

Fight to Win

Rory Elliot

2021

A review of

Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next) by Dean Spade. Verso 2020

With *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*, the trans activist and law professor Dean Spade challenges the reader, and the radical left as a whole, to realize the power of Mutual Aid in collective struggles toward liberation. Spade helps to define the long and often untold history of Mutual Aid as an act of “building subversive networks of care which are of utmost importance to engage, radicalize, and directly provide for our communities.” Citing revolutionary history and contemporary struggle from the Black Panther Party, the efforts of Mutual Aid Disaster Relief, to Hong Kong’s anti-government protest movement, Spade has dropped in our collective laps an easy-to-read road map toward seeding, cultivating, and strengthening our movements, exactly when we needed it most.

Deeply influenced by the abolitionist vision and the accessibility of the text in *Are Prisons Obsolete?* by Angela Y. Davis, Spade’s *Mutual Aid*, (part of Verso’s pamphlet series) is under 200 pages, impeccably researched and critical to sustain and bloom our radical imagination now, and in the fights ahead.

Spade lays out that disaster and crisis planned or unexpected, have long been opportunities for draconian policy maneuvering, violent repression, military occupation, flourishes of new surveillance technologies, and most insidiously, *reforms*. With historical displays of unyielding solidarity and people power, Spade shows how and when these very same disasters become opportunities for activists to engage in radical change through hybridization of on-the-ground action and massive networks of community care.

2020 has revealed to many, and assured to a very vocal few, that the maintenance of the status quo is the crisis; the state and its mechanisms and policies, its roots, its reforms, and steadfast opportunistic desire. COVID-19, climate change, immigration, police murder, white vigilantism, prison death tolls and the rise of direct, unveiled fascism around the world are not inseparable phenomenon. Many have realized that in the face of so much chaos, the only thing we have is each other; Mutual Aid is our lifeline.

Though deeply anchored in revolutionary thought and analysis, this is not a political theory textbook, nor an exploration of what *has* happened. It is a look forward to what is possible and necessary.

Mutual Aid, done radically, allows people to determine and actualize the paths towards their own liberation through collective growth, participation in leadership, and action. It can also act and be used as an on ramp to political struggle; a practiced resistance to white-supremacist non-profit models of “expertise.”

Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next) provides a critical framework to challenge our movements, as well as providing a roadmap to challenge our organizations, to challenge ourselves as activists, and to challenge each other to be ready for the fight ahead. It gives us the context of governmental neglect and anti-government resistance, the patterns of concessions, co-optations and examples of radical movements that succeed in creating the better worlds we know are possible.

As the summer wanes into fall, and because everything is at stake, and we’re fighting to win, we need Mutual Aid.

Rory Elliott is a Portland, OR based student, a member of the abolitionist organization Critical Resistance, an editorial collective member of *The Abolitionist Newspaper*, and an organizer with the anti-policing campaign Care Not Cops PDX. She currently co-runs the ACT UP Oral History Project's fundraising campaign. She is a contributor to *Between Certain Death and a Possible Future: Queer Writing on Growing up with the AIDS Crisis*.



Rory Elliot
Fight to Win
2021

<https://www.fiftheastate.org/archive/408-winter-2021/fight-to-win>
Fifth Estate #408, Winter, 2021

fiftheastate.anarchistlibraries.net