

Washington Post columnist calls for destruction of child care safety in the pursuit of “reopening America”

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As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread rampantly across the country, millions of young people and workers are coming to terms with the unmistakable realization that the crisis has shaken the very foundations of the capitalist system. Over four million people throughout the world have become infected with the illness, while businesses have shuttered and tens of millions have been laid off from their jobs.

Such indices are only the most pronounced expressions of the crisis. As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote previously, “In addition to the death and destruction of human life taking place across the planet, the capitalist system must be particularly indicted for the detrimental impacts upon the youngest and most vulnerable.” This perspective has been entirely borne out in the month since it was written.

In the period since the COVID-19 pandemic swept the planet, the ruling class has sought to turn the crisis to its advantage in order to enact a top-to-bottom restructuring of social relations, make the working class pay for the massive corporate bailouts it has given out to itself, and force workers to return to work even as all practical measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus have been sidelined.

It is within this context that a mounting corporate attack on children, those most unable to defend themselves, is taking place. While many childcare providers—the majority of which are small and independently operated—face bankruptcy, children from low-income families have seen their early education and social development come to a screeching halt.

As part of the escalating drive to force workers to resume production, the question of reopening public schools and childcare facilities becomes essential.

While sections of the political and media establishment falsely claim that COVID-19 does not affect the young, in reality there has been a growing number of deaths of children from the newly named Pediatric Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome, which is linked to COVID-19 infection.

Last month, the *Washington Post*, a nominally “liberal” publication owned by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, the world’s richest man, published a column entitled, “Will a child-care shortage prevent America’s reopening?” written by author Carrie Lukas.

Lukas is the president of the Independent Women’s Forum, a think tank which describes itself as a “conservative alternative to feminist tenets.” She is also a regular contributor to right-wing and pro-business journals such as *National Review*, *Forbes*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, while having served as a former policy analyst for the House Republican Policy Committee and the Department of Homeland Security.

Lukas begins by stating: “Governments across the country are working on plans to reopen society after the novel coronavirus pandemic reaches its peak. While the timing and components of these plans vary, all must confront an important reality: Getting people back to work requires sufficient child care.

“Four in 10 working adults have children under 18. Before the coronavirus struck, approximately one-third all children under five attended a paid care facility, day-care center, preschool or prekindergarten,” she writes.

The columnist briefly dwells on the conditions suffered by low-paid child care workers, noting that many “earn on average less than \$11 per hour.” Rather than offering any solution to this issue, Lukas throws a bone to the *Post*’s billionaire owner Bezos, advising

workers that the “security and compensation offered at a place such as Amazon” may be more to their liking. In reality, Amazon is presently one of the most dangerous workplaces in the world.

Then, Lukas turns to the business at hand, declaring: “As the already limited supply of child-care spaces contracts, demand is about to skyrocket.” She insists that “[s]tates and localities, which regulate providers, should ease requirements to allow existing centers to expand and make it easier for new providers to offer services.”

While the author acknowledges that some “[p]arents initially may be concerned about removing regulations,” she claims that “loosening these regulations does not need to erode quality.” She never explains how this trade-off in protections is to translate into better quality care.

Instead, Lukas cites a 2015 study from the Charles Koch Foundation-linked Mercatus Center which states: “regulations on child–staff ratios, group size restrictions, and education requirements are all associated with higher care prices.”

In fact, a key driver in cost is the profit system itself, which has subordinated human well-being to the bottom line to disastrous effect during the pandemic.

Particularly disturbing is Lukas’ belief that regulations requiring “that all chipped paint and tripping hazards be eliminated and that extreme sanitation thresholds be maintained ... are standards that most normal households with children couldn’t meet.” If “this burdensome level of oversight” was done away with, she maintains, “communities could more easily find solutions for their needs.”

In other words, under conditions where a raging pandemic is claiming ever more lives, “burdensome” laws on children’s sanitary needs, classroom sizes and other forms of physical safety are to be eliminated. One physically *dreads* the outcome of these policies.

Putting aside the exceedingly right-wing character of Lukas’ background, one is compelled to ask what business is it of hers to be offering legal guidelines for childcare? In addition to authoring numerous books, including *Liberty Is No War on Women* and *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Women, Sex, and Feminism*, her qualifications include having held a senior position at the Goldwater Institute, which according to its website is “a leading free-market public

policy research and litigation organization.” The institute was named after the late right-wing Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, a notorious opponent of civil rights legislation in his own time.

In pursuit of its ruthless drive for profit, the capitalist class tolerates no obstacle, including children’s lives. Childcare workers must oppose this unsafe reopening of their workplaces, which puts their lives and those of the children they serve, as well as their families, at greater risk of contracting the virus. It is essential that the working class draws the farthest-reaching conclusions from the crisis caused by the pandemic and take up the building of a socialist opposition to the capitalist system.



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