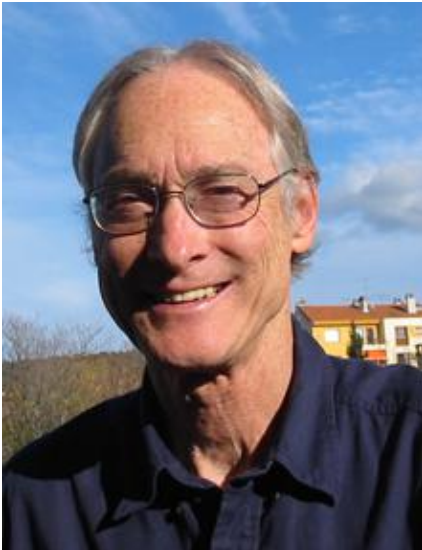


The Growing Wealth Gap Marks The Return Of Oligarchy



Professor Thomas
Weisskopf

One of the most striking features of our era is the widening gap between rich and poor. In fact, wealth inequality may be higher today than any other era, although we lack the data to draw meaningful comparisons with the distant past. Moreover, the gap between the haves and the have-nots seems to be growing, as the [annual reports](#) from the development charity Oxfam clearly indicate. What are the key reasons for the growing divide between rich and poor, especially when governments claim that there is a recovery underway since the 2008 global financial crisis? And what can be done to reorganize society so wealth is no longer concentrated into so few hands while millions of people live in extreme poverty or are barely subsisting? In the interview below, [Thomas Weisskopf](#), emeritus professor of economics at the University of Michigan and a long-time member of the Democratic Socialists of America, offers his insights on the state of economic injustice.

C.J. Polychroniou: Professor Weisskopf, according to the 2019 Oxfam report, a handful of billionaires own [as much wealth](#) as the poorest half of the world's population. In fact, 2018 was a year in which the [rich got richer again and the poor, poorer](#). Do we know the primary culprits behind the ever-growing gap in

economic well-being between rich and poor?

Thomas Weisskopf: There are both economic and political reasons for the growing wealth gap between the very rich and the poor. The natural tendency of capitalism is to generate both overall economic growth and ever-increasing inequality in both wealth and income. Most people do not have the opportunity to acquire much wealth, but those who have inherited or accumulated a certain amount of wealth have many opportunities to increase it, and the more wealth you have, the easier it is to do so. [Wealth](#) is everywhere much more unequally distributed than income, because those who have wealth can use it to generate even more. The distribution of wealth has a huge impact on the distribution of income, because wealth is an important source of income — especially for the very rich. The underlying unequalizing tendency of capitalism can be interrupted by catastrophic developments — such as wars or major economic crises, which can shrink the wealth of an entire capitalist class, or natural disasters which can destroy the wealth of individuals whose wealth is vulnerable to such events. World Wars I and II, as well as the Great Depression of the 1930s, had the effect of [reducing the degree of wealth and income inequality around the world](#). The natural unequalizing tendency of capitalism can also be limited, and sometimes even reversed, by political intervention. From the end of World War II to the 1970s the capitalist world achieved [rapid economic growth without much increase in wealth and income inequality](#), because most governments took responsibility for assuring that the gains from growth would be widely shared. They did this through a variety of means, including relatively high (by current standards) taxes on wealth and income, which funded government spending on public programs that had the effect of redistributing income and opportunities from richer to poorer segments of the populations, well as policies that curbed the power of large corporations and protected workers from exploitation by employers. Beginning in the late 1970s, government policies in many capitalist countries — most markedly in the U.K. and the U.S. — shifted toward less redistributive tax and spending policies, less regulation of large corporations, and less protection for workers.

Should we really be concerned with wealth and income inequality or with poverty?

We should be concerned with all of the above. Wealth provides long-term security, and it opens up all kinds of opportunities for the wealth-holder — whether as a

source of income, for spending beyond one's income, or for weighing in on public affairs, such as buying political influence and thus shifting almost entirely the balance of power toward the interests, needs and whims of the rich and influential. Poverty characterizes people who do not have sufficient income, wealth or access to resources to meet their basic human needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, good education. Every society should feel obligated to enable all of its members to live at such a basic minimal standard. It would be perfectly possible to do so even in a context of growing overall inequality in wealth and income. But such growing inequality itself has numerous adverse consequences for a society, as I discuss below.

What are the primary consequences of massive income and wealth inequality for the advanced industrialized societies?

Massive economic inequality usually means that a substantial share of the population at the lower end of the scale cannot meet their basic human needs. But misery for those at the bottom of the scale is by no means the only negative consequence of such inequality. There are many respects in which one's well-being depends on one's relative, rather than absolute, economic position. First, the way one is treated depends a great deal on one's economic status and resources; those well below the societal average are likely to be disrespected and disfavored, whereas those far above are likely to be given undue deference and granted undue favors. Great economic inequality makes it impossible to achieve anything like equality of opportunity, because one's access to opportunities depends greatly on one's [initial position](#) relative to others. This is especially the case with opportunities that are necessarily limited in supply — such as access to the best institutions in which to study or work, or to the best locations in which to live, or to positions of power and influence. Not only the impoverished at the bottom of the economic ladder, but everyone in the lower half has a lesser chance than those above, and all the more so compared to those near the top. Yet the extent to which one is disadvantaged by a lower position depends significantly on the degree of difference in economic status. In more equal societies, the inequality of opportunity is significantly lower than in highly unequal societies.

Nowhere is this more obvious or more damaging than in the political arena. Those at the top end of the distribution can and do use their wealth and income to gain disproportionate influence over government at all levels, not least in democratic societies. Justice Louis Brandeis famously declared that, “We can have democracy

in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." The growing concentration of wealth in affluent capitalist nations has been an important reason for the change in the distributive impact of governmental economic policies that I noted above. Since the late 1970s, governments in most [of] the affluent capitalist nations are no longer restraining the natural tendency of capitalist economic growth to generate growing inequality; in many cases — notably the U.S. — they are [aggravating](#) it.

According to the [Oxfam report](#), the rich pay less taxes than the poor. Will taxing the rich reduce inequality?

In most countries the rich pay lower taxes than the poor, as a percentage of their income; but they pay considerably more taxes in dollar terms, because even a lower rate of taxation on income delivers a lot more in tax proceeds when applied to much higher levels of income. (The same is true of taxes on wealth.)

Increasing the rate of taxation on the rich — whether on income or wealth — would certainly reduce income inequality, measured after taxes (which is what is relevant to one's standard of living). But it is not the only way to achieve this goal. Other ways to do so are to reduce the rate of taxation on the poor, or for the government to set up programs that benefit everybody without regard to their income or wealth — like a national health program — or that provide benefits that are geared to aid the less well-off.

If inequality is not inevitable, what policy options are available in the age of globalization to reduce the gap between haves and have-nots?

There are many well-known policies that could help reduce the gap. I'll mention just a few — starting with economic measures that have been advocated by many on the left and implemented at some times and in some places by progressive governments. 1. Raise taxes on wealth — especially in its largely unproductive forms, such as inherited wealth and wealth resulting from the appreciation of land value; 2. Work toward ending the [tax havens](#) and secret bank accounts that have enabled the world's richest people to [evade taxes](#) and accountability for their financial operations; 3. Raise marginal tax rates on high incomes; 4. Use the revenue from greater tax receipts to [improve public services](#), such as education, medical care, and transportation — especially for poorer communities; 5. Step up enforcement of anti-concentration and anti-monopoly laws and regulations, and; 6. Enable workers to have greater influence over their workplace conditions, both through stronger unions and through representation on corporate governing

boards.

Implementation of such policies requires that movements responsive to the needs of the great majority of people who are not wealthy succeed in attaining political power. This is possible in a democratic context only if the rules of the political process are fair, so that everyone has an equal ability to vote and that no candidate or party has access to far more resources than others. In many countries — notably and egregiously in the U.S. — the political process [fails](#) to meet this standard. Therefore, political reforms that assure easy access to the vote to every citizen, and that limit the inequality of resources available to candidates and campaigns, are likely to be a prerequisite for economic policies in favor of greater equality of wealth, income, and overall economic well-being.

About the author

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. His main research interests are in European economic integration, globalization, the political economy of the United States and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published several books and his articles have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into several foreign languages, including Croatian, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish. He is the author of [Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change](#), an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books.

Herdenking Februaristaking 2019

- Toespraak Burgemeester Halsema

25 februari 2019. In de toespraak bij de herdenking van de Februaristaking verwijst burgemeester Femke Halsema naar het dagboek van Paula Bermann.

Zie: <https://www.amsterdam.nl/burgemeester/toespraak>

Paul Scheffer ~ De vorm van vrijheid



Paul Scheffer - Ills. Joseph Sassoon Semah

Paul Scheffer (1954), publicist en hoogleraar Europese studies, schreef voor de Maand van de Filosofie 2016 het essay *De vrijheid van de grens*. In 'De vorm van vrijheid' verdiept hij zijn inzichten omtrent grenzen verder, mede naar aanleiding van de vluchtelingen crisis, de Brexit, en de muur die Trump wil bouwen. Vrijheid zonder vorm is niet mogelijk: een open samenleving vraagt om grenzen, aldus

Scheffer.

Paul Scheffer begint zijn boek met een filosofische beschouwing over de betekenis van het kosmopolitisme. Het kosmopolitisme is een principieel pleidooi om door het overbruggen van verschillen duurzame vrede voort te brengen, een belangrijke en ook omstreden traditie in het Europese denken. De filosofen Plato en Aristoteles waren de eersten die dachten over wereldburgerschap. De Renaissance plaatste later het ideaal van kosmopolitisme weer op de agenda. Scheffer gaat in op de filosofen Kant en Erasmus om te illustreren dat men al lang op zoek was naar een gelijkheidsideaal voorbij de grenzen, maar dat zij toch ook gevangen waren in vooropgezette ideeën met een religieuze of nationale strekking. Het kosmopolitisme en pacifisme van Erasmus hebben vanwege de beperkingen en ook tegenstrijdigheden van dat ideaal nu nog steeds betekenis. De vragen die Erasmus opwerpt als 'Hoe verhouden macht en moraal zich in Europa' en 'Baseren we ons op een seculier uitgangspunt dat verder strekt dan een veronderstelde joods-christelijke erfenis?' zijn nog steeds actueel.

Kant, met zijn filosofie van 'de eeuwige vrede' omarmt het wereldburgerschap, een scheiding der machten, gelijkheid voor de wet en het idee van vertegenwoordiging. Het primaat ligt bij de binnenlandse staatsordening in de internationale politiek, het volkenrecht behoort te zijn gebaseerd op een federalisme van vrije staten en het wereldburgerrecht behoort beperkt te zijn tot de voorwaarden van algemene gastvrijheid.

De globalisering brengt zowel verrijking en vermenging. Maar globalisering brengt ook vervreemding en ongelijkheid, die de economische en culturele integratie van de wereld kan ondermijnen.

De digitalisering speelt hierbij een grote rol: het leidt niet alleen tot meer vrijheid en vooruitgang van de burgers maar langzamerhand juist tot onvrijheid. De interneteconomie is een voorbeeld van een wereld die steeds grenzelozer wordt maar zonder regulering slaat die vrijheid om in onvrijheid. En het leidt tot inkrimping van het private en sociale domein, zoals werkgelegenheid en monopolievorming.

Nu de wereld kleiner wordt, moet het kosmopolitisme opnieuw worden bekeken. Het ideaal van wereldburgerschap vraagt misschien wel om begrenzing.

In het veilige deel van Europa is minder behoefte aan grenzen dan bijvoorbeeld in Polen, aldus Scheffer. Maar een grenzeloze wereld kan nauwelijks geborgenheid bieden en dat veroorzaakt onrust.

Het kosmopolitisme is kwetsbaar: ze onderschat de conflicten door de komst van verschillende culturen en godsdiensten en miskent de soms gewelddadige conflicten die de internationale politiek nog steeds tekenen, waardoor grenzen en bewaking noodzakelijk zijn.

Als de EU de roep om bescherming niet serieus neemt, verliest ze haar rechtvaardiging. De grenzen in Europa moeten de ruimte van een open samenleving vergroten.

Vervolgens gaat Scheffer in op de oorzaken van de migratie- en vluchtelingen crisis, zoals demografische veranderingen, de klimaatverandering, de groeiende welvaarts kloof tussen Noord en Zuid en de politieke instabiliteit en gewelddadige conflicten. Het idee dat we aan het begin van een volksverhuizing staan roept afweer op tegenover migranten. Ruime meerderheden in de westerse wereld willen dat de jaarlijkse migratie stabiliseert of afneemt, aldus Scheffer, en dat vraagt om een bewuste keuze, een georganiseerde migratie, waarbij onderscheid moet worden gemaakt tussen arbeidsmigranten en vluchtelingen, waarbij de laatsten een beroep doen op morele beginselen. Een selectieve arbeidsmigratie tegenover vluchtelingen vergroot de aanvaarding van nieuwkomers.

De vraag is urgent welke migratie we willen in de komende decennia. Op Scheffers verzoek heeft de CBS verschillende varianten uitgerekend op basis van uiteenlopende migratiesaldo's, dat goed de effecten laat zien van uiteenlopende keuzes wat betreft de migratiepolitiek. Het publieke debat hoort over bewuste keuzes te gaan, aldus Scheffer, waarbij mensenrechten universeel zijn en burgerrechten territoriaal. Om genereus te blijven zijn grenzen nodig.



In deel III verkent Scheffer de staat van Europa en bespreekt hij nieuwe ideeën over de toekomst van de EU. Van de euforie van Europa is weinig over, de democratie heeft zich niet voortgezet, aldus Scheffer, de toekomst van de liberale democratie staat op het spel, de geopolitiek keert terug. De kwetsbaarheid van Europa is gegroeid door het afnemende vermogen van Amerika om de wereldorde te schragen, dat betekent dat Europa meer op eigen benen zal moeten staan. Er heeft een kanteling van de machtsverhoudingen plaatsgevonden, van West naar

Oost. Dat vraagt om relativering van het Europese perspectief, maar Europa heeft nog steeds een hoge mate van gelijkheid en levenskwaliteit, weinig corruptie en een redelijk functionerende rechtsstaat.

In de nieuwe wereldwanorde heeft Europa wel degelijk ruimte om eigen keuzes te maken.

Vervolgens schetst Scheffer een aantal toekomstscenario's voor de Unie, waarbij de vraag hoe Europa met zijn grenzen moet omgaan urgent is. Ook de vraag naar de politieke vorm van Europa is urgent: een federatie of juist meer ruimte voor de nationale staten.

Scheffer benoemt drie benaderingen voor de toekomstige Unie, ieder met hun eigen voordelen en nadelen: een federaal Europa, naar evenbeeld van de Verenigde Staten, of naar het Europa van de vaderlanden of ten derde het verduurzamen van de EU als een gemengde orde met sterke nationale staten en een aantal bovennationale instituties.

Scheffer wil niet terug naar een nationale staat, maar ook niet de grote sprong maken naar een federale staat. Een duurzame Unie heeft de legitimiteit van nationale staten nodig, en omgekeerd kunnen die staten niet langer functioneren zonder de samenhang die de EU biedt. Om de terugval in nationalisme te voorkomen moet de rol van natiestaten door de Unie worden gewaarborgd. We hebben een nieuw verdrag nodig inclusief een Volksraadpleging.

De waardengemeenschap die Europa wil zijn moet hand in hand gaan met de wil om een veiligheidsgemeenschap te vormen. De Unie moet naast openheid ook bescherming bieden. Een grens sluit niet het menselijk verkeer af, maar reguleert juist de stroom van de mensen.

Ook moet Europa een meer machtspolitieke rol innemen; afzijdigheid is niet langer vol te houden. Europa moet niet terugvallen in het geopolitieke realisme van voor 1989. Het moet zijn eigen weg vinden te midden van machtspolitiek van China, de Verenigde Staten en Rusland.

Scheffer stelt zichzelf de vraag of de huidige EU met zijn 28 lidstaten verder kan uitbreiden.

Alhoewel er sterke argumenten zijn om Turkije toe te laten treden (economie en lidmaatschap NAVO), zijn de vrijheden in Turkije zodanig onder druk komen te staan dat lidmaatschap onmogelijk is. Ook Oekraïne en Georgië komen niet in aanmerking. Scheffer concludeert dat de grens van de uitbreiding is bereikt.

Scheffer sluit zijn boek af met de constatering dat de liberale democratieën van

Europa zich in de chaotische omgeving van autoritaire staten niet zonder voorbehoud kunnen openen naar de buitenwereld, en dat gegeven geldt als rechtvaardiging van de grenzen.

Gemeenschappen kunnen niet bestaan zonder begrenzing: een open samenleving kan alleen bestaan binnen grenzen. De binnengrenzen zijn geslecht zonder na te denken over de buitengrenzen. De vrijheden kunnen in diskrediet raken als het gevoel van onveiligheid groeit.

De opdracht is voor Paul Scheffer helder: we moeten voorkomen dat in een wereld waar grenzen gemakkelijker worden overschreden, de vrijheid omslaat in onvrijheid.

Paul Scheffer - De vorm van vrijheid - uitgeverij De Bezige Bij, Amsterdam 2018 - ISBN 9789023467151

Zie *Conversation on Europe 2013*, Felix Meritis Foundation:

Le nihilisme: 1. Le nihilisme dans la pensée grecque antique

1. Y-a-t-il ou non un nihilisme en Grèce Ancienne ?

Les philosophes Barbara Cassin et Francis Wolff évoquent les origines du nihilisme. Commentant à tour de rôle les définitions possibles de la doctrine, ils s'attachent à en trouver trace dans la pensée grecque, notamment chez Socrate et le sophiste Gorgias.

2: Le père Stanislas Breton, philosophe et auteur de 'La pensée du rien' (Pharos), distingue la pensée du rien "par excès", tel le bouddhisme, du rien "par défaut", qui recouvre la doctrine nihiliste proprement dite. Puis il définit les principaux mouvements philosophiques liés à la pensée du néant par défaut, l'approche de Nietzsche, et les différentes catégories du nihilisme qu'il a dégagées : nihilisme optatif, optionnel absolu, de conséquence.

3: Christine Goémé reçoit le philosophe Gérard Lebrun à propos de Schopenhauer, initiateur malgré lui du nihilisme ; il évoque l'écrivain russe Tourgueniev, l'un des inventeurs du terme "nihilisme", l'ouvrage de Schopenhauer 'Le Monde comme volonté et comme représentation' et l'influence de Schopenhauer en France et à l'étranger.

4. Christine Goémé reçoit Georges Leyenberger et Jean Jacques Forte, organisateurs d'un colloque sur le nihilisme qui s'est tenu à Strasbourg, suivi d'une publication. Ils parlent des différentes manières de comprendre le nihilisme, et donc le "rien" et le "vide", en faisant référence notamment à Nietzsche et à Kant.

5. Entretien avec Alain Badiou à propos du nihilisme. Il donne sa définition du nihilisme, dont le point ultime serait le terrorisme (nihilisme actif). Propos sur le nihilisme de Friedrich Nietzsche. Il existe aussi un nihilisme passif, qu'il qualifie d'"inauthentique", il s'agit surtout de "gloseries". La personnalité de Sofia Kovalevskaia, nihiliste russe et mathématicienne. La grandeur de son oeuvre. Ce que veut dire être nihiliste aujourd'hui dans une société menée par l'argent. Le nihilisme se traduit par une révolte émeutière aveugle face au néant monétaire. Ce nihilisme est en défaut d'acte et dénué de pensée. Il faudrait une vraie critique radicale du nihilisme du monde. Les relation entre l'art contemporain et le nihilisme. L'élément nostalgique du nihilisme et la notion "d'éternel retour" chez Nietzsche.

A World Political Party: The Time Has Come



Heikki Patomäki

Shared problems require shared action. The world economy and deepening global risks bind us together, but we lack the collective global agency required to address them. A sustainable global future will be impossible without a fundamental shift from the dominant national mythos to a global worldview, and the concomitant creation of institutions with transformative political agency. A world political party would be well-suited to bring about such a shift. Although such a party will not materialize overnight, it can emerge from the chrysalis of activism and experimentation already forming on the world stage.

The transnational Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25) is a compelling experiment in this vein, providing useful lessons for a world political party proper. Although the challenges to forming a transformative world party are profound, the risks of inaction are grave – and the rewards of success momentous.

Party Time

We now understand how small our planet has become. The local and global have become profoundly intertwined as our daily activities depend on the workings of the world economy. Common risks, like ecological crises and weapons of mass destruction, tie all our fates together.

Despite such interconnectedness, people's everyday experiences still differ greatly. For example, consider the contrasts between a day in the life of a high school teacher in Finland, a textile worker in China, a CEO of a multinational corporation in Brazil, and a janitor in Kenya—a case study in lateral and vertical diversity. Their lives' possibilities are interwoven and shaped by the global economy, but in sharply divergent ways. Shared problems require shared action. But to achieve collective agency on the global level, disparate individuals must

learn to see themselves (and their daily lives) as fundamentally connected to one another through common global structures, processes, and challenges. Such collective learning has the potential to politicize the world economy and the institutions that govern it. Rather than being treated as immutable, these institutions can and must become the subject of political contestation. Both radically reforming existing institutions and building new ones must be on the agenda. Seeing the world system as malleable goes hand in hand with the quest for globalized political agency, for advancing transformative visions of “another world.”

The roots of the contemporary quest go back to the formation of transnational political associations in the nineteenth century with the burgeoning peace and labor movements. A century later, in the 1960s and 1970s, new movements for gender and racial equality, nuclear disarmament, and environmental justice sparked global organizing and activism. In the 1980s, economic globalization became an era-defining issue. Then, as the walls of the Cold War came tumbling down and the Internet eroded barriers to communication, the concept of global civil society took hold. To this day, civil society carries the banner of transformative hope, expressed through pursuit of peace, justice, democracy, economic well-being, and ecological sustainability.

The growing organization and influence of global civil society can be seen in the human rights movement. For example, an international criminal court was first proposed in 1872 in response to the atrocities of the Franco-Prussian War. However, the NGO Coalition for an International Criminal Court (ICC), which featured prominent human rights organizations, was not founded until 1995. By the time the Rome Statute was adopted in July 1998, more than 800 organizations had joined the campaign; in the early 2000s, the number was more than one thousand. The ultimate creation of the ICC, though noteworthy, was an achievement tempered by the nonparticipation of China, Russia, and the US, among others, and by accusations, especially by African states, that the court has been guilty of applying double standards.

In another arena, civil society became a prominent bulwark against corporate-driven globalization, challenging the “Washington Consensus” and its policy agenda of trade liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and fiscal austerity. Counter-summits, mass demonstrations, and targeted campaigns resisted the power asymmetries, injustices, and environmental impacts of the corporate-driven

world economy. Global media made the protests of this “alter-globalization” movement visible to people around the world.

The turn of the new century saw the creation of a self-consciously political expression of global civil society in the form of the World Social Forum (WSF), inaugurated in June 2001 with an international meeting of 12,000 activists in Porto Alegre, Brazil. In the years that followed, such global meetings grew larger, and regional meetings were spawned, providing a rolling series of vital platforms for interchange and networking among diverse civil society actors. However, the WSF has suffered from an internal contradiction between its promise to facilitate the transition to a better world and its central organizing principle of simply providing an open space.

Political agency requires transformative capacity, which a mere open space for discourse lacks. Because the WSF has remained hesitant to move into the realm of action, interest has waned, leaving the WSF’s future fragile and uncertain.

Without an overarching framework fostering solidarity, shared vision, and synergistic action, civil society remains fragmented across a plethora of organizations, issues, and places. Those who grasp the character and peril of planetary interconnectedness understand the need for new transnational agents and institutions that can tackle global ecological, economic, and security challenges. The times call for the creation of a world political party (WPP): an open ethico-political association in pursuit of a broad program of societal reorganization on a global scale. A WPP offers the most promise for fostering political coherence in civil society.

For many reasons, a detailed blueprint for a WPP is neither advisable nor possible. Yet, we can explore the broad contours of a diverse, democratic global political formation. Any process for advancing new institutional arrangements, to be legitimate, needs to be responsive to all significantly affected actors—and thus robustly democratic. Theory and practice must align. Transformative practice itself must thus embrace adaptive learning, seek democratic consensus, and have the capacity for collective decision-making. Meeting these desiderata takes us far beyond open space venues like the WSF and single-issue civil society arenas.

Skepticism about the feasibility of a world political party is understandable, especially in light of the discontent with political parties in national contexts.

Across the world, major parties have become “post-democratic” as private money rules in politics and power is increasingly concentrated in a narrow elite.[i] Often, the anti-elite backlash has been nationalist, xenophobic, and authoritarian. Many countries, especially in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa, are sliding towards full-scale authoritarianism.[ii] A viable WPP must be able to respond to the moral and political criticism of existing national parties, while cultivating a democratic ethos within global civil society and exercising effective political agency. Such broad-based political capability presupposes the emergence of public consciousness rooted in shared elements of a wider and deeper worldview. This evolution, in turn, fosters the willingness to engage in collective processes to build trust and commitment.

A world party cannot be created overnight, but rather can emerge out of today’s activism and experimentation in the context of intensifying global crises. One instructive experiment is the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25). DiEM25’s successes and failures provide critical lessons for forging organs of collective agency beyond one continent.

The Shape of a New Formation

The earliest analogues for a new world party are the socialist internationals of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Marx and Engels’s declaration of “Proletarians of all countries, unite!” helped inspire the International Workingmen’s Association, or “First International.” In the years before World War I, socialist and labor parties joined together in the Second International. Then, after the Russian Revolution, the Soviet Union formed the Third International, or Comintern, as a vehicle for controlling communist parties worldwide. In parallel, organizations such as the Industrial Workers of the World saw themselves as part of a global organizing project, captured in the IWW’s vision of the OBU (“One Big Union”). The reformist, postwar Socialist International—a descendent of the Second International—still exists, but its constituent social democratic parties lack the sense of solidarity and collective agency of their predecessors.

The top-down character of an organization like the Comintern would certainly meet strong opposition in a contemporary civil society culture skeptical of hierarchy. Recognition of equality is part and parcel of human collective learning. The prolific English writer H. G. Wells presaged a better way, exploring the idea of a WPP in essays and novels, with the 1928 *The Open Conspiracy* his most daring effort.[iii] Rather than a centrally organized party, Wells’s “open

conspiracy” comprised a mass movement united by a humanistic faith and understanding of the world. The diverse set of actors in this movement-party could, he argued, collectively forge a rational and democratic world republic.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, amid lively discussions about the meaning and future of the alter-globalization movement, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri developed the idea of a “multitude,” a complex network of a plurality of actors. In part inspired by the experiences of the alter-globalization movements, in part a modern substitute for the Marxian working class, this concept bears some resemblance to Wells’s open conspiracy (indeed, Wells, too, used the term multitude). Like Wells, Hardt and Negri developed these ideas in response to the global problem of war, arguing that the war on terror waged against a largely unspecified enemy served to justify and reinforce Great Power domination. However, the global governance reforms Hardt and Negri espouse are quite modest, with a global currency transaction tax the most far-reaching proposal.[iv]

The war on terror in 2001, and the opposition to it, proved to be a turning point, sidelining the alter-globalization movement. Another turning point was the global financial crisis of 2008-9, which increased the socioeconomic insecurity and anxiety of people everywhere.[v] In the years since, wage stagnation, unemployment growth, and skyrocketing inequality have undermined social stability, while the concentration of capital has eroded democratic institutions, enabling a moneyed elite to rig economic and political systems. This inequality and instability, in turn, have fanned the flames of resurgent nationalist populism.

A far-sighted response to the contemporary crisis would be to build a world political party. Such a party would contribute to the process of constructing a global demos, best seen as a pluralist, evolving political community of world citizens exercising political rights in a globalized public sphere. A WPP would welcome a range of different ideological agendas concerning how common global institutions might best be organized. The party would constitute a transnational public sphere, where the sufficiently like-minded—i.e., members of the party—could freely debate issues and make collective decisions. The *raison d’être* of the party lies in advancing new institutional forms for organizing the planetary public realm.

A nascent world party would spawn nodes at different levels and contexts, each attuned to salient issues at its level within an overarching global perspective and

strategy. The various chapters would share a core program while maintaining their autonomy, adopting additional planks into their platform as appropriate (provided that they resonate with the overall agenda). Within this complex transformative agency, balance would be sought between pluralism and unity. Cultivating a sense of mutuality, trust, and sensitivity among diverse participants is key to developing a viable global political community and public sphere.

Collective Learning and Cosmopolitanism

Although ancient Greek city-states had cliques and parties of opinion, the contemporary understanding of political parties is rather recent. Until early European modernity, the metaphor of a “body politic” dominated the political imagination. In this view, a conflict or contradiction in one organism or body is not considered. Today, as a result of effectual collective learning processes, rules are no longer treated as external to individual actors, and thus sacred or unassailable, but rather as the product of free, mutual agreement of individuals endowed with autonomous conscience. This form of collective discourse first emerged in some ancient small citystates, typically among free males, but was repressed by large-scale military-agrarian empires. The demand for equality re-emerged in a more radical form in complex large-scale society with modern political revolutions.

In the context of modernity, new ideas such as human rights and the rule of law became part of social reality. Notably, the trial of Louis XVI marked a break with the mythological view of the monarchy’s power, and the ascent of the understanding of citizens as autonomous actors with the right to revise prevailing rules and laws. For the Girondists, the king no longer embodied the law, but rather subject to it, just like any other citizen. All citizens are equally bound by the law.[vi]

The historical process of collective learning points towards cosmopolitan moral sentiments. In higher stages of reasoning, individuals gain an understanding that morality and ethico-political principles must have validity and application apart from both the authority of the groups or persons holding these principles, and the individual’s own identification with particular groups or institutions. Such is the moral foundation of world citizenship.

Of course, the movement toward cosmopolitanism is hardly inevitable, and not all social learning is progressive. Past lessons can be forgotten, and change can be

regressive, undermining future learning. Economic uncertainty can amplify existential insecurity and anxiety, triggering regressive learning. Religion and nationalism can provide channels for diverting resentment and angst originating in socioeconomic conditions. Asymmetric power relations can undermine the learning process as well, by steering public consciousness towards perspectives that serve particular identities, interests, or elites.

Pushing back against such tendencies, a central aim of a WPP would be to nurture positive learning that creates a public more receptive to pluralist cosmopolitanism. This requires strategies for shaping the economic and social conditions that support individual and collective learning, and improving the skills and knowledge required for effective participation in the learning process. Educating the public about global affairs is essential for developing a collective democratic culture and deeper engagement in the global public realm.

Much of our thinking is unconscious, which further complicates learning processes. Thinking is based on prototypes, framings, and metaphors that are seldom explicit. This background is the source of “common sense” views of how we connect and interact and what our expectations are of one another and outsiders. Underlying normative ideas and images generate manifold stories about who we are, where we come from, and where we are heading. A problem for a global political party is that, compared to the rich poetics of national myths and narratives, cosmopolitan prototypes, metaphors, framings, and stories remain rather thin.

A promising way to counter parochial ideologies is to situate the contemporary problematique within a macro-view of cosmological, biological, and social evolution. This “Big History” approach expands both our understanding of “where we are” and visions of “where we want to go.” A sweeping narrative can motivate transformative and progressive politics in the twenty-first century.[vii] The point of departure of Big History is that our common human capacities have emerged from the evolution of life, itself an emergent layer of cosmological unfolding. A sweeping framework puts into context and underscores the import of the Anthropocene: the new geological age defined by the human impact on the whole Earth. Big History encourages narratives and values with a sense of global belonging—the Earth as our common home in the cosmos. This broad panorama suggests a new slogan: think cosmically, act globally.

DiEM25: A Seed Crystal?

Can we see rumblings of a WPP today? Perhaps future historians will look back to many precursors now in play. One promising contemporary initiative is the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25). Established in early 2016 in the aftermath of the Euro crisis, DiEM25 has assumed many of the characteristics of a WPP. As such, it offers an invaluable testbed for cultivating transnational ethical and political consciousness, deploying new technologies to enable widespread participation, overcoming legal obstacles to a supranational political party, and transcending identity-political fragmentation.

Following the 2015 defeat of the Greek left-wing party Syriza in its struggle against the Troika (the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank, and EU Commission), Greek Minister of Finance Yanis Varoufakis resigned. Subsequent political meetings in France and Germany convinced him of the need to “band together regardless of nationality and transcend the divide between debtor and creditor countries.” The solution was clear: a new pan-European political movement to prevent a “descent into a post-modern 1930s.”[viii]

To advance this aim, DiEM25’s strategy is to convene a constitutional assembly that would reflect a genuine European democracy. It intends to have a draft constitution prepared by 2025 that, if adopted, would replace all existing European treaties. Beyond this process, the movement strives to overcome austerity and harmful competition in Europe with concrete policy proposals, including the dedication of 500 billion euros per year to green investment and industrial conversion, a European anti-poverty plan, a universal basic income (financed by a “public” percentage of companies’ profits), and a common and humane migration policy.[ix]

Rather than adhering to a single political ideology, DiEM25 is resolutely pluralistic, aiming to attract a broad spectrum of progressives, whether leftists, social democrats, greens, or liberals. Participants are united in their dissatisfaction with Europe’s economic and political establishment, and in their advocacy for a government by the people of Europe. In contrast to the authoritarian, nationalistic populisms on the rise throughout Europe, DiEM25 exemplifies a form of democratic, transnational populism. Its concept of “we” is a pan-European demos that transcends national identity.

DiEM25’s inclusionary transnationalism manifests in the common front it is building for political activism. But the movement enacts transnationalism in

another sense: its commitment to helping the most vulnerable people in the global political economy, especially refugees.[x] As stated in its manifesto, DiEM25 aspires to “an Open Europe that is alive to ideas, people and inspiration from all over the world, recognizing fences and borders as signs of weakness spreading insecurity in the name of security.”[xi] The movement thus offers a clear alternative to Fortress Europe.

Not surprisingly, given DiEM25’s expansive political philosophy, its participants are not exclusively European. Joining many well-known European intellectuals, are visible international figures such as Julian Assange and Noam Chomsky. The members of the Coordinating Collective that organizes and integrates DiEM25’s actions have wide international experience, including in the peace movement, the ICC campaign, Occupy, and the World Social Forum.

DiEM25 has some 70,000 members, mostly in Europe but from other continents as well, along with eight national collectives and a hundred ad hoc collectives around the world. Although more a movement than a political party for now, it will be presenting a list for the 2019 European Parliament elections, dubbing the effort the “European spring.” This “first progressive transnational list ever” includes both candidates directly chosen by DiEM25 and candidates nominated by DiEM25 to appear on the slates of conventional parties. This selection process, as with all DiEM25’s work, relies on modern IT technology to facilitate discussion among dispersed members, in parallel with in-person meetings and events across Europe.

In spite of such mobilization, DiEM25 has yet to become a high-profile actor in European politics. Its membership and budget remain small compared to those of the major national political parties, and the mainstream media largely ignores its activities and positions. Even after years of decline, Germany’s Christian Democratic Union, for instance, commands a budget of tens of millions of euros per year, while DiEM25’s is less than a half-million. Given its limited resources, DiEM25’s near-term electoral success will likely be modest at best. Nevertheless, as it evolves and grows, it could become a model or, beyond, a seed germinating future world political parties.

Where We Are

While we live longer and value life more highly than ever, the world as a whole faces decades of unprecedented problems. The global economic crisis of

2008-2009 and the subsequent euro crisis are only one indication of how the fates of different countries and regions have become more and more intertwined. The conditions of everyday activities of all people are directly or indirectly affected by how the world economy works—or does not work. The next global crisis will have far-reaching consequences. The challenge then? How to reach the teacher, textile worker, and janitor, to name a few, with the vision and message to convey how a WPP can serve their needs and interests.

Perhaps the most serious immediate threat concerns the danger of global war, and especially nuclear war. Both the escalation of the conflict between Russia and the West and the confrontations in the South China Sea show that questions of global political economy and security have still not been answered on a sustainable footing. Similarly, climate change is a key part of a new geological era, the Anthropocene, in which human action is transforming the composition and processes of the biosphere. The expansion of human society has led, among other things, to the mass destruction of habitats, species, and whole ecosystems. This devolution continues at an accelerating pace, carrying threats to global civilization.

The concept of “world risk society” helps situate our task.[xii] The current epoch, in this conceptualization, is the second phase of modernization, in which actors and movements begin to respond to the problems generated by the consequences of the first phase. The primary feature of this new phase is the emergence of a common world with no outside and no exit. Societal risks demand that we acknowledge the real dangers and threats we confront. At the same time, these risks contain a collective condition and power that creates new ethical, political, and technological opportunities for shaping futures to sustain us and new modernities to dream by.

As humankind is thrilled by scientific discoveries of new planets with the possibility of extraterrestrial life, we become increasingly aware of the peril our technological civilization poses for the future of life right here on Earth. Human curiosity about our place in the cosmos and the awareness of the great ethical-political choices before us demand a new phase of collective learning and promotion of practices and institutions matched to our common challenge.

Our ability to secure a sustainable global future depends on a fundamental shift from the currently dominant national mythos to a global imaginary. The

mechanisms and processes of collective learning through institutional change differ from those of individual growth. Collective learning and institutional change require politically capable transformative actors. Practical and political problems can be overcome by building better common institutions.

The world political party envisaged in this essay embraces this grand task.[xiii] As Wells proclaimed almost a century ago, way ahead of his time, “the alternative before man now is either magnificence of spirit and magnificence of achievement or disaster.” The choice could not be clearer today. The future we want is one that removes constraints on human well-being and enables human flourishing. Navigating history towards collective self-determination on this planet, and one day perhaps beyond it, will take bold, transformative practice.

In our troubled world, the need for global transformative agency is greater than ever. The future is not yet settled, and the path there depends on the choices we make. Our expectations become a feedback loop in the making of the future. Pessimists argue that a series of limited-scale crises or wars—or a full global catastrophe—must erupt before a significant force can coalesce for rational, peaceful, and democratic transformations of global governance.

However likely that view, we cannot stand passively by until crises explode before working for social transformation. If and when a window of opportunity opens, the capacity for such action must already have been established. The time has come, then, to devote our efforts to building a world party as an overarching organizational expression of global citizens’ power.

Notes

[i] Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

[ii] For different views on the decline of democracy, see Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, “The Signs of Deconsolidation,” *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 1 (2017: 5–15); the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index 2017, which reports “the worst decline in global democracy in years” (available at <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracyindex>); and John Weeks, “Free Markets and the Decline of Democracy,” *Open Democracy*, July 18, 2018, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/john-weeks/free-markets-and-decline-of-democracy>.

[iii] There are many different editions of this work, with different titles (including *What Are We To Do With Our Lives?*, available at

<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0201081h.html>). See, in particular, H. G. Wells, "The Open Conspiracy," in *The Open Conspiracy: H. G. Wells on World Revolution*, ed. W. Warren Wagar (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

[iv] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 290-306. The global currency transaction tax they propose relies on a working paper by Heikki Patomäki and Teivo Teivainen, later published in *A Possible World: Democratic Transformation of Global Institutions* (Zed Books: London, 2004), 163-182.

[v] I analyze the global financial crisis and the Euro crisis in *The Great Eurozone Disaster: From Crisis to Global New Deal* (Zed Books: London, 2013).

[vi] Based on Alan R. How, "Habermas, History and Social Evolution: Moral Learning and the Trial of Louis XVI," *Sociology* 35, no. 1 (February 2001): 177-194.

[vii] As discussed in Heikki Patomäki and Manfred Steger, "Social Imaginaries and Big History: Towards a New Planetary Consciousness?" *Futures* 42, no. 10 (2010): 1056-1063.

[viii] Yanis Varoufakis, *Adults in the Room: My Battle with Europe's Deep Establishment* (London: The Bodley Head, 2017), 483-485.

[ix] "European Parliament Elections: Launching the European Spring Transnational List," *DiEM25*, June 2018, <https://diem25.org/european-parliament-elections-launching-the-european-spring-transnational-list/>.

[x] See Panos Panayotu, "Towards a Transnational Populism: A Chance for European Democracy (?) - The Case of DiEM25," *Populismus Working Papers*, 2017, no. 5,

<https://www.populismus.gr/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/panayotu-final-upload.pdf>
11. *DiEM25*, "A Manifesto for Democratising Europe (long version)," 2016, https://diem25.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/diem25_english_long.pdf.

12. Beck Ulrich, "Global Risk Society," in *Encyclopedia of Globalization*, ed. George Ritzker, vol. II (Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford, 2012), 836-838.

13. Heikki Patomäki, "Towards Global Political Parties," *Ethics & Global Politics* 4, no. 2 (2011): 94-98, <http://www.ethicsandglobalpolitics.net/index.php/egp/article/view/7334>.

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De grond lezen als een boek ~ Graven naar de geschiedenis van de Cariben. Met Corinne Hofman

Toen Columbus meer dan 500 jaar geleden de oceaan over zeilde op zoek naar de Nieuwe Wereld, stapte hij het eerst aan wal in het Caribisch gebied. Hoe leefde de Indiaanse bevolking daar? Hoeveel contact was er tussen de eilanden? En hoe

verliep de ontmoeting tussen de oude en de nieuwe wereld? Al meer dan 20 jaar zoekt archeoloog Corinne Hofman het antwoord op deze vragen in de Caribische aarde.

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