

Blaming the victims

written by Stephen Millies

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Enock Benjamin

Have any union members been seen at the recent Tea Party rallies at the state capitols? Working and poor people need jobs and income. But they're not too keen on rolling back the absolutely necessary public health measures combating the coronavirus.

The United Automobile Workers union said "No!" to the automakers who wanted to prematurely open the car factories and endanger employees.

It's the working class — especially Asian, Black, Indigenous and Latinx people — who have suffered most from this crisis. [One hundred transit workers have died](#) of COVID-19, including 70 in the New York City area.

Retired union members have also died from the coronavirus. Among them is longtime Transit Workers Union Local 100 activist [Arnold Cherry](#), who was a key organizer in the 1980 New York City transit strike.

Thousands of packing and poultry workers, many of whom are immigrants, have been exposed to COVID-19. [United Food and Commercial Workers union steward Enock Benjamin died at home on April 3](#) while his family frantically waited for an ambulance. Brother Benjamin worked at the JBS slaughterhouse in Souderton, Pa., just outside Philadelphia.

The tragic death of Black workers Arnold Cherry and Enock Benjamin — or any workers — doesn't seem to bother billionaire bosses Dick Uihlein and Liz Uihlein too much. Why should it?

Profits continue to roll in at the family-owned Uline shipping supply outfit since it's considered an "essential business." Many of its employees — who don't have a union — are forced to work in the company's warehouses and offices.

Liz Uihlein claimed "the media is overblowing COVID-19," in a [March 13 email](#). She's now urging employees to support recalling Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers and lift

the Badger State's stay-at-home order.

Racism hurts all poor and working people

Liz and Dick Uihlein put their corporate headquarters and a warehouse in the southeastern Wisconsin village of Pleasant Prairie. This 90-percent-white suburb is 44 miles away from Milwaukee's Black community and a considerable car distance from Racine and Kenosha, Wis., as well.

Uline could have set up shop on the 360-acre site of the former A.O. Smith plant on Milwaukee's North Side, where 7,000 workers used to earn union pay and union benefits. It's across 27th Street from [ZIP code 53206](#), where 62 percent of Black adult men are either incarcerated or have been in prison.

Wisconsin's poorest neighborhood, a COVID-19 hotspot, was made poor by racism and deliberate deindustrialization. It's a vivid example of why the labor movement needs to demand "Jobs not jails!"

The Uihleins could also have located their HQ in what was the family-owned Schiltz brewing complex. It's across Third Street from Bronzeville, Milwaukee's original Black neighborhood.

Uline's Pleasant Prairie location was chosen as an excuse not to hire Black and Latinx workers, whom capitalists view as more likely to join a union. While workers of color are last hired, all Uline workers, including white workers, lack union protection.

The Uihleins supported the Tea Party rally in Madison, Wis., on April 24. Maybe 1,500 people showed up with their Trump flags.

While 26 million workers lost their jobs, U.S. billionaires increased their collective stash by \$282 billion between March 18 and April 10, [according to the Insitute for](#)

Policy Studies.

One of the organizers of the Madison Trumpfest was [Eric O'Keefe, a longtime political hack for the billionaire Koch family](#). He said "to shut down our rural counties because of what's happening in New York City, or in some sense Milwaukee, is draconian."

O'Keefe is really saying "to hell with Black and Brown people dying in the big cities."

COVID-19 doesn't discriminate, but capitalism does

The coronavirus is sweeping through Black communities like a plague. The real killer is poverty.

The reason African Americans account for [70 percent of Louisiana's deaths from COVID-19](#) is linked to Black women in the state making 47 cents for every dollar made by white men. The virus is just as deadly within Indigenous, Latinx and immigrant communities.

Fifty-four years ago, Martin Luther King Jr. declared: "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane."

It's injustice when a much higher percentage of people of color suffer from asthma, diabetes and high blood pressure, making them more vulnerable to die from the coronavirus.

The White House twists these diseases of poverty into telling victims "it's your own fault." That was the point of Surgeon General Jerome Adams' April 10 lecture, where he told poor people to "step up" to fight COVID-19.

"We need you to do this, if not for yourself, then for your abuela," [said the Trump](#)

[tool](#). “Do it for your granddaddy. Do it for your Big Mama. Do it for your Pop-Pop.”

It’s not the fault of people in the South Bronx that they [suffer from asthma at a rate 8 to 12 times higher than the U.S. average](#). It’s the fault of capitalist air pollution.

It’s not the fault of Black and Latinx workers who catch the coronavirus because they work in essential jobs.

It’s not the fault of family members who get ill because they live in overcrowded apartments. High rents are the cause, along with a capitalist government that refuses to build affordable housing.

One of the first acts of the Cuban Revolution was to limit the amount of rent and utility payments to 10 percent of a family’s income. Sixty years later, Cuban doctors are fighting the coronavirus all over the globe.

