Social Hope Under Trump
Ronald Aronson, History, Distinguished Professor Emeritus

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The election of Donald Trump has exposed American society’s profound crisis of hope. It occurred against the background of a generation of shrinking employment, rising inequality, attacks on public education, and shredding of the social safety net. The tumultuous first months of the Trump presidency have set the stage for a stunning insurgency of resistance. Against this background, and drawing on generations of political struggle as well as philosophy, in “We: Reviving Social Hope (Chicago, April 2017),” Ronald Aronson argues for a unique conception of social hope. Hope, he argues, is not a form of dependency—neither a religious faith nor the belief in an authoritarian strongman who proclaims "I alone can fix it." Hope is not a mood or feeling, and it is not passive. It is the very basis of social will and political action. It entails acting collectively to make the world more equal, more democratic, more peaceful, and more just. Even at a time when false hopes are rife, Aronson argues, social hope persists in the anti-Trump activism. Its philosophical basis can be found underlying all our experience—even if we completely ignore it: the fact of our social belonging, which can be reactivated into a powerful collective force, an active we.

Professor Ronald Aronson taught at Wayne State University between 1968 and 2013, first at Monteith College and then in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, a program for working adults abolished by the WSU Board of Governors in 2007. He is now Distinguished Professor Emeritus of the History of Ideas. Winner of several scholarly and teaching awards at Wayne State, Aronson is the past president of its Academy of Scholars as well as of the Sartre Society of North America.

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