

Kunst is Lang ~ Patricia Kaersenhout

De beeldende kunst is als een altijd doorstomende trein die zich een weg baant langs stromingen, niches, uitspattingen en extravaganza. Het tempo van afwisselingen en opkomende kunstenaars is hoog, de zendtijd voor hedendaagse kunst bescheiden. In de uitzending van Kunst is lang zoekt Luuk Heezen samen met mister Motley de verdieping op met een hedendaagse kunstenaar. Een gesprek over het werk, over vreemde ideeën, over de vooroordelen binnen kunst, en over het (doodnormale) dagelijkse leven van de kunstenaar.

Patricia Kaersenhout is een Nederlandse visueel kunstenaar en cultureel activist. Ze studeerde sociale wetenschappen aan Amstelhorn Amsterdam en beeldende kunst aan de Gerrit Rietveld Academie. Haar werk onderzoekt sociale onzichtbaarheid als gevolg van de Afrikaanse Diaspora. Ook richt ze zich op het kolonialisme in relatie tot haar eigen opgroeien binnen een West-Europese cultuur. De rode draad in haar werk is een onderzoek naar de Afrikaanse Diaspora, die ze in verband brengt met de geschiedenis van de slavernij, racisme, feminisme en seksualiteit.

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Blueprint For A Progressive US: A Dialogue With Noam Chomsky And

Robert Pollin



1902, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA — Child labor strike in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Photograph 1902 — Image by © Bettmann/CORBIS

This is the first part of a wide-ranging interview with world-renowned public intellectuals Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin. The next installment will appear on October 24.

Not long after taking office, it became evident that Donald Trump had engaged in fraudulent populism during his campaign. His promise to “Make America Great Again” has been exposed as a lie, as the Trump administration has been busy extending US military power, exacerbating inequality, reverting to the old era of unregulated banking practices, pushing for more fuel fossil drilling and stripping environmental regulations.

In the Trump era, what would an authentically populist, progressive political agenda look like? What would a progressive US look like with regard to jobs, the environment, finance capital and the standard of living? What would it look like in terms of education and health care, justice and equality? In an exclusive interview with C.J. Polychroniou for Truthout, world-renowned public intellectuals Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin tackle these issues. Noam Chomsky is professor emeritus of linguistics at MIT and laureate professor in the department of linguistics at the University of Arizona. Robert Pollin is distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Their views lay the foundation for a

visionary — yet eminently realistic — progressive social and economic order for the United States.

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, the rise of Donald Trump has unleashed a rather unprecedented wave of social resistance in the US. Do you think the conditions are ripe for a mass progressive/socialist movement in this country that can begin to reframe the major policy issues affecting the majority of people, and perhaps even challenge and potentially change the fundamental structures of the US political economy?

Noam Chomsky: There is indeed a wave of social resistance, more significant than in the recent past — though I'd hesitate about calling it "unprecedented." Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the fact that in the domain of policy formation and implementation, the right is ascendant, in fact some of its harshest and most destructive elements [are rising].

Nor should we overlook a crucial fact that has been evident for some time: The figure in charge, though often ridiculed, has succeeded brilliantly in his goal of occupying media and public attention while mobilizing a very loyal popular base — and one with sinister features, sometimes smacking of totalitarianism, including adoration of The Leader. That goes beyond the core of loyal Trump supporters.... [A [majority of Republicans](#)] favor shutting down or at least fining the press if it presents "biased" or "false news" — terms that mean information rejected by The Leader, so we learn from polls showing that by overwhelming margins, Republicans not only believe Trump far more than the hated mainstream media, but even far more than their own media organ, the extreme right Fox news. And half of Republicans would back postponing the 2020 election if Trump calls for it.

It is also worth bearing in mind that among a significant part of his worshipful base, Trump is regarded as a "wavering moderate" who cannot be fully trusted to hold fast to the true faith of fierce White Christian identity politics. A recent illustration is the primary victory of the incredible Roy Moore in Alabama despite Trump's opposition. ("Mr. President, I love you but you are wrong," as the banners read). The victory of this Bible-thumping fanatic has led senior party strategists to [conclude](#) "that the conservative base now loathes its leaders in Washington the same way it detested President Barack Obama" — referring to leaders who are already so far right that one needs a powerful telescope to locate

them at the outer fringe of any tolerable political spectrum.

The potential power of the ultra-right attack on the far right is [\[illustrated\]](#) by the fact that Moore spent about \$200,000, in contrast to his Trump-backed opponent, the merely far-right Luther Strange, who received more than \$10 million from the national GOP and other far-right sources. The ultra-right is spearheaded by Steve Bannon, one of the most dangerous figures in the shiver-inducing array that has come to the fore in recent years. It has the huge financial support of the Mercer family, along with ample media outreach through Breitbart news, talk radio and the rest of the toxic bubble in which loyalists trap themselves.

In the most powerful state in history, the current Republican Party is ominous enough. What is not far on the horizon is even more menacing.

Much has been said about how Trump has pulled the cork out of the bottle and legitimized neo-Nazism, rabid white supremacy, misogyny and other pathologies that had been festering beneath the surface. But it goes much beyond even that.

I do not want to suggest that adoration of the Dear Leader is something new in American politics, or confined to the vulgar masses. The veneration of Reagan that has been diligently fostered has some of the same character, in intellectual circles as well. Thus, in publications of the conservative Hoover Institution at Stanford University, we learn that Reagan's "spirit seems to stride the country, watching us like a warm and friendly ghost." Lucky us, protected from harm by a demi-god.

Whether by design, or simply inertia, the Republican wrecking ball has been following a two-level strategy. Trump keeps the spotlight on himself with one act after another, assuming (correctly) that yesterday's antics will be swept aside by today's. And at the same time, often beneath the radar, the "respectable" Republican establishment chips away at government programs that might be of benefit to the general population, but not to their constituency of extreme wealth and corporate power. They are systematically pursuing what Financial Times economic correspondent Martin Wolf calls "pluto-populism," a doctrine that imposes "policies that benefit plutocrats, justified by populist rhetoric." An amalgam that has registered unpleasant successes in the past as well.

Meanwhile, the Democrats and centrist media help out by focusing their energy and attention on whether someone in the Trump team talked to Russians, or

[whether] the Russians tried to influence our “pristine” elections — though at most in a way that is undetectable in comparison with the impact of campaign funding, let alone other inducements that are the prerogative of extreme wealth and corporate power and are hardly without impact.

The Russian saboteurs of democracy seem to be everywhere. There was great anxiety about Russian intervention in the recent German elections, perhaps contributing to the frightening surge of support for the right-wing nationalist, if not neo-fascist, “Alternative for Germany” [AfD]. AfD did indeed have outside help, it turns out, but not from the insidious Putin. “The Russian meddling that German state security had been anticipating apparently never materialized,” [according to Bloomberg News](#). “Instead, the foreign influence came from America.” More specifically, from Harris Media, whose clients include Marine Le Pen’s National Front in France, Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, and our own Donald Trump. With the valuable assistance of the Berlin office of Facebook, which created a population model and provided the needed data, Harris’s experts micro-targeted Germans in categories deemed susceptible to AfD’s message — with some success, it appears. The firm is now planning to move on to coming European races, it has announced.

Nevertheless, all is not bleak by any means. The most spectacular feature of the 2016 elections was not the election of a billionaire who spent almost as much as his lavishly-funded opponent and enjoyed fervent media backing. Far more striking was the remarkable success of the Sanders campaign, breaking with over a century of mostly bought elections. The campaign relied on small contributions and had no media support, to put it mildly. Though lacking any of the trappings that yield electoral success in our semi-plutocracy, Sanders probably would have won the Democratic Party nomination, perhaps the presidency, if it hadn’t been for the machinations of party managers. His popularity undimmed, he is now a leading voice for progressive measures and is amassing considerable support for his moderate social democratic proposals, reminiscent of the New Deal — proposals that would not have surprised President Eisenhower, but are considered practically revolutionary today as both parties have shifted well to the right [with] Republicans virtually off the spectrum of normal parliamentary politics.

Offshoots of the Sanders campaign are doing valuable work on many issues, including electoral politics at the local and state level, which had been pretty

much abandoned to the Republican right, particularly during the Obama years, to very harmful effect. There is also extensive and effective mobilization against racist and white supremacist pathologies, often spearheaded by the dynamic Black Lives Matter movement. Defying Trumpian and general Republican denialism, a powerful popular environmental movement is working hard to address the existential crisis of global warming. These, along with significant efforts on other fronts, face very difficult barriers, which can and must be overcome.

Bob, it is clear by now that Trump has no plan for creating new jobs, and even his reckless stance toward the environment will have no effect on the creation of new jobs. What would a progressive policy for job creation look like that will also take into account concerns about the environment and climate change?

Robert Pollin: A centerpiece for any kind of progressive social and economic program needs to be full employment with decent wages and working conditions. The reasons are straightforward, starting with money. Does someone in your family have a job and, if so, how much does it pay? For the overwhelming majority of the world's population, how one answers these two questions determines, more than anything else, what one's living standard will be. But beyond just money, your job is also crucial for establishing your sense of security and self-worth, your health and safety, your ability to raise a family, and your chances to participate in the life of your community.

How do we get to full employment, and how do we stay there? For any economy, there are two basic factors determining how many jobs are available at any given time. The first is the overall level of activity — with GDP as a rough, if inadequate measure of overall activity — and the second is what share of GDP goes to hiring people into jobs. In terms of our current situation, after the Great Recession hit in full in 2008, US GDP has grown at an anemic average rate of 1.3 percent per year, as opposed to the historic average rate from 1950 until 2007 of 3.3 percent. If the economy had grown over the past decade at something even approaching the historic average rate, the economy would have produced more than enough jobs to employ all 13 million people who are currently either unemployed or underemployed by the official government statistics, plus the nearly 9 million people who have dropped out of the labor force since 2007.

In terms of focusing on activities where job creation is strong, let's consider two

important sets of economic sectors. First, spending \$1 million on education will generate a total of about 26 jobs within the US economy, more than double the 11 jobs that would be created by spending the same \$1 million on the US military. Similarly, spending \$1 million on investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency will create over 16 jobs within the US, while spending the same \$1 million on our existing fossil fuel infrastructure will generate about 5.3 jobs — i.e. building a green economy in the US generates roughly three times more jobs per dollar than maintaining our fossil fuel dependency. So full employment policies should focus on accelerating economic growth and on changing our priorities for growth — as two critical examples, to expand educational opportunities across the board and to build a green economy, while contracting both the military and the fossil fuel economy.

A full employment program also obviously needs to focus on the conditions of work, starting with wages. The most straightforward measure of what neoliberal capitalism has meant for the US working class is that the average wage for non-supervisory workers in 2016 was about *4 percent lower than in 1973*. This is while average labor productivity — the amount each worker produces over the course of a year — has more than doubled over this same 43-year period. *All of the gains* from productivity doubling under neoliberalism have therefore been pocketed by either supervisory workers, or even more so, by business owners and corporate shareholders seeing their profits rise. The only solution here is to fight to increase worker bargaining power. We need stronger unions and worker protections, including a \$15 federal minimum wage. Such initiatives need to be combined with policies to expand the overall number of job opportunities out there. A fundamental premise of neoliberalism from day one has been to dismantle labor protections. We are seeing an especially aggressive variant of this approach today under the so-called “centrist” policies of the new French President Emmanuel Macron.

What about climate change and jobs? A view that has long been touted, most vociferously by Trump over the last two years, is that policies to protect the environment and to fight climate change are bad for jobs and therefore need to be junked. But this claim is simply false. In fact, as the evidence I have cited above shows, building a green economy is good for jobs overall, much better than maintaining our existing fossil-fuel based energy infrastructure, which also happens to be the single most significant force driving the planet toward

ecological disaster.

It is true that building a green economy will not be good for everyone's jobs. Notably, people working in the fossil fuel industry will face major job losses. The communities in which these jobs are concentrated will also face significant losses. But the solution here is straightforward: Just Transition policies for the workers, families and communities who will be hurt as the coal, oil and natural gas industries necessarily contract to zero over roughly the next 30 years. Working with Jeannette Wicks-Lim, Heidi Garrett-Peltier and Brian Callaci at [the Political Economy Research Institute], and in conjunction with labor, environmental and community groups in both the states of New York and Washington, we have developed what I think are quite reasonable and workable Just Transition programs. They include solid pension protections, re-employment guarantees, as well as retraining and relocation support for individual workers, and community-support initiatives for impacted communities.

The single most important factor that makes all such initiatives workable is that the total number of affected workers is relatively small. For example, in the whole United States today, there are a total of about 65,000 people employed directly in the coal industry. This represents less than 0.05 percent of the 147 million people employed in the US. Considered within the context of the overall US economy, it would only require a minimum level of commitment to provide a just transition to these workers as well as their families and communities.

Finally, I think it is important to address one of the major positions on climate stabilization that has been advanced in recent years on the left, which is to oppose economic growth altogether, or to support "de-growth." The concerns of de-growth proponents — that economic growth under neoliberal capitalism is both grossly unjust and ecologically unsustainable — are real. But de-growth is not a viable solution. Consider a very simple example — that under a de-growth program, global GDP contracts by 10 percent. This level of GDP contraction would be five times larger than what occurred at the lowest point of the 2007-09 Great Recession, when the unemployment rate more than doubled in the United States. But even still, this 10 percent contraction in global GDP would have the effect, on its own, of reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by precisely 10 percent. At a minimum, we would still need to cut emissions by another 30 percent within 15 years, and another 80 percent within 30 years to have even a fighting chance of stabilizing the climate. As such, the only viable climate

stabilization program is to invest massively in clean renewable and high energy efficiency systems so that clean energy completely supplants our existing fossil-fuel dependent system within the next 30 years, and to enact comparable transformations in agricultural production processes.

The “masters of the universe” have made a huge comeback since the last financial crisis, and while Trump’s big-capital-friendly policies are going to make the rich get richer, they could also spark the next financial crisis. So, Bob, what type of progressive policies can and should be enforced to contain the destructive tendencies of finance capital?

Pollin: The classic book *Manias, Panics, and Crashes* by the late MIT economist Charles Kindleberger makes clear that, throughout the history of capitalism, unregulated financial markets have persistently produced instability and crises. The only deviation from this long-term pattern occurred in the first 30 years after World War II, roughly from 1946-1975. The reason US and global financial markets were much more stable over this 30-year period is that the markets were heavily regulated then, through the Glass-Steagall regulatory system in the US, and the Bretton Woods system globally. These regulatory systems were enacted only in response to the disastrous Great Depression of the 1930s, which began with the 1929 Wall Street crash and which then brought global capitalism to its knees.

Of course, the big Wall Street players always hated being regulated and fought persistently, first to evade the regulations and then to dismantle them. They were largely successful through the 1980s and 1990s. But the full, official demise of the 1930s regulatory system came only in 1999, under the Democratic President Bill Clinton. At the time, virtually all leading mainstream economists — including liberals, such as Larry Summers, who was Treasury Secretary when Glass-Steagall was repealed — argued that financial regulations were an unnecessary vestige of the bygone 1930s. All kinds of fancy papers were written “demonstrating” that the big players on Wall Street are very smart people who know what’s best for themselves and everyone else — and therefore, didn’t need government regulators telling them what they could or could not do. It then took less than eight years for hyper-speculation on Wall Street to once again bring global capitalism to its knees. The only thing that saved capitalism in 2008-09 from a repeat of the 1930s Great Depression was the unprecedented government interventions to prop up the system, and the equally massive bail out of Wall

Street.

By 2010, the US Congress and President Obama enacted a new set of financial regulations, the Dodd-Frank system. Overall, Dodd-Frank amount to a fairly weak set of measures aiming to dampen hyper-speculation on Wall Street. A large part of the problem is that Dodd-Frank included many opportunities for Wall Street players to delay enactment of laws they didn't like and for clever lawyers to figure out ways to evade the ones on the books. That said, the Trump administration, led on economic policy matters by two former Goldman Sachs executives, is committed to dismantling Dodd-Frank altogether, and allowing Wall Street to once again operate free of any significant regulatory constraints. I have little doubt that, free of regulations, the already ongoing trend of rising speculation — with, for example, the stock market already at a historic high — will once again accelerate.

What is needed to build something like a financial system that is both stable and supports a full-employment, ecologically sustainable growth framework? A major problem over time with the old Glass-Steagall system was that there were large differences in the degree to which, for example, commercial banks, investment banks, stock brokerages, insurance companies and mortgage lenders were regulated, thereby inviting clever financial engineers to invent ways to exploit these differences. An effective regulatory system today should therefore be guided by a few basic premises that can be applied flexibly but also universally. The regulations need to apply across the board, regardless of whether you call your business a bank, an insurance company, a hedge fund, a private equity fund, a vulture fund, or some other term that most of us haven't yet heard about.

One measure for promoting both stability and fairness across financial market segments is a small sales tax on all financial transactions — what has come to be known as a Robin Hood Tax. This tax would raise the costs of short-term speculative trading and therefore discourage speculation. At the same time, the tax will not discourage “patient” investors who intend to hold their assets for longer time periods, since, unlike the speculators, they will be trading infrequently. A bill called the Inclusive Prosperity Act was first introduced into the House of Representatives by Rep. Keith Ellison in 2012 and then in the Senate by Bernie Sanders in 2015, [and] is exactly the type of measure that is needed here.

Another important initiative would be to implement what are called asset-based reserve requirements. These are regulations that require financial institutions to maintain a supply of cash as a reserve fund in proportion to the other, riskier assets they hold in their portfolios. Such requirements can serve both to discourage financial market investors from holding an excessive amount of risky assets, and as a cash cushion for the investors to draw upon when market downturns occur.

This policy instrument can also be used to push financial institutions to channel credit to projects that advance social welfare, for example, promoting investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency. The policy could stipulate that, say, at least 5 percent of banks' loan portfolios should be channeled to into clean-energy investments. If the banks fail to reach this 5 percent quota of loans for clean energy, they would then be required to hold this same amount of their total assets in cash.

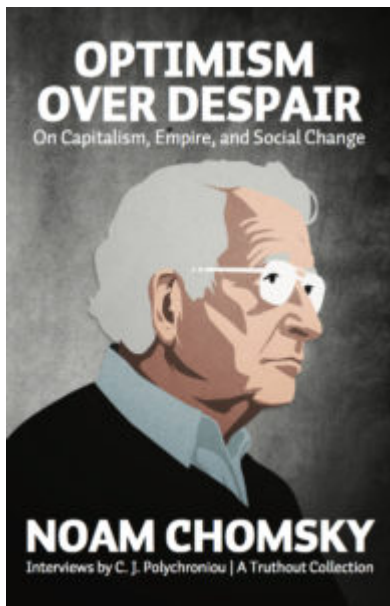
Finally, both in the US and throughout the world, there needs to be a growing presence of public development banks. These banks would make loans based on social welfare criteria — including advancing a full-employment, climate-stabilization agenda — as opposed to scouring the globe for the largest profit opportunities regardless of social costs.... Public development banks have always played a central role in supporting the successful economic development paths in the East Asian economies.

Editor's note: This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

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The Future Of Europe And The New World Disorder: An Interview

With Political Economist C.J. Polychroniou



Since the outbreak of the euro crisis, which was directly linked to the global financial crisis that erupted in 2007-08, Europe has been experiencing a host of contradictory trends and developments, which include efforts to contain the spread of systemic risk in the financial sector while the debt crisis remains unresolved for several eurozone member states, and calls for the creation of a European pillar of social rights while neoliberalism reigns supreme in EU's economic policy agenda. In the meantime, a wave of extreme nationalism and xenophobia have spread in several European countries, challenging in the process

not just globalization, but the foundation of an open, liberal society.

Yet it's not just the state of Europe that raises concerns about the future political and social order. As political economist C.J. Polychroniou points out in this interview, in the US, Trump's militaristic attitude and jingoistic mindset puts the world on a very dangerous path, adding extra pressure to regions already beset by conflict and creating potential conditions not only for a renewed arms race, but for the actual use of nuclear weapons. Polychroniou has taught and worked in universities and research centers in Europe and the United States, and is the author of the recently published book [*Optimism Over Despair: On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change*](#), a collection of interviews with Noam Chomsky that appeared originally in Truthout and have been published by Haymarket Books in the US and Penguin Books in the rest of the English-speaking world.

Alexandra Boutri and Marcus Rolle: C.J., let's start with developments in Europe: Brexit, Catalonia independence, meteoric rise of extreme right in Germany, illiberal democracies in Hungary, Poland and elsewhere, and the ongoing crisis in Greece. Is Europe in crisis?

C.J. Polychroniou: There is no question that Europe is facing severe challenges these days on several fronts that can affect the future of the continent on the

whole. Brexit remains something of a conundrum; the push for independence in Catalonia is probably a very bad idea (although Catalans should have the “right to decide” on their future); the presence of 90 [Alternative für Deutschland \(AfD\) politicians in the Bundestag](#) is yet the strongest indication that the far right’s views have become quite acceptable among a growing segment of the German population, and the specter of illiberal democracy is haunting Europe. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that it is highly debatable whether or not Europe’s road to integration can proceed any more the way it has over the last 20 or so years.

The future of Europe is definitely one of multispeed and multitier, although President Jean-Claude Juncker, in his State of the Union Address in Brussels on September 13, made the case for a more united, stronger and democratic Europe, which includes an all-powerful president and an EU army, while an even far more impressive and comprehensive plan for a “profound transformation” of Europe was laid out by French president Emmanuel Macron at a speech he gave at Sorbonne University in Paris on September 26. Macron’s vision has the potential to turn Europe into the center of the world, but it is most unlikely that Germans would go along with some of his key ideas, such as creating a centralized eurozone budget and having a European finance minister.

Yet, these are precisely the things that are needed to revamp Europe as the specter of another euro crisis is a distinct possibility in the near future. In contrast to what many seem to believe, the euro crisis is not over and it can be reignited without any notice. Take, for instance, the issue of public debt. In Italy, it stands over 130 percent, while France’s public debt rose to the highest level in the first few months of 2017, reaching close to 100 percent of GDP. Moreover, Italy’s banking crisis remains unresolved, and Europe’s banking system in general remains quite fragile. As such, the next financial crisis could crash those economies, and that would mean a euro crisis 10 times bigger than the one experienced between 2010-2013. In fact, I dare say that a crisis in Italy — the eurozone’s third largest economy — is waiting to happen. In the meantime, you have central banks in Europe embarking on what is called the “Great Unwind” — the winding-down of quantitative easing programs that have sustained the continent’s economies, financial markets and banking systems since the outbreak of the euro crisis. What happens next is anyone’s guess. Will this development put a brake on EU economic boost? Most economists are worrying that it will. And what would happen if Europe went into a recession? Extreme nationalism and

fraudulent populism, xenophobia and authoritarianism will surely be further strengthened.

Why do you think that the Catalanian referendum is a bad idea?

I see it as a very unfortunate development, and I am afraid that things could get quite ugly as Spain's central government will obviously refuse to allow an official referendum for Catalan secession to take place — or recognize Catalanian independence if the referendum does take place and a “yes” vote wins. Still, Catalans should have the right to “self-determination,” but I am not sure at all that it is a good thing in this case. It is unclear to me what is driving the current sentiment towards secession among Catalans, and it seems to come down to money, in that Catalonia does not want to have its taxes go to the poor regions of the country. In any case, I think that both Spain and Catalonia will be much worse off without one another. And what would be Catalonia's place in the EU the day after? I don't think their membership should be considered a given. In fact, they would probably have to start from square one insofar as EU membership is concerned. And what currency would an independent Catalonia use? Some years ago, when the issue of independence flared up again in Catalonia, some government leaders insisted that an independent Catalonia would remain in the eurozone, but I find that to be more of a wishful thinking rather than a likely outcome. The EU has no interest in seeing Spain split up and will make life quite difficult for the Catalans if they do succeed in getting a divorce from Spain.

Are you surprised by the election outcomes in Germany? And what's your view on AfD? Is it like Golden Dawn in Greece?

Everyone had expected Angela Merkel to win a fourth term as German chancellor, and astute observers were sensing that the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SDP) was in trouble. In fact, the party has been in trouble for many years, as it has been unable to offer an alternative vision, and one could hardly think of a less inspiring leader than Martin Schulz! But in addition to the fact that SPD began to lose working-class voters to the far right and the far left, Germany's working-class population has shrunk significantly over the last few decades (there has been a huge decline in factory jobs since the 1970s).

The surprising element is how well AfD did, although most polls anticipated that it could indeed reach the 10 percent mark. AfD started out as an anti-euro party,

drawing support even among German academics, but once the euro crisis subsided, its leadership turned to immigration and became something of a single-issue party with an anti-Islam platform. Its anti-Islam policy was adopted at its 2016 conference when its delegates announced that Islam was “not part of Germany.” It is clearly a racist, xenophobic political party, and has moved ever so closely to fascism since the far-right wing of the party pushed aside the “moderates.” Still, the question remains whether AfD represents a “reactionary populism” or something more akin to neo-Nazism like Golden Dawn in Greece.

My own view is that there is still something of an ideological gap separating Germany’s AfD from Greece’s Golden Dawn, an unmistakable neo-Nazi, criminal-in-actuality organization, but the gap can certainly close in the future if the extremist elements inside AfD take complete control of the party. Before it entered Parliament, AfD was mainly a single-issue party, but that will surely change now that it has entered the Bundestag. It will now be compelled to take a stance on many issues and the party’s ideological profile will have to be crystallized if it wishes to make an impact on German politics and society. Be that as it may, the fact that a political party that calls on Germans to view WWII Nazi soldiers as heroes entered the parliament for the first time in almost 60 years by having captured almost 13 percent of the popular vote is a shocking development (Golden Dawn pulled 7 percent of the vote in the last elections held in Greece), and makes one wonder if Nazism is making a comeback in Germany. Indeed, overwhelming sales of a special edition of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* that went into circulation about a year ago surprised everyone in Germany.

Clearly, Europe’s political landscape has changed in the last few years, as voters everywhere seem fed up with old structures and the traditional political establishment. In your view, what are the underlying factors for the shifting political landscape in Europe?

There are several factors that can probably explain the changing political landscape in Europe. The first — and by far the most important — is a sense of profound uncertainty about the economic future as jobs get harder to come by and no longer provide long-term security as they used to during the era of industrial capitalism. People also sense that the social contract is dying, if it’s not already dead, and that their standard of living will most likely decline. This is especially the case among the youth everywhere, both in the core and the periphery of the European Union. Hence, people are turning their back on the

traditional political parties. We saw something similar even in Germany, where both Merkel's party and the SPD lost significant shares of votes. Merkel received only 33 percent of the vote, which suggests that not only does she not have a popular mandate for charting the future course of Germany, but makes a mockery of the view of those who like to see her these days as the leader of the "free world." The issues of immigration and globalization are also surely major factors behind the shifting political landscape in Europe, and I expect that they will become even more contentious and divisive issues in the years ahead.

Do you think the left has a future in Europe?

It all depends on what we mean by the "left" these days. The communist left (Marxism-Leninism, vanguardism and all that stuff) is surely a thing of the past, and the social democratic left is in deep crisis in most European countries because of profound changes in the structure of contemporary capitalist economies and societies. As far as I can see, the future of the left rests with unified mass movements that can articulate a concrete vision about post-capitalist society. Both command economies and neoliberal capitalism have failed to create fair, just, equitable and harmonizing social orders, but we don't know what form or shape a socialist society needs to take under an advanced stage of capitalism. In the meantime, the left needs to contest neoliberalism, but must also come to terms with economic globalization. Neither free trade nor protectionism should be the only options left to those bold enough to envision an alternative social order based on cooperation, prosperity and solidarity. In sum, the future of the left rests with its ability to provide answers to specific questions about economic and political arrangements under an alternative social order away from possessive individualism, unlimited accumulation of wealth, and brutal competition for survival and economic prosperity.

Shifting to the global arena, how do you think the world sees the Trump presidency, and what do you think of Donald Trump's foreign policy agenda?

Governance under Trump has made the US the world's laughingstock, and the administration is so beset by chaos and confusion that it is virtually impossible to speak of Donald Trump's foreign policy. Can anyone say that the Trump administration has a foreign policy toward China? I don't think so. Yet Trump is clearly a dangerous figure to have in a position of executive power because of his obvious militaristic attitude, jingoistic mindset and unpredictable personality.

Take, for instance, his speech at the 72nd Annual UN General Assembly in New York on September 19. It was so outrageous that most world leaders have opted to stay silent about it. Previous US presidents had also used harsh words against the North Korean regime and its leader, but never even came close to launching the kind of threats that Trump did, which amounted to complete annihilation. In fact, Bill Clinton had actually accepted the deal that former president Jimmy Carter had struck with Kim Il-sung, promising to lift sanctions for an end to the regime's weapons program. Trump's remarks about Iran, calling it a "murderous regime" and claiming that the deal negotiated by the Obama administration is an embarrassment to the United States also prepares the groundwork for a military confrontation with Tehran, possibly through an initial attack by Israel itself. In sum, not only has the US entered a new era of political authoritarianism, but the world is now a far more dangerous place than ever before, thanks to the new occupant in the White House. We've entered a new world disorder.

Previously

published: <http://www.truth-out.org/an-interview-with-political-economist-c-j-polychroniou>

Greece and Economic Recovery: Fake News in Action



Ten years ago, the implosion of Lehman Brothers ignited a financial crisis whose impact and effects were felt virtually across the globe as banks and financial institutions everywhere that were exposed to subprime lending, formed part of a long chain of complicated and interconnected derivatives, and partook freely in Wall

Street shenanigans.

In Europe, the global financial crisis that started in the United States did not reach shore until late 2009, and the first victim was the land that gave birth to democracy and laid the foundations for the emergence of Western civilization.

Enter Greece and an ongoing debt drama, with catastrophically spectacular economic, social, and political ramifications, that has no end in sight.

Indeed, now into its eighth year, Greece remains entirely dependent on international bailouts (three bailouts involving the European Union and the International Monetary Fund have been arranged since 2010), has lost a quarter of its GDP with no realistic expectations of recovering it for decades to come, experiences unemployment levels which have oscillated between a high 27.8 percent (in July 2013) and a low 21.2 percent (in June 2017), and has seen the standard of living decline to 1960s levels.

Worse, Greece's debt-to-GDP ratio has exploded since the start of the bailout programs, rising from 128 percent in 2010 to over 185 percent in 2017, and, with no debt relief in sight, the small Mediterranean nation has become truly a permanent debt colony inside the world's richest region. In the meantime, a mass exodus of young and educated people has been in motion for several years now (youth unemployment rate in Greece stands currently at 43.3 percent), a process that is bound to have long-term effects on demographic trends and a significant impact on future economic developments.

Nonetheless, the story line advanced these days from Athens, courtesy of a pseudo-leftist government that has not only reneged on every one of its promises to the Greek citizens since coming to power, but has ended up reinforcing the neoliberal agenda of the European Union/International Monetary Fund duo with more perseverance than all previous governments put together, is that the country has "turned page" and that the crisis is now practically over.

Yes, these days, "post-truth" politics, the production and "fake news" and the dissemination of "alternative facts" are not the exclusive domain of the narcissistic megalomaniac with the pseudo-populist agenda occupying the White House. The Syriza/ANEL coalition government in Athens, a mephitic political marriage of sorts between the radical Left and a nationalistic and xenophobic party, has been following closely in the footsteps of Trumpian manipulation of political discourse and extreme populist propaganda surrounded by lies and more

empty promises.

First, the actual facts about the broken promises and the continuous lies of and the dissemination of fake news by the Syriza government. For starters, not only did Alexis Tsipras deceive the Greek people by winning the popular vote with passionate pleas that, if elected, he would do away with international bailouts, secure a debt write-off, and put an end to the vicious cycle of debt-austerity-recession-unemployment, but ended up signing a third bailout agreement with the country's international creditors and has even consented to the enforcement of Procrustean economics, which entail additional cuts in excess of five billion euros (about \$6bn), even deeper pension reductions, and the attainment of outrageously high primary surplus targets - well into 2020.

The impact of all these measures will be the equivalent of a surgery that was successful, but the patient died.

Indeed, the country's fiscal affairs have improved and some aspects of economic activity are even showing a slight improvement in 2017 (for example the GDP expanded by a pitiful 0.5 percent in the second quarter of 2017, although household consumption continued its steady decline, dropping by an additional 0.1 percent, while fixed investment shrunk 4.5 percent) but the majority of people sink ever deeper into poverty and despair.

Nonetheless, the Greek "economic success" story advanced by Tsipras and some of his lackey ministers would have been hilariously funny if it wasn't such a serious matter. But one couldn't possibly expect anything else from such an unethical and opportunistic government.

After all, the message of a Greek "economic success" story implies, and in contrast to everything known so far about economic reality, or what Syriza government officials were professing themselves until fairly recently, that austerity and the brutal experiment undertaken on the part of European authorities to convert Greece into a neoliberal laboratory are finally paying off; thanks in large part to the government of Alexis Tsipras in enforcing to the fullest possible extent policies such as blanket privatisation of state-owned assets, sharp cuts in wages and pensions, draconian reductions in public spending, and unrestrained labor market flexibility.

However, the reality of the situation in Greece is that the depression that broke

out as early as 2009 has stabilised since late 2014, although the economy took an additional huge dive immediately after Syriza took power in January 2015 and it did not stabilise again until the spring of 2017.

To be sure, back in 2014, the conservative government of Antonis Samaras was also celebrating the “recovery” of the Greek economy on account of having produced a primary surplus thanks to huge taxes and draconian budget cuts and having successfully launched a temporary return to the private credit markets.

Of course, as an opposition party, Syriza made a mockery of the propaganda campaign launched by the Samaras’s government to convince citizens that it had succeeded in putting an end to the crisis.

Yet, for the last year or so, Tsipras’ government had been doing exactly what the Samaras government was doing by virtue of having “accomplished” all of the above tasks.

The problem is that the Greek people, who are stretched to the outer limits with the imposition of massive tax hikes on everything from income, property, and consumption, while experiencing at the same time mass unemployment, a sharply reduced minimum monthly wage, and never-ending austerity, are not buying the “fake news” of their tieless prime minister.

Unsurprisingly, all latest polls in Greece show that, if elections were held now, Syriza would lose by a big margin. And this piece of news is not surprising because whatever its flaws and limitations, under democracy fraudulent populism, lies, and fake news have an expiration date.

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To Make Our Democracy

Functional, We Must Confront Economic Inequality



Larry Bartels

The United States is a plutocratic disaster. Extreme levels of inequality and a political system in which elected officials cater primarily, if not exclusively, to the needs and interests of the rich have produced a social order beset with mounting problems and critical challenges that elections alone cannot realistically be expected to address. In this exclusive interview for [Truthout](#), renowned political scientist Larry Bartels, author of the already classic work *Unequal Democracy*, provides a sweeping look at the state of our dysfunctional society.

*C.J Polychroniou: In your book *Unequal Democracy*, you presented mountains of data revealing the seriousness of the problem of inequality in the United States. In your view, what have been the underlying factors for the emergence of a New Gilded Era, and why has the American political system failed to rise to the challenge of addressing the deep problem of inequality?*

Larry Bartels: Most affluent democracies have experienced substantial increases in economic inequality over the past 30 or 40 years. In significant part, those increases are attributable to technological change, globalization and increased mobility of capital. ... But different countries have responded to those changes in different ways. Most have mitigated their effects through increased redistribution, making post-tax-and-transfer incomes much less unequal. In the United States, there has been comparatively little redistribution. There have also been political shifts that have exacerbated pre-tax-and-transfer inequality,

including deregulation of the financial industry, rules restricting the clout of labor unions and the erosion of the minimum wage.

Broadly, the difference is attributable to the economic ideology of America's political leaders. More specifically, it is attributable to the economic ideology of Republican leaders. My historical analysis of partisan differences in income growth demonstrates that virtually all of the net increase in income inequality since the end of World War II has occurred under Republican presidents; income growth under Democratic presidents has tended to be faster and much more egalitarian.

What is the actual impact or effect of economic inequality on democracy?

We like to think that we can wall off our democratic political system from our capitalist economic system, leaving everyone free to get rich (or poor) but remain politically equal. In practice, however, that turns out to be impossible. Hence, "unequal democracy."

My analysis of the voting behavior of US senators found that they are moderately responsive to the views of affluent constituents but completely ignore the views of low-income constituents. A study by Martin Gilens of policy outcomes likewise found that the probability that any given policy change will actually be adopted is pretty strongly related to the preferences of affluent people but virtually unaffected by the preferences of middle-class people, much less poor people.

Proposed explanations for these remarkable disparities in responsiveness often focus on distinctive features of the US — our permissive system of campaign finance, low rate of unionization, ethos of individualism and so on. But recent work along similar lines in other affluent democracies suggests that they, too, are marked by severe disparities in political influence rooted in economic inequality. Regardless of their specific political institutions, contexts and cultures, democratic systems seem to be chronically vulnerable to the conversion of economic power into political power.

*In your latest book *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (co-authored with Christopher Achen), the key argument being made is that voting behavior is not rational. Is this something you think applies to all democratic polities, or is it confined to the peculiarities of the American political culture and the flawed nature of American democracy?*

Some of the pitfalls Achen and I described involve the “rationality” of voters, loosely speaking. They have lots of other, more immediate demands on their time and attention, so most don’t invest much in mastering the complexities of politics and government. Is that “irrational”? I don’t think so.

In any case, all of us are subject to the fundamental mental limitations richly documented by psychologists under the rubric of “cognitive biases.” For example, we attach more weight to recent experience than to previous experience, we insist on assessing reward or blame for events that are essentially random, and we tend to find arguments and evidence consistent with our prejudices more persuasive than arguments and evidence that contradict our prejudices.

All of us are similarly limited when it comes to what might be called moral imagination. We know that we should be concerned about the well-being of people who are physically or socially distant, unnamed and “statistical” rather than personally identifiable, but that is very difficult, so we tend to be parochial, short-sighted and more attuned to our own comfort and power than to any impersonal vision of the collective good.

I don’t see any reason to suppose that people in other countries or cultures are less susceptible to these basic human limitations than Americans are. Nor am I aware of any compelling evidence that voters in other democratic systems perform notably better or worse than Americans do, on the whole. Certainly there are significant differences in political institutions and behavior across countries stemming from distinctive histories and economic and social contexts. For example, people in other countries are invariably puzzled by the decentralized system of election administration in the US, which leaves state and local officials remarkably free to manage registration and voting as they see fit. That system contributes to our unusually low (and class-biased) turnout; but I wouldn’t say that it fundamentally alters the nature of American democracy.

The main point of our book is not to castigate voters but to criticize an unrealistic “folk theory” of democracy that expects impossible things from them. The idea that millions of people could somehow, literally, rule themselves is simply incoherent. A great political scientist, E. E. Schattschneider, wrote long ago that, “The immobility and inertia of large masses are to politics what the law of gravity is to physics. ... An electorate of sixty million Aristotles would be equally restricted.” Another, Henry Jones Ford, wrote even longer ago that, “Politics has

been, is, and always will be carried on by politicians, just as art is carried on by artists, engineering by engineers, business by businessmen. All that ... political reform can do is to affect the character of the politicians by altering the conditions that govern political activity, thus determining its extent and quality.”

The selection of presidential candidates is a good example. ... We have too many candidates, too little information about their backgrounds, character and commitments, and too little coordination and cueing of the sort that parties themselves provide in general elections. The result is a system ripe for fringe candidates, neophytes and demagogues.

From the analyses one encounters in the two aforementioned books the conclusion easily drawn is that the US is not a democracy. Is it an oligarchy, a plutocracy or something else?

People are used to thinking about the distinction between democracies and non-democracies as categorical. I think that’s an over-simplification. Our political system has important democratic features — most notably, fairly robust civil liberties and elections that allow ordinary citizens to replace their rulers from time to time. Those features do not make it an ideal democracy in the sense suggested by the “folk theory” criticized in *Democracy for Realists*, but they are far from insignificant.

The eminent political theorist Robert Dahl coined the term “polyarchy” to refer to political systems roughly like ours. For better or worse, the term did not catch on. Thus, we are stuck with the term “democracy” to describe a wide variety of actual political systems as well as a variety of political ideals. (As Achen and I noted in the first chapter of *Democracy for Realists*, people almost everywhere nowadays manage to think of their own political systems as democratic. Asked “how democratically is this country being governed today,” people in Rwanda, Malaysia and Kazakhstan provided higher average ratings than Americans, while people in China perceived as much democracy as Americans did.)

Thus, perhaps the best we can do is to try to specify more carefully what we are talking about when we talk about democracy. For example, some scholars have used the term “participatory democracy” to refer to systems in which citizens are supposed to be routinely involved in governing, in contrast to “representative democracy” in which the primary role of citizens is to elect their representatives.

On the other hand, they have referred to various diminished forms of democracy, including “illiberal democracy,” in which rulers are elected but civil liberties are not protected; “limited democracy,” in which rulers are elected but suffrage is significantly curtailed; and “tutelary democracy,” in which democratic rule is subject to military veto.

My phrase “unequal democracy” is intended to highlight another important departure from the usual understanding of democracy — the fact that political influence in America, and, I suspect, in all large-scale democratic systems, is strongly correlated with wealth. But that is a matter of degree. At what point does an “unequal democracy” tip over into a plutocracy masquerading as a democracy? I don’t know any good way to answer that question.

In your view, what would make citizens cast votes more rationally, or, alternatively, what changes need to be undertaken to make the American political system responsive to those issues, problems and threats undermining a democratic political culture?

I don’t have a sweeping agenda of political reforms to offer. I think most reformers vastly overstate their ability to predict the impact of their proposals and vastly understate the difficulty of enacting them in the face of the very political problems they are intended to mitigate.

One problem with the “folk theory” of democracy is that it leads people to think that they ought to be able to get what they want from the political system simply by voting. When that doesn’t happen they blame corrupt politicians and demand “more democracy.” Often — as in the case of [some] presidential primaries, referenda and term limits — the cure is worse than the disease. But even when that’s not the case, the obsessive focus on electoral procedures tends to distract attention from more consequential issues.

The enormous effort devoted to “reforming” campaign finance over the past half-century is a case in point. Concerns about the total amount of money being spent on political campaigns is way overblown; Democrats and Republicans in a typical election cycle spend about as much on advertising as McDonald’s and Burger King. In any case, efforts to limit the role of big contributors have mostly been ineffectual. A reform that might really accomplish that goal — providing public funding of campaigns at a level so lavish that additional private spending would

be of little value — is a political non-starter, highly unpopular among incumbent politicians and citizens alike. And if the problem is the role of money in politics, the fixation on campaign finance mostly misses the point, anyway — political scientists estimate that corporations spend several times as much money on lobbying as they do on campaign contributions.

As a matter of principle, I think efforts to suppress turnout under the guise of safeguarding the electoral system against phantom “voter fraud” are pernicious. However, I don’t think that increasing turnout by liberalizing registration rules or enfranchising ex-felons or allowing everyone to vote by mail would drastically alter the policy outcomes produced by our democratic system. As Achen and I put it in the subtitle of our book, “Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government.”

In the end, politics is about power. Changing election laws can shift the distribution of power, but mostly in modest and somewhat unpredictable ways. (The 1965 Voting Rights Act enfranchised millions of African Americans — and millions more southern whites.) Given the bluntness of the vote as a political tool, a much more straightforward path to equalizing political power would be to equalize economic power. But that is very hard to do, because the economically powerful are also politically powerful. More often, I suspect, the distribution of economic power itself shifts significantly for reasons outside the political system — as with the destruction of physical capital in major wars or the increased mobility of financial capital in the contemporary global economy.

But it is worth bearing in mind that ideas can be powerful, too. The successes of the civil rights movement hinged in large part on the ability of African Americans to harness the power of American ideals, persuading the politically powerful of the justice of their cause. In much the same spirit, I suggested in the concluding chapter of *Unequal Democracy* that “many affluent people support egalitarian policies that seem inconsistent with their own narrow material interests” and that (Democratic) “policy-makers may be much more generous toward the poor than the political clout of the poor themselves would seem to warrant,” since “the specific policy views of citizens, whether rich or poor, have less impact in the policy-making process than the ideological convictions of elected officials” themselves.

Health Communication In Southern Africa: Engaging With Social And Cultural Diversity



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