Solutions: A Party of the 99% and the Power of Debt

Money is one of the shatteringly simplifying ideas of all time, and like any other new and compelling idea, it creates its own revolution.
(Bohannon 1959: 503)

There is an episode of the cartoon series *South Park—Margaritaville* (2009)¹—addressing the financial crisis of 2007/08. In it, Kyle Broflovski, the only Jewish character in the series, risks death to save the community from economic disaster by transferring everyone’s credit card debt to his own so they could resume buying stuff. The episode is a brilliant juxtaposition of economics and religion and highlights the many religious traditions in which redemption is achieved by freedom from all obligations, the freedom, as it were, from debt (Burridge 1969: 6–7). It is also a commentary on the 1887 book of the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche titled *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Commenting on the fact that the German word for “debt” (*schuld*) is also the word for “guilt” or “sin,” Nietzsche speculates that in Christianity, God becomes the ultimate creditor of human indebtedness, and, of course, its ultimate forgiver by dying for its sins (see Ahn 2010; Graeber 2011: 76ff).

This idea that the debtor–creditor relationship is central to our sense of moral obligation, and that ultimate power can be conceptualized as the debtor–creditor relationship, puts the lie to the classical economic idea that money is neutral and simply a means of exchange, a unit of account and store of value. If you have the power to create money through the medium of interest-bearing debt, once you lend it into existence, you

are replicating what, for Nietzsche, is the primal relationship of power and the source of morals and civilization itself.

As we have tried to show, the consequences of that experiment include continuing environmental devastation, growing social and economic inequality, and the continuing centralization of political power. Dozens of books and studies have carefully documented these developments (e.g., Reich 2012; Harvey 2014; Klein 2014; Piketty 2014; Robbins 2014; Di Muzio 2015), and most have concluded with recommendations for reform: for Piketty it is a tax on wealth to begin some form of redistribution and for Naomi Klein it is a grassroots movement; while Ellen Hodgson Brown (2014) advocates the growth of public banks, Bernard Laeiter suggests the development of alternative currencies, to name only a very few recommendations for reform. The dream, writes David Harvey (2010: 247), “would be a grand alliance of all the deprived and the dispossessed everywhere. The aim would be to control the organization, production and distribution of the surplus product for the long-term benefit of all.”

While all are, to some extent, correct in their evaluations of the problems, and while all the recommendations would serve, if implemented, to reverse some of the negative externalities that result from a debt-based economy and the perpetual growth it requires, none offers a way to counter the power that capital represents. In this final chapter we want to offer, first, twelve solutions, most reflecting those proposed by others, that would become a political platform of a Party of the 99% (see Di Muzio 2015). We will then suggest the steps necessary to implement these proposals and a political strategy based on the idea that debt is a technology of power that can be utilized by debtors, as well as creditors.

The platform of the Party of the 99%

First, a Party of the 99% should be organized around the reform of its country’s monetary system. We have tried to show that the present state of affairs began with a single act: the act of bestowing on private

individuals the right and the power to issue interest-bearing money. Consequently, addressing the results of that act requires taking that right away. The current system of creating money through debt only benefits the owners of the banks. The rest of us, with insufficient incomes for what the economy can produce, get mounting debt that pushes up prices (inflation) and an economy that is effectively controlled by whether bankers feel confident to lend at profit (Rowbotham 1998: 292). The over \$27 trillion in total interest on debt paid out in the United States from 2006 to 2013 represents the price US debtors pay for receiving money as interest-bearing debt, and was greater than the total GDP of all but two other countries in the world—China and Japan.

The goals of public banks include: (1) investments that create jobs in the local community, (2) investments that encourage the production of the most durable goods, (3) investments in research and development to enhance the quality of life, (4) investments in renewable energy, (5) investments in sustainable public infrastructure, and (6) investments in local sustainable agriculture.

Public banks are already common throughout the world. Ellen Hodgson Brown (2013), in her book *The Public Bank Solution: From Austerity to Prosperity*, points out that publically owned banks account for 40 percent of all banks globally, particularly in the BRIC countries: 45 percent of all banks in Brazil, 60 percent in Russia, 75 percent in India, and 69 percent or more in China. As these countries rise in economic power, have better public debt to GDP ratios, and funnel wealth back to public projects, it may be necessary for wealthy countries to encourage the development of public banking or nationalize existing banks in order to keep up. These countries have even formed a BRICS Development Bank to challenge the IMF and the World Bank (Chen 2014).

Second, we must eliminate Third World debt. Developing countries receive about \$136 billion in aid from donor countries, including debt cancellations. But they pay out to rich countries in debt service about \$600 billion, much of it in the compound interest of loans granted to deposed rulers (Hickel 2014). Estimates are that from 2002 to

2007 the net flow of money from poor to rich countries was minus \$2.8 trillion (Abugre 2010).

As we pointed out previously, most of that debt reflects absurd conditions, rank incompetence, or a cynical abuse of power by lending agencies. Since debt repayment must be taken from national budgets for education, health care and poverty alleviation it is also of questionable morality. And, as the recent Ebola epidemic illustrated, the costs in devastated health systems are no longer confined to these countries. To add to this debt burden, developing countries lose about \$1 trillion a year in capital flight, largely tax avoidance by multinational corporations.

Third, education, health care, and childcare should be universal and free. This will be easier to accomplish in some countries than in others, since many of the most civilized countries already provide nonprofit health care and education up to and including postsecondary education. This provision will mostly aid developing countries whose health and education budgets have been slashed through IMF structural adjustment programs. These services should be accessible to all and paid, debt-free, from the new public banking system and with funds saved through the canceling of odious debt. This will also contribute to bringing living standards of developing countries into line with that of the wealthy countries.

Fourth, a Party of the 99% should ban all private money from politics and those running for public office must be given a reasonable set of public funds to run their campaigns. A new political party should be eligible for reasonable start-up money as long as it meets certain criteria, such as a certain number of supporters. This will help eliminate fringe or less serious parties. Campaigns should be short in duration so money can be used for other priorities.

Fifth, a Party of the 99% should aim to abolish the wasteful and innovation-killing patent system. Patents were the original way in which a monarch granted a monopoly to private interests—typically for an invention. Some believe that patents are the only way to encourage innovation: they reason that “inventors” invent only if they can profit from their discovery. But this is ridiculous. Neoliberal

economists like to argue that contributions from entrepreneurs such as Steve Jobs or Bill Gates or literary accomplishments, such as J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, would not have been possible without existing patent protection (Mankiw 2013). But the idea that Rowling would have written the Harry Potter books only if she knew that they would make her a billionaire and that Bill Gates expected to earn \$80 billion from his efforts is absurd. The irony of such claims, of course, is that it is only by government regulation that such protections are forthcoming. And as Dean Baker (2013) points out, government could have easily cut the length of such monopolies in half, or return to the 14-year limit of the past instead of the present ninety-five-year limit in the United States.

And government-granted drug monopolies add hundreds of millions of dollars to health care costs, particularly in the United States and, worse, yet, push such drugs out of the reach of the poor who, given the forced reduction of public health budgets in the developing world, most need them (e.g., Baker 2005).

Hence the best solution is to abolish patents entirely through strong constitutional measures and to find other legislative instruments, less open to lobbying and rentseeking, to foster innovation whenever there is clear evidence that laissez-faire undersupplies it (Boldrin and Levine 2012).

Sixth, a Party of, by, and for the 99% should make insurance public and not for profit. Insurance works on the principle of the law of large numbers: the larger the number of people involved in the insurance scheme, the less likely it is that everyone will experience the same calamity. People who do suffer an injury or accidental death are paid out of the contributions provided by those who do not experience an accident or injury. There is no reason whatsoever why insurance provision should be owned by private individuals making money out of the misfortune of others. The absurdity of the present insurance system is evidenced by the practice of employers taking out life insurance policies on their employees, with the employer-companies as beneficiaries (Gelles 2014). Because company-owned life insurance confers generous tax benefits on employers, hundreds

of corporations have taken out such policies on thousands of employees, while banks, such as JP Morgan and Chase, count billions of dollars on their books as evidence of their ability to withstand economic shocks.

Once again, the publicly run banking system can provide for this debt-free, with no premiums required. In other words, everyone is covered by virtue of being a member of the political community.

Seventh, a Party of the 99% should fund retirement at a democratically agreed-upon age. Presently, because of the economic insecurity wrought by the 2008 financial crisis and the defunding of pension plans by governments and municipalities bankrupted by debt, retirement is out of reach for many. Consequently, the elderly are forced to continue working longer (see Table 5.1).

While many may be working longer by choice, most continue working because savings, pensions, and social security are not enough. Moreover, the number of elderly working population is expected to increase further in the United States as baby boomers retire. A recent survey found that 62 percent of people aged 45–60 plan to delay retirement, up from 42 percent in 2010 (Brandon 2013).

In addition, by delaying retirement, jobs become less available for young people wishing to enter the workforce. Arguably one of the biggest problems in the developing world is the high unemployment

Table 5.1 Percentage employed of US men and women working full time by age group, 1995 and 2005

Age	Men			Women		
	1995	2005	% Change	1995	2005	% Change
55–61	91.8	91.8	0	74.6	78.7	6
62–64	77.9	81.2	4	58.9	65.8	12
65	65.4	73.7	13	45.9	56.8	24
66–69	52.3	65.7	26	34.8	49.5	42
70+	44.2	51.7	17	29.6	39.2	32

See Gendell (2006).

rate among the young. Over 70 million young people are out of work—12.6 percent—an increase of 3.5 million between 2007 and 2013 (ILO 2013).

Eighth, a Party of the 99% should provide each adult individual with a guaranteed income through the public bank. The income should be set at a level that secures a basic standard of living. A guaranteed standard of living produces important social goals by taking the power of the sack away from employers. First, it establishes a rule of greater freedom than is currently enjoyed by the majority of workers. The idea is premised on the fact that we are creative, productive beings and work is a large part of our subjectivity or identity. Most people want to work but they want to work in employments that are meaningful to them. With a secure income, we can be sure that those who work for added income will be doing so because they want to contribute to society in some way. Second, a guaranteed income solves the problem of unemployment and does not create any new debt. Third, with a guaranteed income, people will likely choose to work less, increasing their leisure time and potentially leading to a drop in the consumption of goods and services. This is a worthwhile goal not only because leisure time is valued by all but also because people will probably consume less. Without doubt, some will be up in arms about this proposal in such a materialistic economy, where social status is connected to possessions and shaped by advertising and marketing. But, from a sane point of view, we know from studies that after a certain threshold of wealth, individuals are no happier having more and more stuff. It seems that acquiring more and more possessions is not about happiness but about power and the demonstration of it. If we displace the logic of differential accumulation and stop creating debt money, no one will make enough money to acquire an inordinate amount of goods in the first place.

Ninth, a Party of the 99% should seek every way possible to transition away from fossil fuels and stem the growing threat of climate change. There are no quick fixes here, but time is of the essence if we want the transition to be relatively painless and

peaceful. Three important studies have convincingly demonstrated that there is no way to socially reproduce current patterns of high energy consumption in rich countries with alternative energy (Trainer 2007; Heinberg 2009; Zehner 2012). Of course, a Party of the 99% should invest in renewable energy and implement renewable energy schemes wherever possible, but the Party should also have a program to reduce material consumption and promote low-energy leisure activities. As suggested, a guaranteed income should help in this pursuit.

Tenth, all parties of the 99% should work together to demilitarize the world. The military industry is also capitalized by dominant owners and they profit from conflict or the threat of conflict. Most of the bill is paid for by taxpayers and future generations, not to mention with the lives of soldiers and innocents. This is wasteful expenditure and we should not have our scientists working on solutions for how to kill people more effectively. In a social order where everyone is guaranteed a decent standard of living and there is no chance of gaining excessive power over others, there will be no need for a military. Some may recoil at this suggestion and believe it unrealistic, but the idea has deep roots in the liberal tradition. Concerned with the potential for a military dictatorship, people always feared standing armies. It was only with the rise of the capitalist mode of power that professional militaries became a cornerstone of Western states. As the capitalist mode of power withers, so too will the need for wasteful expenditure on an apparatus of violence, surveillance, and death.

Eleventh, a Party of the 99% should ensure that the only income stream available other than the guaranteed income from the public bank comes from a person's direct labor. What this means is that no one will be able to capitalize the labor power of another or take undeserved rewards. Individuals will be free to form producing associations, and, if they require investment, they can issue a proposal to the public bank. Provided that it meets the objectives of the public bank, the money can be created for the project. All projects funded by the bank

should be transparent: this means that the entire entrepreneurial plan is made public. All businesses must be run on a not-for-profit basis and the 99% should design a salary schedule for each employment, with strict caps at the top. Should some jobs that are necessary for the reproduction of society fall into abeyance because no one wants to do them, the government can offer special inducements where these jobs are necessary to support a decent quality of life for all. It could very well be that those working in sanitation and health end up making the most money—but, of course, always within democratically decided reason.

Finally, promote other alternative financial systems, most notably those based on alternative or local currencies, that are designed to avoid interest, keep money circulating, and keep it in local communities (see, e.g., Kennedy 1995; Hallsmith and Lietaer 2011). One of the most successful of the thousands of local currencies existent today is Ithaca Hours, the alternative currency created by Paul Glover (1995) in Ithaca, New York, in the 1980s (see Papavasiliou 2008, 2010). Such local currencies are monetary alternatives to microcredit, which uses the mechanism of debt to affect social and economic change. Instead of microcredit, we need to promote the development of alternative currency systems that promote trade and exchange, rather than locking local economies into currency systems that promote debt and inhibit exchange. By promoting local trade, Papavasiliou (2010: 210–211) suggests, we create direct relationships between producers and consumers that protect local economies from “free trade” commodities and services that don’t reflect the social and environmental costs of production and don’t pit the benefit of cheaper prices against the long-term costs of deteriorating local economic and social conditions.

These twelve points are not a magical panacea for a perfect world free of all social ills and of the vast ecological problems we face. Nor, of course, are they the only steps necessary. For example, we also need to adopt a means of measuring societal well-being that replaces the GDP,

such as the Genuine Progress Indicator (Costanza et al. 2009). We also need to address problems specific to some countries, such as student debt in the United States. But the suggested twelve points are close to a minimum of things that need to be done to repair the environment, reduce inequality, and inject greater accountability into global political systems.

Of course the immediate response to such proposals would be that these goals, while perhaps worthwhile, are completely unrealistic. As we noted earlier when Thomas Piketty proposed the simple expedient of a global wealth tax to stem the growing inequality of income and wealth, something as easy to implement theoretically as any land or income tax, he noted that even this, seemingly small measure, was unrealistic and “utopian.” What hope then for the twelve points above?

We want to suggest that the above measures are at least worth debating and that a Party of the 99% has the means to promote change provided, first, that we correct the ideological imbalance that exists in the creditor–debtor relationship and that we implement a strategy based on the existence of debt as a technology of power.

The debtor as cultural hero

For debt to be maintained as a technology of power exercised by the 1% requires a financial, legal, and ideological structure that vastly privileges the creditor over the debtor. As Graeber points out, the creditor–debtor relationship is the central hierarchical relationship of our society. Debtors are contrasted with “savers,” the thrifty ones that carefully plan for the future and never “spend beyond their means.” We still hear that the financial crisis of 2008 was caused by people who bought 4,000-square-foot homes with loans that they couldn’t afford or governments spending lavishly. As mentioned earlier, the dominant metaphor operative here is one of household finance; a family is spending more than it takes in. But that metaphor wholly misrepresents and obscures the nature or creation of debt in our economy.

First, it is almost impossible to function without personal debt in a global economy where money has been made purposefully scarce by the private power of the owners and managers of banks. A person's first loan is likely to be for education, as students need to borrow for higher education. While there is some debate regarding the degree of dependence of students on loans, presently student debt in the United States has surpassed one trillion dollars. Even if someone chooses not to attend college and get a job, she or he will likely have to borrow to purchase a car. Commercial lenders are so desperate to find profitable investments that there is a booming business in the United States in lending to the working poor—those with impaired credit—who need cars to get to work. Bundled into securities to be sold to investors, they grew at a rate of over 300 percent between 2010 and 2014 (Corkery and Silver-Greenberg 2015). These subprime auto loans pay up to 23 percent interest and are driving workers into bankruptcy (Silver-Greenberg and Corkery 2014).

Second, without debt, there would be no money. Money, in reality, represents the promise of borrowers to labor to repay it and the interest. Furthermore, as we noted, debts are created as assets by banks and financial institutions in the same way as factories produce automobiles. It is the creditor, after all, who creates the money and benefits from its reproduction.

Third, debt is a part of every economic transaction, and a portion of every tax payment goes to service the interest on the public debt, as a portion of the price of virtually everything someone buys contains interest on someone's loan. That means that almost everyone is a net debtor paying more in interest or dividends than they receive.

Finally, it is one thing for a friend to lend you some of her hard-earned cash. It is quite another to “borrow” money created out of thin air and feel some sort of moral obligation to repay it.

None of this is to imply that people shouldn't repay their debts. The problem is viewing them as moral obligations in a hierarchical relationship as opposed to a partnership. David Graeber (2013) summarized the mechanism for debt-shaming well: “The last thing the 1% wants, as the world economy continues to teeter from crisis, is to

give up on one of their most powerful moral weapons: the idea that decent people always pay their debts.”

To a great extent, the debt–creditor relationship is a perversion of the traditional partnership (as it is viewed in Islamic finance). One person is giving money to another and saying “make me more.” But we do not treat it as a partnership; it is treated as a hierarchical relationship that makes the creditor far more powerful than the debtor.

Debt can exist only if the creditor has confidence that the income of the debtor will grow sufficiently to pay off the debt with interest as our whole economy must rest on the assumption that the economy will grow exponentially. Without that assumption, our present economy and our financial system makes no sense.

It is important, of course, that the 99% be kept unaware that they have considerable power. One way to think about this, we suggest, is to understand that the real power lies not with investors but with the collective on whom the capitalists depend to generate the return on capital. More specifically, the real power lies with the debtor, not the creditor. Without the debtor to generate the return on capital, there can be no creditor, and as we have shown, in our present system of money creation there must be few creditors and many debtors.

Why is it that people have a moral obligation to repay their debts, while banks do not have a moral obligation to extend credit, even when the money they lend is created by them and when the withholding of credit leads to individual suffering, as well as financial, social, and political chaos? How can people be said to have a moral obligation to repay their debts when corporations, multilateral institutions, and national or local governments can unilaterally cancel or reorder debt obligations or unilaterally cancel negotiated pension rights, or seize the savings of depositors to repay foreign creditors, as they have done? How can debtors have a moral obligation to repay debts, when at least thirty Republican members of the US House of Representatives and thirty-three US Republican Senators, attempting to force budget cuts, voted against the government repaying its debt obligations?²

Lending and investing require risk to justify a demand for a return on capital. If risk is nullified through the idea that debt entails a moral as well as a financial obligation, then there is no justification for interest and/or dividends. Yet government policies, particularly over the past two decades, have virtually eliminated all risk by having taxpayers “bail out” investors and financial institutions. Thus, creditors are protected from loss, leaving debtors to assume the burden. There is no morality in this.

People must accept debt to function in the current economic world because money has been made scarce. In effect, we have far more of an obligation to assume debt than we have an obligation to repay it, for without the assumption of debt, there would be no money, and therefore no economy.

Debt as a technology of power revisited

Besieging politicians with demands and demonstrations, even in countries that are nominally democratic, clearly is not as effective in determining legislation as the capital drowning them in dollars or their currency of choice. And anarchists do have a point when they refuse to make such demands because, they say, it legitimizes the state's power (Graeber 2009). In fact, politicians have little power; as we maintain, it is capital that has the power that they wield through the technology of debt. The job of the capitalist state is to make the world safe for capital, using the mantra that what is good for capital is good for the people. When Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan claimed that they wanted to take government off the backs of the people, they meant off the back of capital. By weakening the regulations that had been instituted to ward off the stark utopia that Karl Polanyi warned of, dominant owners had a field day as the wealth of the 1% soared, while the well-being of everyone else declined. Modern corporations are at least honest when they admit that their responsibility is not to customers, employees, or the community in which they function; their responsibility is to shareholders.

But how do you appeal to capital? The genius of capitalist power is its invisibility and anonymity. The insidiousness of this power is that it has been normalized and naturalized, and therefore it largely goes unquestioned despite the serious consequences it has on people's everyday lives. If, as Jeffrey A. Winters (1996: x) suggested, unelected and democratically unaccountable creditors and investors were all to wear yellow suits and meet weekly in huge halls to decide where, when, and how much of their capital (money) to invest, there would be little mystery in their power. But, of course, they don't. Collectively they make private decisions on where, when, and how to distribute their investments. Furthermore, investors and creditors are free to do whatever they wish with their capital while states are virtually helpless to insist that private capital be used for anything other than what creditors and investors want to do with it.

The anonymity of creditors and investors and the structural power they hold present problems for political leaders: while the actions of creditors and investors can greatly influence our lives, it is political leaders that we often hold responsible for the rise and fall of a country's financial fortunes. So how might we think strategically about overcoming debt as a technology of power?

There is one way. Representatives of the 99% should communicate with capital when they service or pay off a debt. Household and individual bill-payers, along with business, corporate, and government accountants, constitute the channel of communication to capital. Each time a debt is serviced or paid, a portion, as we have seen, buttresses the power of capital and serves as a vote for the status quo. Each interest-bearing debt payment represents acquiescence to a system of money creation and distribution that sanctions the funneling of money and power to those that have the power to create money out of thin air. In a perfect world, those assigned that right would be working in the public interest and would be accountable to public needs. Massive demonstrations and violent actions may sometimes move capital, but generally

the reactions are stopgap measures to defuse the protest. Besides, delegitimizing collective action and promoting a value system that emphasizes “individuality” and “freedom” defuses the potential for protest. Capital fares best when people shop and bowl alone.

The debt action and the implementation of debt as a technology of power

To understand how debt as power can be utilized to promote necessary change, we need to first recognize that the wealth of the 1% lies largely in the pockets of the 99% where it is supposed to work to produce interest and dividends. The power that the 99% retains *that has the potential to promote changes that, in the long run, benefit everyone is the right to withhold one's debt payments*. People are told, of course, that repayment of debt is a moral obligation; but debt, as outlined above, is not freely entered into. *As our economy is presently constituted, without debt, there would be no money*. Furthermore, if governments and municipalities can, without penalty, default on pension obligations or renounce obligations to protect children, the poor, and the elderly, surely we retain the right in the name of a just society to withhold our debt payments. By doing so, we deprive creditors, a small minority of our society, a source of their power and impel them to consider the harm that present arrangements inflict on all. *A debt strike must not constitute a refusal to pay debts*; rather it must be considered an act of civil disobedience to *withhold debt payments*, particularly on securitized debt (e.g., mortgages, automobiles, credit cards, and student loans), until action is taken to reform the presently unethical and unsustainable financial system. This would not be a strike against finance, per se; some means of managing the flow of capital is necessary. However, a financial system founded on debt and interest and the resulting need for perpetual growth is highly unethical and clearly unsustainable.

The idea of a debt action is hardly new; but generally the goals have been modest. There have been instances of national movements, such as El Barzón, an organization of debtors in Mexico, to resist foreclosures and repossessions due to debt default (Caffentzis 2013). There is also a movement in France to eliminate the public debt claiming that most sovereign debt is illegitimate (Keucheyan 2014). The organization, *Strike Debt!*, has set forth arguments for debt refusal (Ross 2014) focused on predatory behavior by the finance industry, and the organization *Rolling Jubilee* was formed to raise funds for, as they put it, “A bailout of the people by the people.”³ We propose that a debt action have as a broader purpose the recognition that debt as a technology of power and the financial structure that it creates is at the root of most of our environmental, social, and political problems, and that unless it is addressed, there is little hope of solving them.

If a debt action, that is, the symbolic withholding of a month’s payments by those concerned about climate change, corporate power, the decline of democracy, inequality, racial injustice, and colonial exploitation, is not doable, when it is legal and nonviolent and involves only a small financial penalty, then it is difficult to imagine any other way that the 99% could convey their concerns and instigate a movement for reform. Given the fact that it costs millions of dollars to successfully run for public office, asking politicians to take the message to finance is like asking someone to threaten the interests of their fabulously rich uncle who pays their allowance. Even people of faith must remember that the sole violent action of Jesus of Nazareth was his overturning of the money changer’s tables in the Temple (Matthew 21:12), while the Koran has an outright ban on lending at interest—albeit circumvented in various ways.

Some might object to a debt action claiming that our economy and monetary system are built on trust. But we maintain that whatever trust existed has been severely violated by those in power, a violation evidenced by how they have used the power of debt to

amass great wealth at the expense of everyone else. The purpose of the debt action is to hold capital accountable and to restore balance to our economic relationships.

The Party of the 99% with chapters around the globe can first announce its presence by declaring a debt holiday, a month set aside, say October 2016, during which securitized debts (home mortgages, student loans, car loans, and credit card loans) should go unpaid. This would involve a penalty, and additional profits for creditors, but it would be a small price to pay to publicize the presence and platform of the 99%.

The next step would be a debt action or strike. The mechanics of a debt strike are relatively easy to institute. As with the debt holiday, a date in the future should be set, at which point, unless there is significant movement to promote public banking and eliminate Third World debt, the first two items of our platform, citizens will withhold their debt payments until such actions are taken. Further debt actions can be instituted as needed. The effort must be global in scope. The requirement for perpetual growth is not one faced only by the wealthy countries of the world; it is faced by every country that has adopted a Western-style, debt-based financial system.

There will, naturally, be some concern on the part of debtors that their withholding of payments will result in some negative consequence (e.g., foreclosure or repossession of assets, fines, lowered credit rating). However, it will require only a small minority (e.g., some 20 percent) to begin the strike to make it impossible for creditors (or the government or financial institutions) to effectively impose penalties. Remember, creditors need debtors; they are the source of their power and discrediting a significant portion of them is not in their interest. Money, as Barbara Garson (2001) noted, has to keep working, and it is debtors who do most of the work. Thus, a debt strike will not be, as mentioned above, a refusal to pay debts, but rather an act of civil disobedience to effect change that will not only benefit all but save our economy from recurrent crises and collapse.

A debtor's strike is not without its dangers. If the strike succeeds and there is a refusal to implement reform, the economy will collapse in a credit crisis. A debt strike, in that regard, is no different than a labor strike; as in a labor strike, all parties have a vested interest in changing a situation that threatens the firm with collapse. However, without some form of financial reform, we remain a world in which ephemeral financial gain for the few can occur only by abandoning visions of free societies thriving in hospitable environments.