(Re)Enter the Monster: COVID-19 and the Crisis of Capitalism. An Interview with Mike Davis*

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Mike Davis (California, 1946), is an American sociologist, historian and political activist. He is one of the most widely recognized Marxist authors today. Among his main research interests are: social inequity, and conflicts in urban áreas – as he has shown in his Works *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (Verso Books, 1990) or *Planet of Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Working Class* (2006). Likewise, he has worked on the relationship between capitalist economy and changes in weather and natural environment. His *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (Verso, 2001) is one of the most influential work in this research field nowadays.

In 2005, two years later of the appearance of avian flu, professor Davis published *The Monster at Our Door: The Global Threat of Avian Flu* (The New Press). In this work he analyzes the relationship of the Livestock Revolution, the massive deforestation process and the commodification of pharmaceutical research with the emergence of new diseases, all of that considering the political, social and territorial dimension of this problems. On the occasion of the appearance of the Sars-Cov-2 / COVID-19 global pandemic, which largely confirm the long scope of his work, the author has written a new foreword to his *Monster at Our Door* and has decided to republish this book under the title *The Monster Enters: COVID-19, Avian Flu and the Place of Capitalism* (OR Books, 2020). On the occasion of the publication of this work we decided to interview him for this special issue of the journal *Materialismo Storico.*

Interviewer: *This year 'The Monster at Our Door: The Global Threat of Avian Flu' (2005) was released again but now with a different title –The Monster Enters: COVID-19, Avian Flu and the Place of Capitalism (2020)– with a new introduction written by you just in the middle of this COVID-19 pandemic crisis that is still ongoing today. What led you to focus on this problem? Was just the connection of the current crisis with the 2003 flu crisis, or does the book somehow converge with some other topics of your research?*

* This interview took place on December of 2020.

Mike Davis: The Avian Flu book was part of a trilogy that was actually about globalization. My objective was to look at aspects of globalization both historically and contemporary context. The big book was called *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (2002) and looked at one of the greatest mortality events in human history. I wrote also a book on carbons that also represent a process of globalization and resistance to a new military planning technology. For this book I went to the World Health Organization in Geneva to study a new era of diseases under conditions of globalization which both break down the barriers between natural reservoirs of viruses and bacteria in human society and processes of urbanization that create enormous of population of people living in dangerous, overcrowded, and unsanitary conditions. So, in my mind this was a tryptic, a trilogy of studies about globalization.

Interviewer: *I would like to add something related to this. When we read 'The Monster Enters' we were amazed about your ability to anticipate this crisis. Do you think current global leaders are taking consistent measures to avoid further diseases like these, or on the contrary, the measures that they are taking right now (just against COVID-19) are not focus on solving the problem of how to deal with global diseases in the era of globalization?*

Mike Davis: First of all, lets start with the SARS break in 2003 and the appearance of avian flu for a second time in China. A number of pandemic national plans were used and there was an enormous amount of research. Various agencies were set up to surveil the wild animal population in the emergence of new diseases. There were innumerable commissions and reports and most of them ended up totally ignored by present leaders. But the bigger problems, in terms of preparation and response, was that in many poor countries there is no public health system or universal access to primary health care like in richer countries. Also in the United States there have been several cut backs to public health and medical access. On the contrary, in the 1980s, Ireland, Britain and Norther Ireland were just amazed by the convenience of free public health. In United States, after the 2008 crisis, 60.000 public health jobs, –and I am not talking about nurses, and doctor, and hospitals, but people who work through local government in the front line– were eliminated and never replaced. So you look around the world and you find this health care system crisis both in poor and rich countries.

At the same time, we live in a planet where several billion people are inescapably exposed to high rates of disease and persistent infections, insanitary conditions –included water–, and also hunger (which is a major preexisting condition) that end up suppressing immune responses. Other thing that I would like to remark is that regional-international infrastructure for mutually cooperation is collapsed and totally ignored. The World Health Organizations has been on the side of the crisis from the very beginning despite the fact that the signatories to the World Health Organization (who supposedly follow its leadership), in the midst of the global crisis ended up ignoring the Organization. The problem is that the World Health Organization is underfunded and so many countries have failed to meet their pledges to the organization. That is why the World Health Organization has, in someway, become captive of State donors like United States or China, or The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. One of the things that I wrote about in the first edition of *The Monster at Our Door* (so many years ago in the face of a flu threat) was that many countries wanted to generically produce antivirals that have shown success in severe cases on influenza, and the World Health Organization failed to go along with this, but rather, cut a deal with big pharmaceutical companies who donated a certain supply of the antivirals to the World Health Organization meanwhile that organization the prevent India, and other countries, from manufacturing it. Right now, India and other countries (mainly poor countries) are demanding the right to produce generic vaccines outside of patents. Meanwhile World Health Organization have been totally hollowed out, and to some extent, privatized. In this context, EU nations, try to act coordinately due to the exponentially increase of the disease. But what happened instead was the closing of borders and forbid the export to Italy and other countries –including medical supplies–, and one country after another did the same thing. So the only aid that Italy got at the beginning of the crisis came from doctors of other countries. So we found most in the front lines, true internationalists, and the Chinese who sent a couple of medical supplies to Italy. That shows the total collapse of the European unity in front of the disease.

In summary you see these three things: firstly, the refusal of regimes in power to follow the guidelines and strategies that have been perfectly worked out. In United States and Great Britain you see a reduction of immunity strategies ('save the economy first' is, essentially, a neo Nazi policy that demands the sacrifice of ordinary people specially the poor, and racial minorities). Secondly, the crisis of public primary health care system around

the world. Thirdly, the collapse of most international arrangements. However, there is one exception to this, and it is very important: the amount of research and international cooperation on this matter is unprecedented. There is a kind of open global commons of researchers. Medical journals put online free articles about COVID-19 and coronavirus, and tens of thousands of research across the world, starting with the Chinese scientists, share their research. At that level, internationalism worked, and it worked to a large extend outside of the context of private health care and the State policy.

Interviewer: *It seems that your approach to the contemporary epidemic crisis can't be considered as externalist, that is: your view is not limited to analyze viruses or epidemiological features but deals in detail with social and cultural features that allows its appearance and stratify its spreading among different segments of population (which can accelerate or slow down the amount of contagious of a particular disease). According to your view, what are the main tendencies of contemporary capitalism that make foreseeable the appearance of virus like COVID-19? Moreover, in your opinion, what factors affect mainly the spreading of the virus nowadays?*

Mike Davis: The destruction of natural barriers between dense human populations and reservoirs of novel viruses, bacteria or fungus is very important in terms of emergent diseases. We have to recognize that food industry has responsability in some of these diseases and that has huge economic consequences. But what is destroying those barriers are these: the desperation of poor farmers and the impact of multinational big industries. I think the most important study that I have ever seen about this is a study that showed how West Africa is the most rapidly urbanizing region of the world and it is also the youngest population. West Africans traditionally depended of fishing and a huge number of several million of local people fishing in Gulf of Guinea. But 25 years ago, factories appeared from northern Europe, the ex-Soviet Union, China and Japan. Now, in the Gulf of Guinea, and according to a scientific estimate, something like half of the fish protein in the Gulf of Guinea is not intended to put fish on dinner tables but become animal feed. The result of this was that the price of fish soared in urban markets in West Africa. Now parallel to this, multinational companies were hard at work on reducing the labor cost to optimize the fishing process by hiring professional that basically killed anything that was potentially edible. So everything came together to create the worst possible situation: a vicious circle which shows global forms of exploiting local resources and destroying –at the same time–

the barriers between viral reservoirs and human populations. The consequence of this is the misuse of resources, the export of vital protein resources for consumption in rich countries and the exponential growth of slums (which means populations with poor sanitation and widespread malnutrition). This is the perfect storm that explains for instance Ebola, and probably HIV as well as, and in someway, is the current conditions that exists in the Amazon, and in the tropical forest of South East Asia.

We can see, at every stage, that private companies, market economies, –capitalism in short–, are directly involved in the generation of vulnerability that allows the emergence of diseases. And finally another factor, which my friend Rob Wallace has written about so brilliantly, is the rise of factory farming. Poultry farms and beef farms are perfect for speeding of animal viruses. Pigs are particularly important too: they are able to infect humans with forms of influenza. Right now, we got two different kinds influenza circulating in sick pigs. In other words, new viruses that preserves all the deadliness of the wild are also highly transmissible to humans, and this is how influenza pandemics have emerged form factory farms .

Interviewer: *Can we break that circle? Poor countries are intensively following extractivist logics in order to be part of global capitalism but by doing so they are acting against themselves. How to break that circle in which rich countries, in order to provide their population with high quality food, explode other countries?*

Mike Davis: According to the United Nations, by 2050 human population will reaches its maximum size and then it will stop growing. In order to feed that population we need to increase grain production by 50% in the next generation. Particularly, in the case of Africa –which has never experienced its own green revolution–, agrobusiness stands directly between population growth and the achievement of a stable safety net of nutrition for the planet, because in Africa grain production is directly used to beef production.

This is a totally unstable system that have made all worst and now climate change began to have dramatic impacts –in the very near future– on agriculture, particularly in areas like the Caribbean, Central America, the Eastern Mediterranean an some areas of Pakistan and India. Studies show that by mid-century, in Pakistan, and in some parts of India, water availability will decline. So existing relations of production and structures of agriculture are and will be obstacles to the feeding an survival of humanity by mid-century. In Europe, there is a much better consciousness about the

exploitation and environmental disasters of agro business. Agro business, as Marx pointed out a hundred and seventy years ago, basically mines the soil, it mines the environment: it is ultimately unsustainable. And that crisis is expressing itself in different ways. The agricultural crisis and global warming are also part of a larger complex of a convergent crisis, that just as capitalism, is unable to feed the planet. At the same time, this complex crisis has shown that it can decarbonize at a highly rate which means a catastrophic climate change. Moreover, the majority of urban work forces in South America, Africa, and some of South Asian countries –for instance– are in the informal sector. Thus, formal economy is no longer creating jobs at all. Countries like Brazil have replaced industry and they have lost hundreds of thousands manufacturing jobs replaced with primary exports landlords and farmers opponents of the achievement of the labor party in Brazil. We have to talk about an industrial apocalyptic reality that threatens the survival of the poorest quarter of humanity at least.

Interviewer: *Your analysis shows a very disturbing future. It seems that capitalism is not worried about how to constrain itself, on the contrary, capitalism is trying to go further and trying to unleash all its power in this moment. And what we realize, specially right now in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis, is that the system in itself, is not, by any means, sustainable. In your opinion, what could be, or what are the possibilities to have a different kind of system in order to avoid further crisis?*

Mike Davis: First of all, we should note that, to some extent, these convergent crisis affects the structure of capitalism in itself. The environmental human resource foundations of accumulation would scale but what is striking is the absence –despite the economic form–, of forms of sustainability. The fact that the larger share of the capital –particularly the driven by the financial industry– is focused on short term goals reveals the crisis of the natural conditions for existence in capitalism. In other words, the slogan of capitalism seems to be "let's exploit and enjoy all the good things of life in our life time and not leave anything to future generations". One exception to this, perhaps, is China. China's State capitalist system has achieve goals in agriculture and renewable energy. At the same time has become an imperialist in its own right. I believe, as the old anthem of the work movement goes, in a final crisis because now the capitalism has truly become a death force on a global scale. We can talk about of innumerable kinds of reforms and good causes, but at the end of the day, it comes down to a question of

the economic power. I mean, will the resources of labor and technology be devoted to sustainable development of humanity? Capitalism has destroyed the most vulnerable part of humanity. For instance, look at the way that we have come to regard drownings of a hundred Africans in the Mediterranean. In rich countries it no longer have a great impact, and in the same way, we naturalize the deaths of millions of people. In future scenarios, the only possible solution has to be that anti-capitalist movements will open broader fronts. I should note that the only world leader on any stature who consistently talks about the priority of poor humanity, about the crisis of unemployment, about the climate crisis in a consistent and eloquent way is the 'Argentine soccer fan' who lives in a big house in Rome, and Catholics should understand the importance of what he is saying and what he is doing, and the same institution of the Catholic church itself.

Interviewer: *You are talking about the Pope!*

Mike Davis: Of course. Who else defend the unity of humanity right now?. Remember, in the cold war there was not an inch of ground anywhere in the earth who was not seen as insignificant, at least because of the possibility that the other side, the Soviets or the Americans, would make that country (no matter how small was) parts of its alliance. And that is why the result of this was a process of global cooperation and global institutions. Once the cold war ended, who represented ideals of progress or human unity?. I mean, even when the cold war was the worst possible way to valorize struggle for the allegiance of humanity at all, at the end of it , and after the disappearance of the soviet block, there is no authoritative voice, there is no political force that represents humanity as a whole. We must remember what Marx said in the communist manifest: a communist differ from a common worker only because he struggles not only for the present but for the future.

Now, one of the crisis that is happening in America's life is the decline of interest in internationalism. Particularly this issue is a concern for the future of humanity in terms of the environment. The American left, in its enormous need to enlarge an reinforce itself –by building alliances–, forgets the importance of support movements for international struggles. One exception is, of course, the movements for immigrants' rights: they are fighting against the atrocious border policies in the United States and Europe. We see this here in San Diego. We are border city, a twin city with Tijuana. Just across the border, on the Mexican side, are thousands of Central Americans who are

waiting for receiving a refugee status. Many of them are small farmers who have been forced to emigrate by climate change and daily violence in terrorist States. But instead of helping them we built an iron curtain around the world: the great wall of capitalism.

To summarize, the genocidal attitude towards the future demand international aid. However, besides Europe agreement to create and deliver vaccines to the poor world, United States has adopted an attitude *of monopolizing the market and not helping anybody.*

Interviewer*: In your* Planet of Slum *(2006) you point out to the I.M.F. structural adjustment program initiated in the 80s as a tipping point that breaks the previously existing solidarity between industrialization and urbanization. Furthermore, the insertion of the economies of poor countries in a globalized market contribute to the growing of the slums and the urbanization of the countryside. Additionally, in* The Monster Enters *(2020) you point out how these slums work as incubators for viruses. Could you go deep on those topics?*

Mike Davis: if I were to update Planet of Slums I would give more emphasis to the fact that traditional land occupation squatting –for instance the community people that occupy vacant land in the edge of the city–, create communities and then, in three or five years, fight for the recognition of their rights of tenure and ownership. This is vanishing now because there is no longer vacant public land that people can occupy for free. It is all now private property.

We have not seen in almost forty years public investment in infrastructure or sanitation in informal urbanization. Now the State takes the place of a landlord and a dispossessor rather than provide with necessary public services. As I explained earlier, this concentrated population is highly susceptible to emergent diseases because they are already sick anyway due to the lack of sanitation, regular nutrition, and so on. For me, one of the unexpected and bizarre results of the publication of my book Planet of Slums was its wide adaptation and use in classes at The Naval War College in New Port, Rode Island. Actually I was invited to speak at the Naval War College about slums, and slums as incubators of asymmetric warfare. Most of my Marxist urged me to go, and of course I will.

Interviewer*: And do they share your view on this matter?*

Mike Davis: Sure. I did have a beer recently with the president of the Naval War College, an American Admiral (for confidential reasons no name was mentioned[1]), and the conversation was very interesting because what he pointed out was this –he said to me–: "look, the American Navy is the only force that is able to go to any costal city area in the world, bring an infrastructure to a small city: hospital ships, power plants, helicopters, loads of medical personnel, and technicians." And then he said –and I am actually quoting him–: "My kids[2] are very proud about the work they did after the earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia. It made them a lot more happy than bombing wedding parties in Afghanistan". Ante then he continue saying "What is going to happen when two crisis happen at the same time?. If I go to Washington and ask to the Armed Forces Committee for more money for more hospital ships, power generators or whatever, they are going to let me out of the room. But if I go and ask for three billion dollars for a super carrier they are going to be excited and like it."

I had no answer in terms of the power that drives Armed Forces. But at a point in which he recognized the possibility of convergent crisis, would have to consider how United States' physical means can be converted from warfare to human relief. Right now, those resources are mostly available for warfare. In subsequent conversations, I discovered that there is a much higher awareness of the consequences of slumification and environmental change amongst this kind of Pentagon's intellectuals than there is amongst the traditional foreign policy makers in the United Stated, and unfortunately, in most large sectors of the American left. They have a much clearer view of the future and of course they don't have solutions but they see the future through more realistic eyes than most of the rest of us.

Interviewer*: Continuing on this matter and regarding the socioeconomic resources available in contemporary societies, you remark –as one of the thesis of 'The Monster Enters'– the existence of two immunologically differentiated mankind and then you insist on the catastrophic effects that COVID-19 will have in the slums. Do you think that age can be an effective barrier against the virus or on the contrary, as you say in 'The Monster Enters' this is a misleading thesis because the data collected and analyzed was biased?*

[1] Note added by the interviewers.

[2] The admiral is referring with this term to the US NAVY officers and marine corps in general.

Mike Davis: Let's start with the scientific principles of this. There are some infectious diseases that affect almost uniformly every age. In 1918, in the so called Spanish flu, (apologize me, it is just the name given by other people), the most vulnerable groups in Europe and United States were young and healthy adults. One reason that explains that is that this group of people (mostly in their late thirties) have not experienced the pandemic that took place twenty five years earlier. So, older people, who had some existent immunity, and children (who have a more primitive and robust immune systems) were not greatly affected either. Now, with COVID-19 we see that the elderly is particularly susceptible. On the other hand, if you look back at the 1918 influenza, the greatest mortality was in India (the majority of people who died were people in South Western India). Why? Because it was the beginning of the famine exacerbated by British policies that forced the exports of food from India to support armies in the field during the First World War. That created artificial shortages of food. So, during 1918 pandemic, Western India was devastated because the preexisting condition of hunger.

Likewise today, certain economic status is as important as the age in the process of preventing diseases. Of course, poor people in Western Europe, and some racial or ethnic minorities in the United States are particularly susceptible. For example, right now Southern California is the new epicenter of the pandemic in the United States. Los Angeles' Hospitals has reached its full capacity. The point I raised in the new introduction of The Monster Enters, and what worried me most earlier in the year, is that in a country like United States 75% of the population have access to some kind of health care, is well fed and is protected, and the other 25% are poor people with no support. We can see the inverse of this in the case of the poorest countries where three quarters of the population experience regular malnutrition or have lack access to clean water. We know that poorest people on the planet won't have vaccines available for two to four years, which leaves a terrifying large scope for the spreading of COVID-19 (and of course COVID-19 is not the only threat).

We live in an age of pandemic, there will be more pandemics. Now there are two varieties of avian flu circulating in populations across the world and both have a chance to jump to humans, and then, will become avian flu pandemics. The threat of the avian flu is not reduced at all. Now the tradition of fighting infection diseases has two paradigms. One paradigm is the one

used by the United States military against yellow fever and malaria. In all the purges and militarized United States campaigns focused on pathogens the major organization conducting this interventions was the Rockefeller Foundation. There is a second paradigm, born out of the work of Rudolf Virchow in Germany. His position was that was more important to create primary health care, I mean universally and accessible primary health care, in order to reduce the vulnerability of population to infectious diseases. Virchow was not against vaccines, but he argued that focusing on specific diseases was totally insufficient. His view became known on social medicine and it was widely integrated into socialist programs and in social democratic parties in Europe, but he achieved properly its greatest influence in Latin America. By the way, doctors play a crucial role in the original development of Latin America; the Argentine socialist party was founded by a doctor, a pathologist. But probably the most memorably was Salvador Allende who was a prophet of social medicine and wrote two important books about infection diseases and primary care in Latin America.

Both of these traditions continued under the umbrella of the World Health Organization and with the social medicine tradition advocated by the soviets. However, some social democrats from countries like Canada and Norway adopted Virchow paradigm. On the contrary, United States continued following the Rockefeller Foundation paradigm focus on disease campaigns. I think that there is an urgent need to revisit these debates on the tradition of social medicine. Social medicine and universal primary health care were highlighted in 1979 in The Alma Alta declaration. However the claims of this declaration were blocked and after that, part of the world decided to fight against infectious diseases following the Rockefeller Foundation paradigm rather than following the creation of an international infrastructure for health. Again, as we discussed earlier, we need a global infrastructure of health provision. There is no fraction or segment of capitalism capable of advocating for this effectively today. Rather it must be the product of social struggles.

Interviewer*: It seems that logistics has played a critical role in the current pandemic crisis. It shows that, on the one hand, the accelerated flow of goods and people across the planet has promoted the spreading of the virus, and on the other hand, privatization process has been an enormous burden that affect negatively the response against the virus. What are, in your opinion, the main challenges of new global and economic relationships? In the same way, what are the opportunities that today's world offers to overcome this crisis?*

Mike Davis: I am living in a region in California where one nursing home has almost a hundred percent infection rate. Is a nursing home where every patient and every staff member has been infected, and then they started to die. This is California, this supposed to be one of the richest and most advanced places in the world, and years ago, when Arnold Schwarzenegger was the Republican Governor of California, he became very concerned about the capacity to deal with mass casualty events, diseases, and national disasters. So he convinced the legislation to invest in field hospitals (such as the military), but then, the democratic successor Jerry Brown –a much stronger advocator of austerity in public planning and expenditure– sold off the field hospitals. For example, we know, since the spring, that the this winter would be one of the worst in years but we haven't reacted with any sense of real emergency to that. In this very rich society –though at the same time is an unequal society (most specifically here in California)–there is still widespread shortages everywhere, which means the reduction –for instance– in the number of intensive care units and hospital beds.

We have seen this year the results of the incompetence in the management of the pandemic and also the results of austerity policies in the United States as a whole: there are much fewer hospital beds than they were twenty or thirty years ago. This is a turning point because now many hospital are privatized. Currently, hospitals adopted models of financial management and just in time inventory to reduce the number of unoccupied hospital beds which of course meant sacrificing the availability of emergency beds. At the same time, the pharmaceutical industries have retreated, to a large extend, from basic research. Now they buy research from smaller pharms or specially from the public sector. Today the greatest profit in the pharmacy business lies –for instance– in producing things for sexual disfunctions for elderly males. So we lost a whole generation of development of new antibiotics. At the same time, there is little profit in developing new antivirals and the vaccines we have are the result of a tremendous State subsidies. Some pharmacy industries in United States get to claim the entirety profits of the vaccine despite the fact that most of the research capitalized in the vaccines was produced publicly and the Federal Government gave them financial support. So big pharmacy industries, instead of playing the role of a irreplaceable source of medical innovation and drug production, basically doesn't play a fundamental productive role. Pharmacy industries become just a feather on the development of the productive forces of modern medicine: we live in an era of extraordinary rapid advances in bio design, genetic sequencing and

biotechnology in general, but the drug companies actually stand between that and new science application to public health. In short, pharmaceutical sector today is an obstacle rather than a mean of delivering public health in this crisis.

The result of all of this in United Stated is as follow: twenty million Americans are out of work –or part time employed– and 320.000 have died. Despite all of this, the stock market is soaring and monopolies like Amazon –which is probably the most outstanding example– have achieved an unprecedented level of profit making. The wealth of the very richest Americans has increased by a trillion dollars due to the fact that their ownership of key technologies or distribution of networks. Moreover, beside the crisis, Amazon warehouse employees (in many cases) go to work without mask for protective care and get sick like hundreds of thousands of delivery drivers right now. This exposes, to the most basic level, the parasitic nature of American capitalism today and the monopoly power that few sectors, particularly in technology finance and logistics, have acquired over the entire economy. In fact, we are also experiencing a mass exchange in small businesses: many of them have been put out and will never return. This is equivalent, in a fairly sinister way, to the super inflation that had destroyed the savings of the German middle class after the First World War and created a reservoir of grievance and hate and mobilizes the foundation of national socialism. The far right in United States has been very acute to the possibility of recruiting members of the ruined middle class to their causes. I think, people voted for Trump not necessarily because they like Trump at all but they were scared to death about a second closure that would wipe them out and destroy their small businesses and take away their jobs forever. Sadly, the democrats did a miserable job of linking national pandemic strategy to job security and income maintenance during the crisis.

Interviewer*: Having in mind COVID-19 crisis. What are the current perspectives in the context of global capitalism in the next five years? That is, in the years of post COVID-19 era?*

Mike Davis: First of all, we should be clear that Biden's administration is not going to fundamentally fix anything because Biden's administration is a continuation of the Clinton-Obama neoliberal macroeconomic administration that bring some reforms, do some good things but is an obstacle in many ways to the most necessary immediate structural reforms. The most important of this reform is universal health care. The progressive

movement fights for universal health care, public higher education, cancelation of student debt and new jobs. We are in an odd situation because right now it seems that we are in a second recession like in 1932. However, I do not believe in a new golden age of capitalism either in America or in Western Europe. Now China has a role in the world economy, but I think also that currently China's resources are less than they were in 2008. So, in my opinion, the future is bleak and simple democratic demands like universal health care acquire a more radical importance. At the same time, we need to think and recognize that the socialist demands that question property rights and raise the question of democratizing the economy become urgent in short term. Also I think we need to talk about to break up some of the tech monopolies. It is time to raise the question about public ownerships for 21st century economies and urban life. Now United States has shifted towards neo fascism but if you look at the population under 30 years old, they look more favorable to socialism than capitalism. Of course this is problematic because nobody knows what socialism means to this people. Maybe means just Bernie Sanders' program. Earlier I was critical of the occupy movements because they targeted economic inequality, income inequality where socialist would target the question of private economic power and for me that is the real question. Only Elizabeth Warren, by the way, not Bernie Sanders, raised the question of wealth inequality. We are in an age of more brutal class struggles and much higher levels of repression, but at the same time, there are incredible fertile conditions –for the first time in a century– for the growth of a movement that goes against of what is happening. Far right has taken over the Republican Party but a democratic left movement is also growing on a unprecedented scale also.

Interviewer*: Thank you for your contribution to this special issue. Your view will surely enrich the discussion not just about COVID-19 but also about current trends in global capitalism. You pointed out very important matters and questions such as the emergence of neofascism in United States and how young people are fighting against it by demanding a different democracy than the one we have nowadays.*

Mike Davis: Young people really understand that the only thing that is going to affect the future is a radical fundamental change. Maybe they have not any idea of socialism and its tradition, but they are so radical in understanding that what we need is to assure a better future. An example of that is University of California Riverside's campus: it looks like the actual

California because is highly diverse. Students' families have made many sacrifices to get them to college and they carry the burden of the hopes and sacrifices of their families only to find that there is no available space for them in the current economy. This is a thing that leads students to a deep radicalization. So we are talking about of a much deeper, endurable and radical consciousness that leads to mobilization and to the creation of structures to ensure the continuity of activism and particularly highlight the role of poor kids and working class kids in the fight for a better future in United States.