

Ubuntu And Natural Resources Management ~ Some Reflexions



[“The tragedy of the commons”](#) was the first topic in the subject- environmental science at my university. Although I agree with Hardin (1968) that the “Tragedy of the Commons” is foreseeable with uncontrolled population growth and

pollution which is threatening life as we know it. I am unconvinced about his counsel on privatisation of land as a means to better manage the environment. Which implies that communal land would be more difficult to manage and privatisation of land is the answer for improved environmental management.

In Africa, historically, land belonged to the community that lived on it. Land was communal and communalism promoted sharing of resources and managing them together. Humans and animals were not separate from the environment and communalism encouraged a [collective sense of responsibility to conservation](#). It runs far deeper, into African way of thinking and philosophy, into cultural beliefs, ethics, values and indigenous knowledge.



A co-managed forest in Liwonde, southern Malawi (above) compared to one that is managed by the State (below) a few kilometres away.

When we talk about communalism, the African philosophy of “Ubuntu”, which is an Nguni Bantu term meaning “I am because you are” is of relevance. Ubuntu is often translated as “humanness,” and “humanity towards others,” but is often

used in a more philosophical sense to mean “the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity”. *“Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”*

In Zulu language, is literally translated as “a person is a person because of people”. Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu were very influential among other people in promoting Ubuntu philosophy. Desmond Tutu has explained Ubuntu as meaning [“My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours”](#). That implies that because we are all part of a greater whole, hence we are all interconnected. Human existence depends on interconnectedness and not on isolation. This interconnectedness can be extended from between humans to include the land and the environment in which humans live.

Rural communities in Africa depend on natural resources in their livelihood, therefore, how land is managed is of particular concern as it has human well-being implications. Communities such as the San people, who lived as close as possible to nature exhibit the spirit of communalism and Ubuntu. In fact, their tribes do not have Chiefs and their spirit of community is so strong that they make decisions for the tribe based on consensus. They live in such harmony within themselves and in nature and are a living testimony that it is indeed possible for people to come together to solve problems collectively for the greater good of their community and the environment. It is possible to practise Ubuntu and live harmoniously and thrive.

Principles of Ubuntu are contained within co-management systems such as those found in forest management in Malawi. Communal land is managed by traditional authority and Chiefs act on behalf of their subjects to manage land equitably. In 1996, a project by World Bank for sustainable use of forest products such as wood, poles and non-timber products such as medicinal plants was started. Communities came together and set up a constitution and by-laws charting out sharing of forest revenues between themselves and the Government. [They also drew up rules for access to resources and the rights and obligations of members.](#) Here, local governance structures were important, as power was divulged from state to local bodies. Such a participatory approach was found to have worked well in most cases and Government would be the enabler providing guidance and training, while it is the communities that make the laws and plans which include marking of boundaries, managing fires, sustainable harvesting of products, penalizing those who do not follow the by-laws and controlling illegal trafficking of forest products. [In some co-management programmes, incomes of poor](#)

[communities have substantially been improved \(from 35-98% more\)](#). The evidence that co-management works is visible to those who care to simply take a stroll to these areas. I have observed co-managed hills thick with foliage and compared it with barren forest reserves where the state has entire control.

The San community of southern Africa have survived thousands of years as hunter-gatherers and later on acquiring domesticated animal stocks. Values of Ubuntu can also be seen in their rich cultural traditions, where there is no formal authority figure or chief, but they govern themselves by group consensus. Until everyone agrees and airs their thoughts, lengthy discussions are held which culminates in agreement by all. This society shares food and resources, definitely owns and manages land communally. Having survived harsh weather conditions and environmental shocks over decades, the San respect the earth and do not waste any food, living in harmony with nature. We have much to learn from such egalitarian societies, where people are governed by kindness, generosity and sharing.

[The debate whether individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force, or, is good for the society as it promotes self-determinacy, self-reliance and independence has been ongoing](#). Ubuntu thinking upholds communalism, which is in dissimilarity to individualism. What we have seen is that with natural resources management, community based, participatory approaches do work and they have similarities with Ubuntu philosophy entrenched in African way of thinking, which promotes equality.

My experience in Southern Africa for the last fifteen years encourages me to desire the use of Ubuntu philosophy for managing the environment in Africa. I have seen fairly good success in co-management in some areas in Malawi. I can't help but wonder: Could Ubuntu be the way to avoid the tragedy of commons? Couldn't problems be solved through collective responsibility and management? I ask this because Ubuntu carries with it universal values such as kindness, sharing, compassion. Perhaps it is time to go back to the roots. Africa is rich in natural resources and values. Let us explore ways and means of using such values to manage the land around us.

See: <http://abundanceworldwide.weebly.com/>

Marine Le Pen, Donald Trump And The Emergence Of New Right-Wing Movements



Brexit, the rise of Donald Trump and the emergence of a new right-wing radicalism in both Europe and the United States signify fundamental developments in the political and ideological landscape of Western societies, while at the same time, there is a resurgence of extreme

nationalism and authoritarian politics virtually all around the world. For an understanding and explanation of some of these disturbing developments and the alternatives available, we spoke to political economist C.J. Polychroniou, editor of a forthcoming book consisting of interviews with Noam Chomsky, titled *Optimism Over Despair: On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (Haymarket Books, 2017).

Marcus Rolle and Alexandra Boutri: Today's political landscape in many advanced capitalist societies is marked by the rise of a new right-wing populism centered around anti-immigrant sentiment, xenophobia and extreme nationalism fueled mainly by the antiglobalization rhetoric of authoritarian political leaders. We'd like to start by asking you to put in context the contradictions of global capitalism and the emergence of what has come to be known as the "alt-right."

C.J. Polychroniou: For quite some time now, there have been clear and strong indications across the entire political and socioeconomic spectrum in advanced Western societies that the contradictions of capitalist globalization and the neoliberal policies associated with them have reached an explosive level, as they have unleashed powerful forces with the capacity to produce highly destructive outcomes not only for growth, equality and prosperity, justice and social peace, but concomitant consequences for democracy, universal rights and the

environment itself. Indeed, not long after the collapse of the former Soviet Union and its “communist” satellites in Eastern Europe — a development which led to such unbounded enthusiasm among supporters of global neoliberal capitalism that they embarked on an audacious but highly dubious course of (pseudo) intellectual theorization to pronounce the “end of history” — it became quite obvious to astute observers that the forces unleashed by capitalism’s inner dynamism and the dominant capitalist states, with the US imperial state at the helm, were more attuned to the brutalities of societal regression, economic exploitation, war and violence than to the subtleties of socioeconomic progress, geopolitical stability and environmental sustainability.

To be sure, we now live in a world of unparalleled economic inequality coupled with massive economic insecurity and dangerously high levels of unemployment (especially among the youth), all while the depletion of natural resources has reached highly alarming rates and climate change threatens the future of civilization as we know it. All these developments are interconnected as they are fuelled by globalization’s imminent contradictions, but ultimately sustained by actual government policies and measures that cater almost exclusively to the needs of the wealthy and the concerns of the corporate and financial world. In the meantime, authoritarianism is reestablishing a foothold in many Western nations just as the social state is being reduced to the bare bone under the pretext of fiscal discipline.

Yet, despite poll results [showing rising support for socialism](#) in the US, [especially among millennials](#), growing discontent with the current economic order has thus far resulted not in a new socialist era but in the rise of ultranationalist leaders like Donald Trump who deploy rhetoric shrouded in racism and anti-immigration sentiment.

In France, Marine Le Pen is playing on similar strains of xenophobia and ultranationalism, arguing that “division is no longer between left and right ... but between patriots and believers in globalization.”

What is called the “alt-right” is in some ways a new phenomenon in the sense that, unlike conservatives and neoconservatives, the new right-wing radicalism belongs expressly in the “antiglobalization” camp. But the “alt-right’s” grievance is not with capitalism itself. Instead its adherents blame economic globalization and immigration for their woes. The strengthening of this right-wing

antiglobalization movement was behind Brexit and Trump's presidential victory and can explain the resurgence of authoritarian, xenophobic political leaders in countries like France, Austria, Hungary, Italy and Germany, to name just a few.

In a way, then, the sudden rise of the new right-wing radicalism is due to the fact that it has adopted part of the "antiglobalization" posture of the left and a good deal of the old left's radical political discourse, such as the struggle of "people vs. elites." In some cases, extreme right-wing leaders in Europe, such as Marine Le Pen in France, promise to strengthen the welfare state, impose capital controls to avoid speculation, nationalize banks and provide employment opportunities through keeping production at home. Marine Le Pen's economic vision for France seeks to counter "unregulated globalization" and is based on a particular version of old-fashioned state capitalism, which globalization appears to have made obsolete.

Is the formation of an "illiberal state" also part of the "alt-right's" vision for the future of Western society?

The term "illiberal state" is associated with the ideology and policies of Viktor Orbán in Hungary. Since coming to power, Orbán has operated on a political platform that combines social and nationalist populism with anti-European Union rhetoric. He has infringed on the freedom of the press, made inroads into the judiciary system and openly advocates an "illiberal" democracy as a means to counteract the impact of globalization. More recently, he has sought to shut down Central European University, which was founded by George Soros in 1991 as part of the billionaire's "Open Society" project.

The extent to which the rise of "alt-right" leaders in Western Europe can lead to similar outcomes as in the case of Viktor Orbán in Hungary is a rather shaky proposition. Eastern European countries do not have the system of checks and balances of established democracies. Moreover, millions of Hungarians do not embrace Orbán's authoritarian tendencies, and oppose him every step of the way, as millions of Turks opposed Erdoğan's quest to be granted expansive powers via a highly controversial referendum (51.4 percent voted for it, making Erdoğan officially Turkey's new sultan). Likewise, Donald Trump may be an autocrat, but he cannot just run roughshod over the whole country. The tendency to call Trump a fascist (even though he has authoritarian leanings) and to define the US as a totalitarian state does a great disservice to political analysis and, by extension, to

our imaginative capacity for realistic and sustainable alternatives.

In popular accounts of globalization, the impression one frequently gets is that this is a new phenomenon and simply irreversible. What's your take on globalization?

Globalization itself is not a new phenomenon in history. The conquests of Alexander the Great and the spread of Hellenic civilization in Europe and Asia was the first great instance toward the creation of a cosmopolitan, globalized world. And, for the record, Alexander actually sought the “marriage” between different cultures and expressed disdain toward some of his own generals for failing to show proper respect for civilizations older than Greece.

To be sure, as many scholars have shown, the history of the world is practically a history of imperial expansion. Most people throughout recorded history actually lived in empires. And, equally important, there have been different visions of empire. The Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the British Empire and the French Empire shaped the world in fundamentally different ways.

Nonetheless, with the advent of capitalism, sometime during the so-called “long 15th century,” the nature of expansion, through trade and commerce accompanied by the sword, follows a different trajectory. Capitalism spreads to all corners of the world, resulting in the accumulation of wealth for European powers and the gradual impoverishment of the colonized countries and regions, simply out of sheer necessity. As such, capitalism is pretty much distinguished from all previous socioeconomic systems by this fact — that is, that the system has to expand in order to survive. Alexander the Great made a decision to expand Hellenic culture to the deepest ends of Asia. Capitalists have to expand, otherwise they face possible extinction. In short, capitalism is by its nature an expansionist socioeconomic system, with the accumulation of capital being one of the system's basic but fundamental laws of motion.

In the modern times, and prior to our own age, we saw a great wave of capitalist globalization taking place sometime around the 1880s and lasting until the outbreak of World War I. The world economy was as open as it is today, and possibly even more so, and capital movement across national boundaries was so extensive of an activity that a passionate opposition to foreign direct investment had developed in the United States by the 1890s.

After World War I, there were lukewarm efforts to return to the previous era of internationalization, but the political climate of the time proved to be a major stumbling block and the outbreak, eventually, of World War II put to an end all aspirations for the revival of a new international capitalist order.

The latest phase of capitalist globalization begins sometime in the mid-to-late 1970s and comes in the aftermath of the collapse of the postwar structure of capital accumulation. Following World War II, Western capitalism experienced a phase of unprecedented growth and development: the ranks of the middle class exploded, labor rights were solidified (including labor representation on company boards) and workers' benefits were greatly expanded, all while the "social state" became a major pillar of the postwar Western capitalist world. But the postwar social structure of accumulation collapsed when capitalism entered a systemic crisis in the early 1970s, manifested by "stagflation," an oil crisis and the appearance of new technologies that made Fordist production obsolete.

Enter neoliberalism. In an attempt to overcome the accumulation crisis, the major international organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and of course, the US Treasury, began to promote throughout the world the neoliberal triad of liberalization, privatization and deregulation. These policies were accompanied by budget-cutting for social programs and generous tax cuts for corporations and the rich. In this context, globalization becomes a development strategy vehicle for the realization of super-profits.

Like many on the left, certain powerful segments of the extreme right, such as the leader of the National Front in France, think that globalization is reversible. Is it?

If Marine Le Pen wins the French presidential election coming up (April 23-May 7) and pushes forward with her goal of taking France out of the EU and returning to the Franc, the European integration project — and hence, a major component of globalization — could collapse like a house of cards, especially since the anti-euro fever is also spreading in Italy, and a Frexit [French exit from the European Union] will surely have immediate effects among all Europeans now skeptical of the integration project in their continent. However, it should be noted that the Frexit scenario is not as easy as Brexit. It would require a constitutional change, and that is very unlikely to happen. But, yes, globalization is certainly reversible, although it will require nothing short of cataclysmic events in the world's major power centers. Having said that, it is unclear if a return to the old nation-state is

desirable. A policy of autarchy is impossible in today's world, and I don't think anyone in his/her right mind advocates such a project. Socialists and radicals must come up with a new version of a globalized economy.

Speaking of the upcoming French elections, there seems to be a new twist with the momentum gained by ultra-left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Is the French radical left back?

This is one of the most interesting and uncertain presidential elections in the history of the French 5th Republic. None of the traditional center-right, center-left party candidates are expected to make it to the second round. This is yet another evidence of the changing nature of the political and ideological landscape in today's Western societies. Marine Le Pen will surely make it to the second round, and the only question is who will be her opponent. Entering the final stretch, it appears that the gap separating the major contenders for the second round is closing, and that Jean-Luc Mélenchon has an actual shot (although the odds are against him) of making it to the second round. If this happens, you would have a candidate from the ultra-right and the ultra-left competing for the French presidency.

Like Marine Le Pen, Mélenchon is against the EU but also promises to pull France out of NATO. And he advocates a much more radical economic agenda than Le Pen, which includes higher wages and a 90 percent tax rate on the very rich. Moreover, and this goes to the core of your question, his supporters seem to be coming from the entire political spectrum in France. This development has been helped by Mélenchon's overt nationalist rhetoric as of late, and his promise to crack down on "illegal immigration." Not coincidentally, the French flag prevails over the red revolutionary flag in the latest rallies organized by Mélenchon's party. This must be seen as an indication that the concerns about the contradictions of globalization cross traditional party lines, and that the new political contest is between those who are in favor of globalization and those who are against it.

Does this mean that there is more hope now for resistance to global capitalism?

Perhaps. We may be reaching a point where the traditional terms "left" and "right" do not have much applicability in today's world, at least insofar as the reaction of a growing segment of the population around the world is concerned

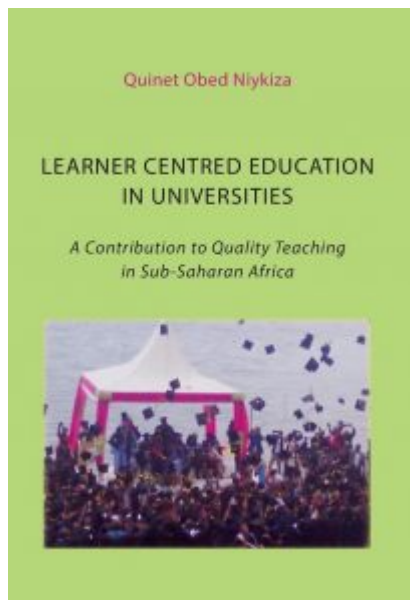
with regard to the impact of neoliberal capitalism on their lives and communities. But whatever may be going on in terms of people's political affiliations, hope is all we have.

Despair, as Noam Chomsky keeps saying, is not an option, no matter how horrendously depressing the current world situation appears to be, as resistance to oppression and exploitation has never been a fruitless undertaking even in more dire times than our own. Indeed, the Trump "counter-revolution" in the US has already brought to surface a plethora of social forces determined to stand up to the aspiring autocrat and, in fact, the future of resistance in the world's most powerful country appears more promising than in many other parts of the advanced industrialized world. Of course, the problem with the United States is that it is in the perpetual habit of taking "one step forward and three steps backward." But this does not mean we should give up hope, but only to work harder to create powerful organizing forces that can pose greater resistance to predatory capitalists and war-makers, while at the same time articulating consistently a coherent and realistic vision of radical change.

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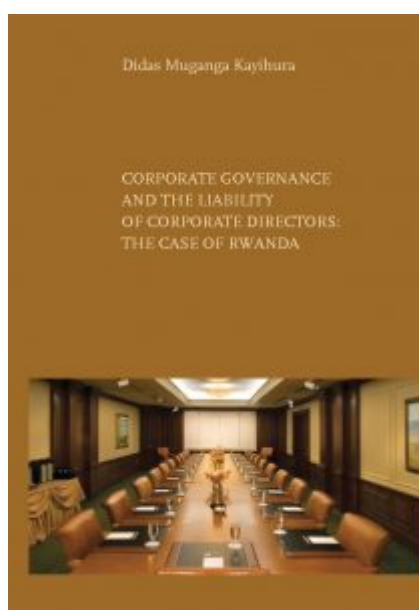
Effective university teaching and learning is an intellectually demanding task (Brown & Atkins 1988; Freire 2006; Escobar, Fernandez & Guevara-Niebla 1994 Susan & Wijeyesinghe 2011). The lecturer is not only expected to be versed with the course, but also to develop teaching strategies based on the contexts of education (Brown & Atkins 1988: 1-2). Knowledge, to believe the words of McLaren, has no intrinsic value per se but depends on the context in which it is produced as well as its purpose (Escobar, M., Fernandez & Guevara-Niebla, 1994). This leads me to quote Meirieu's book (2010), titled "*Apprendre ... oui, mais comment?*" "To learn ... yes, but how?"

One of the major difficulties in higher education (HE) occurs when students leave the university with a very low growth of skills. The motivation for this research is the lack of quality education characterized not only by the insufficiency of its content, but also by a teaching method that is mostly magisterial.

Students are neither expected to actively participate in class nor to work independently. The development of critical thinking, intrinsic motivation and self-responsibility are hardly encouraged and sometimes are destroyed. The improvement of education is of a major and important concern. Thus, this study is a contribution to the ongoing debate on quality university education and a study on the awareness and perception of LCE in the teaching-learning process in Higher Learning Institutions.

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How To Generate Job Growth: Robert Pollin On Alternatives To Trump's Smoke-And-Mirrors Economic Plan



Prof.dr. Robert Pollin

Trump made specific promises to many of the voters who were instrumental in getting him elected — some of whom are people living in poverty, thanks in part to the impacts of globalization. Yet, his economic plan will do nothing for most Americans, argues *Robert Pollin*, distinguished professor of economics and codirector of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, in an exclusive interview for Truthout. Instead, Pollin

says, Trump's plans will make the rich richer. What should we be doing instead? Pollin lays out the reality, explaining that an economic plan that will increase employment, provide higher wages and protect the environment requires, among other things, an industrial policy, increasing the minimum wage, strengthening unions and implementing a Green New Deal agenda.

C.J. Polychroniou: Trump's economic plan is supposedly about "making America great again." We know that his tax cuts and deregulation proposals will be an extra bonus for the big corporations and the super-rich, but what's in it for the average American worker who has been experiencing stagnant wages for the past 40 years, economic insecurity, and a declining standard of living?

Robert Pollin: Trump won the election in large part because he spoke to the visceral anger within the US [white] working class over the conditions you describe — two generations in which average working-class incomes have stagnated while inequality has soared, millions of good manufacturing jobs have been lost and strong communities have been brought down. But it wasn't just that Trump recognized this anger. It was equally that, for a generation, the Clinton Democrats have been the party of Wall Street and free trade, while their support for the US working class has been tepid and back-handed.

Of course, the fact that Trump spoke to this [white] working class anger doesn't mean that he actually cares about the US working class, or, more importantly, that he has a program that will deliver rising well-being for them. Some of Trump's key proposals are to: 1) bring back manufacturing jobs by eliminating burdensome regulations on business and fight against unfair foreign competition, especially from China; 2) stimulate jobs, especially in construction, through a huge infrastructure investment program; and 3) deport undocumented workers, who Trump says are stealing US-born workers' jobs.

There are glimmers of logic in some of these Trump positions, but overall, they add up to very little for workers, and mostly they are a means of creating a smokescreen through which Trump and his super-rich friends can further enrich themselves. Just to take some examples:

US manufacturing has been declining for 40 years, and over that period, regulations on US businesses have also been declining. Business regulations are therefore very weak overall. But declining regulations have not brought back

manufacturing jobs. Let's compare the US with Germany. The German economy is far from ideal, including in its treatment of working people. But in Germany, average manufacturing wages are about 30 percent higher than the US, businesses are much more heavily regulated, and unions are much stronger. Yet Germany is a manufacturing export powerhouse. How could that be? It's primarily because the German government aggressively practices industrial policies to support their manufacturing firms, promotes innovation and export competitiveness, along with decent wages, strong training and job ladders for workers. Until the US commits to a positive industrial policy agenda, we will not succeed in regaining our manufacturing strength.

On infrastructure investments, Trump has been talking for nearly two years now about his \$1 trillion plan. But he has yet to explain exactly what it amounts to or how he intends to pay for it. He has sometimes said his program will be modeled on the Interstate Highway System that was initiated in the 1950s under the Republican President Eisenhower. But what Trump fails to mention here is that, under Eisenhower, rich people in the US did pay serious taxes. The top marginal income tax rate under Eisenhower was 91 percent. Right now, the top rate is 39.5 percent, and Trump wants to cut it sharply from there. To date, it appears that Trump's idea is to privatize the US infrastructure, just like he wants to privatize public schools. So our roads, bridges and airports will be owned by the rich, and they will extract profits from everyone else every time we drive or get on a plane.

On immigration, the facts are the opposite of what Trump claims. We know, for example, that when we compare conditions for low-wage US-born workers in cities with heavy immigrant populations, such as Miami, LA or New York, with cities having a much smaller share of immigrants, such as Atlanta or Philadelphia, that US-born workers are no better off in the cities with proportionally fewer immigrants. That is because immigrants create businesses of their own and buy things in their communities — they aren't just competing in the job market but are expanding overall economic activity in their communities. Of course, conditions are bad for US-born workers in the low end of the labor market. But what they need to support them is a \$15 minimum wage, decent labor rights and union support. Trump vehemently opposes all of these things — we need only look at his cabinet appointments to see this clearly. It is so much easier to just blame immigrants and distract people from where the real problems lie.

In February 2017, the real unemployment rate was 9.2 percent, including people

who have accepted part-time jobs but want full-time work and people who have been discouraged from looking by their lack of success in getting a job. Have we reached an era of growth without jobs?

The 9.2 percent of the labor force that you mention amounts to nearly 15 million people. That's roughly equal to the entire population of New York City, Los Angeles and Chicago combined. Imagine all the people in our three largest cities all experiencing the hardships of unemployment. Now on top of that, relative to 2007, right before the Wall Street Crash and Great Recession, we have seen another roughly 9 million people drop out of the labor force. That adds up to nearly 24 million people, including the unemployed, underemployed and labor market dropouts. This is despite the fact that, since the official end of the Great Recession in 2009, the official unemployment rate has fallen by more than half.

Putting all this together, we can conclude, first, that the US economy is certainly capable of creating millions of jobs in a relatively short period of time — such as between 2010 and 2016. But it is also clear that mass unemployment is a persistent feature of neoliberal capitalism, in the US and elsewhere. We cannot forget the insight, first advanced by Karl Marx, that capitalists like mass unemployment because it gives them much greater bargaining power relative to workers, in the setting of both wages and working conditions. We have the technical knowledge and policy tools to operate the US economy at full employment. Whether we can advance full employment under capitalism becomes a matter of politics and struggle for a decent society.

What are the benefits of full employment, and how can we accomplish this in an age of automation and great capital mobility?

The benefits are fundamental, at both the levels of individuals and families, and for a society at large. For individuals, obviously, earning money from jobs, so that they and their families can go about their lives, is the first consideration.... At the economy-wide level, when employed people have more money in their pockets, this means they can spend more on the things they need and want. This in turn produces more buoyant markets and, therefore, strong incentives for private businesses to invest more and create more jobs. An economy with an abundance of decent jobs will promote individual opportunity and equality, because this kind of economy offers everyone the chance to provide for themselves and their families. A full-employment economy is therefore also the best single tool for

fighting poverty.

Despite these massive benefits of full employment, a capitalist economy, operating on its own, will never get to full employment with decent jobs because, as I mentioned before, full employment will weaken the bargaining power of capitalists. This is why it is critical for an engaged citizenry to fight for full employment. Policymakers will never fight for it on their own. In fact, most Western capitalist economies did operate at something close to full employment over the initial post World War II era — from roughly 1950 to 1973 (up until the first oil price spike). Of course, the historical setting in the immediate post World War II era was dramatically different than what we face today. But that doesn't mean that full employment is now an impossibility. Mobilizing public investment to promote decent education, health care and housing for everyone, to revive manufacturing, and to transform our energy infrastructure to operate with zero greenhouse gas emissions, will generate tens of millions of jobs for decades. Strong labor laws and unions can ensure that these millions of jobs provide living wages, as well as decent benefits and working conditions.

Given the deteriorating condition of the environment, the creation of green jobs has long been seen as a vital and necessary goal. What would a US program for controlling climate change and creating job opportunities look like?

A Green New Deal agenda, which is capable of delivering both a viable path to near-zero emissions and climate stabilization, as well as expanding good job opportunities, is actually a pretty straightforward proposition, both for the US economy and the global economy. My own research finds that we need to commit to investing about 1.5 percent of GDP — in the US, China, India, Europe, Africa, everywhere — in order to dramatically improve energy efficiency standards in the operations of buildings, industrial machinery and transportation systems; and to expand the supply of clean renewable energy, including solar, wind, geothermal, small-scale hydro power and low-emissions bioenergy. According to the US Energy Department, the average costs of generating one kilowatt of electricity from solar, onshore wind or geothermal energy are now at approximate parity or lower than those for fossil fuel energy and nuclear power. Combine this with the cost reductions that people will enjoy through raising energy efficiency — it then becomes a reality that energy consumers will not need to spend more money to rely on clean renewable energy as opposed to fossil fuels and nuclear power. In addition, building the green economy in all regions of the world is a powerful

engine of new job creation. For example, my coworkers and I find that investing in green energy in the US today generates approximately three times more jobs per dollar of spending than maintaining our existing fossil fuel energy system.

It is obviously true that some jobs will inevitably be lost in the transition to a green economy — coal mining jobs being one critical case in point. That is why it is fundamental to the Green New Deal agenda that we incorporate a generous Just Transition program for all workers and communities that are presently dependent on fossil fuels. The Just Transition program would include guaranteed reemployment with no sacrifice of wages for people whose jobs would be displaced through the necessary contraction of the fossil fuel industry. It would also include, critically, guaranteed protections for the pensions of fossil fuel industry workers once they move into retirement. In addition, regions and communities that will be hard hit by the decline in, say, the coal industry, should be provided with re-investment projects, starting with land reclamation, and moving from there into energy efficiency and green energy manufacturing. All of this can be done at reasonable cost levels. My own research finds that a generous Just Transition program for the affected US economy workers and communities would cost in the range of \$600 million per year. This is less than one one-hundredth of 1 percent of current US GDP.

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Neoliberalism In The Driver's Seat: Trump And Ryan's Ruling-Class Schemes



Donald Trump ran a campaign to “make America great again,” promising the creation of high-paid manufacturing jobs and the restoration of the middle class. Yet, his economic policies will most likely make things worse for average American workers and deal a further blow to the environment, says economist Michael Meeropol, an NPR commentator and author of *Surrender: How the Clinton Administration Completed the Reagan Revolution*. Michael Meeropol is the oldest

son of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

C.J. Polychroniou: Donald Trump’s economic policies are not simply controversial; they constitute a neoliberal nightmare. His policies revolve mostly around corporate tax cuts, tax cuts for people with high incomes and investments, deregulation and selective protectionism. Assuming the Trump administration can succeed with these objectives, what, in your view, would be the most likely effects of these policies on the US economy?

Michael Meeropol: It is essential to separate Trump (the man) from the policies proposed by the Trump administration. Trump, the man, displays “bright shiny objects” that unfortunately divert us from the substance of the actual policies.... The national media and too many of the opposition are diverted by his outrageous lies, his grandiose promises, his bombast and his dangerous authoritarianism. These are the “bright shiny objects” but they have almost nothing to do with the substance of [his] proposed policies.

Your question brings focus where it should be — the neoliberal content of his administration’s proposals. With the possible exception of the selective protectionism he promised during the campaign, [his] economic policy proposals are extensions of traditional neoliberal policies that date back to Ronald Reagan. These policies were enabled by Bill Clinton (see my book *Surrender* and Bob Pollin’s book *Contours of Descent*), expanded by George W. Bush and not forcefully countered by Barack Obama. The failure to include a public option in the Affordable Care Act is one glaring example.

The neoliberal content of the Trump administration's policies comes from Paul Ryan, the Club for Growth, the Heritage Foundation, the Chamber of Commerce ... this is the policy-planning apparatus of the American ruling class.

(Anyone who doubts what I just said, check out the [Who Rules America?](#) website. G. William Domhoff has been documenting who rules America since the late 1960s. [Here is a recent piece with relevance today.](#))

In a [recent Washington Post article](#), the first round of proposed budget shifting by the Trump administration is detailed — a massive transfer of discretionary budget spending to defense and away from everything else. This is more extreme than the 1981 Reagan budget proposals. The failed “repeal and replace” for the Affordable Care Act was similar to efforts proposed in the past — partial privatization of Social Security — replacing the guarantees of Medicare with vouchers (called “premium support” in one of the “Ryan budgets” proposed during the Obama Administration). “Welfare reform” signed into law by Bill Clinton turned the old AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children] program into a set of fixed block grants to the states. Changing Medicaid from a guarantee to a state-administered stingy block grant as in the failed Ryan “Trumpcare” proposal would have a similar impact — reducing enrollment in one more means-tested entitlement program. All of these changes were efforts to dismantle the set of policies associated with the New Deal and Great Society.

Should this new set of neoliberal proposals be adopted, there is no way they will have a positive macroeconomic impact. Forty years of neoliberal policies since 1980 show that. But in terms of income and wealth for the top 1 percent, neoliberalism was a dramatic success. The well-known Saez-Piketty diagrams plotting shares of the top 10 percent and 1 percent of the income distribution show that reduced inequality (the top 1 percent [of people in the US] had 20 percent of income in 1929 and 8 percent in 1979) was successfully reversed in the neoliberal heyday: The [top] 1 percent's share climbed to 18 percent by 2007. In other words, it didn't matter that the economy as a whole did worse — the “most important” people did better.

Concerning today's economy, so long as the political structures that support neoliberal policies are able to withstand the assaults of an outraged population — here I am including both the Sanders campaign and many of Trump's (duped) supporters — the policies will continue because they do keep large flows of

income going to the top 1 percent and power firmly in the hands of corporate decision makers and their political enablers.

If there is a neoliberal tax cut masquerading as tax reform, if there is a giant boondoggle to construction companies masquerading as an infrastructure program, if there is wholesale deregulation of financial markets masquerading as removing stifling government regulations — in short, if the neoliberal dreams of Paul Ryan become law ... there will be *no* macroeconomic improvement, no return to the period right after World War II. But the top dogs in the economy will retain the advantages they achieved during the ascendancy [of] neoliberalism, [from] 1980-2008.

In short, no improvement for the economy and the vast majority of the people, but contentment and increasing riches for the 1%.

What Trump adds to this with his promise of protectionism — through massive deportation and bringing back (some) jobs — is a way to gain the support of enough members of the working class to keep the neoliberal political coalition in control. By the way, there are three other major elements to the erection of a strong political defense of the new round of neoliberal policies: One, the assault on public sector unions that began in Wisconsin in 2011, and that might succeed decisively if Trump and the Republicans successfully replace Scalia with a similar justice, given the cases that are pending. Two, the suppression of voting rights. And three, the unleashing of police forces to enforce “law and order” on Black people and other people of color. The last two are related because the disenfranchisement of felons in many states falls disproportionately on Blacks and Latinos caught up in the prison industrial complex — also known as (from Michelle Alexander’s work) *The New Jim Crow*. These three [elements] help bring a group of native-born, mostly white workers into a self-destructive coalition with the top dogs of our society to “keep those people down.” We should never underestimate the power of racism to keep the elite laughing all the way to the bank....

David Kotz in his book *The Rise and Fall of Neoliberal Capitalism* (Harvard University Press, 2015) actually predicted a possible “tweak” to the neoliberal model that had dominated the US economy until the financial crisis of 2008. He calls this “business-regulated capitalism.” A key element would be the total marginalization of organized labor. There would also be more public-private

partnerships (the as-yet-unreleased infrastructure program would be along these lines) and increased military spending. Kotz wrote, "The dominant ideas that could hold together such a social structure of accumulation are those of nationalism and individual responsibility. Such ideas justify a stronger role for the state." Trump himself probably has no idea what his administration is doing but those pulling strings may be groping toward some form of Kotz's "business-regulated capitalism." In 1920s Italy, this was called fascism. To summarize: no macroeconomic improvement, but continued prosperity for the top of the income and wealth pyramids. Political changes sufficient to keep these policies in place and beat back challenges from people who supported Bernie Sanders and (erroneously) Trump.

In pledging to reduce or eliminate trade deficits, Trump has attacked Germany by saying it uses the European Union as a vehicle for accumulating trade surpluses, and China, as a currency manipulator. Is this attack on two of the world's major economies the prelude for upcoming trade wars and/or the state of a new world economic order?

The period of the Great Depression saw the final breakdown of the trade regime that was dominated by the British Empire (including the "informal empire" in Latin America) and the Pound Sterling. The Bretton Woods system inaugurated a US-centered world economic order with the dollar as the world currency. It lasted from 1945 till 1973. The end of the Bretton Woods system did not end that role for the dollar nor the central US role. But one could argue that the financial crisis of 2008 has called the future of that system into question. Yes, Trump policies could spark trade wars; neither China nor Germany wants that. [National Trade Council Director] Peter Navarro has Trump's ear, though my guess is his ideas are anathema to most of the intellectuals in charge of the Fed, the IMF and the European Central Bank. Obviously, the major multinational corporations and banks want there to be an international order — predictability is important for these folks. Can they force the Germans, the Chinese and the Americans to "get together" and "work things out"? It's much too early to tell. In 1944 at Bretton Woods, the British were too damaged by World War II to successfully resist American policy proposals (despite the presence of Keynes himself in the British delegation). The US is nowhere near as weak as Britain was then; China and Germany [are] nowhere near as strong as was the US.

Trump's proposed budget cuts for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

and his selection of Pruitt as the head have caused a major concern among environmentalists and active citizens. What does Trump's war on the EPA mean for health and the environment?

Trump's war on the EPA and climate science is terribly dangerous. Hopefully, his and Pruitt's positions are so outrageous that scientists and thoughtful politicians will respond vigorously. Here is where the "ruling class" is actually split. There are many, even among the top 1 percent, who believe that climate change presents an existential threat to the continuation of human life as we know it on the planet. The rest of us need to demand action to curb carbon emissions while, in my opinion, pointing out that only a true transformation of the economic system will create the structure necessary for a carbon-neutral future. Capitalism as we know it demands economic growth and the political power currently lies with those who profit from the current carbon-centered system. Maybe a "green" version of capitalism would work — I am not opposed to fighting for structural reforms to get us there — but we must constantly remind people who is benefiting and who is dying as a result of our economic commitment to a carbon-based economy.

Trump has proposed to restore America's middle class by bringing back manufacturing jobs. How realistic is this goal in the age of deep globalization?

The Trump promise to bring back manufacturing jobs and the promise that holds for high-wage workers is based on a false equivalence. It is not manufacturing jobs per se that pay well — it's the success of unionized workers raising wages that leads to "good" jobs — and these could be anywhere in the economy. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, manufacturing jobs paid very poorly in the United States. Unionization created the great manufacturing-based American middle class of workers. If nursing homes, hospitals, cleaning services, hotels, day care centers, restaurants were all unionized, as well as autoworkers and steelworkers in the 1950s, these work sites, too, could be the basis for middle-class workers' wages. Trump's allies in government, particularly governors like Scott Walker of Wisconsin, want to destroy unions, not promote them.

Trump's effort to undo the Affordable Care Act was dealt a crushing blow as the House cancelled a vote on the health care legislation. What do you expect to be the next move by the Trump administration on health care?

That's easy. They have already promised to do their best to sabotage the actual workings of the Affordable Care Act and publicize rises in premiums, deductibles and anecdotes (often false) about individuals who could not get the care they needed in a timely fashion. It is essential that people remain vigilant and publicize and counter every effort at sabotage, while, at the same time, pushing for a rational universal policy: Medicare for all.

Given the overall effects of Trump's economic policies, what do you see as the future direction of neoliberalism in the US?

Neoliberalism "dodged a bullet" when the Obama administration ignored the pleas of many of us to bring forth a "New" New Deal. Instead, they hit the reset button — bailed out the financial sector (including GM and Chrysler) and settled for an anemic "recovery" bill rather than a more robust one. (I've already noted the surrender on the public option in the Affordable Care Act). After 2010, they accepted budget sequestration and the economy limped through eight years of recovery, which mostly benefited the top 10 percent and [the] 1%.

Neoliberalism remains in the driver's seat, and it is essential that we continue to expose it and demand real change while resisting the worst proposals of the Trump administration. I do not see acceleration of growth in the macro-economy. The employment-to-population ratio — the best measure of labor market slack — has struggled to reach 60 percent just last month, well below the 2007 peak of 63 percent. If the Trump administration rattles world markets sufficiently, there will be another recession.

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