

Summer 2020

Socialists of Caltech

Discussion Group

Capitalism and Disability by Marta Russell

“Our freedom lies in the fact that we are not at the mercy of some ‘natural law’ but are part of a social order which is by no means fixed, but needs democratizing to offer a counterforce to the dominant market ‘society.’”

- Marta Russell

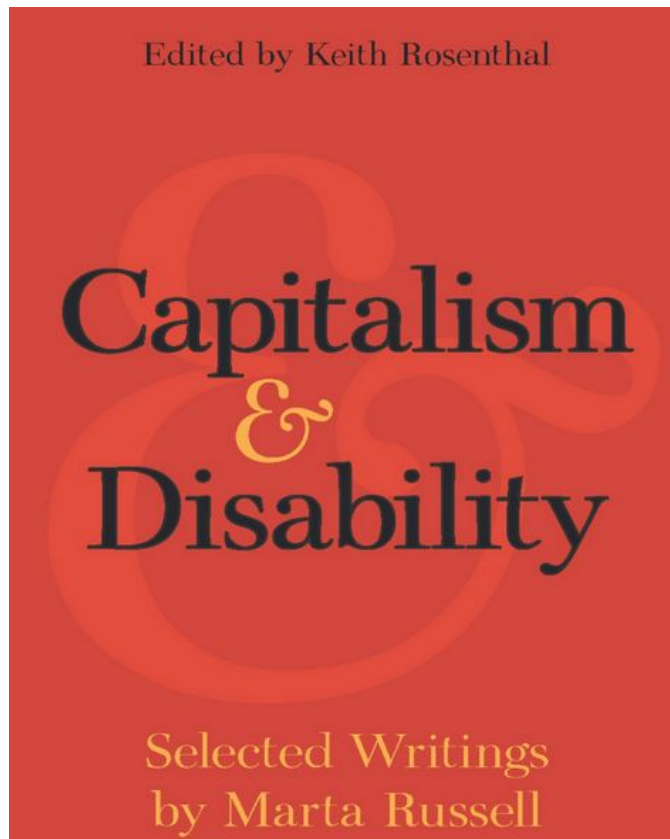
Text: *Capitalism and Disability* by Marta Russell, additional readings linked in table below.

You can find audio recordings [here](#).

Submit discussion questions [here](#)!

Meeting Time: Tuesdays from 6:30-8:00 PM

Meeting Schedule: Weekly



Date	Assigned Reading
May 12, 2020	<p>Unit 0: Healthcare Organizing at Caltech: “Socialists of Caltech Endorse Caltech For Affordable Healthcare’s Petition” by Jane Panangaden, Kriti Sharma, and Ashay Patel</p> <p>Supplemental Reading: None of Us Are Getting Jobs: Notes on Organizing in the COVID University Long Read No Humans Involved A Mental Health Crisis Among Graduate Students: Uncovering the Root Cause</p>
May 19, 2020	<p>Unit 1: The Political Economy of Disability: <i>Capitalism and Disability:</i> Introduction: Capitalism and the Disability Rights Movement Chapter 1: Marxism and Disability Chapter 2: The New Reserve Army of Labor? Chapter 3: Disability and Capitalist Globalization</p> <p>Supplemental Reading: Chapter 4: A Brief History of Wal-Mart and Disability Discrimination</p>
May 26, 2020	<p>Unit 2: Civil Rights and Retreats: <i>Capitalism and Disability:</i> Chapter 5: Backlash and Structural Inequality Chapter 6: What Disability Civil Rights Cannot Do Chapter 7: Supreme Injustice: Disability and the Judiciary</p> <p>Supplemental Reading: Chapter 8: Handicapitalism Makes Its Debut</p>
June 9, 2020	<p>Unit 3: Disability Incarcerated <i>Capitalism and Disability:</i> Chapter 9: Disablement, Prison, and Historical Segregation</p> <p>Unit 4: The Social Security Complex Chapter 11: Targeting Disability</p> <p>Supplemental Reading: Chapter 10: Stuck at the Nursing Home Door Chapter 12: Between Dependence and Independence: Rethinking a Policy Wasteland The Social Functions of the Prisons in the United States</p>
June 16, 2020	<p>Unit 5: Beyond Ramps <i>Capitalism and Disability:</i> Chapter 13: “Crips Against War” Chapter 16: The Affordable, Accessible Housing Crisis</p> <p>Supplemental Reading: Chapter 14: Disability and the War Economy Chapter 15: Un-Natural Disasters: Reflections on Hurricane Katrina Chapter 17: The United States versus the World</p>
June 23, 2020	<p>Unit 6: Body Politics: The Missing Link <i>Capitalism and Disability:</i>” Chapter 18: Dollars and Death: The Question of Physician-Assisted Suicide Chapter 19: Eugenics and the “Sole Possible Economic Order”</p> <p>Supplemental Reading: Birth, Under Control • SftP Magazine</p>

Discussion Questions:

Unit 0: Healthcare Organizing at Caltech

1. What is the form of the argument of the SoC statement? How does the writing style and form of argument allow it to achieve or not achieve its function?
2. How would you characterize the relationship between Caltech today and eugenics? How does this relate to the organizing around healthcare on the Caltech campus?
3. What is the relationship between academic workers and precarity during an economic crisis? How does this relate to healthcare issues specifically?
4. How should socialists argue against the austerity narratives that permeate society precisely during failures of capitalism?
5. How do socialists interact with movements whose horizons are different from their own?

Unit 1: The Political Economy of Disability

1. In what sense is *disability* a particular kind of social relation?
2. According to Russell, what is the relationship between the state and business as they pertain to maintaining disability?
3. How does Russell's description of the political economy of disability relate to academia?
4. Russell argues that the imposition and exploitation of disabled people is intimately tied to the capitalist mode of production. Does disability under capitalism reveal an underlying logic to capitalist oppression of workers in general? What is this logic? Have we seen this logic at play in our own organizing?

Unit 2: Civil Rights and Retreats

1. According to Russell, how does Marxist theory explain the economic inequality of disabled people? How does the same logic explain the economic inequality across racial and gender lines?
2. What kind of legal mechanisms and loopholes thwart enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in courts? Is there an economic thinking that undergirds this legal phenomenon?
3. What is Russell's critique of liberal reformist approaches to achieving equality for disabled people? What obstacles do such liberal approaches run into?

Unit 3: Disability Incarcerated

1. **Broad question:** what is the social function of prisons? What is the relationship between prisons, “criminality,” and disability?
2. Describe broader forms of institutionalization of disabled people besides imprisonment? How do these forms relate to the political economy of disability described earlier?

Unit 4: The Social Security Complex

1. What are the merits of the Social Security Disability program? How is it weaponized against disabled people?

Unit 5: Beyond Ramps

1. How has neoliberalization created the conditions for further oppression of disabled people?
2. What is the connection that Russell draws between U.S. imperialism and oppression of disabled people?

Unit 6: Body Politics: The Missing Link

1. Russell is deeply critical of physician-assisted suicide as part of a larger eugenic program with its legacy in the explicit killing of undesirable people. **Explain this argument.** When explicit eugenics efforts were defeated by proponents of individual rights, this same ideology was used to advocate for physician-assisted suicide. **How does Russell argue that the “individual rights” arguments are insufficient to eliminate eugenics?**
2. Marta Russell describes the move from explicit elimination of undesired individuals towards a model that socially engineers the same kind of outcomes. **How was eugenics socially engineered in Nazi Germany? How is eugenics socially engineered in our society?** Remember the example that denial of care was one prong of the German eugenic effort.
3. **In 1941, Bishop von Galen decried the killing of “innocent” individuals through artificial means in Germany.** How does our society eliminate non-“innocent” individuals and how does this fit into the broader scheme of eugenics?
4. Russell refers to the “sole possible economic order” several times in this unit. **How is capitalism an overdetermined system? Comment on eugenics and capitalist realism.**
5. **How did socialists and progressives further the program of eugenics in the twentieth century?**