

JOTE ~ The Journal Of Trial And Error

JOTE

Journal of Trial and Error

The Journal of Trial and Error aims to close the gap between what is *researched* and what is *published*. In scientific practice, trial and error is a fundamental process of learning and discovery. Therefore, we want to make public the lessons of the struggles in research. We are convinced about the productive role of errors, and so we aim to publish answers

to the question “what went wrong?”, as well as problematising this question by reflecting on what failure means in science. You can read our [manifesto](#) to learn further about our goals, and the benefits of publishing errors.

From the Manifesto

We state that ...

Trial and Error is the elementary process in Science by which knowledge is acquired. We differentiate between two types of scientific Trial and Error processes:

- *Methodological* errors in a practical sense, driving improvement in the understanding and application of techniques. These errors are here understood in a broad sense, those that go beyond the learning of the individual researcher and have an impact at the scale of the scientific community.-

Conceptual flaws, arising from hypothesis being confronted with conflicting observations. When the initial hypotheses are inappropriate in the face of empirical evidence, scientists improve or reject theoretical frameworks by developing alternative theses aimed at increasing empirical adequacy. Not only hits (positive results), but also misses (negative results) are key to scientific progress.

We identify three core problems in today's Science. Namely, ...

... a public image of Science based on breakthrough discoveries, fascinating

images, and clear results. This reputation comes at a cost. Both scientists themselves, as well as philosophers, sociologists and historians of science have increasingly been highlighting the importance of science in the making. A more faithful picture of Science, the one of practices and fine-tuning methodologies, seems to be at odds with the unrealistic public image of big-discovery Science.

... a gap between what is *published* and what is *researched*. We know positive publication bias pressures scientists to conceal methodological mistakes and discard research containing negative findings, threatening proper interpretation. In the face of failed research —outcomes of Science that do not meet the initial aim of the individual researchers— scientists have two options at hand: not publishing or framing the results as productive by, for example, adding ad-hoc hypotheses in a potentially inadequate manner. This point is a consequence of the expectations of big-discovery Science and the *publish-or-perish* politics of this Science.

... a replication crisis. Since scientists validate their results in terms of replicability, the present-day situation of unreplicable experiments is a serious problem. Debate on this replication crisis has focused on the misuse of statistics by scientists, on methodological carelessness, or theoretical inappropriateness. Only a few venues are attentive to the potential harm.

[...] *The complete Manifesto:*
<https://www.jtrialerror.com/the-manifesto-for-trial-and-error-in-science/>

URL Journal: <https://www.jtrialerror.com/>

Noam Chomsky: Trump Is Consolidating Far-Right Power Globally



It is no easy task to make sense of U.S. foreign policy in the current era. Trump is wildly unpredictable and lacks any semblance of a coherent view of world affairs, appearing to believe that all it takes is “the art of the deal” to turn “enemies” into friends. Meanwhile, since Trump’s rise

to power, the end of U.S. hegemony has come into sight.

In the exclusive *Truthout* interview below, renowned public intellectual Noam Chomsky — one of the world’s most astute critics of U.S. foreign policy in the postwar era — sheds considerable light on the current state of U.S. foreign policy, including Trump’s relations with the leaders of North Korea, Russia and China, as well as his so-called “Middle East Peace Plan.”

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, in 2016 Trump called U.S foreign policy “a complete and total disaster,” claiming that previous administrations in the post-Cold War era were guided by unrealistic expectations that damaged America’s national interests. Since taking office, he has withdrawn the country from a series of international agreements, demanding that countries pay for U.S. protection, and seeking to advance U.S economic interests through tariffs and protectionism. These moves have led many analysts to speak of a new era in U.S. relations with the world. What’s your own take on Trump’s foreign policy?

Noam Chomsky: One of the most appropriate comments I’ve seen on Trump’s foreign policy appeared in [an article in *The New Republic*](#) written by David Roth, the editor of a sports blog: “The spectacle of expert analysts and thought leaders parsing the actions of a man with no expertise or capacity for analysis is the purest acid satire — but less because of how badly that expert analysis has failed than because of how sincerely misplaced it is ... there is nothing here to parse, no hidden meanings or tactical elisions or slow-rolled strategic campaign.”

That seems generally accurate. This is a man, after all, who dismisses the information and analyses of his massive intelligence system in favor of what was said this morning on “Fox and Friends,” where everyone tells him how much they love him. With all due skepticism about the quality of intelligence, this is sheer madness considering the stakes.

And it continues, in ways that are almost surreal. At the recent G20 conference,

Trump was asked about Putin's statement that Western liberalism is obsolete. Trump assumed he must be talking about California: *Western* liberalism. Putin "may feel that way," Trump responded: "He sees what's going on. And I guess, if you look at what's happening in Los Angeles, where it's so sad to look; and what's happening in San Francisco and a couple of other cities which are run by an extraordinary group of liberal people."

He was asked why the U.S. alone is refusing to join the G20 in a commitment to address global warming and responded by praising the quality of U.S. air and water, apparently not understanding the distinction.

It's hard to find a comment on foreign policy that departs from this impressive norm. Efforts to detect some coherent global strategy indeed seem to be a kind of acid satire.

Not that there is no coherent policy. There is one policy that emerges from the chaos — the kind we would expect from an egotistical con man who has one principle: Me! It follows that any treaty or agreement reached by predecessors (particularly the despised Obama) is the worst deal in history, which will be replaced by the Greatest Deal in History negotiated by the most accomplished deal-maker of all time and greatest American president. Similarly, any other action carried out in the past was misguided and harmed America, but will be corrected by the "stable genius" now in charge of defending America from those who are cheating and assaulting it on all sides.

It makes no difference what the consequences are — terrible, decent, indifferent — as long as the imagery is preserved.

It may be recalled that a president who obtains his picture of the world from "Fox and Friends" is not an entirely new phenomenon. Forty years ago, a revered predecessor (Ronald Reagan) was learning about the world from movies, and was so mesmerized that he even came to [believe that he had taken part in the liberation of Nazi concentration camps](#) (while not leaving California).

All of this tells us something about modern politics. But Trump can't be compared to Reagan, any more than farce can be compared to tragedy, to paraphrase Marx. It's understandable that the farce elicits ridicule, and no doubt some are relishing the coming photo-op of Trump and Boris Johnson upholding Anglo-American civilization. But for the world, it's dead serious, from the destruction of the environment and the growing threats of terminal nuclear war to a long list of other crimes and horrors.

The most dangerous immediate foreign policy crisis is the conflict with Iran, which has been deemed the official source of all evil. Iran must end its “aggression” and become a “normal country” — like Saudi Arabia, which is making rapid progress in Trump’s fantasy world, even “a great job in Saudi Arabia from the standpoint of women,” he explained at G20.

The charges against Iran resonate through the media echo chamber with little effort to assess the validity of the accusations — which hardly withstand analysis. Whatever one thinks of Iranian international behavior, by the miserable standards of U.S. allies in the region — not to speak of the U.S. itself — it is not much of a competitor in the rogue state derby.

In the real world, the U.S. unilaterally decided to destroy the well-functioning nuclear agreement (JCPOA), with ludicrous charges accepted by virtually no one with the slightest credibility, and to impose extremely harsh sanctions designed to punish the Iranian people and undermine the economy. The [U.S. government] also uses its enormous economic power, including virtual control of the international financial system, to compel others to obey Washington’s dictates. None of this has even minimal legitimacy; the same is true of Cuba and other cases. The world may protest — last November, the UN General Assembly once again condemned the U.S. embargo on Cuba, 189-2 (only the U.S. and Israel voted against the resolution). But in vain. The weird idea of the founders that one might have “decent respect to the opinions of mankind” has long vanished, and the pained bleatings of the world pass in silence. On Iran as well.

This is not the place to pursue the matter, but there is a good deal more to say about the U.S. specialty of resorting to sanctions (with extraterritorial reach) to punish populations — a form of “American exceptionalism” that finds its place within what Nick Turse calls “the American system of suffering” in his harrowing expose of the U.S. assault on the civilian population of South Vietnam. The right to engage in this malicious practice is accepted as normal in the U.S. doctrinal system, with little effort to analyze the actual motives in individual cases, the legitimacy of such policies, or in fact even their legality. Matters of no slight significance.

With regard to Iran, within the government-media doctrinal system, the only question that arises is whether the victim will respond in some way, maybe by “violating” the agreement that the U.S. has demolished, maybe by some other act. And if it does, it obviously will be deemed to deserve brutal punishment.

In commentary made by U.S. officials and media, Iran “violates” agreements. The

U.S. merely “withdraws” from them. The stance is reminiscent of a comment by the great anarchist writer and Wobbly activist T-Bone Slim: “Only the poor break laws — the rich evade them.”

Analysts have tried hard to detect some grand strategy behind the U.S. assault on Iran, another exercise in futility. It’s easy enough to detect the goals of the thugs surrounding Trump: for Pompeo and Bolton, the goal is to smash the miscreant — from a safe distance, so that it isn’t costly for us. And damn the consequences. Trump himself seems to see it quite differently. Whether he in fact called off a military strike because of his compassion for 150 possible victims, who knows? The only evidence comes from a source that is not famous for its credibility. But it seems clear that he doesn’t want a war, which would spoil all the fun and games that he is so greatly enjoying, and would harm his electoral prospects. It’s far better to go into the elections facing the cosmic threat of an evil enemy that only the Bold and Courageous Leader is able to confront, not any of those weak-kneed Dems, surely none of those “mere” women. Reagan grasped the principle as well when he boldly faced the threat of Nicaragua, strapping on his cowboy boots and warning that Nicaraguan troops were only two days’ march from Harlingen, Texas, and declaring a national emergency because of the extraordinary threat to the security and survival of the U.S.

This is not the place to pursue the matter again, but in the background of the Iran conflict are some unmentionable facts. The alleged threat of Iranian nuclear weapons can readily be overcome by adopting the demand of the Arab States, Iran, and in fact virtually the entire world, to establish a nuclear weapons-free zone in the region, a policy to which the U.S. and UK have a unique obligation, and which the U.S. regularly blocks — for reasons that are hardly obscure: If the U.S. were to officially acknowledge the existence of Israel’s nuclear arsenal, the huge flood of aid to Israel would be illegal under U.S. law, and of course, Israel’s weapons of mass destruction cannot be subject to inspection.

What about tariffs? “Tariff man” tells us that the tariffs are designed to promote U.S. economic interests, but whether he believes it or not, or cares, we have no idea. Political pronouncements can rarely be taken at face value, and Trump is not notorious for his truthfulness and credibility.

There is, to put it charitably, scant evidence for Trump’s boast that his tariffs are forcing China to pour “billions of dollars” into the Treasury Department. “We never had 10 cents coming into our Treasury” under past administrations, he

explained. “Now we have billions coming in.” In the real world, the costs of the tariffs are borne by U.S. companies (which may choose to compensate by reducing wages) and consumers, burdened with a highly regressive tax that targets mostly less affluent. In brief, Trump’s tariffs are yet another one of his policies to harm American workers and the poor.

It is, however, true that “billions” are involved. A study by the New York Fed with Princeton and Columbia Universities estimates that [U.S. companies and consumers have paid \\$3 billion a month in additional taxes](#) because of tariffs on Chinese goods and on aluminum and steel from around the globe, in addition to a \$1.4 billion in costs to U.S. companies related to lost efficiency in 2018.

The tariff war against China may lead to some shifting of assembly operations from China to Vietnam and other countries with even lower labor costs, but as for the U.S. economy, more typical is the decision of Apple a few days ago to [shift Mac Pro computer assembly](#) from Texas to China.

Trump’s tariff wars seem to relate primarily to domestic policy, crafted with the coming election in view. He has to somehow convince his voting base that he is the one man in the country protecting battered Americans who are suffering from the “carnage” created by his predecessors — which is real enough for a great many Americans, as illustrated dramatically by the astonishing decline in life expectancy among white working age Americans, attributed to “deaths of despair,” a phenomenon unknown in developed societies. Trump’s trick is to wave a big club and threaten others with dire consequences unless they stop torturing poor America and agree to “play fair.” When we take all this apart, a different picture emerges, much as in the case of the ominous threat of Iran. But what matters for the con game is the “alternative reality” that the conjurers are concocting.

With no little success. It’s a mistake to “mis-underestimate” Trump (to borrow W. Bush’s neologism). He is a canny demagogue and manipulator, who is managing to maintain the allegiance of the adoring crowds that believe he is standing up for them against the hated elites while also ensuring that the primary Republican constituency of extreme wealth and corporate power are doing just fine, despite some complaints. And they surely are, in fact, making out like bandits with help from Trump and his associates.

It is quite remarkable to see how effectively alternative reality is created. Iran is typical, but the successes are far broader. Consider the charge that “China is

killing us,” stealing our jobs, joined by “Mexican robbers.” How is China killing us? Did China have a gun to the head of CEO Tim Cook of Apple, ordering him to end the last vestige of production of Apple computers in the U.S.? Or Boeing, or GM, or Microsoft, or any of the others who have shifted production to China? Or were the decisions made by bankers and investors in corporate boardrooms in New York and Chicago? And if the latter, is the solution to wave a fist at China or to change the mode of decision-making in the U.S. — by shifting it to the hands of stakeholders, workers and communities, or at least giving them a substantial role, as democratic theory would suggest? It seems a fairly obvious question. Oddly, it isn’t raised, while the official mantra persists unperturbed.

It’s claimed that China imposes unfair conditions on investors, demanding technology transfer (following the pattern of development of others from England and the U.S. to the East Asian tigers). Perhaps so. If Apple and others don’t like these conditions, they’re free not to invest in China. Worshippers of free enterprise and the market should surely agree.

Another charge is that China is unfairly pursuing an industrial policy that subsidizes favored industries. If so, U.S. political leaders and analysts should be cheering. According to the economic doctrines they profess, China is harming its economy by departing from the optimal free market mode of development, thus contributing to U.S. economic hegemony. What’s the problem?

Somehow, that’s not what we hear. Nor do we hear much about how this is normal policy in Western state capitalist societies, notoriously in the U.S. throughout its history, and dramatically since World War II, the basis for the creation of today’s high-tech economy, and continuing today.

What appears to be a more credible charge is that China is violating the intellectual property rights regime (TRIPS) established in the World Trade Organization. Suppose so. Several questions arise. One is: who gains, who loses? To a large extent, American consumers gain, while Big Pharma, Microsoft, and others granted exorbitant and unprecedented patent rights under TRIPS suffer some reduction in their enormous profits. That leads at once to another question: Is the TRIPS regime legitimate? True, it was established by interstate agreement, but who made those decisions? Did the public have any role, or even know what was happening? Hardly. The misnamed “free trade agreements” are more properly described as investor-rights agreements, often with little relation to trade in any meaningful sense, and not surprisingly, serving the interests of their

designers in the investor class.

Other elements of the “China is killing us” complaints actually make sense. Concern is often openly expressed that Chinese progress might leave the U.S. behind — for example, that Huawei’s cheaper and superior technology may give them an [“unfair advantage”](#) in establishing 5G networks. Plainly that has to be stopped, U.S. officials argue, along with Chinese economic development generally. Their concerns are reminiscent of the 1980s, when superior Japanese manufacturing techniques were undermining inefficient U.S. enterprises, and the Reagan administration had to intervene to block Japanese imports by “voluntary export restraints” — where “voluntary” means “agree or else” — and other devices to enable backward American management to catch up.

Without proceeding, while there are some detectable strategic objectives, much of what is offered and discussed is concealing something quite different. And there is good reason to agree that the sight of experts seeking to detect some grand strategy behind Trump’s antics is [“the purest acid satire.”](#) But there is a strategy. And it is working quite well.

One of Trump’s stated objectives behind his understanding of diplomacy is to “turn enemies into friends.” Is there any evidence that he is actually pursuing such a diplomatic objective? I have in mind, in particular, the cases of North Korea and Russia.

In this case, the stated objective seems real. It elicits ridicule and bitter condemnation across the mainstream political spectrum. But whatever Trump’s motives may be, the general policy makes some sense.

The Panmunjom Declaration of the two Koreas in April 2018 was a highly significant event. It called for the two Koreas to proceed toward amicable relations and eventual denuclearization “on their own accord,” without the external interference that has often in the past undermined what seemed to be initiatives with some promise: repeated interference from the U.S., as the historical record shows, facts commonly evaded in reporting. In this Declaration and related agreements, as discussed by Korea specialist Chung-in Moon in the main establishment journal *Foreign Affairs*, for the first time the two Koreas laid out specific timetables and took concrete and promising steps toward reduction of tensions and disarmament — developments that should be welcomed and supported.

To his credit, Trump has largely adhered to the request of the two Koreas. His recent meeting with Kim at the demilitarized zone, the symbolic border crossing, and possible tentative agreements are steps that with goodwill could have salutary consequences. They might facilitate efforts of the two Koreas to proceed on the difficult path toward accommodation and might offer a way to relieve the sanctions that are blocking badly needed aid to the North and contributing to a major humanitarian crisis there. All of this may infuriate commentators across the spectrum, but if there is a better way to bring peace to the peninsula and to take steps toward denuclearization and reform within the North Korean dictatorship, no one has yet informed us about it.

Putin's Russia need not be turned into a "friend," but cooperative relations with Russia are a prerequisite for survival. Trump's record on this score is mixed. Mattis's [Nuclear Posture Review](#) (February 2018) poses very severe threats, escalated since by the unbelievable decision to carry forward development of hypersonic weapons. Adversaries are doing likewise. The right approach is diplomacy and negotiations to prevent a suicidal course, but there is not a hint of that. The same is true of the INF Treaty negotiated by Reagan and Gorbachev, which significantly reduced the risks of terminal war. Each side claims that the other is violating the treaty. The right approach is to have neutral analysts investigate the claims and to negotiate an end to such violations as are discovered. The worst approach is to withdraw from the treaty, as the U.S. is doing, with Russia following. The same considerations hold for the other major arms control treaty, New Start. Throughout, it seems that John Bolton, consistent in his malevolence, has succeeded in blocking progress and driving policy in directions that are extremely ominous.

What's your assessment of the Trump administration's Middle East plan? And how instrumental is Jared Kushner's role in this?

I presume that Kushner is the main architect, as reported. What has been released so far is fairly straightforward, and consistent with earlier policies of the administration authorizing Israel's takeover of the Golan Heights and development of Greater Jerusalem, all in violation of Security Council orders (backed at the time by the U.S.). At the same time, the meager U.S. aid to Palestinians has been terminated on the grounds that they do not thank the boss politely enough when he is undermining their most elementary rights.

The Kushner plan carries this forward. Israel is to be granted the fondest wishes

of its expansionist leadership. The Palestinians are to be bought off by development funds provided by others (not the U.S.). The essence of the Trump-Kushner “Deal of the Century” was [captured succinctly by Israeli UN Ambassador Danny Danon](#), in *The New York Times*: Palestinians should realize that the game is over and “surrender.”

Then there can be peace, another triumph of the “great negotiator.”

In this case there is an underlying strategic objective: to consolidate the alliance of reactionary states (the oil monarchies, Egypt, Israel) as a base for U.S. power in the region. That is by no means something new, though earlier variants had somewhat different forms and were less visible than today.

These objectives fall within a broader strategy of forming a global reactionary alliance under the U.S. aegis, including the “illiberal democracies” of Eastern Europe (Hungary’s Orbán, etc.) and Brazil’s grotesque Jair Bolsonaro, who among other virtues, shares with Trump the dedication to undermine prospects for a livable environment by opening up the Amazon — “the lungs of the earth” — to exploitation by his friends in mining and agribusiness. That’s a natural strategy for today’s Trump-McConnell Republican party, well ensconced [to the far right of the international spectrum](#), even beyond the European “populist” parties that were not long ago considered a contemptible fringe.

Without asking you to play the role of a Cassandra, how do you think history will assess Trump’s stance on climate change, which is by far the biggest global challenge facing the world?

To borrow from [Wittgenstein](#), with a slight tweak, “Whereof one cannot speak politely, thereof one must remain silent.”

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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. Copyright © Truthout. May not be reprinted without [permission](#).

Patrice Lumumba's Independence Day Speech, June 30, 1960



Patrice Lumumba -
Photo:
en.wikipedia.org

Men and women of the Congo,

Victorious fighters for independence, today victorious, I greet you in the name of the Congolese government. All of you, my friends, who have fought tirelessly at our sides, I ask you to make this June 30, 1960, an illustrious date that you will keep indelibly engraved in your hearts, a date of significance of which you will teach to your children, so that they will make known to their sons and to their grandchildren the glorious history of our fight for liberty.

For this independence of the Congo, even as it is celebrated today with Belgium, a

friendly country with whom we deal as equal to equal, no Congolese worthy of the name will ever be able to forget that it was by fighting that it has been won [applause], a day-to-day fight, an ardent and idealistic fight, a fight in which we were spared neither privation nor suffering, and for which we gave our strength and our blood.

We are proud of this struggle, of tears, of fire, and of blood, to the depths of our being, for it was a noble and just struggle, and indispensable to put an end to the humiliating slavery which was imposed upon us by force.

This was our fate for 80 years of a colonial regime; our wounds are too fresh and too painful still for us to drive them from our memory. We have known harassing work, exacted in exchange for salaries which did not permit us to eat enough to drive away hunger, or to clothe ourselves, or to house ourselves decently, or to raise our children as creatures dear to us.

Read more: <https://sfbayview.com/patrice-lumumba>

Capitalist Workplaces Set Bosses Up To Be Authoritarian Tyrants



*Prof. Elizabeth S.
Anderson - University of
Michigan*

Long before the growing interest in economic inequality facing contemporary capitalist societies, radical thinkers and [union](#) organizers were concerned about the authoritarian governance in workplaces. Unfortunately, this concern seems to have taken a back seat in political philosophy during the present era. Elizabeth S. Anderson, a professor of philosophy and women's studies at the University of Michigan, is seeking to remedy this with her trenchant analyses of the coercive and hierarchical nature of capitalist firms and corporations. Her book *Private Government* offers an important reminder that bosses tend to be dictators and that workers' lives are essentially at the mercy of private government.

C.J. Polychroniou: In your book [Private Government](#), you analyze the different facets of modern workplaces and argue that firms and corporations operating under so-called "free market" norms and arrangements are actually coercive and hierarchical in nature, and rule over workers' lives as authoritarian governments tend to do. Can you elaborate a bit on these highly challenging ideas, as most people don't seem to view workplaces as dictatorships?

Elizabeth S. Anderson: Look at the organizational chart of any firm: You will see a hierarchy of offices, with subordinates reporting to their bosses, and bosses issuing orders to subordinates that must be obeyed on pain of sanctions such as getting fired, demoted, harassed or denied decent hours. That's all it takes to make a little government — the power to issue orders to others, backed by threats of punishment. If the workplace is a government, we can ask, what is the constitution of that government? The answer, in nearly all cases where workers lack union representation, is that the constitution of workplace government is a dictatorship. Workers don't get to elect their bosses. They don't have a right to participate in the firm's decision-making about the terms and conditions of their work. For the most part, they have little effective recourse if their bosses abuse them, other than to quit.

Workers even lack the power to hold their bosses to account for a wide range of abuses at work — *even when those abuses are illegal*, such as [sexual harassment](#) and wage theft. The scale of [wage theft](#) — effected by forcing workers to work off the clock, work overtime without extra pay and numerous other scams — is vast.

It exceeds the sum total of all other thefts in the U.S. The vast majority of workers who are sexually harassed face illegal retaliation at work for complaining. So most keep silent. More and more, employees are forced to sign mandatory arbitration agreements, which strip them of their right to have their case be heard by a neutral judge following legal procedures. Instead, they must go to an arbitrator chosen by their employer, who is bound by no procedures, and knows that the arbitration contract will not be renewed if they render too many judgments in favor of the worker. No wonder workers under mandatory arbitration are far less likely to win their cases, and when they win, receive far less compensation than workers who sue their employer in court. It's a recipe for mass abuse. While many workers — particularly those in management or with rare skills — get decent treatment, millions of ordinary workers suffer under awful working conditions, low pay, unstable hours, and subjection to discrimination, wage theft and other illegal treatment.

Dictatorial employer control over workers doesn't even end when workers are off-duty. The default rule in the U.S. is "employment at will." This means that, with a few exceptions (mostly having to do with discrimination), employers are legally entitled to fire, demote and harass workers for any reason or no reason at all. This rule opens the door to punishing workers for things they do while off-duty. Many workers have been fired because their boss disapproves of their choice of sexual partner, support for candidates and political causes the boss doesn't like, unconventional gender presentation, recreational use of marijuana on days off and other personal decisions. When a Coke worker can be [fired for drinking Pepsi](#) at lunch, it's easy to see that the scope of employer control over workers' lives is nearly unlimited.

You maintain that most people can't see what private workplaces are all about. Do you mean to say that employees can't see where authority lies and that they don't realize the power that employers have over their lives? How could this be possible? Is it related to the pathology of "free market" ideology? Is this what grants legitimacy to capitalist firms and corporations in the eyes of employees and the general public?

A Zogby poll of U.S. workers about 10 years ago found that 25 percent regard their workplace as a dictatorship. Why don't they all recognize the reality? I think this is because political discourse about work frames vital issues of worker freedom in terms of "freedom of contract." Because workers are always legally

free to refuse a job offer or to quit, people talk as if workers are free. But this free-market freedom only guarantees workers the freedom to starve. The critical questions should focus on what employed workers are free to do at work and off-duty. Talk about “free markets” distracts us from recognizing that the standard employment contract puts workers under the thumb of their bosses and strips them of their rightful freedoms. Thousands of slaughterhouse workers lack the freedom to use the bathroom during their eight-hour shift. They are told to wear diapers to work! When employers restrict even the most basic bodily functions of their workers, it’s ridiculous to pretend that these workers are free. While the *acceptance* of the employment contract is, from a legal point of view, voluntary (even when workers are desperate for a job), the *content* of the contract puts workers under the subjection of their employers.

Free-market ideology refuses to accept this framing, because it insists on the illusion that the content of the employment contract represents a meeting of minds over terms that have been freely negotiated between the parties. In reality, the vast majority of employment contracts are oral, not written, with workers knowing none of the terms other than what the employer chooses to tell them. This is possible, because the *state* has written the default terms of the employment contract in its laws regulating work. In that sense, the default employment contract is much like the default marriage contract, the terms of which have also been written by the state. Quick question to married readers: Do you know whether your marriage follows common law or community property? This follows from the state where you reside, not (unless you have a prenuptial agreement) from terms you negotiated with your spouse. The vast majority of workers never get an opportunity to negotiate, either. This is because the state has already decided, in the default employment contract, to deal virtually all of the authority cards to employers. Since employers are already holding the authority cards, they have little incentive to deal any of them back to the employee in negotiations. So, most don’t bother to hold negotiations.

What about all the latest trends in many workplaces where the tendency is to get employees to feel, through various creative schemes, that they are all part of the big picture? I have in mind such corporate tactics as group meetings on leadership (“everyone can be a leader”), encouraging communication in common areas, rewarding individuals as “employee of the month,” and so on and so forth. These schemes are obviously designed to increase employee satisfaction and

productivity, but are they not also designed to promote a further sense of “false consciousness” about power relations between employers and employees?

While employers have immense legal and practical power over workers, it's important to recognize the vast diversity of worker experiences. These are often dependent on their skill level, rank in the organization, experience, and demographic characteristics, such as their race, gender, sexual orientation, age and health status. Firms also vary a great deal in their work cultures. Some workers have great jobs, where they enjoy the respect of their co-workers, interesting jobs, autonomy in fulfilling their duties, good pay and enough leisure to have a life outside work. If these workers suffer from false consciousness, it is mainly in failing to appreciate how little protection they have if circumstances change. An economic downturn, a new boss who is petty or abusive, a pregnancy, illness, or any number of other circumstances could turn a dream job into a nightmare, with few recourses available to the worker.

Yet, there was a time, not that far back, when workers' resistance to private dictatorships was rather widespread and in fact, quite well organized. What will it take for employees to recognize the coercive, hierarchical and oppressive nature of private workplaces?

Labor unions have always played a critical role in generating the knowledge, as well as the organization, that workers need to defend their interests. In our individualist culture, with its rhetoric of “personal responsibility” and freedom of choice, it is all too easy for atomized workers to blame themselves when something goes wrong at work. “Is it just me? Am I oversensitive?” are often the first questions victims of sexual harassment ask about their experience. When workers come together to share their experiences, they recognize that problems for which they blamed themselves are due to the system to which they are subject. A revival of the labor movement is needed to raise workers' consciousness beyond our individualist discourse of free markets and freedom of contract. It's already happening, with the [Fight for \\$15](#), teachers' strikes in several states, and organizations outside traditional union structures, such as ROC United. But we have a long way to go.

One final question: Do you think that the emergence of the gig economy will result in a new organizational setting for the modern firm that will deviate from the description you have provided of private workplaces as dictatorships?

Technology now enables firms to hire workers by the task, rather than the job or

the career. But the short-term nature of this work doesn't change who is calling the shots. Firms such as Uber claim that their drivers are independent contractors, even while they minutely regulate how they do their jobs, and the terms and conditions of their work. Such misclassification of employees as independent contractors is pervasive, offering workers the illusion of personal autonomy, while depriving them of the benefits they are legally entitled to have as employees. Many firms hire temps to do work identical to that done by their regular employees, at a fraction of the pay and benefits, and with far less security. For the most part, the [gig economy](#) is generating a new precariat, not a class of self-employed, autonomous workers. If gig workers organized, however, they could win better conditions for themselves. There is no substitute for collective action. Contrary to all the hype about the gig economy, tech alone won't secure their freedom.

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Previously published: <https://truthout.org/>

Rosa Luxemburg Internet Archive



Rosa Luxemburg
Internet Archive



“Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party - however numerous they may be - is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and

exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of ‘justice’ but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when ‘freedom’ becomes a special privilege.” - The Russian Revolution

The Library: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/index.htm>

Dutch Prize Papers



HCA 32 / 1845.1: A box with ship's documents, court papers, ship's journals, cash books and a wallet with a small French prayer book, seized in the 17th century during the Second and Third Anglo-Dutch Wars. Source: Sailing Letters Journal IV,

Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2011, 12;

picture: Erik van der Doe

The Prize Papers are documents seized by British navy and privateers from enemy ships in the period 1652-1815. These papers are kept in the archive of the High Court of Admiralty in The National Archives in Kew (London). Approximately a quarter of the Prize Papers originates from Dutch ships. Apart from ship's journals, lists of cargo, accounts, plantation lists and interrogations of crew members, this collection also contains approximately 38,000 business and private letters. The letters originate from all social strata of society and most of them never reached their intended destination.

Research

The huge variety of the Prize Papers makes it suitable for different types of research. It means that the Prize Papers can be used for a wide range of research topics, for example, for developments in language and dialect, trade, material culture, social relationships and knowledge transfer from the 17th to the 19th centuries. A large international research project by the universities of Oxford and Birmingham led by Jelle van Lottum focused on the migration of sailors and the distribution of human capital, based on records of interrogations of crew members. This [research](#) was financed by the Economic and Social Research Council (2011-2016).

The Sailing Letters' project carried out by the National Library of the Netherlands in 2004, introduced the Prize Papers to a broad group of Dutch researchers. Five *Sailing Letters Journals* were published between 2008 and 2013 to make this rich and versatile resource even more widely known.

Preservation and digitisation

The award at the end of 2015 of a substantial subsidy to Huygens ING by *Metamorfoze*, the national programme for the preservation of paper heritage, made it possible to preserve and digitise 144.000 pages of selected documents.

Go to: <https://www.huygens.knaw.nl/dutch-prize-papers/>

or: <https://prizepapers.huygens.knaw.nl/>