Throughout our country, many experience sharp divisions and frequent disrespect from and toward people of differing perspectives and backgrounds from political leaders to everyday folks. What can people steeped in the nonviolent tradition and deeply concerned about this schism do to help bridge the communication gap and find some common ground?

Please join us in a day of focusing on successful specific strategies and/or models, in an interactional format, of what we as individuals and within our groups can learn to provide us additional competence and confidence toward this communal healing.

Information and Registration
https://wwfor.org/spring-assembly-2021/

2021 Spring Assembly Schedule:

9:00 Welcome
9:10 First Speaker: Amy Funkhouser of Braver Angels
9:55 Breakout Rooms
10:15 Q&A
10:30 Break
10:35 Second Speaker: Airen Lysdick of Kitsap Equity, Race, and Community Coalition: Including Breakout Room Discussions
11:50 Music Break: Holly Graham and Susan McRae
12:10 Howard Stolz of developing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission or Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Commission in Western Washington
12:40 Mike Yarrow Peace Fellow Panel
1:25 Final Comments
1:30 Assembly ends
Bregman goes through many things we have all heard that make us doubt whether humans are by nature a good species. For example, he contrasts the perennial bestselling fictional book *Lord of the Flies* with a real event where six Tongan boys were marooned on an island for fifteen months (p. 22ff.). After eight days adrift, after a storm damaged their boat making them unable to sail or steer it back home, the six landed on the island of Ata'. Much of the time the boys were sad, missing their families and friends. But they did not turn on each other and form fighting factions like the boys in *Lord of the Flies*. The six worked in teams of two. They made decisions democratically. If there was conflict, they separated the antagonists for a few hours on opposite sides of the island, like a timeout. At first, they hunted coastal birds on the cliffs of the island. Since there had been Polynesian people on that island at one time, before it became “deserted” after Peruvian slavers kidnapped the original people, the boys were able to catch feral chickens and raise them. They built gardens and kept a signal fire going the whole time they were marooned.

There are so many more inspiring stories: the refusal of most soldiers to shoot their weapons in World War II (p. 79ff.); the archaeological study that showed many muskets found on the battlefield at Gettysburg had been loaded more than one time (p. 83ff.), explained by the idea many soldiers would rather load their muskets over and over rather than shoot the enemy; what really happened on Easter Island – the deforestation was not done by careless humans (p. 115ff.); a description of a large Dutch non-hierarchical home healthcare business (p. 264ff.); a new kind of school (p. 288ff.); a clear explanation of some of the more difficult ideas in the Sermon on the Mount (p. 323); a description of a Norwegian prison (p. 326ff.); and a description of participatory budgeting in the chapter entitled “This is what democracy looks like” (p. 300ff.).
Bregman ends his book with a story many people in the peace movement know: the Christmas Eve truce of 1914 (p. 366ff.) spontaneously organized by the rank-and-file of both sides in the trenches of World War I. He adds details most of us have not heard. This type of truce has happened many times in other wars: in the Spanish Civil War, the Boer Wars, the American Civil War, in the Crimean War and in the Napoleonic Wars (p. 370). The officers “turned themselves inside out to halt the plague of peace. On 29 December (1914), German Army Command issued an order that strictly prohibited fraternizing with the enemy.” (p. 376) The British field marshal did the same and threatened court-martial. Sometimes, letters were passed across the lines like one by a French unit to a German one that warned a General was coming, “…so we will have to fire”.

Bregman comes down on the side of Rousseau in the famous debate in Western philosophy between Rousseau and Hobbes on the nature of our species. Today we live in “civilization”, long after most of our kind existed as foragers in small egalitarian bands. Living in huge nations, with many levels of hierarchy, we are “mismatched” with this kind of society and it is this that causes many problems. All the history we read, our daily dose of “news”, Hollywood movies, and TV shows, all tend to make us believe the worst about our species. Bregman has a big mountain to climb to convince people of his thesis. I suspect most elite individuals will not accept his analysis. This would not surprise him since he tells us that many of those perched at the top of huge corporate and government hierarchies have actual or “acquired sociopathy” (p. 226). For the rest of us, and for the young people who need a better world, Humankind can be recommended.

9to5: The Story of a Movement

by Cindy Cole

“9to5: The Story of a Movement” is a new documentary celebrating the building of a feminist organization for better pay, respect, and good working conditions. 9to5, the Association of Working Women, began at Harvard University when a few secretaries began organizing clerical workers.

In the early 1970s the workplace for women was quite different from today. Even college educated women were expected to type, and if they got a job, it was most likely as a secretary and, of course, the goal was to marry a good man. There was little chance of advancement in the workplace and the pay was low. However, women had the will and were coming into the workforce in greater numbers. Office workers became the largest segment of the workforce at that time.

Karen Nussbaum and Ellen Cassedy both came from activist families and both were secretaries at Harvard. After a student came into Karen’s office, looked straight at her and said, “Isn’t anybody here?” she and Ellen decided to start talking to other office workers. They realized that there was strength in numbers. They called themselves 9to5 and began with publishing a newsletter with stories from office workers and their experiences. One older woman wrote, “We are ‘the girls’ until we retire without a pension.” They met with personnel at the university with demands for better pay, better working conditions, possibilities for advancement. They got nothing.

They decided they needed help. They raised money to send Ellen to the Midwest Academy to learn organizing and how to channel power. 9to5 did surveys of workers, had one to one meetings and lunches with workers, organized events to air grievances, gave out “bad boss” awards, educated themselves in labor law and challenged illegal practices. They realized they needed to promote diverse leadership and build women’s confidence and skills. They had some wins. They realized the employers worked together and the workers needed to also. Eventually, they joined Service Employees International Union as District 925 and had union offices in several cities. However, by this time it was the 1980s, and Ronald Reagan and elite employers declared open season on unions. Organizing a union was extremely difficult as was getting a first contract. There was a backlash against feminism and the ERA failed to be ratified.

The popular movie, “9 to 5” (1980), with Jane Fonda, Lilly Tomlin and Dolly Parton was based on interviews with 925 union members in Cleveland. The movie was a farce about secretaries and what they did to their boss, but it highlighted many office worker problems such as lack of promotion, sexual harassment, the coffee rebellion, low pay, and benefits. It also brought lots of attention to 925 and office workers.

I was fortunate to work in the office at SEIU Local 925 in Seattle as office support staff. When I started in 1984, we had 1,000 members and 4 staff in an open shop. I think I made coffee once. The union, run by women, absolutely would not let me. In 1994 after much hard work, we won an agency shop. With agency shop a worker did not have to join the union, but they had to pay a fee to the union for collective bargaining and representation on their behalf. Agency shop allowed us to
have a stable financial base and devote resources to organizing a larger segment of workers. When I retired with a pension, we represented 20,000 office workers, IT staff, lab techs, and family childcare workers.

In 2018 the Supreme Court issued the Janus decision which reversed precedent and declared that all public employees are entitled to work without having to pay union dues or agency fees. This was another blow to strong unions. The work, labor law and the workforce has changed since 9to5 began. It remains to be seen how the labor movement will fare in the coming years. A strong labor movement built the middle class. It’s time to organize and demand a living wage, paid sick days, health care, paid vacation, and respect.

“9to5: Documentary of a Movement” can be seen on PBS, Independent Lens for a limited time. The Dolly Parton song was written for the 1980 movie.

Karen Nussbaum organizing

“Democracy and its operative principle, the rule of law, require a ground on which to stand. That ground is the truth.”

Marcus Raskin, father of Congressman Jamie Raskin, lead manager for the second Trump impeachment.

The insurrection (of Jan 6, 2021) was the culmination of a carefully orchestrated, month-long plan to destroy democracy, to block the results of a fair and democratic election, and to disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of African-American voters who cast valid ballots.”

Derrick Johnson, NAACP President DemocracyNow, February 17, 2021

The Wealthy Like Redistribution – If the Money Goes Into their Pockets.

by John M Repp

Published on Sunday, December 02, 2012 by Common Dreams, edited by the author in 2021.

Republicans and the corporate media are always saying that taxing the rich is “redistribution of wealth”. As if the capitalist economy is not itself a great redistribution engine! In its normal workings, capitalism redistributes the money and labor of poor and working people to the rich.

As John Ruskin wrote in 1862 in Unto the Last, rich and poor are relative words like north and south. Gandhi read Ruskin’s book and he said that it changed his life. Most people think of wealth as an absolute and too many also think that everyone could become wealthy with the right application of knowledge and effort.

If that were true, why aren’t we all wealthy? The wealthy have an answer: the poor are ignorant and lazy. The rich tell us they have nothing to do with the poverty of their brethren.

The truth is there are many transactions or relationships in capitalist society that make and keep the rich wealthy and the poor in poverty. The whole goal of the self-interested actor in the marketplace is buying low and selling high, hoping to profit. That is redistribution, is it not?

Working for wages that pay the worker less than the value his work creates for the owner is the key transaction in capitalism. Usually, the owner will not even hire a worker unless they believe they can make a profit. Profit is not just covering the costs of running the business including the pay for managers. It is what is over and above those costs. It is compensation for ownership, and it is redistribution.

A person renting from a landlord, whether an apartment, house, or piece of land is another redistribution. Most landlords want to make a profit over and above their costs.

Banks loan money to borrowers and collect interest. A bank loan is one way new money is created in our economy, but the interest is redistribution to the banks. They get the new money too.

The corporations of the military-industrial complex redistribute wealth from the US taxpayer to those private corporations at profit rates much higher than average. Viewing the Department of Defense website, a citizen can read about these contracts and follow the path of billions of dollars, redistributed from your paycheck and taxes to the war profiteers.

The creation of a strong middle-class in the U.S. With the line going down, the middle-class was doing better relative to the 1%.
Or consider the IPO, the initial public offering of stocks. If the business plan is tested and looks good, a company may put on the market 100,000 shares. Public demand the first day sets the price for a share. The new company will hold back hundreds of thousands of shares for the original investors. Those shares then take on the value the market gives to the publicly offered shares, and—voilà—the original investors instantly become billionaires. That is the “magic” of the market and a redistribution on steroids.

That is what Bezos did.

Currently, the big Wall Street banks and hedge funds have found another way to literally mine money from the world’s markets. They trade on currency, commodity, stock, bond, and derivative markets the world over. We have seen pictures of a trader’s desk with six computer screens. They scour the world for a tiny “spread” and when they find it, they make a huge trade, often with borrowed money, “leveraging” the transaction to make a “killing.”

Does this all add up to something significant? Yes! The Rand Corporation, no left-wing outfit, has calculated that in the United States from 1975 to 2018 there has been an actual redistribution of 50 trillion dollars from the working and middle classes to the top 1%. On an individual level, this means the average college-educated middle class person’s current salary is just one-half what it would have been had the 1% not grabbed so much of the growth of the economy since 1975. In other words, that person’s salary would be double what they are taking home now!

So, John Ruskin was right when he said the wealthy work to keep their neighbor poor. And to protect their wealth, the wealthy engage in politics, using their vast media resources and the politicians their money helps elect to attack the idea of the wealthy paying a higher percent of their income to the government in taxes. The wealthy also stand behind the so-called “science” of economics to justify the redistribution in their favor as good and natural regardless of the consequences to society or the natural world. Yes, the wealthy like redistribution — if the money goes into their pockets.

The military can no more forsake newer costlier weapons than flies above a summer pasture can avoid fresh cow flop. Whether it is iron over bronze for spearheads, steel over iron for cannons, titanium over aluminum for jets—despite the cost, the new is better and required.

No surprise. New weapons are like new toys to their minds, not shiny new—more likely black and drab. Yet except for a few old school hardliners, experts have agreed there are some weapons which—however technically perfected—should just stay banned.

Not everyone agrees. In recent memory Saddam Hussein used poison gas on his Iraqi countrymen. Syrian factions (they keep blaming each other) have barrel-bombed their helpless counterparts from helicopters hovering over crowded urban areas. Countless others (the USA included) research and maintain stockpiles of the forbidden weapons just in case.

But even the dullest tool in the military shed knows that, however carefully employed, Chemical, Biological, and Radiological weapons have a nasty history of unpredictably blowing back on one’s own cherished troops. Best not to use them.

Any weapon, from hand grenades to lately touted “smaller” (more usable) nuclear weapons can endanger its users. It could be as simple as a poor pitch or as complicated as an unexpected detonation at ground level which hurls heaps of fallout when the wind is in the wrong direction.

And we, the wizards of the devil’s dynamite, are we safe? H-bombs have fallen by accident on American soil (fortuitously their chemical explosions failed to trigger the big nuclear ones). ICBMs have exploded in their concrete silos.

Had we known Agent Orange to be a severe risk to our soldiers we might have banned it for its hazardous blowback.

The same should apply to nuclear warheads. War planners cannot guarantee small wars can be kept from escalating to massive nuclear exchanges. The resulting nuclear winter should frighten even the most unwitting strategists. More grounded country types already understand.

“every single effort to provide Americans with a national healthcare system, from the late 19th century right up to the passage of Medicare in 1965, was opposed by white southern conservatives who repeatedly and openly bragged they were against it because they didn’t want any such benefit to go to Black people.”

Thom Hartmann the Medium Feb 26, 2021
If the blinding light does not immediately vaporize you where you stood, or the blast does not turn your organs to flying bits of human jelly, and if by some miracle you do not perish from the radioactive dust settling on everything—that is, supposing you had some shelter with fresh air, food, light, toilets, and maybe a good book—you would still find at your door your former neighbors who will soon perish horribly.

To any reasonable intelligence, nuclear weapons should be regarded as self-banning. They render war impossible not just inconceivable. A war requires not only that everyone else loses, but some winner also must survive. In nuclear war there are no “winners.” The meager few who live a tad longer cannot be called winners.

The world is at its limit. We know everyone; we can just about phone anyone. There is no land, no mineral, no wealth, no Helen of Troy worth a war whereby we lose our food, our health, our history, our wisdom, honor, devotion, love .... where only untidy piles of radioactive rubble signal, we once existed.

The boomerang of nuclear war will return to cull its hurler. It is that comical gun which is trained on the shooter. In this day of pandemic who with his head screwed on straight would release a disease on his enemies and think it would not make the rounds?

Nuclear weapons must be dismantled lest, like the ammonium nitrate stored in a hot warehouse in Beirut, they spontaneously remind us of their original purpose—to destroy horrifically and completely.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CAVE PAINTING

The cave painting in Spain and France spanned over thousands of years. (There are cave paintings in other parts of the world.) The paintings look very similar over the hundreds of sites. The dating of the paintings and the lack of pictures of war in the paintings means there was a peaceful culture in ice age Europe that lasted for at least 20,000 years, many times longer than the Roman Empire. With no class conflict or war, they avoided the two forces that usually destroy a civilization. It also appears the artists knew how to portray three dimensions, commonly thought to be a skill only first learned during the European Renaissance.

In 2013, Mike and Ruth Yarrow, with John Repp and Cindy Cole were able to visit Niaux cave. At one point in the tour, the guide had the lights in the biggest room in the cave turned off, and he asked if someone wanted to sing, so we could all hear the acoustics of the cave. Ruth whispered to Cindy and then Cindy, Ruth and Mike started singing “Keep on Moving Forward” by Emma’s Revolution, a song they learned singing with the Seattle Labor Chorus. The acoustics were outstanding! So was the singing.