

Congress will do nothing for us without struggle

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The only reason Congress is considering Build Back Better legislation is that 26 million people marched last year to declare Black Lives Matter.

Eighty-one million people voted last year against Trump and racism. For nearly 50 years, poor and working people have suffered from frozen wages and cutbacks.

People want action now. Yet Congress is failing to pass the modest “Build Back Better” bill. [Here’s some of what it includes](#):

- Two years of free community college.

All education should be free. Even in capitalist France and Germany students don’t pay college tuition. A trillion dollars that’s owed for student loans should be wiped off the books, too.

- Expand Medicare to include dental care, vision and hearing. Increase Medicaid coverage.

Healthcare is a human right! Who wants their grandparents to be unable to go to the dentist and get their teeth fixed? Or not able to get glasses or hearing aids?

Nobody has to pay to go to a hospital or clinic in socialist Cuba.

Rev. Martin Luther King declared that “of all the forms of inequality, injustice in healthcare is the most shocking and inhumane.” Medicaid would cover more poor people in a dozen states where they have been [excluded from the program](#) by reactionary state legislatures.

- Cut prescription prices.

The pharmaceutical outfits are thieves. Pfizer and Moderna made billions from their COVID-19 vaccines, which were subsidized by the U.S. government.

No one should have to choose between paying their rent and buying food or purchasing medicines. Alec Smith died in Minnesota on June 27, 2017, because he couldn't afford insulin anymore.

The price of insulin in the U.S. [costs ten times more](#) than what it sells for in other countries. When the Minnesota legislature passed the "Alec Smith Act" to guarantee emergency access to insulin, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America [tried to get it thrown out](#) in federal court.

Big Pharma spent [a million dollars a day](#) in the first three months of 2021 to lobby Congress.

One result is that Medicare is prohibited from negotiating with drug companies. So it pays [nearly twice as much](#) for medicines as the Veterans Administration does.

Child poverty is obscene

- Expand the child tax credit to pay families \$300 per month for children under 6 years old and \$250 per month for children ages 6 to 18.

Over 10 million children in the United States [live in dire poverty](#). That includes more than one out of four Black children.

While [22,000 children](#) live in New York City homeless shelters, there's not a single homeless child in Cuba.

- Help subsidize childcare for children under five. Universal pre-kindergarten for children aged 3 and 4 years old.

Free child care should be guaranteed to every family that needs it. It was the Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai that helped [establish universal childcare](#) in the socialist Soviet Union.

- Paid family and medical leave.

Of the 41 countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the [United States is the only one](#) that doesn't allow working parents time with their newborn or sick children. Japan offers more than a year of paid leave for new parents, while Canada offers six months.

While the media says this bill will cost \$3.5 trillion, that's spread over 10 years. So the real annual cost is \$350 billion.

Compare that to the trillion-dollar annual war budget, which includes not just the Pentagon but also the spy agencies and other government departments. The U.S. spent \$6 trillion in building nuclear weapons that, if used, would kill every human being on the planet.

No struggle, no progress

The only reason why this legislation is being considered by Congress is that 26 million people marched last year to declare Black Lives Matter!

The provisions of "Build Back Better" may seem meager to those familiar with social conditions in other countries with stronger labor movements. But socialists shouldn't sneer at workers who hope this legislation is enacted.

These simple measures mean a lot to people who desperately need them. Revolutionaries are the best fighters for reform.

Sen. Bernie Sanders originally wanted a \$6 trillion bill. Now there's talk of reducing the cost of this bill to \$2.3 trillion by either cutting out items or making its measures last for just five or six years instead of a decade.

Passing "Build Back Better" should have been twinned with pushing for a big

increase in the federal minimum wage. One of the demands of the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom—where Dr. King gave his “I Have a Dream” speech — was for a \$2-per-hour minimum wage.

That's worth \$17.82 today, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics inflation calculator](#). Fighting to raise the minimum wage will win the support of millions.

Frederick Douglass declared that “without struggle there is no progress.” U.S. Rep. Cori Bush from Missouri knows that. She forced President Biden to extend the moratorium on evictions by leading a sit-in on the steps of the Capitol.

The AFL-CIO should follow Cori Bush’s example and call for a new Solidarity Day to march on Washington and demand that Congress help the people, not the billionaires.

