

After Brexit And Catalonia, What Will Become Of The EU?



The future of the European Union is surely in doubt.

Brexit and [Catalonia](#) are the most glaring recent examples of the irrepressibly dynamic forces of nationalism that continue to exert powerful influence on the human psyche within European communities.

More importantly, the processes that led to the victory of the “Leave” campaign in the June 2016 and the eruption of Catalonia’s cessationist sentiment form part of the disintegrating tendencies under way in today’s global political economy. They add to the growing list of cases illustrating the limits of the idea of a united Europe.

The more likely future of Europe is a neoliberal superstate jointly run by Berlin and Brussels. The European elite has been working hard for a long time now to have power transferred from the national governments to a Brussels-based super bureaucracy, with Berlin acting as the political and economic hegemon.

But there is also an alternative - a United States of Europe (a Europe with total integration and without nation states), which is a widely shared idea within certain European elites. Such a project can succeed only if the norms and values of democracy are applied at a transnational and global level (cosmopolitan democracy).

An imperial superstate

As a citizen of a European neoliberal superstate, your life will be determined by two entities: the Brussels-based bureaucracy and the unelected hegemon, Berlin. They will dictate the policymaking process, while nation states - especially those situated on the periphery of the Union - will be turned into “satellites”.

We have already seen plenty of evidence that the EU is heading that way.

Economic cooperation among European member states has revolved around distinct Machiavellian principles and it is the interests of the strong and

influential economic agents and of powerful state actors that drive public policy agenda.

The tradition of political cynicism also defines the actual foreign policy agenda of EU authorities and institutions as evidenced by their double-standard approach towards integration and secession. They opposed Catalonia's declaration for independence in late October 2017 because they don't wish to see Spain (an EU member state) split, but provided unanimous support in 2008 to Kosovo's independence.

As a matter of fact, the European Community (along with Washington) not only failed in the case of former Yugoslavia back in the early 1990s to guarantee the territorial integrity of European state frontiers, in clear violation of the 1975 Helsinki Accords Final Act, but individual European member states actually played a key role in the destruction of the Yugoslavian state.

But no one has ever charged the EU with being a democratic political entity. If anything, it acts as an imperial power by virtue of the very emergence of a neoliberal superstate, at least in regard to economic affairs. The manner in which the bailout programmes for Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Cyprus were handled during the euro crisis stands out as a glaring example of heavy-handed, anti-democratic tactics.

In Greece and Italy, democratically elected governments were forced to resign under pressure from EU authorities and replaced in turn by non-elected technocratic governments.

In the case of Greece, Germany's finance minister and EU officials even refused to accept the outcome of a bailout referendum. They still maintain a financial stranglehold over the economy, securing the country's transformation into a debt colony as a result of brutal austerity measures and outright refusal to provide debt relief.

Speaking of sovereign debt, Germany's own debt was largely written off in 1953 with the London Debt Agreement. To add insult to injury, Europe's new hegemon refuses to give back to financially strangled Greece a loan that the country was forced to provide to its Nazi occupiers during World War II. The value of the loan is estimated today to be in the [tens of billions](#) of euros.

Cosmopolitan democracy

The emergence of a United States of Europe presupposes not merely the complete redesign of the current EU architecture and fiscal unity but also the development of a new level of political consciousness.

The different peoples of Europe will have to embrace a cosmopolitan version of democracy which may be not simply contradictory to their national political cultures but run also contrary to emotional community attachment.

All prevailing experience indicates that we have not yet reached a stage of extending our emotional attachments to any measurable and influential degree to individuals and settings beyond close proximity to our own existence.

In other words, we can identify with the values and experiences of our communities and our nations, but hardly with those of the world at large, although we can still believe and subscribe to something called universal principles.

Moreover, cosmopolitan democracy is a noble but fanciful attachment not to universal principles as such, but rather to imagined political communities organised in empty space which may literally require the transcendence of time, culture, and history.

In other words, for cosmopolitan democracy to work, what is required is the application of a set of norms, practices, and values in a borderless world deprived of national cultures and distinct historical experiences - a borderless world that is located "outside" history and culture.

Cosmopolitan democracy requires the transcendence of all arbitrary limitations. In this sense, ontologically speaking, of course, cosmopolitan democracy as global governance comes close to resembling pantheism.

Unfortunately, the EU is not going that way. It will continue to accumulate political power at the expense of the democratic nation state in order to extend the tyranny of the neoliberal market for the benefit of European capital.

This is what the EU economic and political project has become all about, and the notion of a united Europe serves literally more as a political guide towards the establishment of a superstate rather than the remaking of Europe's political landscape along the lines of a federal democratic polity.

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Noam Chomsky And Robert Pollin: Breaking Through The Political Barriers To Free Education



Robert Pollin - Photo: UMass
Amherst

In an increasingly unequal country, the stakes are high for debates over student debt and the prospect of free higher education. Driven by neoliberal politics, our current educational system is both a product of and a driver of deep social inequities. In this interview, world-renowned public intellectuals Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin take on the question of who should pay for education — and how a radical reshaping of our educational system could be undertaken in the US.

This is the third part of a wide-ranging interview series with world-renowned public intellectuals Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin. Read part one [here](#) and part two [here](#).

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, higher education in the US is a terribly expensive affair, and hundreds of billions are owed in student loans. First, do you think that a system of free higher education can coexist alongside tuition-charging universities? Secondly, what could and should be done about student debt?



Noam Chomsky ~ Photo:
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Noam Chomsky: The educational system was a highly predictable victim of the neoliberal reaction, guided by the maxim of “private affluence and public squalor.” Funding for public education has sharply declined. Tuition has exploded, leading to a plague of unpayable student debt. As higher education is driven to a business model in accord with neoliberal doctrine, administrative bureaucracy has sharply increased at the expense of faculty and students, developments reviewed well by sociologist Benjamin Ginsburg. Cost-cutting dictated by the revered market principles naturally leads to hyper-exploitation of the more vulnerable, creating a new precariat of graduate students and adjuncts surviving on a bare pittance, replacing tenured faculty. All of this happens to be a good disciplinary technique, for obvious reasons.

For those with eyes open, much of what has happened was anticipated by the early '70s, at the point of transition from regulated capitalism to incipient neoliberalism. At the time, there was mounting elite concern about the dangers posed by the democratizing and civilizing effects of 1960s activism, and particularly the role of young people during “the time of troubles.” The concerns were forcefully expressed at both ends of the political spectrum.

At the right end of the spectrum, the “Powell memorandum” sent by corporate lobbyist (later Supreme Court Justice) Lewis Powell to the Chamber of Commerce called upon the business community to rise up to defend itself against the assault on freedom led by Ralph Nader, Herbert Marcuse and other miscreants who had

taken over the universities, the media and the government. The picture was, of course, ludicrous but it did reflect the perceptions of Powell's audience, desperate about the slight diminution in their overwhelming power. The rhetoric is as interesting as the message, reminiscent of a spoiled three-year-old who has a piece of candy taken away. The memorandum was influential in circles that matter for policy formation.

At the other end of the spectrum, at about the same time, the liberal internationalists of the Trilateral Commission published their lament over "The Crisis of Democracy" that arose in the "terrible" '60s, when previously apathetic and marginalized parts of the population — the great majority — began to try to enter the political arena to pursue their interests. That posed an intolerable burden on the state. Accordingly, the Trilateral scholars called for more "moderation in democracy," a return to passivity and obedience. The American rapporteur, Harvard professor Samuel Huntington, reminisced nostalgically about the time when "Truman had been able to govern the country with the cooperation of a relatively small number of Wall Street lawyers and bankers," so that true democracy flourished.

A particular concern of the Trilateral scholars was the failure of the institutions responsible for "the indoctrination of the young," including the schools and universities. These had to be brought under control, along with the irresponsible media that were (occasionally) departing from subordination to "proper authority" — a precursor of concerns of the far-right Republican Party today.

The right-liberal spectrum of concerns provided a good indication of what was to come.

The underfunding of public education, from K-12 through colleges and universities, has no plausible economic rationale, and in fact is harmful to the economy because of the losses that ensue. In other countries, rich and poor, education remains substantially free, with educational standards that rank high in global comparisons. Even in the US, higher education was almost free during the economically successful years before the neoliberal reaction — and it was, of course, a much poorer country then. The GI bill provided free education to huge numbers of people — white men overwhelmingly — who would probably never have gone to college, a great benefit to them personally and to the whole society. Tuition at private colleges was far below today's exorbitant costs.

Student debt is structured to be a burden for life. The indebted cannot declare bankruptcy, unlike Trump. Current student debt is estimated to be over \$1.45 trillion, [more than] \$600 billion more than total credit card debt. Most is unpayable, and should be rescinded. There are ample resources for that simply from waste, including the bloated military and the enormous concentrated private wealth that has accumulated in the financial and general corporate sector under neoliberal policies.

There is no economic reason why free education cannot flourish from schools through colleges and university. The barriers are not economic but rather political decisions, skewed in the predictable direction under conditions of highly unequal wealth and power. Barriers that can be overcome, as often in the past.

Bob, what's your own response to the question I posed above?

Robert Pollin: Student debt in the US has exploded in the past decade. In 2007, total student debt was \$112 billion, equal to 0.8 percent of GDP. As of 2016, total student debt was [more than] \$1 trillion, equal to 5.6 percent of GDP. Thus, as a share of GDP, student debt has risen approximately seven-fold. As of 2012, nearly 70 percent of students left college carrying student loans, and these loans averaged \$26,300.

The rise in student debt reflects a combination of factors. The first is that the private costs of attending college have risen sharply, with public higher education funding having been cut sharply. Average public funding per student was 15 percent lower in 2015 than in 2008, and 20 percent lower than in 1990. The burden of the public funding cuts [has] been worsened by the stagnation of average family incomes. Thus, in 1990, average tuition, fees, room and board amounted to about 18 percent of the median household income. By 2014, this figure had nearly doubled, to 35 percent of median household income.

Despite these sharply rising costs, college enrollments have continued to rise. There are many good reasons for young people to go off to college, open their minds, develop their skills and enjoy themselves. But probably the major attraction is the fact that income disparities have increased sharply between those who go to college versus those who do not. This pattern corresponds with the stagnation of average wages since the early 1970s that we discussed [previously]. The reality under neoliberalism has been that, if you want to have a

decent shot at a good-paying job with a chance for promotions and raises over time, the most important first step is to get a college education. The pressures to go to college would be much less intense if working-class jobs provided good pay and opportunities to advance, as was the pattern prior to the onset of neoliberalism.

Virtually all student debt in the US is now held by the federal government. It would therefore be a relatively simple matter to forgive some, if not all of it. This would enable young people to transition much more easily into creating their own households and families. At the same time, if the government is going to enact a major program of student debt forgiveness, it should be at least equally committed to relieving the heavy mortgage debt burdens still carried by tens of millions of non-affluent households in the aftermath of the 2007-09 financial crash and Great Recession. Similarly, the government should also be at least equally committed to both lowering the costs of college education in the first place, and [supporting] better wages and work opportunities for people who do not attend college.

The [blueprint for a progressive US](#) that the two of you have sketched out requires that a certain course of political action is carried out ... which includes educating the masses in getting from here to there. How is this to be done, especially given not only the peculiarities of American political culture, but also the balkanization of progressive and left forces in the country?

Chomsky: The answer is both easy and hard. Easy to formulate (and familiar), and hard to execute (also familiar). The answer is education, organization [and] activism as appropriate to circumstances. Not easy, but often successful, and there's no reason why it cannot be now. Popular engagement, though scattered, is at quite a high level, as is enthusiasm and concern. There are also important elements of unity, like the Left Forum, novel and promising. And the movements we've [already mentioned](#). Significant efforts are underway, such as those alluded to briefly [before], and there's no reason why they cannot be extended. While the left is famous for constant splits and internal disputes, I don't think that's more so now than in the past. And the general mood, particularly among young people, seems to me conducive to quite positive changes.

I don't feel that there is anything deep in the political culture that prevents "educating the masses." I'm old enough to recall vividly the high level of culture,

general and political, among first-generation working people during the Great Depression. Workers' education was lively and effective, union-based — mostly the vigorous rising labor movement, reviving from the ashes of the 1920s. I've often seen independent and quite impressive initiatives in working-class and poor and deprived communities today. And there's a long earlier history of lively working-class culture, from the early days of the industrial revolution. The most important radical democratic movement in American history, the populist movement (not today's "populism"), was initiated and led by farmers in Texas and the Midwest, who may have had little formal education but understood very well the nature of their plight at the hands of the powerful banking and commercial sectors, and devised effective means to counter it....

I've been fortunate enough to have seen remarkable examples elsewhere. I recall vividly a visit to an extremely poor, almost inaccessible rural village in southern Colombia, in an area under attack from all sides, where I attended a village meeting that was concerned with protecting their resources, including irreplaceable water supplies, from predatory international mining corporations. And in particular, a young man, with very little formal education, who led a thoughtful and very informed discussion of sophisticated development plans that they intended to implement. I've seen the same in poor villages in West Bengal, with a handful of books in the tiny schoolroom, areas liberated from landlord rule by Communist party militancy. The opportunities and, of course, resources are vastly greater in rich societies like ours.

I don't think it is idle romanticism to recognize the potential that can be awakened, or arise independently, in communities that free themselves from indoctrination and passive subordination. The opportunities I think are there, to be grasped and carried forward.

Pollin: I think it is inevitable that leftist forces in the US would be divided, if not balkanized, to some extent. Among the full range of people who are committed to social and economic equality and ecological [justice] — i.e. to some variant of a leftist vision of a decent society — it will always be the case that some will be more focused on egalitarian economic issues, others around the environment and climate change, others on US imperialism, militarism and foreign policy, others on race and gender equality, and still others on sexual identity.

I certainly do not have the formula for how to most effectively knit all these

groups together. But I do think we can learn a lot from the major successes out there. The 2016 Bernie Sanders presidential campaign is a first obvious example. Another is the California Nurses Association/National Nurses United (CNA/NNU) that I mentioned [before]. This is a union, fighting first for the well-being of its members, who are overwhelmingly women, with a high proportion being women of color. At the same time, CNA/NNU has been in the forefront of campaigns for single-payer health care and even the Robin Hood Tax on speculative Wall Street trading.

There are other progressive organizations that have proven track records of success. One is the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), which has long been active around both living wage and other worker rights issues, as well as community economic development and environmental justice. A more recently formed coalition is NY Renews, which is comprised of 126 organizations in New York State who have come together to advance a serious program in the state to both dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and expand good job opportunities. The Washington State Labor Council — part of the AFL-CIO — has also been committed and innovative in bringing together coalitions of labor and environmental groups.

The US left needs to learn and build from the achievements and ongoing work of these and similar groups. In fact, as Margaret Thatcher used to say, “there is no alternative” — if we are serious about successfully advancing a left alternative to the disasters caused by 40 years of neoliberal hegemony.

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The Failed Dream Of A Russian Revolution



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aljazeera.com Exactly one hundred years ago today, in the evening of October 25, 1917, the Winter Palace in Petrograd (today's St Petersburg) was stormed. This event marked the beginning of the Great October Revolution, one of the most significant political events of the twentieth century that shaped the course of history for decades ahead.

Leading up to the events of October 25 was another revolution in late February 1917, which brought to power a group of leaders from bourgeois political parties that formed a provisional government headed initially by Georgy Lvov, a liberal reformer, and then by Aleksander Kerensky, a socialist. In early March of that year Tsar Nicholas II, who had ruled imperial Russia since 1894, abdicated. Five months later, Russia was pronounced a republic.

Although the provisional government did introduce some reforms on the political front, prompting even Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin to declare Russia in April 1917 "the freest country in the world", it was the Red October Revolution that turned the old order completely upside down by inaugurating a socialist regime and making Soviet-style communism a global ideological and political force that lasted until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991.

Still, one hundred years later, the rise of the Bolsheviks to power continues to divide scholars, the chattering classes and even the educated public. There are several issues that are particularly divisive, such as whether the October Revolution was a popular insurgency or essentially a coup, and whether Stalinism evolved naturally from the basic principles and political strategies of Lenin or was an unexpected development.

Likewise, there is still a great deal of ambiguity, disagreement and confusion over the nature of the regime that flourished in the Soviet Union after Lenin's death in 1924. For example, did the Soviet Union represent an "actual socialist society", a "degenerated workers' state", or simply a "totalitarian state economy" in which the communist ideology functioned as a mere instrument of political legitimisation and imperial rule?

When it happened, the Great October Revolution produced global hysteria, untamed enthusiasm and hope about the possibility of the creation of heaven on earth (a new utopia) in equal measures. For the bourgeois classes everywhere, the inauguration of the Soviet regime was anathema to core values of the "western civilisation", while for radicals and communists it signified a natural culmination of the inevitable march of history towards human freedom and a social order devoid of exploitation.

No room for mourning or celebration

On the centenary of the Great October Revolution, an objective evaluation on socialism and the legacy of Soviet communism gives no room for mourning or celebration. It was essentially the epic story of an impossible dream that turned in due time into a political and historical nightmare because of the interplay of a vast array of factors that included "backward" socioeconomic conditions, outside intervention, an absence of democratic traditions, and misconceived notions about socialism and democracy. Hence, while you can easily romanticise about the October Revolution, the cold reality of history smacks you in the face.

For starters, the Great October Revolution was unlike the February Revolution which erupted as a result of spontaneous action by hundreds of thousands of hungry and angry men and women workers and militant troops. What happened in October 1917 was the outcome of a well-designed strategy on the part of the leader (Lenin) of a minority party (the Bolsheviks) to wrest control from the provisional government because of a strong ideological aversion to "bourgeois democracy" and desire for power. Unsurprisingly Lenin's call for "all power to the Soviets" ended up being something entirely different: all power went to the party and its politburo.

The October Revolution was not a coup in itself, but neither was it a popular uprising that enjoyed the kind of mass support that the February Revolution had.

In fact, it was not until the autumn of 1917 that Lenin's "land, peace, bread" slogan had been embraced by some workers in St Petersburg and Moscow.

Yet, even this does not mean that the Bolshevik programme and Lenin's ideas of rule were accepted by the majority of the Russian people: In the November 1917 elections, the first truly free election in Russian history, Lenin's party received only one quarter of the vote, while the Social Revolutionaries managed to receive over 60 percent.

Lenin had stomach neither for parliamentary democracy nor for sharing power with any other political organisation. His unwavering intent to establish socialism in Russia, regardless of the ripeness of the social and economic conditions, and his firm conviction that only the Bolsheviks represented the true interests of the workers, would compel him to adopt strategies and policies that would soon deprive the Revolution of whatever potential it had originally had for the establishment of a new social order based on workers' control of the means of production and democracy (which Lenin, sadly enough, associated with the "dictatorship of the proletariat").

Indeed, not long after the November elections, Lenin would ban several opposition newspapers and unleash a campaign of "Red Terror" against all class enemies (with the Social Revolutionaries being the first victims following their uprising in Moscow in early July 1918). The orchestration of the "Red Terror," which lasted until the end of the Russian civil war, was assigned to Cheka (a Bolshevik police organisation that reported to Lenin himself on all anti-communist activities), thereby laying the foundations for the emergence of a full-fledged police state under Stalinism.

The clearest illustration of how far to the "right" the Bolsheviks had moved following the outbreak of the October Revolution is the brutal repression of the Kronstadt rebellion in 1921 by Red Army troops. Disheartened by the Bolsheviks' dictatorial tendencies, a garrison of the key fortress of Kronstadt revolted in March 1921 against the communist government and the ideas of "war communism" - even though the Kronstadt sailors had been, back in 1917, among the strongest supporters of the October Revolution and the idea of "Soviet power". To be sure, they were, until then, in Lev Trotsky's own words, "the pride and joy of the revolution".

With the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion, it became clear that Lenin's concept of the "vanguard party" and his understanding of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" did not permit dissent of any kind and that a socialist political order was to be based on one-party rule.

As for the policy of "war communism", it ended a complete disaster. Lenin himself admitted as much in a speech on October 17, 1921, when he said, "we made the mistake of deciding to go over directly to communist production and distribution".

But this did not mean that all Bolsheviks shared Lenin's views on "war communism" or that they embraced the policy that was followed in the 1920s by a partial return to the market system of production and distribution. The soon-to-be "new Tzar" Joseph Visarionovich Stalin, regarded the New Economic Policy as the betrayal of the October Revolution. His "revolution from above", launched in 1928 with the policy of collectivisation and dekulakisation (a campaign of political repressions, including arrests, deportations, and executions of millions of the more "well-to-do" peasants) reopened the gates of hell and converted Soviet socialism once and for all into a barbarous and murderous regime.

Stalinism did not merely formalise the worst aspects of Leninism but became, in reality, an actual stumbling block for the transition into socialism both inside the Soviet Union and throughout the rest of the world where the ideas of social justice and equality continued to move the minds and hearts of millions of decent people.

Hence, the end of Stalinism and the collapse of Soviet communism (which in the course of its 74 years did manage to turn a "backward" country into an industrialised nation that was able to defeat Nazism and make undeniable advances on several economic, cultural, and social fronts) mark simply the end of a dream turned into a nightmare.

In this context, the legacy of the Russian Revolution obliges, one hundred years later, neither celebration nor mourning. Dreams are surely renewable, and a new world is waiting to be born, but the possibilities available to create an egalitarian, socially just, ecologically friendly, and decent society lie outside the ideas, practices and policies of the October Revolution.

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talkers who do not speak “broadcast English.” Although they won prizes at film festivals, were used in college classes, and occasionally were shown on PBS, they found few outlets commercial theaters, video shops or television. But they have permanent value.

They come from the same intellectual movement that gave rise to American studies, regional and ethnic studies, the “new history,” “performance theory,” and investigation of tenacious cultural styles in phenomena like song, dance, storytelling, visual designs, and ceremonies. They also respond to the intense political and social ferment of the period.

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Imagining Our Way Beyond Neoliberalism: A Dialogue With Noam Chomsky And Robert Pollin

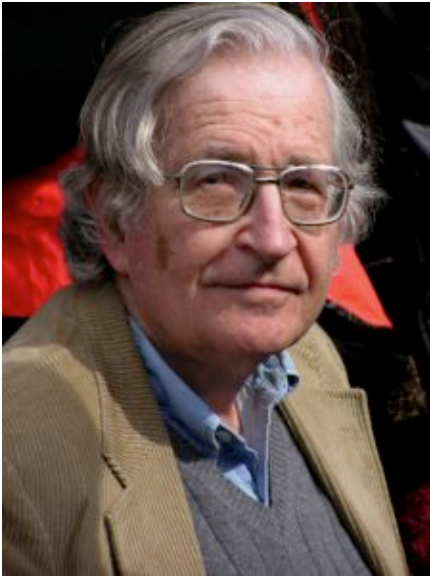


Prof.dr. Robert Pollin

This is part two of a wide-ranging interview with world-renowned public intellectuals Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin. [Read part one here](#). The next installment will appear on October 31.

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, racism, inequality, mass incarceration and gun violence are pathologies that run deep inside American society. How would a progressive government begin to address these problems if it found itself in a position of power in, say, the next decade or so?

Noam Chomsky: Very serious problems, no doubt. In order to address them effectively, it's first necessary to understand them; not a simple matter. Let's take the four pathologies in turn. Racism certainly runs deep. There is no need to elaborate. It's right before our eyes in innumerable ways, some with considerable historical resonance. Current anti-immigrant hysteria can hardly fail to recall the racist immigration laws that at first barred [Asians] and were extended in the 1920s to Italians and Jews (under a different guise) — incidentally, helping to send many Jews to gas chambers, and after the war, keeping miserable survivors of the Holocaust from US shores.



Noam Chomsky ~ Photo:
en.wikipedia.org

Of course, the most extreme case for the past 400 years is the bitter history of African Americans. Current circumstances are shameful enough, commonly held doctrines scarcely less so. The hatred of Obama and anything he touched surely reflects deep-rooted racism. Comparative studies by George Fredrickson show that doctrines of white supremacy in the US have been even more rampant than in Apartheid South Africa.

The Nazis, when seeking precedents for the Nuremberg laws, turned to the United States, taking its anti-miscegenation laws as a model, though not entirely: [Certain] US laws were too harsh for the Nazis because of the “one drop of blood” doctrine. It was not until 1967, under the impact of the civil rights movement, that these abominations were struck down by the Supreme Court.

And it goes far back, taking many strange forms, including the weird Anglo-Saxon cult that has been prominent for centuries. Benjamin Franklin, the great American figure of the Enlightenment, pondered whether Germans and Swedes should be barred from the country because they are “too swarthy.” Adopting familiar understanding, he [observed](#) that “the Saxons only [are] excepted” from this racial “defect” — and by some mysterious process, those who make it to the United States may become Anglo-Saxons, like those already accepted within the canon.

The national poet Walt Whitman, honored for his democratic spirit, justified the conquest of half of Mexico by [asking](#), “What has miserable, inefficient Mexico ...

to do with the great mission of peopling the New World with a noble race? Be it ours, to achieve that mission!" — a mission accomplished by the most "wicked war" in history, in the judgment of General-President U.S. Grant, who later regretted his service in it as a junior officer.

Coming to recent years, Henry Stimson, one of the most distinguished members of the FDR-Truman cabinets (and one of the few to oppose atomic bombing) "consistently maintained that Anglo-Saxons were superior to the 'lesser breeds'," historian Sean Langdon Malloy observes in his book, *Atomic Tragedy: Henry L. Stimson and the Decision to Use the Bomb* — and again reflecting not-uncommon views, asked to have one of his aides reassigned "on the slight possibility that he might be a Hebrew," in his own words.

The other three maladies that you mention are also striking features of US society — in some ways, even distinguishing features. But unlike racism, in all three cases, it is partially a contemporary phenomenon.

Take inequality. Through much of its history, the US did not have high inequality as compared with Europe. Less so, in fact. That began to change in the industrial age, reaching a peak in 1928, after the forceful destruction of the labor movement and crushing of independent thought. Largely as a result of labor mobilization, inequality declined during the Great Depression, a tendency continuing through the great growth period of regulated capitalism in the early postwar decades. The neoliberal era that followed reversed these trends, leading to extreme inequality that may even surpass the 1928 peak.

Mass incarceration is also period-specific; in fact, the same period. It had reached high levels in the South in the post-reconstruction years after an 1877 North-South compact gave the South free rein to institute "slavery by another name," as Douglas Blackmon calls the crime in his study of how the former slave-owning states devised techniques to incarcerate much of the Black population. By doing so, they created a renewed slave labor force for the industrial revolution of those years, this time with the state, rather than private capital, responsible for maintaining the slave labor force — a considerable benefit to the ownership class. Turning to more recent times, 30 years ago, US incarceration rates were within the range of developed societies, a little towards the high end. By now they are 5 to 10 times as high, far beyond those of any country with credible statistics. Again, a phenomenon of the past three decades.

The gun cult is also not as deeply rooted as often supposed. Guns were, of course, needed to conduct the two greatest crimes of American history: controlling slaves and exterminating [Native Americans]. But the general public had little interest in weapons, a matter of much concern to the arms industry. The popular gun cult was cultivated by gun manufacturers in the 19th century in order to create a market beyond governments. Normal capitalism. Methods included concoction of “Wild West” mythology that later became iconic. Such efforts continue, vigorously, until the present. By now, in large sectors of the society, swaggering into a coffee shop with a gun shows that you are really somebody, maybe a Wyatt Earp clone. The outcomes are sobering. Gun homicides in the US are [far beyond](#) comparable countries. In Germany, for example, deaths from gun homicide are at the level of deaths in the US from “contact with a thrown or falling object.” And even these shocking figures are misleading. Half of suicides in the US are with firearms, more than [20,000 a year](#), amounting to two-thirds of all firearm deaths.

Turning to your question about the four “pathologies” — the four horsemen, one is tempted to say — the questions virtually answer themselves with a careful look at the history, particularly the history since World War II. There have been two phases during the postwar period: regulated capitalism through the '50s and '60s, followed by the neoliberal period from the late '70s, sharply accelerating with Reagan and his successors. It is the latter period when the last three of four pathologies drove the US off the charts.

During the first postwar phase, there were some significant steps to counter endemic racism and its devastating impact on the victims. That was the great achievement of the mass civil rights movement, peaking in the mid-1960s, though with a very mixed record since. The achievements also had a major impact on the political system. The Democratic Party had been an uneasy coalition, including Southern Democrats, dedicated to racist policies and extremely influential because of seniority in one-party states. That’s why New Deal measures [were] largely restricted to whites; for example, household and agricultural workers were barred from Social Security.

The alliance fell apart in the '60s with the fierce backlash against extending minimal rights of citizenship to African-Americans. The South shifted to Republican ranks, encouraged by Nixon’s overtly racist “Southern strategy.” The period since has hardly been encouraging for African Americans, apart from elite

sectors.

Government policies could go some way towards ameliorating these social pathologies, but a great deal more is needed. Such needs can only be fulfilled by dedicated mass popular activism and educational/organizational efforts. These can be facilitated by a more progressive government, but, just as in the case of the civil rights movement, that can be only a help, often a reluctant one.

On inequality, it was low (by comparative standards) during the period of regulated capitalism — the final era of “great compression” of income as it is sometimes called. Inequality began to increase rapidly with the advent of the neoliberal era, not only in the US, though the US is extreme among developed societies. During the tepid recovery from the Great Recession of 2008, virtually all gains went to the top few percent, mostly 1 percent or a fraction thereof. “For the United States overall, the top 1 percent captured 85.1 percent of total income growth between 2009 and 2013,” [an Economic Policy Institute Study revealed](#). “In 2013 the top 1 percent of families nationally made 25.3 times as much as the bottom 99 percent.” And so, it continues. The latest Federal Reserve studies show that “The share of income received by the top 1 percent of families rose to 23.8 percent in 2016, up from 20.3 percent in 2013. The share of the bottom 90 percent of the distribution fell to 49.7 percent, the lowest on record in the survey’s history.” [Other figures are grotesque](#). Thus, “Average wealth holdings for white families in 2016 were about \$933,700, compared with \$191,200 for Hispanic families and \$138,200 for black families,” a product of deep-rooted racism exacerbating the neoliberal assault.

The gun culture, too, has expanded rapidly in recent decades. In 1975, the NRA formed a new lobbying arm — a few years later, a PAC — to channel funds to legislators. It soon became [one of the most powerful interest-group lobbies](#), with often fervent popular participation. In 2008, the Supreme Court, in an intellectual triumph of “originalism,” reversed the traditional interpretation of the Second Amendment, which had previously respected its explicit condition on the right to bear arms: the need for “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State....” That provision was understandable in 1790. There was almost no standing army. The world’s most powerful state was still an enemy. The slave population had to be controlled. And the invasion of the rest of what became the national territory was about to be unleashed. Not exactly today’s circumstances.

Since 2008, our “constitutional right to bear arms,” as declared by the right-wing Roberts Court, has become Holy Writ.

There are many contributing factors to the sharp break between the two postwar periods — neither [of] which began to approach what is surely possible in the richest society in world history, with incomparable advantages.

One leading factor is the financialization of the economy, creating a huge bloc of largely predatory institutions devoted to financial manipulations rather than to the real economy — a process by which “Wall Street destroyed Main Street,” in the words of Financial Times editor Rana Foroohar. One of her many illustrations is the world’s leading corporation, Apple. It has astronomical wealth, but to become even richer, has been shifting from devising more advanced marketable goods to finance. Its R&D as a percentage of sales has been falling since 2001, tendencies that extend widely among major corporations. In parallel, capital from financial institutions that financed business investments during the postwar growth period now largely “stays inside the financial system,” Foroohar [reports](#), “enriching financiers, corporate titans, and the wealthiest fraction of the population, which hold the vast majority of financial assets.”

During the period of rapid growth of financial institutions since the '70s, there seem to have been few studies of their impact on the economy. Apparently, it was simply taken for granted that since it (sort of) accords with neoliberal market principles, it must be a Good Thing.

The failure of the profession to study these matters was noted by Nobel laureate in economics Robert Solow after the 2008 crash. His tentative judgment was that the general impact is probably negative: “the successes probably add little or nothing to the efficiency of the real economy, while the disasters transfer wealth from taxpayers to financiers.” By now, there is substantially more evidence. A 2015 paper by two prominent economists found that productivity declines in markets with rapidly expanding financial sectors, impacting mostly the sector most critical for long-term growth and better jobs: advanced manufacturing. One reason, Foroohar observes, is that “finance would rather invest in areas like real estate and construction, which are far less productive but offer quicker, more reliable short-term gains” (hence also bigger bonuses for top management); the Trump-style economy, palatial hotels and golf courses (along with massive debt and repeated bankruptcies).

In part for related reasons, though productivity has doubled since the late '70s when finance was beginning to take over the economy, wages have stalled — for male workers, declined. In 2007, before the crash, at the height of euphoria about the grand triumphs of neoliberalism, neoclassical economics and “the Great Moderation,” real wages of American workers were lower than they had been in 1979, when the neoliberal experiment was just taking off. Another factor contributing to this outcome was explained to Congress in 1997 by Fed Chair Alan Greenspan, when testifying on the healthy economy he was managing. In his own words, “Atypical restraint on compensation increases has been evident for a few years now and appears to be mainly the consequence of greater worker insecurity.” Insecurity that was, as he noted, markedly increasing even as employment prospects improved. In short, with labor repressed and unions dismantled, workers were too intimidated to seek decent wages and benefits, a sure sign of the health of the economy.

The same happened to the minimum wage, which sets a floor for others; if it had continued to track productivity, it would now be close to \$20 an hour. Crises have rapidly increased as deregulation took off, in accord with the “religion” that markets know best, deplored by another Nobel laureate, Joseph Stiglitz, in a World Bank publication 20 years ago, to no effect. Each crisis is worse than the last; each following recovery weaker than the last. None of this, incidentally, would have come as a surprise to Marxist economists, who pretty much disappeared from the scene in the United States.

Despite much lofty rhetoric about “free markets,” like other major industries (energy, agribusiness, etc.), financial institutions benefit enormously from government subsidy and other interventions. An IMF study found that the profits of the major banks derive substantially from the implicit government insurance policy (“too big to fail”), which confers advantages far beyond the periodic bailouts when corrupt practices lead to a crash — something that did not happen during the earlier period, before bipartisan neoliberal doctrine fostered deregulation. Other benefits are real but immeasurable, like the incentive to undertake risky (hence profitable) transactions, with the understanding that if they crash, the hardy taxpayer will step in to repair the damage, probably leaving the institutions richer than before, as after the 2008 crash for which they were largely responsible.

Other factors include the accelerated attack on unions and the radical reduction

in taxes for the wealthy, both natural concomitants of neoliberal ideology. Another is the particular form of neoliberal globalization, particularly since the '90s, designed in ways that offer very high protection and other advantages to corporations, investors and privileged professionals, while setting working people in competition with one another worldwide, with obvious consequences.

Such measures have a mutually reinforcing effect. As wealth becomes more concentrated, so, automatically, does political power, which leads to government policies that carry the cycle forward.

A primary goal of the neoliberal reaction was to reverse the falling rate of profit that resulted, in part, from growing labor militancy. That goal has been achieved with impressive success. The professed goals, of course, were quite different. And as always, the reaction was buttressed by ideology. One staple has been the famous thesis of Simon Kuznets: that while inequality increases in early economic development, it begins to decrease as the economy reaches a more advanced level. It follows, then, that there is no need for redistributive policies that interfere with the magic of the market. The Kuznets thesis soon became conventional wisdom among economists and planners.

There are a few problems, however. One, as [American University economics professor] [Jon Wisman observes](#), is that it wasn't a thesis, but rather a conjecture, very cautiously advanced. As Kuznets explained, the conjecture was based on "perhaps 5 percent empirical information and 95 percent speculation, some of it possibly tainted by wishful thinking." This slight qualification in the article was overlooked in a manner not uncommon when there is doctrinal utility in so doing. Other justifications fare similarly.

One might almost define "neoliberalism" — a bit cruelly, but not entirely unfairly — as an ideology devoted to establishing more firmly a society based on the principle of "private affluence, public squalor" — John Kenneth Galbraith's condemnation of what he observed in 1958. Much worse was to come with the unleashing of natural tendencies of capitalism in the neoliberal years, now enhanced as its more [brutal] variants are given virtually free rein under Trump-Ryan-McConnell Republicanism.

All of this is under human control, and can be reversed. There are many realistic options, even without looking beyond short-term feasibility. A small financial

transaction tax would sharply reduce the rapid trading that is a net loss to the society while benefiting a privileged few, and would also provide a progressive government with revenue for constructive purposes. It's common knowledge that the deterioration of infrastructure has reached grotesque proportions. Government programs can begin to address these serious problems. They can also be devoted to improving rather than undermining the deteriorating public education system. Living wage and green economy programs of the kind that Bob Pollin has developed could go a long way toward reducing inequality, and beyond that, creating a much more decent society. Another major contribution would be [an equitable] health care system. In fact, just eliminating the exorbitant patent protections that are a core part of the neoliberal "free trade agreements" would be a huge boon to the general economy — and the arguments for these highly protectionist measures are very weak, as economist Dean Baker has shown convincingly. Legislation to put an end to the "right to scrounge laws" (in Orwellian terminology, "right to work laws") that are designed to destroy unions could help revive the labor movement, by now with different constituencies, including service and part-time workers. That could reverse the growth of the new "precariat," another matter of fundamental importance. And it could restore the labor movement to its historic role as the leading force in the struggle for basic human rights.

There are other paths toward reviving a vital and progressive labor movement. The expansion of worker-owned and managed enterprises, now underway in many places, is a promising development, and need not be limited to a small scale. A few years ago, after the crash, Obama virtually nationalized a large part of the auto industry, then returning it to private ownership. Another possibility would have been to turn the industry over to the workforce, or to stakeholders more broadly (workers and community), who might, furthermore, have chosen to redirect its production to what the country sorely needs: efficient public transportation. That could have happened had there been mass popular support and a receptive government. Recent work by Gar Alperovitz and David Ellerman approaches these matters in highly informative ways. Conversion of military industry along similar lines is also quite conceivable — matters discussed years ago by Seymour Melman. [There are all] options under progressive initiatives.

The "right to work" legislation that is a darling of the far right will probably soon be established solidly by the Roberts Court now that Neil Gorsuch is in place,

thanks to some of Mitch McConnell's more sordid chicanery in barring Obama's nominee. The legislation has an interesting pedigree. It traces back to the Southern Christian American Association, an extreme racist and anti-Semitic organization that was bitterly opposed to unions, which its leaders condemned as a devilish contrivance in which "white women and white men will be forced into organizations with black African apes." Another enemy was "Jewish Marxism," the "Talmudists" who were planning to Sovietize the world and were already doing so in the US through the "Jew Deal," known elsewhere as the "New Deal."

An immediate objective of moderately progressive policy should be to sharply cut the huge military budget, well over half of discretionary spending and now expanding under the Republican project of dismantling government, apart from service to their wealthy/corporate constituency. One of many good reasons to trim the military budget is that it is extremely dangerous to our own security. A striking illustration is the Obama-Trump nuclear weapons modernization program, which has sharply increased "killing power," a very important [study in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists](#) reported last March. Thereby, the program "creates exactly what one would expect to see, if a nuclear-armed state were planning to have the capacity to fight and win a nuclear war by disarming enemies with a surprise first strike." These developments, surely known to Russian planners, significantly increase the likelihood that they might resort to a preemptive strike — which means the end — in case of false alarms or very tense moments, of which there are all too many. And here, too, the funds released could be devoted to badly needed objectives, like quickly weaning ourselves from the curse of fossil fuels.

This is a bare sample. There's a long list.

The United States spends more money on health care than any other nation in the world, yet its health care system is highly inefficient and leaves out millions from even basic coverage. What would a socialized health care system look like in the US, and how can the opposition from the private insurance sector, big pharma and the medical industries in general be overcome?

Noam Chomsky: The facts are startling. It's an international scandal, and not unknown. A recent [study](#) by the US-based Commonwealth Fund, a nonpartisan health policy research group, found that once again, as repeatedly in the past, the US health care system is the most expensive in the world, far higher than

comparable countries, and that it ranks last in performance among these countries. To have combined these two results is a real triumph of the market. The roots of the achievement are not obscure. The US is alone in relying on largely unregulated private insurance companies. Their commitment is to profit, not health, and they produce huge waste in administrative costs, advertising, profit and executive compensation. The government-run component of the health system (Medicare) is far more efficient, but suffers from the need to work through the private institutions. The US is also alone in legislation barring the government from negotiating drug prices, which, not surprisingly, are far above comparable countries.

These policies do not reflect popular will. Poll results vary, depending on how questions are formulated, but over time, they show considerable, often majority support for a public health system of the kind found elsewhere. Usually, Canada is the model because so little is known about the rest of the world, though it is not ranked as the best. That prize has regularly been won by the British National Health Service, though it, too, is reeling under the neoliberal assault. When Obama's [Affordable Care Act] was introduced, it included a public option, supported by almost two-thirds of the population. It was unceremoniously deleted. Popular opinion is particularly striking in that [it] receives so little mainstream support, even articulation; and if even brought up, is usually condemned. The main argument against the far more successful systems elsewhere is that adopting their framework would raise taxes. [However, single-payer usually results in] cutting expenses considerably more and benefitting the large majority — so the experience of other countries indicates, [as does] US Medicare.

The tide may be turning finally. Sanders has received considerable support, even within the political system, for his call for universal health care to be achieved step-by-step in his plan, by gradual extension of Medicare and other means. The temporary collapse of the fanatic seven-year Republican campaign to destroy "Obamacare" may provide openings as well — temporary collapse, because the extremist organization in power has means to undermine health care and are likely to use it in their passionate dedication to destroying anything connected to the [reviled Black president](#).... Nevertheless, there are new openings for some degree of [reason], which could greatly enhance people's welfare, as well as improving the general economy.

To be sure, there will be massive opposition from private power, which has

extraordinary influence in our limited class-based democracy. But it can be overcome. The historical record shows that economic-political elites respond to militant popular action — and the threat of more — by endorsing ameliorative measures that leave their basic dominance of the society in place. New Deal measures of social reform are one of many illustrations.

Bob, you produced recently an economic analysis for the backing of a single-payer bill in California (SB-562) and worked on Bernie Sanders's proposal for universal health care, so what are your own views on the previous question?

Robert Pollin: A socialized health care system for the US — whether we call it “single-payer,” “Medicare-for-All” or something else — should include two basic features. The first is that every resident ... should be guaranteed access to decent health care. The second is that the system achieves significant overall savings relative to our existing system through lowering administrative costs, controlling the prices of prescription drugs and fees for physicians and hospitals, reducing unnecessary treatments and expanding preventive care.

In our study analyzing the California single-payer proposal, we estimated that providing decent coverage for all state residents — including, in particular, the roughly 40-45 percent of the state's population who are presently either uninsured or who have inadequate coverage — would increase total costs by about 10 percent under the existing system. But we also estimated that operating the single-payer system could achieve overall savings in the range of 18 percent relative to the existing system in the areas of administration, drug prices, fees for providers and cutting back on wasteful service delivery. Overall then, we found that total health care spending in California would fall by about 8 percent, even with the single-payer system delivering decent care for everyone. My work on the Sanders's Medicare for All bill is ongoing as of now, so I will hold off on providing estimates of its overall impact.

Let's consider how transformative the California-type outcomes would be. Under single-payer in California, decent health care would be established as a basic human right, as it already is in almost all other advanced countries. Nobody would have to forego receiving needed treatments because they didn't have insurance or they couldn't afford high insurance premiums and copays. Nobody would have to fear a financial disaster because they faced a health care crisis in their family. Virtually all families would end up financially better off and most

businesses would also experience cost savings under single-payer relative to what they pay now to cover their employees.

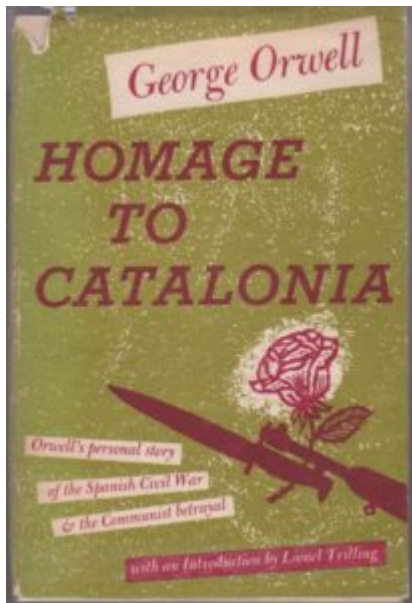
How can the opposition from the private health insurance sector, big pharma and the medical industries in general be overcome? It obviously will not be easy. Health care in the US is a \$3 trillion business. Profits of the private companies are in the hundreds of billions, even while most of the funding for our existing health care system comes from the federal, state and local government budgets. As one example of how to respond to this political reality, we can learn from the work of the California Nurses Association/National Nurses United. The nurses' union has been fighting for single-payer for over 20 years. They bring enormous credibility to the issue, because their members see firsthand how the health and financial well-being of especially non-wealthy people in the US suffer under our current system.

There is no secret as to how the nurses' union fights on behalf of single-payer. They believe in their cause and are highly effective in the ways they organize and advance their position. The basics are as simple as that.

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George Orwell ~ Homage To Catalonia

Chapter 1



In the Lenin Barracks in Barcelona, the day before I joined the militia, I saw an Italian militiaman standing in front of the officers' table.

He was a tough-looking youth of twenty-five or six, with reddish-yellow hair and powerful shoulders. His peaked leather cap was pulled fiercely over one eye. He was standing in profile to me, his chin on his breast, gazing with a puzzled frown at a map which one of the officers had open on the table. Something in his face deeply moved me. It was the face of a man who would commit murder and throw away his life for a friend—the kind efface you would expect in an Anarchist, though as likely as not he was a Communist. There were both candour and ferocity in it; also the pathetic reverence that illiterate people have for their supposed superiors. Obviously he could not make head or tail of the map; obviously he regarded map-reading as a stupendous intellectual feat. I hardly know why, but I have seldom seen anyone—any man, I mean—to whom I have taken such an immediate liking. While they were talking round the table some remark brought it out that I was a foreigner. The Italian raised his head and said quickly:

'Italiano?'

I answered in my bad Spanish: 'No, Ingles. Y tu?'

'Italiano.'

As we went out he stepped across the room and gripped my hand very hard. Queer, the affection you can feel for a stranger! It was as though his

spirit and mine had momentarily succeeded in bridging the gulf of language and tradition and meeting in utter intimacy. I hoped he liked me as well as I liked him. But I also knew that to retain my first impression of him I must not see him again; and needless to say I never did see him again. One was always making contacts of that kind in Spain.

I mention this Italian militiaman because he has stuck vividly in my memory. With his shabby uniform and fierce pathetic face he typifies for me the special atmosphere of that time. He is bound up with all my memories of that period of the war—the red flags in Barcelona, the gaunt trains full of shabby soldiers creeping to the front, the grey war-stricken towns farther up the line, the muddy, ice-cold trenches in the mountains.

This was in late December 1936, less than seven months ago as I write, and yet it is a period that has already receded into enormous distance. Later events have obliterated it much more completely than they have obliterated 1935, or 1905, for that matter. I had come to Spain with some notion of writing newspaper articles, but I had joined the militia almost immediately, because at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do. The Anarchists were still in virtual control of Catalonia and the revolution was still in full swing.

To anyone who had been there since the beginning it probably seemed even in December or January that the revolutionary period was ending; but when one came straight from England the aspect of Barcelona was something startling and overwhelming. It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle. Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists; every wall was scrawled with the hammer and sickle and with the initials of the revolutionary parties; almost every church had been gutted and its images burnt. Churches here and there were being systematically demolished by gangs of workmen. Every shop and cafe had an inscription saying that it had been collectivized; even the bootblacks had been collectivized and their boxes painted red and black. Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonial forms of speech had temporarily disappeared. Nobody said 'Senior' or 'Don' or even 'Usted'; everyone called everyone else 'Comrade' and 'Thou', and said 'Salud!' instead of 'Buenos dias'. Tipping was forbidden by law; almost my first experience was

receiving a lecture from a hotel manager for trying to tip a lift-boy. There were no private motor-cars, they had all been commandeered, and all the trams and taxis and much of the other transport were painted red and black. The revolutionary posters were everywhere, flaming from the walls in clean reds and blues that made the few remaining advertisements look like daubs of mud. Down the Ramblas, the wide central artery of the town where crowds of people streamed constantly to and fro, the loudspeakers were bellowing revolutionary songs all day and far into the night. And it was the aspect of the crowds that was the queerest thing of all. In outward appearance it was a town in which the wealthy classes had practically ceased to exist. Except for a small number of women and foreigners there were no 'well-dressed' people at all. Practically everyone wore rough working-class clothes, or blue overalls, or some variant of the militia uniform. All this was queer and moving. There was much in it that I did not understand, in some ways I did not even like it, but I recognized it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for. Also I believed that things were as they appeared, that this was really a workers' State and that the entire bourgeoisie had either fled, been killed, or voluntarily come over to the workers' side; I did not realize that great numbers of well-to-do bourgeois were simply lying low and disguising themselves as proletarians for the time being.

The complete book: http://www.george-orwell.org/Homage_to_Catalonia/