used in the production process, management becomes the owner of the final product. Once workers sell their labor, they have no further interest in the enterprise, as the employer now owns the final product and all profits derived from its sale. Ultimately, the notion that human labor is not a commodity brings to the forefront the proposition that the rights of workers must trump market considerations. Whether one is arguing that courts cannot enjoin workers from striking, that bankruptcy law should not apply to labor contracts, or that unions should be able to monopolize labor markets, the phrase “labor is not a commodity” cuts through a host of employer arguments. On a deeper level, if the commodity status of labor is indispensable to a capitalist economy, then to say that human labor is not a commodity is quite radical in its implications. According to Karl Marx, wages were “a commodity which its possessor, the wage worker, sells to the capitalist. Why does he sell it? It is in order to live.”19 Thus, the rejection of the commodity status of human labor is also a rejection of the idea that the market should govern every sphere of human activity.

#### Alternatives short of the right to strike fail—only withholding labor can grind capitalism to a halt.

Nolan 21

(Hamilton, Labor Journalist for In These Times, <https://inthesetimes.com/article/no-strike-clause-labor-peace-union-contracts>, 5-4)

In post WWII America, union contracts work more or less like this: The company guarantees workers certain wages and benefits, and the workers agree to give up their right to strike for the term of the contract. This fundamental agreement — material gains in exchange for labor peace — defines modern labor relations. And where has this arrangement gotten the labor movement? Near death. For decades, union membership has declined, wages have stagnated, and capital has gained more and more power over working people. This devastating collapse in the power of organized labor has coincided with the post ​“Treaty of Detroit” period in which a very dangerous idea was cemented and enshrined as conventional wisdom. That is the idea that employers agree to union contracts in order to purchase labor peace—that the incentive for a company to bargain and sign a contract with its workers is to receive, in turn, a guarantee that those workers will be quiescent. Today, the belief in the necessity of this arrangement prevails among management-side attorneys, labor-side attorneys, and union leaders alike. Indeed, it is embodied very well in this quote that the Sacramento Bee got from labor attorney Tim Yeung when asking about the proposal to get rid of no-strike clauses: ​“It’s all about labor peace,” Yeung said. ​“When we agree to a contract, we’re agreeing that for the next three years or whatever, we’re not going to have a strike. If you can walk out at any time, that defeats much of the purpose of what we’re trying to do.” Let me suggest a different, more reasonable framework for labor relations between an employer and its employees. The employer signs a union contract in order to buy the work the employees do. Labor peace is something that the employer purchases separately, by being a good employer, and not fucking the employees over. The basic act of enshrining a mundane agreement on wages and working conditions in a contract should rightly be seen as a normal part of doing business, not as something that working people have to fight to gain at the expense of their own rights. What a business gets in return for a union contract is a work force. What the workers get is freedom from having the terms of their employment radically upended at any moment. To our jobs, we should be obligated to give our time and our effort, but not our souls. The right to strike is, at the end of the day, the only thing that gives working people power. The only thing! Withholding our labor is the one and only weapon we have that can match the power that capital has — the economic power to render people destitute, a fearsome power that is every bit as threatening as guns and bombs. Any working person individually can be destroyed by that power. Collectively, however, working people can match that power by striking and forcing capital to grind to a halt. No set of laws, regulations, or contractual provisions will ever change the fact that this is the only balance of power that exists in a capitalist workplace. We are fed the illusion that giving up the right to strike in exchange for material gains is an even trade. But that’s not true. For a little bit of money, businesses gain freedom from the one thing that can make them negotiate evenly with their workers. They maintain their own economic weapons over their workers, while we willingly lay down ours and tell ourselves that we have won something.

#### Now is the perfect time for strikes.

Mordock 10-14-21

(Jeff, https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/oct/14/strikes-increase-poses-political-test-biden/)

But more recent events, including Mr. Biden‘s pro-union stance and the worker shortage caused by COVID-19 shutdowns, have given labor a shot in the arm. “Right now, the stars are aligned in favor of unions,” Mr. Clark said. “They have both low unemployment, and you have a very friendly administration in Washington supportive of unions. Everything is in order for unions to take advantage of the situation right now.”

#### Be very skeptical of negative evidence- employers have launched a propaganda war to blame Biden and workers for economic problems. Ideological data is laundered through allegedly neutral sources

Skolnik 21

(Jon Skolnik is a staff writer at Salon. His work has appeared in Current Affairs, The Baffler, AlterNet, and The New York Daily News. <https://www.salon.com/2021/05/19/how-the-business-lobby-created-the-labor-shortage-myth--and-gop-used-it-to-slash-benefits/>, 5-19)

Earlier this month, the Department of Labor released a less-than-stellar jobs report that sent politicians, economists and leaders in corporate America scrambling for answers. That report details an approximate 71% drop in job growth paired with a slight hike in unemployment, falling far below analyst expectations of a month-over-month boom. This prompted many "mainstream" or conservative pundits, along with Republican elected officials, to point toward a prime suspect: unemployment insurance. Their logic is simple: if people are getting paid to do nothing, they have no incentive to do anything. But Democrats have argued that the reality is far too complicated to chalk up to one factor. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen attributed the disappointing jobs report to a lack of proper child care and lingering fears about the pandemic. Others have pinned the blame on employers, citing low wages and poor working conditions as reasons why Americans might be more hesitant to rejoin the workforce. Nevertheless, over the past two weeks week, a narrative about "labor shortages'' and the allegedly corrosive effects of overly generous unemployment benefits, has been force-fed to the American public. Within a matter of days, at least 16 state governors — including such nationally prominent Republicans as Kristi Noem of South Dakota, Doug Ducey of Arizona and Brian Kemp of Georgia — seized the opportunity to slash or eliminate aid to the jobless, even as the U.S. struggles to recover from the effects of a global pandemic. Given how effective this "labor shortage" narrative was in driving reactionary GOP policy, it seems worth unpacking exactly where and how it arose. Several observers on the left have argued that it emerged from "explicitly ideological think tanks and explicitly ideological right-wing projects," as Henry Williams, co-founder of the Gravel Institute, put it in an interview with Salon. It then "trickled outward" through mainstream media sources, effectively cleansed of its right-wing roots. Conservative think tanks and other institutions, Williams said, "will facilitate studies, analyses and articles that can then be laundered through various communications arms through their press releases." That material then appears in local media or the seemingly neutral business press, he said, and is then widely perceived as apolitical conventional wisdom. The recent "labor shortage" narrative appeared to arise right after the recent jobs report from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a massively influential pro-business lobby with one of the widest reaches of any political organization in the country. Within hours of the report's release, the Chamber released a statement arguing that "paying people not to work is dampening what should be a stronger jobs market" and announced a broad lobbying effort aimed at pressuring both the White House and Capitol Hill to kill jobless benefits. Republican lawmakers then jumped onto the bandwagon to trash unemployment insurance. "Systematically paying unemployment benefits that are more than a person makes working doesn't create an environment that's particularly conducive to going back to work," Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania — a distinctly moderate Republican by current standards — told Fox News in a Friday interview. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., also railed against the benefits, calling them a "special bonus for unemployed people to stay home." But in fact this campaign against unemployment benefits can be traced at least as far back as last July, when the Chamber wrote a letter to then-President Trump urging what it called a "middle-ground approach" to federal assistance — which effectively amounted to a drastic reduction in benefits. "The additional $600 [in weekly benefits] is also causing significant distortions in the labor market and hurting the economic recovery," the group wrote at the time. "We routinely hear from our employer members who report that individuals are declining to return to work because they can take home more money on unemployment." Other conservative or pro-business organizations were also trying to build public sympathy for the struggles of employers. Mere months after the pandemic had forced millions of Americans out of work, groups like the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute and the Hoover Institute lamented that overly generous unemployment insurance was wreaking havoc on the labor market. As Rachel Greszler, a Heritage research fellow, put it: "Instead of bridging the gap, excessive unemployment payments will only increase the breadth and depth of the economic downturn." This analysis then bled into the business press, with publications like Forbes and Business Observer publishing seemingly non-ideological stories about a scarcity of labor. Then it reached mainstream news, with a series of anecdotally-driven reports from the perspectives of disgruntled business owners in industries hit hard by the pandemic, including hospitality, construction, manufacturing, nursing, food service and more. Potential labor shortages, as Williams told Salon, have been a concern for the business community since the pandemic began, with employers "wondering how they're going to bring people back in these conditions." He continued, "The business community was already fighting this proxy battle months ago. The difference was, when these jobs numbers came out, they saw a perfect opportunity … to connect them to this broader lobbying effort and create an economic narrative that they know has a unique power in shaping policy." Indeed, immediately after April's jobs numbers were released on May 7, business leaders vociferously hammered home this narrative. The National Owners Association, a group of McDonald's franchisees, wrote on May 10 about the "perverse effects of the current unemployment benefits" on hiring. Goldman Sachs chief economist Jan Hatzius echoed this theory the day, arguing that "labor supply appears to be tighter than the unemployment rate suggests, likely reflecting the impact of unusually generous unemployment benefits and lingering virus-related impediments to working," as Yahoo Finance reported. On the very day the numbers were released, the New York Post published an article featuring testimonials from New York City restaurateurs who blamed jobless benefits for their hiring challenges. The response of the business class was like a "lightning-flash reaction," said Joseph A. McCartin, executive director of the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor at Georgetown University, in an interview with Salon. "Employers' associations and conservative groups have been seizing on the jobs numbers to campaign for the rollback of benefits in order to force workers back to work," he said, in hopes of regaining control over the labor supply and controlling wages. "There was a well-organized operation that's been in place for several months by groups who were preparing for the pushback. They knew they couldn't do it two months ago. They were ready for these numbers." Williams told Salon that the speedy response from Republican governors was best understood as a genuflection to their business constituencies. "Many of these Republican governors genuinely see themselves as serving the business community, above and beyond their constituents more broadly," he said. "They are willing to go out ahead of the evidence, and ahead of the political consensus, in order to demonstrate their fealty to the business community." Unsurprisingly, many of the GOP governors who were quick to eliminate federal payments also have ties to pro-business organizations like the Chamber of Commerce. Just last year, the Chamber's chief public affairs officer sent several private emails to Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp and his aides, asking Kemp "to prioritize legal protections for businesses if workers or customers were to contract the coronavirus," as the Washington Post reported. In April, the Cobb Chamber of Commerce, one the Chamber's local Georgia chapters, hosted an annual luncheon featuring Kemp, where he spoke about what he described as the misguided backlash surrounding Major League Baseball's decision to pull its All-Star Game from the state after the Republican-dominated Georgia legislature passed a now-notorious package of voting restrictions. He promised economic benefits "far beyond the value of any All-Star Game," stressing, "I will always fight for the business community." Missouri Gov. Mike Parson has also been a loyal ally of his corporate constituencies. During the pandemic last year, Parson worked to advance legislation that would shield businesses against damages related to the spread of COVID-19. In May of last year, the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry delivered "an urgent letter" to Parson asking him to "address the growing problem of opportunistic COVID-19 lawsuits." In July, Parson delivered a speech to the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce touting the state's economic health prior to the outbreak. "Incomes have gone up. Taxes have gone down. We had at many times more jobs than we had people to fill them," he told the Chamber. South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster, also a Republican gave several speeches to the state's Chamber of Congress and the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Congress, and received support from South Carolina's Small Business Chamber in September, when he recommended that the state use $30 million of coronavirus relief aid to provide grants to businesses that didn't qualify for PPP loans. Advertisement: Notably, the effort to eliminate federal benefits is being led out in the open for the public to see, instead of being astroturfed through pseudo-grassroots organizations. It's a lot like a "culture war," William Spriggs, a professor of economics at Howard University, told Salon in an interview. "It is a purely ideological move" because "this is federal money," Spriggs explained, stressing that in the terms of pure economic self-interest, Republican politicians' decisions appear nonsensical. The federal money for jobless benefits "is not coming out of the state trust funds," he said. "From the local politicians, it's dumbfounding. The state of South Carolina is going to send half a billion dollars back to the United States Treasury" that would otherwise be spent in the state on rent, mortgages, groceries, gasoline and a host of other goods and services. "Don't they understand that?" he asked rhetorically. "You're going to take half a billion dollars of sales away from your companies?" "In a case like this," Williams explained, "you're talking about a program that touches so many people that you need to change the public opinion first to win on it." Republicans and the business lobby, in other words, "want to change the prevailing political winds." Advertisement: The "prevailing winds" at this point appear largely in favor of unemployment insurance, despite Republican protestations that, somehow or other, they're bad for the average worker. According to a poll from March, three-quarters of all Iowa residents — in a state dominated by Republicans — oppose cutting unemployment benefits. A Politico/Morning Consult similarly found in March that 72% of Americans supported President Biden's latest COVID relief bill, with a broad majority specifically supporting the latest batch of unemployment checks. In other words, it would require a truly impressive propaganda triumph for the GOP to change the minds of American workers, at least one-fourth of whom relied on unemployment insurance to survive throughout the pandemic. In seeking to accomplish that, Republicans are trying to link the unemployment issue "to the politics of reopening," Williams explained. "The goal is to use the media to try and create a national narrative that Biden is holding back the recovery."

#### Ignorance, class, and money corrupt media reporting on labor issues

Craig 17

(Berry, History@WestKentucky, <https://ky.aflcio.org/news/heres-scoop-media-bias>, 3-21 )

“Why is the media so anti-union?” This retired reporter-turned-history-teacher could retire if he had a dime for every time he’s heard a union brother or sister ask that question. They mostly mean Fox News and local newspapers and radio and TV stations. There’s not much to say about Fox except that it’s blatantly biased. It’s the Republican Party’s propaganda ministry. “Fair and balanced” is the network’s motto, but I’ll believe that when hogs fly and kids don’t shoot hoops in my native Kentucky any more. Nah – I won’t believe it even then. On the other hand, the anti-union slant of small-town media news reporting is subtler. Unions are all but ignored, except during strikes – more on that in a minute. Of course, unions are commonly demonized on the editorial pages of small town papers. They routinely get trashed by Rush Limbaugh wannabes on boondocks radio stations. Tiny market TV station owners sometimes go after unions, too. Most small-town publishers and TV and radio station owners are among the local powers-that-be. They are usually well-heeled and often active in the local Chamber of Commerce. The fact that the chamber is openly pro-business and anti-union apparently doesn’t trouble local media owners about conflicts of interest. More than a few local papers and TV and radio stations proudly plaster Chamber of Commerce stickers on their front doors. Almost all small-town media owners believe that what’s best for local businesses – of course, including their media businesses – is best for the community. So local business leaders get a lot of ink and broadcast time. They are depicted as “solid citizens” who are “pillars” in their communities. Yet union leaders almost never enjoy such positive press. The president of the local bank gets in the paper or on TV or the radio all the time. About the only time a local union president is in the news is during a strike. Reporters commonly call strikes “labor disputes,” not “labor-management” disputes. “Labor dispute” implies, on purpose or not, that unions are solely to blame for work stoppages. Too, strike stories seldom focus on why workers go on strike. Instead, they concentrate on how strikes might inconvenience the public. Therefore, newspaper readers, TV viewers and radio station listeners are led to believe that the public is the innocent victim in “labor disputes.” Striking workers, no matter how aggrieved, come off as greedy malcontents who just cause trouble, not only for their employers, but for everybody. Some of the anti-union bias in the media is rooted in a lack of understanding on the part of reporters. Not that many small town print or broadcast newshounds even have a basic idea of how unions and collective bargaining work. Almost no small-town papers or TV or radio stations have unions. Few reporters have ever been in any kind of union. Many come from families in which nobody has ever been in a union. Of course, well-paid company PR flacks are always glad to “help” the reporter with skillfully spun news releases. Like the company’s hired guns, most reporters are middle-class college grads. Hence, many reporters connect with the flacks; like reporters, a lot of them majored in journalism, too. At the same time, many reporters sympathize with management. These scribes see themselves as "professionals," too, whose station in life is above that of blue-collar manual workers -- even though many union members enjoy better wages and benefits than they do. Even reporters and editors who consider themselves liberals sometimes stereotype union members as dimwitted, Archie Bunker-style bigots. At the same time, the liberalism of many big city newspaper editorial writers doesn’t necessarily translate into consistent support for organized labor and its positions.