WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDICINE?

> 1 1/2 CENTURIES OF FORGETTING AND REMEMBERING

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Social Medicine Consortium
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> 1 1/2 CENTURIES OF FORGETTING AND REMEMBERING

- Importance of history
  - Clarify the social determinants that cause illness and early death.
  - Remembered and then forgotten in succeeding generations
  - U.S. far behind other countries in orientation toward social medicine
  - Current struggles in social medicine to be seen in this historical context.
> 1 1/2 CENTURIES OF FORGETTING AND REMEMBERING

- To study illness-generating social determinants... or to change them?
Epidemic right here in Gallup, NM (1993 and sporadic cases later)

- Young and older people dying rapidly from adult respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS)
- High fever, fluid-filled lungs, rapid death, no treatment except supportive
- Death rate initially about 80%, later improved to about 40%
> 1 1/2 CENTURIES OF FORGETTING AND REMEMBERING

- Epidemic right here in Gallup, NM (1993 and sporadic cases later)
  - Epidemiological sleuthing by Dr. Bruce Tempest at Gallup IHS and colleagues at UNM and CDC
  - Identification of Hanta Virus - sin nombre
  - Host: deer mouse in houses: inhaled feces and urine
> 1 1/2 CENTURIES OF FORGETTING AND REMEMBERING

- Epidemic right here in Gallup, NM (1993 and sporadic cases later)
  - Advice: clean up your house, barns, other buildings wearing respiratory and with bleach.
  - What’s missing from this picture?
> 1 1/2 CENTURIES OF FORGETTING AND REMEMBERING

- Epidemic right here in Gallup, NM (1993 and sporadic cases later)
  - What’s missing from this picture?
    - Hanta is mainly a disease of poverty, marginalization, internal colonization, and racism.
    - NM is the 2nd or 3rd poorest state.
    - McKinley county is one of the poorest in New Mexico, and with one of the highest rates of income and wealth inequality.
> 1 1/2 CENTURIES OF FORGETTING AND REMEMBERING

- Epidemic right here in Gallup, NM (1993 and sporadic cases later)
  - What’s missing from this picture?
    - Such epidemics emerge from a combination of microbial infection and unjust social conditions.
    - Prevention involves fundamental change in the unjust social conditions that foster such epidemics.
>1½ centuries of forgetting and remembering
Virchow

- Rudolf Virchow: “father of social medicine” [and pathology]
  - Epidemics:
    - typhus, Upper Silesia
Virchow

- **Typhus, Upper Silesia**

1847-1848

- Prussian government appointed Virchow to investigate the suspected outbreak.
- Clinical: flu-like symptoms, including fever and headache, rash, brain inflammation, death.
- Cause then unknown. Much later: bacterium (Rickettsia)
- Body lice carry the bacteria from one person to another, usually within crowded and unsanitary housing.
- Typhus and Hanta viruses are caused by infections.
  - But both diseases occur in a specific social context.
  - This is what leads us to consider typhus and Hanta as a “diseases of poverty.”
Virchow

- Rudolf Virchow: “father of social medicine” [and pathology]
  - Epidemics:
    - typhus, Upper Silesia
    - cholera, Berlin
    - tuberculosis, Berlin
  - Infectious diseases due to unequal social conditions
Virchow

- Inadequate social conditions increased the population's susceptibility to
  - climate
  - infectious agents
  - other specific causal factors
  - none of which alone was sufficient to produce an epidemic.
- For the prevention and eradication of epidemics, political economic change was more important than medical intervention.
"The improvement of medicine would eventually prolong human life, but improvement of social conditions could achieve this result even more rapidly and successfully."

Virchow

- Active participant on the barricades in the revolution of 1848.
- Later member of Reichstag.
- Radicalism suppressed in academic medicine.
  - Focus on pathology rather than social medicine
  - Letters to his parents
1½ centuries of forgetting and remembering
Engels

Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*

- Context: work with Marx
- Managed father’s textile mill in Manchester
- First major work of social epidemiology
Engels

Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*

- Extensive and often first descriptions of inequalities in disease prevalence and outcomes
  - Occupational and environmental lead poisoning
  - Byssinosis
  - Coal miners pneumoconiosis
  - Repetitive motion injury syndrome
  - Neighborhood effects on morbidity and mortality
  - Etc., etc.
Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*

- Roots of illness and early death lay in the organization of economic production and in the social environment marked by inequality.
- Under the capitalist economic system, working-class people had to live and work under circumstances that inevitably caused sickness.
1 ½ centuries of forgetting and remembering
Allende

- Pathologist, student of Engels and Virchow (and Max Westenhofer)
- The “golden age of social medicine,” Chile, 1930s
  - Later senator, president of Chile
  - Health and mental health in wide-ranging epidemiological study
Allende
Allende
Salvador Allende, *La Realidad Medico-Social Chilena*, 1939

- Emphases
  - Alcohol/substance use rooted in social “misery”
  - Health effects of wage differentials between men and women
  - Impact of economic cycles, especially inflation, on health outcomes
  - Relationships among poverty, nutritional deficiency, and outcomes in infant mortality, tuberculosis, other infectious diseases
Allende

Salvador Allende, *La Realidad Medico-Social Chilena*, 1939

- Other emphases
  - Housing conditions, neighborhood effects and health outcomes
  - Abortion among working women
  - Economic production and occupational illnesses (silicosis, industrial accidents)
  - Adverse practices of pharmaceutical industry
    - First analysis of generic versus brand name drugs
Allende

Salvador Allende, *La Realidad Medico-Social Chilena*, 1939

- Government’s public health proposals
  - No additional health services as such
  - Instead, address social causes of public health problems
    - Income redistribution
    - Housing
    - Clothing
    - Occupational safety
    - Food
Comparisons

• **Convergences**
  • Unnecessary illness and premature death as inherent outcomes of inequities and inequalities generated by capitalist production and the expansion of empire
  • Social causation: vision of multiple social structures and processes impinging on the individual to cause illness and death
Comparisons

- **Divergences: 1) Primary causes**
  - Engels: Organization and process of economic production
  - Virchow: Inequities in the distribution and consumption of social resources.
    - E.g.: poverty, unemployment, malnutrition
  - Allende: Impact of class structure, in context of empire and underdevelopment
Comparisons

- Divergences: 2) policy, reform, political strategy
  - Engels: Revolution, not reform
  - Virchow: Reform, not revolution
  - Allende: Socialist transformation of society along the peaceful road
1 ½ centuries of forgetting and remembering
Asa Cristina Laurell

- “Mother of Latin American social medicine”
- Professor, Metropolitan Autonomous University - Xochimilco (Mexico City)
- Recently Director of Health Services, Federal District of Mexico City
  - National Minister of Health in “Legitimate Government of Mexico”
Health-illness as a dialectical process rather than a dichotomous category that views disease as either present or absent.

Group interviews in occupational health

Multi-method research to consider the *dynamic* linkages by which social conditions, especially inequality, affect the dialectical process of health-illness.
1 ½ centuries of forgetting and remembering

• Efforts to improve the health of populations without addressing the social origins of illness – especially poverty, inequality, and racism – ultimately will fail.
1 ½ centuries of forgetting and remembering

- Strategies (unthinkable?) that do address these social origins reveal the scope of reconstruction that is necessary for meaningful solutions:
  - Revolution?
  - Redistributive policies like tax reform, reducing inequality
    - We’ve done it before.
    - Tobin tax to end speculative financialization and to solve world poverty
“It’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of our economic system.”
- Fredric Jameson
Facebook home page of the [U.S.] Horizontal ***[Place] Autonomous Region
New Zealanders in Standing Rock protests
JACKSON RISING

The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi

Kali Akuno & Ajamu Nangwaya
Cooperation Jackson
Figure 1. Peculiar Ways of Struggling to Improve Our Key Problems Without Confronting Capitalism
Figure 2. Rinky-Dink Revolution: Struggling to Improve Our Key Problems By Confronting and Moving Beyond Capitalism

Creative constructive actions
Building the solidarity economy
- Solve the housing problem
- Solve the food problem
- Develop cooperative economic activities to meet other needs and wants
- Solve the personal transportation problem
- Enact “mutual aid”
- Take part in very limited electoral work to achieve “dual power.”

Creative destructive actions
Resistance and non-participation in the global capitalist economic system: focus on “cracks,” contradictions, vulnerabilities
- Direct actions that specifically aim to slow and to stop the easy functioning of capitalism.
- Avoid symbolic politics.
- Massive tax resistance: stop acting as financiers of capitalism and the capitalist state.
- Massive divestment and redirection of investment into non-capitalist enterprises
- Ideological work, de-mystification, media, moving beyond false consciousness.

Incarceration, prison industrial complex
Neoliberalism, austerity, privatization, philanthrocapitalism
Environmental degradation, expropriation, pollution, climate change, species extinction
Ideology, hegemony, distorted education
Ill health, mental illness/suffering, drug use, barriers to accessible services, medical industrial complex
Militarism, endless war, gun violence, arms trade, military industrial complex
Poverty, inequality, food insecurity, housing insecurity
Racism, sexism, ageism, otherisms based on socially constructed differences
Capitalism
Revolution Now

Teachings from the Global South for Revolutionaries in the Global North

HOWARD WAITZKIN

Seen from the global South, U.S. elections inspire jokes about the deeply flawed democracy that the United States seeks to impose on the rest of the world.¹ When democratically elected governments try to challenge the global capitalist system, they become targets for military intervention, coups d’état, and furious attempts to destabilize their political and economic systems.² So defects of the U.S. electoral system become glaring: scheduling election days on workdays rather than national holidays or Sundays; buying politicians through campaign contributions and other financial support; creation of false consciousness through manipulation of the media; and apathy, non-participation, intimidation, and exclusion of U.S. voters through complex voter registration requirements, insufficient polling places and staffing, and similar maneuvers that discourage voters from voting—leading in this case to Trump’s so-called triumph when he received votes from less than 25 percent of eligible voters and less than one-sixth of all citizens, lost the popular vote, and faced no run-off election.

From this vantage point, two conclusions emerge. First, elections are not the point. Elections play only a small role in the struggle to transform oppressive social conditions, and the role that elections do play is to clarify the need for much more fundamental revolutionary strategy. As public health nurse and anarchist Emma Goldman pointed out long ago, elections are mostly symbolic actions that never in themselves bring fundamental change. In her writing and in a quote attributed to her, she said, “If voting changed anything, they’d have made it illegal long ago.”³

The understandable longing of voters for humane government and responsive leadership, chosen through elections, belongs in the proverbial dustbin of history, because that desire has been realized rarely if ever. Since the origins of so-called democracy during the Greek empire, elections

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HEALTH CARE
UNDER THE KNIFE

Moving Beyond Capitalism for Our Health

HOWARD WAITZKIN
and the Working Group for Health Care beyond Capitalism

Monthly Review
Press, 3/18
1 ½ centuries of forgetting and remembering

- Courage to think (and to act on) the “unthinkable”
- Thanks for considering!