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**Single-Payer Healthcare  
A BlackCommentator.com Series - Part 38  
Working for Health Justice & Economic Security!  
By Ethel Long-Scott, Executive Director  
Women's Economic Agenda Project  
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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**Our nation is being presented with an amazing opportunity right now.** We have the resources to give good health care to everyone who lives here. We have the opportunity to end the agonizing worry and unnecessary suffering of so many people about their health care. What stands in the way is a time-honored idea that modern technology has made as outmoded and backward as the horse and buggy transportation we used to depend on. It's the idea that nothing should be done unless some company can make a profit on it. We no longer need the idea of making profits off other people's misery.

Health care is in the same place that education was when Alabama's George Wallace and other segregationist governors were standing in the schoolhouse door shouting "NEVER!". People believed the four-term governor when he shouted out "segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever." There were huge public policy arguments over whether school integration would destroy American society. The segregationists spent huge amounts of time and money defending the only way of life they had ever known – even though its time was gone.

Now the time is gone for the idea that ill health can't be treated unless someone makes a profit from it. But like modern George Wallaces, powerful people still defend the ways they know. Attacking segregation turned out to be so much more possible than we feared back in the days of George Wallace. It took decades of struggle and a big social movement that included people from 12 to 80 protesting and standing up to

police dogs to hasten the end of legal segregation. Those protestors had the vision to see it was past the time for the old ways to die. Like them, we need the vision to see that scientific progress has reached the point where profits are no longer necessary for health care progress.

What lessons can we draw from the way earlier generations seized opportunities for positive change, despite formidable opposition? In order to prevail against great forces, a boatload of money, and powerful corporate interests, we cannot simply rely on laws or elected leaders. We have to build a broad people's movement armed with a vision of the new possibilities. In health care, this means talking up the United Nations declaration that decent health is a human right, for everyone, not just for people who can afford expensive medical care. And it means speaking up for single payer universal health care as the only form of health care that will secure true adequate health care for everyone.

It also means seeing health care reform as part of a working class struggle for survival. Why? Because just as segregation was a social policy designed to keep African Americans and other non-whites from advancing, the social policy that benefits corporate profits today is designed to drive workers lower and lower on the economic scale. This has produced tremendous class stratifications in our country that cannot be papered over. There is a growing new class of workers made up of part-time, contingency, undocumented and low-wage workers with limited or no benefits, as well as unemployed, disabled and retired workers whose rights to employment-based healthcare have been destroyed. While women, African Americans and other historically dispossessed groups are hit disproportionately hard by the efforts to drive workers' wages and benefits down, it's important to see that all workers are at risk.

It's easy to see why this is happening, and why the problem can't be solved with more patching up of the existing system. Fewer and fewer workers are needed for production in a society where the tools of production are computers, robots and electronics. The drive to maximize profits means that companies eliminate as many jobs as they can, and try to get the workers they have to have on the cheap. Employer-based health care, therefore, is increasingly expendable. Companies are busy with the restructuring of labor/management relations to conform to the needs of capital in a shrinking global market. They are dismantling the safety net that was part of the old industrial-era social contract. Workers who lose the fight to hold onto ever-shrinking wages and benefits are increasingly left to fend for themselves.

What it will take to change this situation is **a broad social movement**, informed by a forward-looking vision of a new American social contract and a new strategy for working class independence. Only a movement focused on the needs of the most threatened workers will get us the health justice we need. And only such a movement can insure that good public policy aimed at remedying this broken health care system will be secured.

Any new vision of the better life that technology is making possible must be aware of when so-called "health reform" are nothing more than distractions designed to keep the old systems in place just a little longer. One of those phony distractions is called the "Individual Mandate" and we need to speak out against it. Here's what we need to know about the Individual Mandates many states are moving toward:

- They force people to purchase private insurance at rates inflated to pay for corporate profits, high management compensation, the costs of consultants, lobbying, and union-busting.
- They do not create a fair and just health care system for all.
- They will worsen current health care problems and create new ones.
- They will charge more for coverage and give us less!
- They are as dead end a political strategy as the old system of segregation, forcing individuals to buy private insurance while leaving a multi-tiered system of corporate healthcare intact and doing nothing to curb the corporate appetite for profits.

What can you do? Here are some practical ways to help build this movement for health care justice. Some of them may seem small, but they add up:

- Get over the idea that health care should be tied to jobs, or to individual mandates. We all deserve adequate health care as a human right. Spread the word.
- Get over the idea that the plight of the poor is someone else's problem. Gain an understanding of how your life is affected by poverty, then speak out about it. Educate others.
- Break the silence on the contribution of poverty to health care injustice. Speak out about how big health care corporations are stealing away the hard-fought benefits of our health care today, and steal from all of us in so many other ways. We all need to come together to build a powerful movement for economic human rights.
- Tell 5 more people every day about the wonderful opportunity to achieve universal health care. Learn about and promote health care as a human right.
- Speak out across color, cultural and class lines. Together, dedicated to a vision of health care for all, we can build a working relationship across color lines, across cultural lines.
- Spread a vision of what is possible, and what is right. It's up to us to do this, we can't rely on the tired, weak, and inadequate proposals from either of the major parties. They are too tied to the old ways.
- Use the tools on our web site, [weap.org](http://weap.org). Click on the links at the top of the page marked "Human Rights," "Health Justice," "Get Involved," "Resources" and "Events." Share our news and notes and comment sections.
- Become a human rights monitor, use our tools to document human rights abuses, fill out our surveys pass them around send them back to us.

I am reminded that before Dr. Martin Luther King was killed in 1968, he switched his


focus from civil rights to economic rights. That idea scared a lot of the people around him. They saw poverty everywhere and didn't see how you could fight it. Dr. King was killed before he could get his poor people's movement fully organized. But the idea of a poor people's movement wouldn't die because it really was the answer. The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, which [WEAP](#) hosts, carries on in that tradition.


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**BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board** member, *Ethel Long-Scott*, is the Executive Director of the Women's Economic Agenda Project, ([WEAP](#)). She is known nationally and internationally for devoting her life to the education and leadership of people at the losing end of society, especially women of color. She is dedicated to economic security and justice and believes that the US is engaged in a relentless war against workers and the poor. [Click here](#) to contact Ms. Long-Scott.

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