

PVV Blog 11 ~ The Ideology Of The PVV In Practice: Conclusion



09-02-2024 ~ In this final episode of the series, I conclude my reflections and venture a prediction on how the new government, with its PVV contingent, will fare. The reason for ending the series is twofold. Firstly, I have based this series on my earlier work on the PVV, as expressed in my books [*De ideologie van de PVV. Het kwade goed en het goede kwaad*](#) (2012) and [*The Dutch Party for Freedom. An Analysis of Geert Wilders' Thinking on Islam*](#) (2012). I noticed that everything I had noted and analyzed in the books regarding the PVV's ideology had become almost exhausted. In this series, I have extensively discussed the positions and considerations that party leader Wilders and party ideologue Bosma once committed to paper, which I analyzed in both books. Secondly, I notice that all the points I have discussed now also frequently appear in the national and international press. It seems that what I wrote about in 2012 has now become common knowledge in the reporting of the PVV-critical press. And that, of course, gives me much satisfaction. The press is aware of the very poor democratic structure of the PVV; they know of the now more than ever unhidden agenda of the PVV to make the Netherlands, and preferably all of Europe, Islam-free and thus Muslim-free. Of the close relationships the PVV maintains with like-minded individuals in Europe, such as Marine Le Pen of the French Rassemblement National and Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán of the Fidesz party. This series will remain online for the time being, but it will also be published in full on my [website](#) and on my [Academia page](#), both in Dutch and English, and perhaps later in French and Arabic as well.

The New Government

The [debate on the government declaration](#) on July 3 and 4 already led to a significant clash between the newly minted Prime Minister Dick Schoof and PVV leader Wilders, which I reported on in the [previous episode](#) of this blog. The prime minister identified himself in his observations with the later Dutch Olympic champion marathon runner Sifan Hassan, of Ethiopian origin, saying he considered her someone who belongs to society. The prime minister has so far

acted inclusively ('everyone is part of society'), and I have yet to catch him making an 'exclusive' statement ('us versus them').

Furthermore, the ministers from the PVV are confronted with the daily realities of governance. Minister Agema of Health reported that she could do little or nothing to keep [a hospital in Heerlen](#), in the south of the country, open, even though she repeatedly argued as a Member of Parliament at the time that hospitals should not be closed and that the government should take the necessary measures to prevent this.

Minister Faber of Migration and Asylum told the press that there is an '[asylum crisis](#),' on the basis of which the government would no longer be obliged to take in asylum seekers or would be able to refuse them. However, the minister had to temper her words within a few hours.

I believe that the PVV ministers are, as it were, caught in the web of the reality of daily governance and are confronted with the sometimes-limited possibilities that exist, both administratively and financially, to realize the PVV's agenda. Moreover, the PVV is one of four political parties in the government and potentially faces three other parties. While the PVV may find itself in the center of power, it is not alone.

The Troublemaker Wilders

The only real and also powerful troublemaker is party leader Geert Wilders, who continues to express his still unabashedly populist and racist views from the sidelines, particularly on X (formerly Twitter). A simple look at his [X timeline](#) shows the reader that he is no less fierce than in the past.

The question is what happens next. I think this cabinet is seriously trying to work on its program, and we will see (as they say in Dutch) that the soup is not eaten as hot as it is served. The PVV ministers are bound by the coalition agreement, and that certainly does not consist solely of pure PVV points of view. Prime Minister Dick Schoof will continue to act inclusively, and this will lead to a further deterioration of the relationship between him and Geert Wilders in the future.

No Physical PVV Power Base

PVV leader Wilders will also be confronted with the fact that he has never bothered to give his party more structure. Like-minded parties such as the Rassemblement National and Fidesz in Hungary have a well-developed party

apparatus, with a party office, a youth wing, and a scientific bureau. The PVV has none of these. The PVV is a party where Geert Wilders is the only human member. But now that he is in the center of power, this would have been the chance to gain more influence than ever. But if you only have a phone (that is never answered), an email address, and a website, and no manpower at your disposal, and on top of that, if you have to or want to do almost everything alone, then you miss the opportunity to build power. But who knows, maybe PVV leader Wilders will gain new insights and start building. But I think it will be too late.

The Future of the Netherlands

Thus, the Netherlands faces a potentially turbulent time. I will continue to follow the cabinet from the sidelines, and I have full confidence that others will continue to critically monitor the PVV and this government. I hope the damage this government can do to society will be limited. Time will tell.

All

episodes:

<https://rozenbergquarterly.com/pvv-blog-introduction-the-dutch-party-for-freedom-an-analysis-of-geert-wilders-thinking-on-islam/>

Labor Militancy Is The Only Way To Increase Union Membership



Agitated workers face the factory owner in The Strike, painted by Robert Koehler in

09-01-2024 ~ *We need to rebuild the labor movement, and that means not going back to the kind of unions that existed in the postwar era. We need unions with a radical vision, unions that exert power in the workplace and society.*

With Labor Day 2024 upon us, it is important to critically reflect on the current state of the U.S. labor movement and the challenges that it faces in an environment where Big Business dominates the economy and mainstream society continues to abide allegiance to the values of a Lockean political culture in which ruthless individualism reigns supreme. To put it mildly, without a strong labor movement and a public spirit guiding our institutions, the country will never succeed in realizing the vision of a just and fair society.

However, the news on the labor front is not very encouraging. The share of U.S. workers who belong to a union has been declining since the early 1980s—an era which coincides with the full swing of the neoliberal counterrevolution and deindustrialization. In [1983](#), the first year for which comparable data are available, the union membership rate was 20.1 percent and declined to 11.1 percent in 2015.

In [2021](#), the union membership rate was 10.3 percent and dropped to 10.1 percent in 2022. In [2023](#), union membership declined even further to 10.0 percent, which is a [historic low](#).

The irony is that the United States has seen a “union boom” over the last couple of years. Thousands of employees at [Starbucks](#) stores across the country have voted to unionize and workers at [Amazon warehouses](#) and [Trader Joe’s](#), [grad students](#), and [Uber and Lyft](#) drivers also joined the unionization fight. But the data, as cited above, tells a different story. The share of U.S. workers belonging to a union continues to decline and is now at the lowest rate in history. Today, organized labor in the United States is dominated by [public-sector employees](#), which is more than five times higher than the 6 percent rate of private-sector employees.

The [United States](#) is near the bottom among industrialized democracies when it comes to union membership rates. The average level of union membership across the [European Union](#) (EU) is 23 percent, but the average is held down by relatively

low levels of membership in some large EU states, such as Germany with 18 percent and France with 8 percent. However, even in countries where union density is lower, such as in France, virtually all workers are covered by a collective bargaining agreement. In Denmark, Sweden and Finland, union density is 70 percent. Incidentally, the Nordic countries consistently rank among the happiest nations in the world. In the latest [World Happiness Report](#), the United States doesn't even make the top 20 list. Trade union density is even higher in [Africa](#) and most parts of Asia than it is in the United States.

Why is union membership in the United States so low? This is something of an anomaly considering the fact that [polls](#) consistently reveal that majorities of U.S. adults see the decline in union membership as bad for the country and for working people. It is mostly ultra-conservatives and reactionary think tanks like the [Hoover Institution](#) that believe that the decline of unions is good news.

Globalization, technology, and the transformation of an industrial economy into a service-oriented society are the most common reasons offered for the decline of U.S. unions. However, these explanations, even when put together, are not sufficient in explaining why the U.S. has one of the lowest union membership rates in the world. [Europe](#) is much more open than the United States, according to the International Monetary Fund. Thus, globalization alone cannot be an explanation for the general decline in unionization in the U.S. Europe's technology lags behind the U.S., but it is not technology but rather institutional arrangements and intentional policy decisions that succeed in altering in significant ways the balance between capital and labor that can explain why union membership has plateaued at 10 percent among workers in the United States. We must acknowledge that neoliberalism itself is not a monolithic process; rather, it is affected by a variety of domestic pressures and thus plays out differently in different national contexts.

In the U.S., it is politics—manifested in the form of a vicious class struggle orchestrated from the economic elite and its supporters—that keeps workers from joining or creating a union. The basic rights of U.S. workers to unionize and engage in collective bargaining have been under attack throughout the history of U.S. capitalism. [Strikes](#) figured prominently during the height of the industrialization era and well into the twentieth century, with immigrant workers from Ireland, Italy and Germany being at the forefront of labor radicalism, but so did employer and government violence directed against striking workers. The

U.S. has the [most violent labor history](#) in the western world. The U.S. government may be the only government in the industrialized world that has engaged in systematic [massacres of striking workers](#).

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), also known as the Wagner Act, was passed in July 1935. The [Act](#), whose broad intention was to guarantee employees “the right to self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid and protection” was probably instrumental in the dramatic increase in unionization rates that was witnessed from the late 1930s to the 1950s, hitting its apex at 32 percent; yet, its failures are well established and can, conversely, be attributed to the decline in private sector unionization rates that started taking place following their [peak](#) in the late 1950s. In fact, NLRA, however ironic this may sound, may be responsible for the creation of “[a vibrant non-union sector instead](#).”

The Supreme Court, of course, has also been instrumental in creating a “vibrant non-union sector.” The Court has consistently made decisions that limit union power, including the right to strike. Rather typical here was the stance taken by the [union-busting Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor](#) when she said that employees who strike in support of union bargaining “[gamble](#)” their jobs.

Indeed, in no other country in the western world has the [right to strike](#) been as severely undermined as in the U.S. In fact, U.S. labor law is an outright failure when it comes to safeguarding one of the key International Labor Organization (ILO) principles, which is to guarantee the right to strike, as it allows employers to enjoy [the right to replace workers](#) who strike for better wages and conditions.

Indeed, in no other country in the western world is anti-union consulting as huge of an industry as it is in the United States. As shocking as it may sound, it’s estimated that employers spend more than \$400 million per year in hiring “[union-avoidance](#)” consultants.

Moreover, “the party of the people” is equally guilty for throwing U.S. workers under the bus. All three living Democratic presidents ([Jimmy Carter](#), Barack Obama, and Bill Clinton) [let down unions](#) and certainly were no friends to working people. In fact, they worked ceaselessly to promote neoliberalism and overall

policies that were a disaster for labor, with [Clinton](#) leading the pack.

But no narrative for the dismal state of unionization in the U.S. can be fully complete if the role that unions themselves played in undermining the vision and the goals of the labor movement can be left out. As David N. Gibbs points out in his outstanding book [The Revolt of the Rich](#), the largest union in the country, the AFL-CIO, “was conceived on very conservative terms as an institutional reaction against leftist strains within the labor movement” and one of its main activities was working with the Central Intelligence Agency in fighting communism both at home and abroad. Getting rid of class struggle unionism was a primary objective of the AFL-CIO even when the union had begun its steady decline. Worse still, the [ties between mafia and labor unions](#), which go back to the early 1930s, had reached such a high point by the late 1950 that government investigation on labor racketeering got underway that in the ensuing decades would lead to convictions of major labor leader and mob figures. As James B. Jacobs argues in [Mobsters, Unions, and the Feds: The Mafia and the American Labor Movement](#), “labor racketeering” was a major feature of U.S. organized labor and contributed in a very big way to the decline of U.S. trade unionism.

The U.S. labor movement has been experiencing a renaissance of sorts over the last few years, although the truth of the matter is that union membership remains stagnant. The challenges ahead are indeed immense as there is no alternative left party in the U.S. and no social democratic traditions which rely on trade unions for softening the injustices inflicted by the capitalist system. U.S. capitalism is brutal and the reactionary forces, which lead all the way up to the Supreme Court, are extremely powerful, well organized, and massively funded.

Yet, we need unions as they are absolutely a critical force in the struggle to create a fair and just society. We need to rebuild the labor movement, and that means not going back to the kind of unions that existed in the postwar era. We need unions with a radical vision, unions that exert power in the workplace and society. There is no reason why a service-based economy, which is mainly associated with low wages and insecure employment, should offer less opportunities for union membership. In this context, there is much to learn from the experience of the [Union of Southern Service Workers](#), a union that doesn't shy away from taking militant action on the job against low pay and dangerous work conditions and to demand a seat at the table.

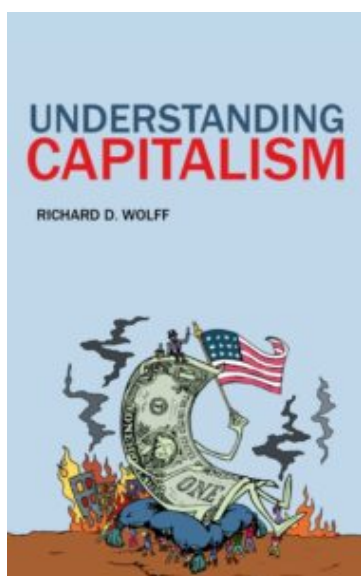
Rejecting business unionism and renewing in turn [labor militancy](#) is the only way to increase union membership and fight back labor exploitation and inequality.

Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/labor-day-union-militancy>

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Why Poverty Reduction Under Capitalism Is A Myth



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08-27-2024 ~From its beginnings, the capitalist economic system produced both critics and celebrants, those who felt victimized and those who felt blessed. Where victims and critics developed analyses, demands, and proposals for change, beneficiaries, and celebrants developed alternative discourses defending the system.

Certain kinds of arguments proved widely effective against capitalism's critics and in obtaining mass support. These became capitalism's basic supportive myths. One such myth is that capitalism created prosperity and reduced poverty.

Capitalists and their biggest fans have long argued that the system is an engine of wealth creation. Capitalism's early boosters, such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, and likewise capitalism's early critics such as Karl Marx, recognized that fact. Capitalism is a system built to grow.

Because of market competition among capitalist employers, "growing the business" is necessary, most of the time, for it to survive. Capitalism is a system driven to grow wealth, but wealth creation is not unique to capitalism. The idea that only capitalism creates wealth or that it does so more than other systems is a myth.

What else causes wealth production? There are a whole host of other contributors to wealth. It's never only the economic system, whether capitalist or feudal or slave or socialist. Wealth creation depends on all kinds of circumstances in history (such as raw materials, weather, or inventions) that determine if and how fast wealth is created. All of those factors play roles alongside that of the particular economic system in place.

When the USSR imploded in 1989, some claimed that capitalism had "defeated" its only real competitor—socialism—proving that capitalism was the greatest possible creator of wealth. The "end of history" had been reached, it was said, at least in relation to economic systems. Once and for all, nothing better than capitalism could be imagined, let alone achieved.

The myth here is a common mistake and grossly overused. While wealth was created in significant quantities over the last few centuries *as* capitalism spread globally, that does not prove it was capitalism that *caused* the growth in wealth.

Maybe wealth grew despite capitalism. Maybe it would have grown faster with some other system. Evidence for that possibility includes two important facts. First, the fastest economic growth (as measured by GDP) in the 20th century was that achieved by the USSR. And second, the fastest growth in wealth in the 21st century so far is that of the People's Republic of China. Both of those societies rejected capitalism and proudly defined themselves as socialist.

Another version of this myth, especially popular in recent years, claims capitalism deserves credit for bringing many millions out of poverty over the last 200 to 300 years. In this story, capitalism's wealth creation brought everyone a higher standard of living with better food, wages, job conditions, medicine and health care, education, and scientific advancements. Capitalism supposedly gave huge gifts to the poorest among us and deserves our applause for such magnificent social contributions.

The problem with this myth is like that with the wealth-creation myth discussed above. Just because millions escaped poverty during capitalism's global spread does not prove that capitalism is the reason for this change. Alternative systems could have enabled an escape from poverty during the same period of time, or for more people more quickly, because they organized production and distribution differently.

Capitalism's profit focus has often held back the distribution of products to drive up their prices and, therefore, profits. Patents and trademarks of profit-seeking businesses effectively slow the distribution of all sorts of products. We cannot know whether capitalism's incentive effects outweigh its slowing effects. Claims that, overall, capitalism promotes rather than slows progress are pure ideological assertions. Different economic systems—capitalism included—promote and delay development in different ways at different speeds in their different parts.

Capitalists and their supporters have almost always opposed measures designed to lessen or eliminate poverty. They blocked minimum wage laws often for many years, and when such laws were passed, they blocked raising the minimums (as they have done in the United States since 2009). Capitalists similarly opposed laws outlawing or limiting child labor, reducing the length of the working day, providing unemployment compensation, establishing government pension systems such as Social Security, providing a national health insurance system, challenging gender and racial discrimination against women and people of color, or providing

a universal basic income. Capitalists have led opposition to progressive tax systems, occupational safety and health systems, and free universal education from preschool through university. Capitalists have opposed unions for the last 150 years and likewise restricted collective bargaining for large classes of workers. They have opposed socialist, communist, and anarchist organizations aimed at organizing the poor to demand relief from poverty.

The truth is this: to the extent that poverty has been reduced, it has happened *despite* the opposition of capitalists. To credit capitalists and capitalism for the reduction in global poverty is to invert the truth. When capitalists try to take credit for the poverty reduction that was achieved against their efforts, they count on their audiences not knowing the history of fighting poverty in capitalism.

Recent claims that capitalism overcame poverty are often based on misinterpretations of certain data. For example, the United Nations defines extreme poverty as an income of under \$1.97 per day. The number of poor people living on under \$1.97 per day has decreased markedly in the last century. But one country, China—the world’s largest by population—has experienced one of the greatest escapes from poverty in the world in the last century, and therefore, has an outsized influence on all totals. Given China’s huge influence on poverty measures, one could claim that reduced global poverty in recent decades results from an economic system that insists it is *not* capitalist but rather socialist.

Economic systems are eventually evaluated according to how well or not they serve the society in which they exist. How each system organizes the production and distribution of goods and services determines how well it meets its population’s basic needs for health, safety, sufficient food, clothing, shelter, transport, education, and leisure to lead a decent, productive work-life balance. How well is modern capitalism performing in that sense?

Modern capitalism has now accumulated around 100 individuals in the world who together own more wealth than the bottom half of this planet’s population (over 3.5 billion people). Those hundred richest people’s financial decisions have as much influence over how the world’s resources are used as the financial decisions of 3.5 billion, the poorest half of this planet’s population. That is why the poor die early in a world of modern medicine, suffer from diseases that we know how to cure, starve when we produce more than enough food, lack education when we have plenty of teachers, and experience so much more tragedy. Is this what

reducing poverty looks like?

Crediting capitalism for poverty reduction is another myth. Poverty was reduced by the poor's struggle against a poverty reproduced systemically by capitalism and capitalists. Moreover, the poor's battles were often aided by militant working-class organizations, including pointedly anti-capitalist organizations.

By Richard D. Wolff

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Credit Line: This adapted excerpt from Richard D. Wolff's book [Understanding Capitalism](#) (*Democracy at Work*, 2024) was produced by [Economy for All](#), a project of the Independent Media Institute.

Harris's Failed Opportunity?



Sonali Kolhatkar

08-26-2024 ~ Kamala Harris chose to embrace Republican language on the economy even if she backs progressive politics.

During her nearly 40-minute-long [speech](#) on the final day of the 2024 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Vice President Kamala Harris laid out her economic plan for the nation as “an opportunity economy where everyone has the chance to compete and a chance to succeed.”

I deliberately chose not to watch her speech, preferring instead to read it. The ebullience at this year’s DNC was infectious. The Democratic Party is leaning into some of the language of progressive economic populism and is energized by a younger, more enthusiastic nominee. But reading Harris’s speech rather than watching it, helped bring some distance from the joy and clarified that the party is still not embracing the language of progressive economic populism and continues to use the destructive language of the right.

The term “opportunity economy” is itself the problem. It’s a phrase that former Senate Majority Leader [Mitch McConnell](#) used to defend Donald Trump’s economic agenda in 2019. [Florida’s Chamber of Commerce](#), a staunchly pro-business outfit, has used it as well.

The word “opportunity” means a chance, the creation of circumstances to make something possible. We live in a nation where racial segregation is technically illegal, which means people of color have the “opportunity” to attend elite schools, apply for jobs, build wealth, retire comfortably, and pass their wealth to their children. Those opportunities have existed for decades. But data shows over and over that they don’t translate into reality, especially for Black and Brown people in the U.S. The [racial wealth gap](#), for example, remains high. There are

structural barriers that remain firmly in place, and that require very specific government intervention to dismantle. Will Harris embrace such a dismantling?

Harris proudly related during her DNC [speech](#) that she “took on the big banks, delivered \$20 billion for middle-class families who faced foreclosure, and helped pass a homeowner bill of rights, one of the first of its kind in the nation.”

But she took on banks as a prosecutor, not as a legislator or executive. And her homeowner bill of rights was, once more, based on the ideas of “opportunity.” In a [2017 op-ed](#) she explained that the bill of rights was based on “six bills designed to give Californians a fair opportunity to work with their banks, modify their loans, and keep their homes.”

Harris [pointed](#) out at the DNC that she “stood up for veterans and students being scammed by big, for-profit colleges. For workers who were being cheated out of their wages, the wages they were due. For seniors facing elder abuse.” Again, all were commendable achievements made during her role as a prosecutor and Attorney General of California. Will she stand up for the rights of veterans, students, workers, and seniors, or simply afford them opportunities for justice?

There is a huge difference between “opportunities” and “rights.” The former is a pro-corporate, pro-business term that is perfectly consistent with an individualist capitalist economy that has “winners” who make use of opportunities for wealth-building and “losers” who fail to do so. But “rights” is a word that insists on basic standards of fairness that everyone deserves. It encompasses an idea that capitalism hates: that people have the *right* to healthcare, childcare, education, homes, good wages, union jobs, and a stable climate. There are no winners and losers.

There was little talk of such rights at the Convention. In fact, even the [New York Times](#) noticed that Democrats avoided bringing up Medicare-for-All and the idea that everyone—not just a subsection of the population—has the right to taxpayer-funded healthcare. The Times’s Noah Weiland pointed out, “Her avoidance of a policy that had been central to progressive Democratic aspirations underscores how quickly she has sought to define her candidacy while appealing to more moderate voters, and how Medicare-for-All proposals have effectively left the Democratic mainstream for now.”

Instead of asserting that everyone has the right to taxpayer-funded healthcare

Harris [said](#), “We are not going back to when Donald Trump tried to cut Social Security and Medicare. We are not going back to when he tried to get rid of the Affordable Care Act when insurance companies could deny people with pre-existing conditions.”

It sounds as though she and her party have given up on expanding government healthcare to all and instead gone on the defense against the Republican Party’s attacks on Medicare and the ACA.

Harris’s second favorite word, after “opportunity” was “[freedom](#).” She used it a dozen times in her speech, recasting “rights” as “freedoms.” She referenced the “The freedom to live safe from gun violence in our schools, communities, and places of worship. The freedom to love who you love openly and with pride.” She also touted, “The freedom to breathe clean air, and drink clean water, and live free from the pollution that fuels the climate crisis. And the freedom that unlocks all the others: the freedom to vote.”

Clearly, Harris was attempting to reclaim the word “freedom” from the GOP, a formation that has been pulled toward the extreme right by Republican lawmakers who label themselves as members of the “[Freedom Caucus](#).” Freedom is akin to opportunity.

Indeed, Harris’s failure to make a full-throated embrace of progressive economic populism was a failed “opportunity.” The conditions were ripe for her to lean in to language centered on the rights of people given that we have witnessed a cultural sea change on the failures of capitalism.

This change was apparent at the 2024 DNC as well. One need only examine how Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders was received this year compared to the last two conventions. When Sanders spoke at the 2016 DNC in Philadelphia, his role was to [placate progressives](#) in the party who had supported his candidacy for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination. He urged his voters to back Hillary Clinton, the centrist candidate who would go on to lose the electoral college vote to Donald Trump in spite of winning the popular vote. Only months earlier, [leaked internal emails](#) from the Democratic National Committee revealed just what the party’s insiders thought of Sanders—and it wasn’t pretty.

Then, four years ago, his role at the 2020 DNC in Wisconsin was to defend Joe Biden’s candidacy against Trump. He [remarked](#), “Many of the ideas we fought for,

that just a few years ago were considered ‘radical,’ are now mainstream.”

But this year, even though his role was once more to convince his supporters to back a mainstream Democratic candidate, Sanders’s prime-time [address](#) at the 2024 DNC in Chicago sounded remarkably mainstream. The [New York Times](#) recognized him as an insider, saying that he seemed to have “a sense of vindication that the Democratic Party, as he sees it, has finally recognized that many progressive causes are broadly popular with Americans.”

Sanders hasn’t changed, but the party’s rhetoric has. Slate’s [Alexander Sammon](#) pointed out that, “There were very few themes in Sanders’s speech that other Democratic speakers hadn’t already covered on Monday and Tuesday.” Although the DNC’s tenor was markedly different from four and eight years ago—Sanders now sounded like he fit in, largely because the tenor, if not the substance, of his political leanings have become mainstream.

Meanwhile, Harris’s language of “opportunity agenda” leans right. She shared at the DNC, “My mother kept a strict budget. We lived within our means. Yet, we wanted for little and she expected us to make the most of the opportunities that were available to us, and to be grateful for them.” Such words could easily have been said by a Republican and reflect the party’s ideas about “fiscal responsibility.”

Harris also touted a “middle-class tax cut” in attempting to distinguish herself from Trump’s tax cuts for the rich. But tax cuts for the middle class is a [core GOP talking point](#)—even if the party usually delivers for the already-rich in spite of its promises to the not-so-rich.

In truth, Harris is likely more economically progressive than she let on. She has [backed](#) the Child Tax Credit, a program that was [popular](#) and remarkably [effective](#). But she made no mention of it at the DNC. Her running mate Minnesota Governor Tim Walz is known for his [economically progressive policies](#).

Granted, party conventions these days appear to be tailored to appease a sliver of the American public: the undecided voters in swing states whose all-important ballots will help determine who wins the electoral college, and thus, the presidency. In the context of such an undemocratic system, politicians will always feel pressure to tack toward the center, as winning the popular vote does not guarantee victory.

But we live at a time when momentum is building for fulfilling the economic “rights” of people via such ideas as [universal basic income plans](#), and [reparations](#) for Black people. A broad movement of progressives has for years demanded that the Democratic Party distinguish itself from the GOP by making a full-throated defense of the values it claimed to stand for. Rather than leaning rightward by using the Republican-style language of “opportunity” and “freedom,” the Democratic Party could lean left and center the “rights” of people.

By Sonali Kolhatkar

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Source: Independent Media Institute

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Interest Rate Cuts Now Could Help

Workers. But That's Not Who The Fed Serves.



Prof.dr. Gerald Epstein

08-26-2024 ~ *Progressive economist Gerald Epstein says the Fed is more sensitive to the needs of the wealthy few than the rest of us.*

The Federal Reserve hasn't changed interest rates since July of last year, after 11 hikes between March 2022 and July 2023 in the hope that higher borrowing costs would slow down consumer and business demand so inflation rates would drop. It kept the benchmark interest rate unchanged in its latest meeting ending July 31, 2024, but Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said that the first rate cut in four years "[could be on the table](#)" in [September](#). Nonetheless, the Fed has faced criticism for its refusal to lower rates, though inflation rates have moved steadily lower. By tightening monetary policy, the Fed hurts consumers' financial lives and even increases unemployment. So why has the Fed been so reluctant to cut interest rates?

The main reason, argues renowned progressive economist Gerald Epstein in the exclusive interview for *Truthout* that follows, is because the Fed is "more sensitive to the needs of the wealthy few than the rest of us." As such, the Fed's claim that it is an independent government agency is a complete myth. Epstein is professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and author of the recently published book [Busting the Bankers' Club: Finance for the Rest of Us](#) (University of California Press, 2024).

C. J. Polychroniou: The Federal Reserve has generated a lot of controversy by deciding at the July Federal Open Market Committee meeting to keep its benchmark interest rate unchanged. Obviously, the central bank is determined to attain its 2 percent inflation objective even though its 23-year high interest rates are having a significantly negative impact on the economy and on consumers' financial lives. Indeed, the Fed's high interest rates are counterproductive. They drive up housing prices, including rent; make it more difficult for people to pay down their debts; and even the unemployment rate has started to tick up. What's going on here? Why is Fed Chairman Jerome Powell refusing to cut the short-term interest rates even as inflation falls?

*Gerald Epstein: You are right. For quite a while, the Federal Reserve's high-interest rate policy has been harmful for most people and even counterproductive in terms of its ostensible objectives: reducing the cost of living for most Americans. These high interest rates are also interfering with other important needs. For example, as [Jen Harris](#) wrote in *The New York Times*, they are discouraging important investments in green energy such as wind power projects, because these projects tend to have large up-front costs and long-term pay-offs. So, the question is: Why has the Fed kept rates up so high and for so long? A key reason, at least until recently, is that these high rates have had [big pay-offs](#) for banks and other financial institutions that have been able to charge higher interest rates while reaping rewards from big capital gains in the [stock market](#). At this point, however, with the major drops in inflation and the weakening state of the economy, even big financial institutions have been calling for rate cuts. So why has the Fed refused to cut rates? Probably the main reason is that they fear a backlash from their major constituents, big finance and the wealthy top 1 percent, if they lower rates too quickly. In other words, they are much more sensitive to the needs of the wealthy few than to everyone else. Compounding this bias is the fact that the Fed's policy is informed by a profoundly mistaken economic theory: Their view, shared by most mainstream macroeconomists — such as former Fed Chair Ben Bernanke and former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers — is that the Fed controls inflation to a large degree by influencing the “public's” expectations of inflation, and that they do this by their inflation fighting “credibility.” And what determines this credibility? Their willingness to hurt workers if they try to raise their wages too much. It is a sort of central bankers' “macho” contest that Jerome Powell and other central bankers want to win. A major problem with this, from a theoretical point of view, is that there is very little, if any, evidence that*

expectations — credible or otherwise — have much impact on inflation, especially at the relatively low levels at which it is occurring these days.

To what extent does the stock market influence the real economy of goods and services? And should the Fed be blamed for the stock market rout in early August?

In principle, the stock market can influence the “real economy” in a couple of ways. The market can affect decisions that investors make as to how much and where to invest in the real economy — in plants, equipment and technology. And second, the value of the stock market can affect how “rich” people who own stocks feel. This so-called wealth effect can impact how much people are willing to spend on goods and services, or how much they are willing to borrow to do the same. Of course, since it is rich people who own most of the stock (though middle-class Americans also have some of their pensions and other savings in the stock market), this wealth effect will mostly impact the consumption of the wealthy. [Thomas Ferguson and Servaas Storm](#) have argued that, in recent years, this wealth effect has had a powerful impact on consumption demand, and indirectly on inflation.

Donald Trump warned Powell in mid-July not to cut rates before the election. Obviously even Trump himself understands that cutting interest rates would boost the economy and the Democrats’ odds of a victory in November. Is the Fed an independent government agency or a political institution?

The Fed is of course a political institution, and the claim that the Federal Reserve is inherently “independent” is a commonly stated attempt to obscure this fact. The Fed is political both formally and informally. It is formally political because it is a “creature” of Congress. The U.S. Constitution allots to Congress the power to manage the U.S. “coinage” and currency and, by founding the Fed in 1913, the Congress delegated various powers of monetary management to the Fed. But, since the power lies with Congress, they can expand, curtail or change these at any time.

Similarly, over time, the president has been given by Congress the power to make appointments to the Federal Reserve governing body. So, the president has been delegated certain powers over the Fed by Congress. None of these, however, have formally given the Fed any political independence whatsoever. As such, the

formal independence of the Fed is a complete myth — one, however, that the Fed and others are obsessed with promoting. The process by which the Fed promotes its independence demonstrates the second, informal sense, in which the Fed is highly “political.” As I show in my recent book, [*Busting the Bankers’ Club: Finance for the Rest of Us*](#), the Federal Reserve cultivates powerful constituencies to expand and protect its “independence” from the government. This constituency consists primarily of the big banks and other financial institutions and their mouth pieces in the press and business. They are very successful in promoting this idea. It is not unusual to hear from pundits that the Federal Reserve is mandated to be “independent.” But the reality is that the Fed is highly political, dependent on big finance for support, and, in turn, the Fed is incentivized to give big macroeconomic and regulatory support to these banks. This is a political quid pro quo on a massive scale.

The claims about mandated Federal Reserve independence have become louder recently since Donald Trump has occasionally announced that, if he becomes president again, he will get rid of Fed independence. Of course, if Donald Trump got control over the Fed ... he would certainly try to use the Fed to do his bidding at the expense of the rest of us. But the same would be true of the Defense Department, or the Environmental Protection Agency or the Commerce Department. The response is not to say that these all should be independent. The response should be to say that these agencies should be staffed by experts who have mandates to carry out laws in the public interest.

Fed Chair Powell has said that a September rate cut is on the table. How likely is that to happen, and would it have any impact on mortgage rates and rent prices and on consumers’ financial lives in general?

At this point, it is very likely since, as I said before, with inflation now tamed and the economy slowing down, even banks and other financial institutions are urging the Fed to cut the interest rate. When they speak, the Fed surely listens. And yes, mortgage rates would come down ... in fact, we are already seeing them fall in anticipation of such cuts. As for rental prices, that is a more complex story. As long as private equity firms and other big financial companies can buy up rental properties and use [algorithms](#) and other mechanisms to keep rents high, a simple interest rate cut will not broadly work to lower rates or increase sufficiently the availability of rental housing. Here, bolder and more real economy interventions will be necessary to make a dent in this major problem.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/articles/interest-rate-cuts-now-could-help-workers-but-thats-not-who-the-fed-serves/>

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C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, 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 scores of books and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

The Profound Implications Of The

2024 US Election



08-24-2024 ~ *This election is indeed unlike any other in modern history because American voters are so polarized that the threat of civil breakdown is real.*

Since U.S. Vice President [Kamala Harris](#) took the reins from President Joe Biden, the presidential race has tightened in key battle states as the momentum has shifted in Democrats' favor. Why do so many people say that the 2024 presidential race is pivotal for the future of democracy? And what would a Kamala Harris foreign policy look like with regard to the transatlantic relationship, Ukraine's war effort, China, and [Gaza](#)?

Political scientist and political economist C. J Polychroniou tackles these questions in an interview with the French-Greek independent journalist Alexandra Boutri. Unlike many radicals who won't support the Democratic ticket if Harris does not change her policy on [Israel](#), Polychroniou thinks that the 2024 presidential election has great implications beyond Gaza.

Alexandra Boutri: For the next couple of months or so, U.S. elections will be under the spotlight. It has been argued that because of Trump's embrace of authoritarianism, the 2024 presidential election is pivotal for the future of U.S. democracy, critically consequential to Washington's European allies, and potentially transformative for today's geopolitical realities. [Donald Trump](#) and Kamala Harris also differ radically when it comes to climate change, immigration, and the economy. They are also quite apart across a broad range of issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation. Do you agree then with the view of many people who say 2024 is the most important election of their lives?

C. J. Polychroniou: The 2024 U.S. presidential election is enormously important for many of the reasons you cited, although we shouldn't be oblivious of the fact that parochialism is what drives most American voters. That said, this election is indeed unlike any other in modern history also because American voters are so polarized that the threat of civil breakdown is real. In fact, I believe that Trump is

already laying the groundwork for rejecting the election result if he loses. This is why he calls Democrats' replacement of Biden a "coup" and even "[a violent overthrow](#)" of a president. And back in March, he said that there will be a "[bloodbath](#)" if he loses the November election. Obviously, there is something very wrong with the contemporary political culture in the U.S. I mean, compare what is happening in the U.S. to Britain's political culture where civility is still the name of the game. Former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak not only conceded defeat and congratulated Labour's leader, Keir Starmer, for his party's victory, but took [responsibility](#) for the Tory party's worst defeat in history.

Alexandra Boutri: Why does polarization run so deep in today's United States?

C. J. Polychroniou: Political polarization among Americans has deep societal roots, with religion and race playing pivotal roles, but has been steadily intensifying in the last 40 or 50 years. There is now such a huge gap between Democrats and Republicans over political and social values that each side fears that the other side will destroy the nation if they are allowed to dictate policy. Democrats tend to be quite liberal when it comes to social issues, but most Republicans identify themselves as social conservatives. However, it is interesting to note that an annual poll on values and beliefs conducted last year by [Gallup](#) found that more Americans identify themselves as socially conservative than at any time in about a decade, although the largest increase was among Republicans. The role of guns in society, abortion, race, immigration, gender identity, and sexual orientation are among the issues that sharply divide supporters of the two parties, according to the latest findings from a [Pew Research Center](#) survey. Republicans and Democrats are also very much divided over [the role of government power](#) and [global warming](#). In sum, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Democrats and Republicans live in different worlds.

Alexandra Boutri: How would you describe today's GOP?

C. J. Polychroniou: Today's GOP is the creation of one man alone—namely Donald J. Trump. What I mean by that is Trump can shift the party in any direction he chooses because he exerts a cult of personality over his followers. He can deliver fiery anti-abortion messages at some juncture during his political life, like he did when he first ran for president because he needed the support of evangelical Christians, but then decline to endorse a national abortion ban at another juncture because he fears that it would cost him votes if he did so.

Trump is not about ideology, values, or beliefs. Trump is the penultimate political opportunist who will say and do anything that might help him to achieve his goals. He is a clown, but a dangerous one who poses a real threat to democracy and the rule of law. The Republican Party has always been a reactionary political party but has now become an extreme political organization that fires up its base with lies and conspiracies. Trump employs the rhetoric of conservative populism, mocks the elite class, and pretends to be pro-worker. Never mind that Trump has no ideological convictions of his own and spent four years in office weakening unions and catering to the interests of the superrich. Most GOP voters have become blind followers of Trump and have neither the critical thinking skills nor the will to face the truth. They live in the political bubble that Trump has created for them. They would gladly take part in any political scheme conceived by Trump and even allow him to govern by dictatorial means. Moreover, virtually no Republican dares to stand up to Trump. He mocked and humiliated all his Republican rivals, but in the end they all fell in line and kissed his ring. I have a hard time coming up with politicians anywhere else on the planet who are so cowardly and obsequious as the Republicans are in the “land of the free.”

Alexandra Boutri: By the same token, the Democratic Party also went from being the “party of the people” to the party of the financial elite. Would you say then that it is the Democrats who paved the path for the rise of someone like Donald Trump?

C. J. Polychroniou: The Democratic Party has always been a pro-business party. Until recently, the differences between Democrats and Republicans were not that great. Indeed, as [Noam Chomsky](#) used to say, “The United States has essentially a one-party system and the ruling party is the business party.” So, it was largely a myth to say that the Democratic Party was the “party of the people.” Nonetheless, Bill Clinton remade the Democratic Party (after [Jimmy Carter](#) had already laid the groundwork for the shift to neoliberalism) to such an extent that it abandoned all pretext of being a party representing the working class. Clinton had revealed his anti-union credentials long before he made it to the White House. He had been working ceaselessly toward undermining the labor movement in [Arkansas](#) since the mid-1970s.

The working class ditched Hillary Clinton in 2016. Working-class voters, feeling betrayed by the Democratic Party and its economic policies, were a key demographic element behind Trump’s rise. Of course, it wasn’t just economics

that drove white working-class voters to Trump's camp. An equally important factor was racial and cultural resentment. Anyone who thinks that racism and xenophobia were not important factors in Trump's rise or that they don't figure prominently in the support he has been receiving since from the millions of his followers needs a reality check.

But something rather exciting has been happening over the past few years inside the Democratic Party. The progressive wing has moved the party to its left on key economic issues. Subsequently, Joe Biden has been very outspoken about supporting [organized labor](#) and his administration may be the most progressive in U.S. history.

If Trump returns to the White House, we should all brace ourselves for major shocks. We should expect to see mass deportations, systematic efforts to undermine democracy and rights in the U.S. and even abroad, the sacking of thousands of civil servants, the dismantling of the Department of Education, the expansion of presidential power (and bear in mind that an ultra-conservative Supreme Court gave presidents total immunity from prosecution for all official acts), major tax cuts for the rich, the end of policies to tackle the climate crisis, and even a rollback of policies that have aided minorities economically and socially. This is what's behind [Project 2025](#), a blueprint of over 900 pages for a second Trump term developed by the arch-conservative Heritage Foundation.

That said, I do not wish to create the impression that the Democratic Party has somehow become a democratic party of the alternative and progressive left. The irony is that the Democratic Party not only remains pro-capitalist, and with deep ties to Wall Street, but is even far more militaristic and pro-war than the Republican Party. And its leadership remains profoundly hypocritical. At the Democratic National Convention (DNC), one speaker after another, including Kamala Harris, spoke about justice and equality for all. But Democrats refused to give airtime to Palestinians who wanted to highlight the ongoing tragedy in Gaza. They also spoke about "joy," "compassion," and "safety" and then paraded a host of speakers who spread the message of militarism. As the brilliant [Jon Stewart](#) aptly summarized this amazing contradiction in his *Daily Show* following the conclusion of the DNC, "These are the new Democrats, man. They lead with joy and compassion and acceptance. And, oh yeah, we will fuck you up."

Alexandra Boutri: What would a Kamala Harris foreign policy look like with

regard to the transatlantic relationship and Ukraine's war effort?

C. J. Polychroniou: I don't think U.S. foreign policy under a Kamala Harris presidency will be any different from the Biden administration when it comes to engagement with European allies and support for Ukraine. In fact, she made that abundantly clear during her acceptance speech at the DNC. After all, continuity is one of the main characteristics in U.S. foreign policy. Transatlantic relations experienced an initial shock when Trump entered the White House in early 2017 but returned to stability shortly thereafter. And Biden's foreign policy hasn't been very different from that of Donald Trump. The U.S. is a global superpower, an imperial state, so it would be naïve to think that foreign policy can change dramatically from one administration to the next. Barack Obama campaigned for president in 2008 with the intent of bringing about a fundamental shift in the direction of U.S. foreign policy. He offered the promise of renewed idealism and a return to the rule of law. He fell way short of achieving even the slightest transformation. His [U.S. drone program](#) was far deadlier than what had taken place under the Bush administration. Obama carried out more strikes in his first year as part of a covert drone war strategy than Bush carried out in his entire presidency.

Alexandra Boutri: What about China?

C. J. Polychroniou: There is a looming superpower clash between the United States and China that I would place at the top of geopolitical risks for the years ahead. An incident in the Taiwan Strait or the South China Sea could easily trigger conflict escalation. The U.S. is obsessed with how to respond to China's involvement in the South China Sea. And this is not merely a question of prestige and power. The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that the [South China Sea](#) holds about 11 billion of barrels of untapped oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. We remain a highly violent species. Trump won't solve the U.S.-China conflict, and I doubt that Kamala Harris will become the [next Richard Nixon](#) on U.S.-China relations.

Alexandra Boutri: I suppose then that you also don't expect a shift in U.S.-Israeli relations under a Kamala Harris presidency. Will she at least handle Gaza differently?

C. J. Polychroniou: I think the answer is negative on both counts. Israel is the

most important strategic ally that the U.S. has in the Middle East. What this means is that the U.S. will continue to look the other way to whatever Israel pleases to do and will confine itself to the use of diplomatic language in connection to any Israeli violations of international law and human rights simply for PR purposes. But Israel's total dependence on the U.S. is something that should worry future generations in Israel. What will happen if Israel happens to lose its strategic value in a future world order?

Alexandra Boutri: The Hamas October 7 attack continues to divide the world and in particular the left. Didn't the Hamas leadership anticipate a massive Israeli response? Or it is that they didn't care?

C. J. Polychroniou: What's been happening in Gaza for more than 10 months now is one of the greatest crimes in the postwar era, a totally disproportionate response to the October 7 terror attack inside Israeli territory. But, at the same time, it is inconceivable that you have people, leftists and radicals, who refuse to condemn Hamas for those horrific actions against innocent Israelis, many of whom were in fact peace activists. Also, and putting aside the question of who a terrorist is actually, I find rather absurd the comparisons between the Hamas organization and the anti-fascist resistance movements against Nazism. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government is beyond extreme. But Hamas is not some sort of a progressive "liberation movement."

The October 7 attack is a war crime. Plain and simple. I am baffled by those (and, as you know, I've had some unpleasant exchanges over this matter with certain people) who try to argue that the October 7 attack is justified on moral grounds and strategic considerations. Attacking civilians is never moral. Both Hamas and Israel are guilty of the same crime. Hamas and Israeli leaders are indeed [war criminals](#). And what exactly are those strategic objectives on the part of Hamas that can justify the October 7 terror attack against innocent Israeli civilians? Israel has destroyed almost all of Gaza's infrastructure; killed more than 40,000 Gazans, mostly women and children; and Hamas has been severely weakened. Perhaps Hamas did not anticipate such a brutal response on the part of the Israeli military. Perhaps its leadership did not think that their operation would be as vast as it turned out to be given the state of Israeli military intelligence. But I am sure that they also did not care if innocent civilians in Gaza were going to be killed because of their actions. They would probably call that "collateral damage," just like the Israelis do. And this war has also made the two-state solution a virtual

impossibility, although there was never any real chance of that happening anyway. In fact, I am of the opinion (and hope that I am wrong) that the goal of Palestinian self-determination has been made far more difficult now on account of the October 7 attack despite of the fact that support for the Palestinian cause continues to grow among civil society organization across the globe.

Alexandra Boutri: One final question, and it has to do with third-party and independent candidates running for president. Could they affect the 2024 vote?

C. J. Polychroniou: One could and should be in support of third-party candidates for all sorts of reasons. The problem however with the U.S. political system is that they have no chance of winning a presidential race. I doubt that they can even shake up the two-party system. You need some form of proportional representation, like the system that exists in many European democracies, for third parties in the U.S. to make a real impact on national politics. But third-party candidates can easily end up having the opposite-than-desired effect, which is to help the candidate they least want in the White House emerge victorious. And this may very well happen if voters in swing states who are opposed to the Democrats on account of the war in Gaza end up casting their ballots for third-party candidates.

Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/implications-2024-election-us>

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