

# **Is Neoliberalism Dying? A Structuralist Approach To Predatory Global Capitalism And The Challenge of Reform\***



*C.J. Polychroniou*

Forty years of neoliberal rule have produced devastating effects on lower and working-class people and on the social fabric throughout the world: wages have stagnated, labor rights have been trampled, and economic inequalities have exploded. Neoliberalism has also proven detrimental to democracy as many forms of collective decision-making and even faith and trust in the ability of government to solve problems have been severely eroded by the marketization project. Citizens have been encouraged to think and act like consumers and powerful private interests have made a mockery of the idea of a common good. Moreover, trends of ongoing income and wealth inequality combined with job insecurity and the hijacking of the state by the economic elites has led to the eruption of popular anger, leading to the rise of a new generation of authoritarian rulers and to a concomitant attack on the traditional democratic order, along with an explosion of xenophobic rage and racism.

Nonetheless, neoliberalism has remained the hegemonic paradigm in the workings of contemporary capitalism and the operating framework of the global economy, even though this particular form of economic governance is prone to systemic crises and in spite of challenges and sporadic forms of resistance from

below.

At least until now, that is. For the eruption of the pandemic appears to have discredited market fundamentalism and state interventionism has returned with vengeance throughout the West. We have seen massive monetary and fiscal packages introduced both in Europe and the United States in order to provide relief for unemployed workers and struggling businesses in ways that have not been seen in many decades. During the global financial crisis of 2008, the state bailed out the financial sector and turned a blind eye towards homeowners and the millions of people suffering from the consequences of “predatory capitalism” that neoliberalism gave rise to from the mid-1970s and continued to fuel throughout the next four decades. However, during the era of the pandemic, the state has come to some degree to the rescue of the entire economy, although still not as aggressively as economic thinking associated with the name and work of John Maynard Keynes would surely recommend for a crisis as severe as the one thrust upon the world by the eruption of the Covid pandemic, which has created a classic capitalist crisis of accumulation.

Be that as it may, the question popping up suddenly (once again, we might add, since the same question popped up after the financial crisis of 2008) is whether the return of “Big Government” during the pandemic is signaling the end of neoliberalism.

My view on this matter is that it is too early to tell, and, more importantly, that neoliberalism is not going to wither away without an increased role of participatory democracy and the emergence of political vehicles (political parties and social movements) envisioning and fighting for an alternative social order. Neoliberalism is not merely an ideology or even a specific policy at this point, but an institutional component, a substructure, of the very capitalist system that has been built in the age of globalization, and thus the measures taken today to address the economic effects of the pandemic may be quite temporary and the world could easily return to “business as usual” once the pandemic has been brought under control.

*Let me elaborate*

Any effort to fully understand the nature of contemporary capitalism should begin with the recognition that the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts. It is also pertinent that we recognize the importance of structural causality in making sense of contemporary capitalist developments while avoiding

methodological reductionism. As such, we need to look at the overall structure of the system; that is, we need to comprehend the different constitutive parts of the system that keep it together and running in ways which are harmful to the interests of the great majority of the population, dangerous to democracy and public values, and detrimental to the environment and earth's ecosystem. Focusing on one element of the system while ignoring other things (perhaps because we think that they constitute incidental outcomes or processes of secondary nature) may limit our understanding by creating a flawed perspective about the dynamics and the contradictions of contemporary capitalism and thereby undermine our ability to propose sound and realistic solutions.

Now, we know what capitalism is, and how it basically works. It is a specific, historically determined mode of production, a ruthless economic system representing the most advanced form of commodity production. It is not an economic system designed to serve the needs of society as such, because the extraction of profit is the "logic" that drives capitalist commodity production. Not only that, but when left to operate without regulations, capitalism can wreak havoc on societies. Exploitation and inequality represent structural necessities of the system itself, and capital itself is nothing other than value that generates surplus value.

Moreover, capital accumulation is an anarchic and contradictory process, and with a constant need to expand, all of which result all too frequently in systemic crises that threaten to destroy capitalism itself and which, subsequently, mandate the intervention of the state in order to save the system from collapse. In the age of the financialization of capital, systemic crises have become far more frequent, and with greater severity, and government bailouts have emerged as the essential tool through which the system avoids a catastrophic collapse.

Capitalist expansion has taken place over the course of the past five centuries via different venues, ranging from plunder and exploitation, through trade, to investment in industry and the financialization of assets. However, the state has been the driving agency behind the spread and consolidation of capitalism from the very start. And it is no less the case than with the architecture of contemporary capitalism.

The landscape of contemporary capitalism has been structured around three interrelated elements: financialization, neoliberalism and globalization. All

three of these components constitute part of a coherent whole which has given rise to an entity that can be briefly described as “predatory global capitalism.”

As such, contemporary capitalism is characterized by a political economy which revolves around finance capital, is based on a savage form of free market fundamentalism and thrives on a wave of globalizing processes and global financial networks that have produced global economic oligarchies with the capacity to influence the shaping of policymaking across nations. Indeed, today’s brand of capitalism is particularly anti-democratic and simply incapable of functioning in a way conducive to maintaining sustainable and balanced growth. By waging vicious class warfare, the economic elite and their allies have managed in the contemporary era to roll back progress on the economic and social fronts by resurrecting the predatory, “free-market” capitalism that immiserated millions in the early 20th century while a handful of obscenely wealthy individuals controlled the bulk of the wealth.

The capitalist order we have in place today has its roots in the structural changes that took place in the accumulation process back in the mid-to-late 1970s. The 1970s was a decade of economic slowdown and inflationary pressures in the advanced capitalist world. The crisis, brought about by new technological innovations, declining rates of profit and the dissolution of the social structures of accumulation that had emerged after World War II, led to sluggish growth rates, high inflation and even higher rates of unemployment, bringing about a phenomenon that came to be known as “stagflation.”

From a policy point of view, “stagflation” signaled the end of an era in which there was a trade-off between inflation and unemployment (shown by the Phillips curve) and, by extension, the end of the dominance of the Keynesian school of thought.

As with all other capitalist crises in the past, the crisis of the 1970s compelled capital and the economic elite to restructure the way the capitalist economy had functioned up to that time. The restructuring process unfolded in several ways, which included, among other things, increasing the pace of market liberalization, attacking the traditional welfare state and the interests of unionized workers in an attempt to eliminate social programs and suppress wages and create greater flexibility in the labor market, respectively, and initiating a new wave of globalization under the aegis of both industrial and financial capital.

The new economic orthodoxy (which came to be known as the “Washington Consensus”) called for open markets, deregulation, privatization, labor flexibility, short-term optimization as a more attractive way to ensure competition and growth, low taxation for corporations and the rich, and a minimum welfare state. The desire was to return to an era in which capitalism functioned unfettered by government and social constraints, in other words, back to the age when capital grew by running roughshod over labor.

Indeed, a counterrevolution was under way, and it seemed to be global in nature and scope. The radical paradigm shift in economics was taking place in highly diverse economic environments, ranging from Chile under Augusto Pinochet’s reign of terror to liberal democracies in the Anglo-Saxon world (in the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher and in the United States under Ronald Reagan) and even to communist China under Deng Xiaoping. By the mid-1980s, most capitalist nations around the world, including many Western European countries with long traditions with social democratic policies, had shifted from Keynesianism to neoliberalism, although by no means in a uniform manner.

The march to “economic freedom,” which is how the neoliberal counterrevolution was celebrated by arch-conservative thinkers, captivated by the nonsense of Austrian economics, did not take place on the basis of some abstract entity known as the “free market.” On the contrary, it required active intervention by the capitalist state across society and the economy. Indeed, how else was the welfare state going to be reduced and the power of the labor unions weakened? How else could policies be introduced that increased the upward flows of income, created new investment sites, promoted a new wave of privatization and permitted banks and other financial institutions to practice financial chicanery? How else could failed financial institutions be bailed out with public funds if governments and elected officials had not been turned into the minions of the money class?

The capitalist state everywhere resorted to the use of both hard (i.e., repression) and soft (propaganda) power in order to secure the transition to the new economic and social order commanded by finance capital and big business interests. But the story does not stop here. International organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, but also countless non-governmental organizations throughout the world, were mobilized for the promotion of this goal. The corporate-owned mainstream media and the

overwhelming majority of academics and intellectuals also joined the show as cheerleaders of the global neoliberal vision.

In sum, the return to “predatory capitalism” was prompted by a crisis in the workings of the postwar capitalist regime and realized through active political intervention, i.e., class politics, by the capitalist state and international organizations, and the support provided by the intellectual elite and mass media. Yet, its success depended on the redesigning of the global economy (a cycle of upswing in the movement towards the global integration of national economies enforced by the market liberalization policies of leading and ascending states), and not merely on the institutionalization of neoliberal policies within a national context. Neoliberalism had to be global, or it could not possibly work as efficiently if it was confined only to the national setting.

As noted earlier, the three pillars on which contemporary capitalism is structured around are financialization, neoliberalism and globalization. But what is their connection? Can neoliberalism, for example, be dismantled while leaving untouched the current processes of financialization and globalization?

First, we know that the surge of financial capital long predates the current neoliberal era, and the financialization of the economy takes place independently of neoliberalism, although it is greatly enhanced by the weakening of regulatory regimes and the collusion between finance capital and political officials that prevails under the neoliberal order. Neoliberalism, with its emphasis on corporate power, deregulation, the marketization of society, the glorification of profit and the contempt for public goods and values, provides the ideological and political support needed for the financialization of the economy and the undermining of the real economy. Thus, challenging neoliberalism – a task of herculean proportions given that virtually every aspect of the economy and of the world as a whole, from schools to the workplace and from post offices to the IMF, functions today on the basis of neoliberal premises – does not necessarily imply a break on the financialization processes under way in contemporary capitalist economies. Financialization needs to be tackled on its own terms, possibly with alternative finance systems and highly interventionist policies, which include the nationalization of banks, rather than through regulation alone.

The surge of finance capital can be traced at least since the beginning of the 20th century. In a major study addressing “the economic characteristics of the

latest phase of capitalist development," published in 1910, Rudolf Hilferding, an Austrian-born Marxist economist and main theoretician for the Social Democratic Party of Germany during the Weimar Republic, devoted special attention to the processes of the concentration and centralization of capital, and outlined a theory of imperialism as a necessary development in the evolution of capitalism. In the course of this process he also made it clear that systematic investigation of the role of money and credit, the expansion of capitalist enterprises into corporations and their conversion into corporations was of the outmost importance for the understanding of the evolution of capitalism.

Hilferding demonstrated that the rise of the industrial corporation reflects an objective "change in the function of the industrial enterprise." The industrial corporation, or the joint-stock company, allows anyone in possession of money to become a money capitalist. In effect, what Hilferding was observing was the phenomenon of the separation of ownership of capital from control in the joint-stock company. According to him, this process not only accelerated the concentration of capital, but also provided the joint-stock company with the ability to expand far more rapidly than the individually owned enterprise, thereby leading to the centralization of capital.

For Hilferding, however, it was the emergence of financial institutions and banks, in particular, that truly intensified the processes toward concentration. He stressed that in the mature stage of capitalism, banks, which were quite necessary to the growth of industry, had become fully dominant and directly controlled the economic life of the system. Through its vast resources of liquid capital, banks were able to obtain control of major trusts in industry, since the latter needed idle capital in order to increase and expand the production process. Viewed from this perspective, industrial capital was inextricably intertwined with banking capital and wholly dependent on money capital.

The merging process between industrial and banking capital gives rise to a new form of capital: finance capital. Moreover, the establishment of an intimate relationship between banking capital and industrial capital results in an increased tendency toward the export of capital. The concentration of capital, which leads to monopolization, encourages the export of capital by virtue of the fact that the over-accumulation of capital can no longer find profitable investment opportunities at home.

While it is true that Hilferding mistakenly considered the dependence of industrial capital on banking capital as a permanent state of affairs (the great monopolistic corporations became independent of banking capital and today's large corporations use their own retained profits to finance investment), there can be no mistake that the transition "from the domination of capital in general to the domination of finance capital" emerged as a key feature of "modern" capitalism even before the outbreak of World War I. Indeed, the Great Depression of the 1930s revealed in unmistakable terms the extent to which finance and financial capitalism had taken central stage, reshaping in a profound way the United States' economy and affecting dramatically developments across the world.

However, the task of stabilizing financial capitalism's inherent tendency towards instability has clearly been severely undermined with the onset of neoliberalism, and the global financial crisis of 2008 represented just the latest act in a long series of financial crises since the early 1970s, and with each new crisis getting bigger and becoming more severe than the previous one. Yet, it is equally clear that scores of financial crises, mainly "systemic banking crises," have occurred prior to the installation of a neoliberal regime. Moreover, because of globalization, "Big Government" action has been restrained and the challenges posed to central banking from globalized finance are quite severe, with financial globalization leading to growing frequency and severity of systemic financial crises. Thus, globalization is in itself a contributing factor to the spread of financial crises while also providing a greater impetus for the deepening of neoliberalism.

Now, although finance is at the forefront of globalization, there is hardly an aspect of contemporary life that is not affected by globalization, making it therefore a very elusive concept indeed, while adding new levels of complexity to the task of forming appropriate economic and political responses to a system bent on instability and prone to large-scale crises. The reshaping of the global economy to the economics of profitability along neoliberal lines is now an entity that, having come into being, has formed a specific structure of its own upon which neoliberalism depends on in order to continue to thrive.

Globalization, of course, has also created new systemic risks (and crises of all sorts, including the rapid spread of pandemics) which we are simply uncertain how to address given the existing power structure in the global political economy where a plutocracy reigns supreme as national governments have capitulated to



the whims of the corporate and financial elite and the formal global governance structure needed is missing. Yet, this is precisely the environment that makes predatory capitalism thrive, and makes one wonder whether neoliberalism can actually wither away in a national setting without actually altering the very nature of the globalizing economic processes at work in the contemporary era. For, to put it bluntly, globalization is now the oxygen mask through which neoliberalism is able to breathe.

Having said that, this is not to imply that meaningful reform cannot take place, and there is no short supply of proposed solutions for tackling the major problems facing the contemporary world, including that of global warming. The worst effects of neoliberal capitalism can be addressed through short-range (proposals for tax reform that will close the gap between rich and poor) and medium-range goals (reregulation and nationalization) to some rather long-range structural reforms (redesigning the architecture of the global financial system). Taming global warming also represents a long-range goal, in fact of vital importance for the stability of any future social and economic order.

On the political front, the task of recapturing the state is absolutely essential for any progressive movement or political party seeking to reestablish balance in the relationship between labor and capital, resurrect democracy, redress social injustice and reorient the economy toward sustainable and balanced growth. Still, such undertakings are likely to fail if they are pursued in the absence of a solid understanding of the nature of the current system, without having captured the public imagination, and without a vision towards a new global order. A long-term vision should not stand in the way of pursuing immediate reforms that alleviate human pain and suffering, and short-term goals should not block the imagination from opening up a world of new possibilities for human relations.

In sum, what the above analysis suggests is that doing away with neoliberalism may require, in addition to progressive forces recapturing the state, major reforms in financialization and the disruption of at least certain features of the present-day wave of globalization. And this means, in a nutshell, making significant alterations in the way international organizations such as the IMF, the World Bank, and WTO operate. This is a tall order, indeed, but the building of a sustainable world will, in the end, require much more than just temporary economic stimulus packages mandated by the need created from the threat a pandemic has posed to capitalist economic life.

*\*This is a revised article that originally appeared on Truthout under the title “Predatory Capitalism: Old Trends and New Realities” (July 12, 2014)*

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

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## **Chomsky: Biden’s Early Agenda Gives Hope, But Activist Pressure Must Not Cease**



*Noam Chomsky*

Joe Biden’s first months in office have comprised a flurry of actions on the domestic front, including a historic stimulus bill. In this exclusive interview, the

celebrated public intellectual Noam Chomsky shares his views on some key policies embraced by the Biden administration. Chomsky is Institute Professor Emeritus at MIT and Laureate Professor of Linguistics at the University of Arizona. His latest books are *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (co-authored with Robert Pollin and C. J. Polychroniou; Verso, 2020), *Chomsky for Activists* (Routledge, 2020) and *Consequences of Capitalism: Manufacturing Discontent and Resistance* (Haymarket Books, 2020).

*C.J. Polychroniou: President Joe Biden has been in office for approximately two months now, in the course of which he has signed scores of executive orders meant to reverse the policies of Donald Trump. But he has also managed to pass a huge and ambitious stimulus bill unlike anything seen during peacetime. What's your assessment of Biden's actions so far to deal with the most pressing issues facing U.S. society: namely, the coronavirus pandemic and the pain caused to millions of Americans on account of the pandemic?*

*Noam Chomsky:* Better than I'd anticipated. Considerably so.

The stimulus bill has its flaws, but considering the circumstances, it's an impressive achievement. The circumstances are a highly disciplined opposition party dedicated to the principle announced years ago by its maximal leader, Mitch McConnell: *If we are not in power, we must render the country ungovernable and block government legislative efforts, however beneficial they might be. Then the consequences can be blamed on the party in power, and we can take over.* It worked well for Republicans in 2009 — with plenty of help from Obama. By 2010, the Democrats lost Congress, and the way was cleared to the 2016 debacle.

There's every reason to suppose that the strategy will be renewed — this time under more complex circumstances. The voting base in the hands of Trump, who shares the objective but differs from McConnell on who will pick up the pieces: McConnell and the donor class, or Trump and the voting base he mobilized, almost half of whom worship him as the messenger God sent to save the country from ... we can fill in our favorite fantasies, but should not overlook the fact that what may sound [ridiculous] has roots in the lives of the victims of the neoliberal globalization of the past 40 years — extended by Trump, apart from some rhetorical flourishes.

In those circumstances, passing a stimulus bill was a major accomplishment.

Republicans who favor it, and know that their constituents do, nevertheless voted against it, in lockstep obedience to what the Central Committee determines. Some Democrats insisted on watering it down. But what finally passed has valuable elements, which could be a basis for moving on.

There are huge gaps. The bill surely should have contained an increase in the miserable minimum wage, an utter scandal. But that would have been very difficult in the face of total Republican opposition, along with a few Democrats. And there are other crucial features that are missing. Nevertheless, if the short-term measures on child poverty, income support, medical insurance and other basic needs can be extended, it would be a substantial step toward fulfilling the promise envisioned by such careful observers as Roosevelt Institute President Felicia Wong, [who reflected that](#), “As I see it, both the scale and the direction of the American Rescue Plan break the neoliberal, deficits-and-inflation-come-first mold that has hollowed out our economy for a generation.” We haven’t seen anything that could elicit such hopes for a long time.

There is also hope in appointments on economic issues. Who would have imagined that a regular contributor to radical economics journals would be appointed to the Council of Economic Advisers (Heather Boushey), joined by the senior economic adviser of the labor-oriented Economic Policy Institute, (Jared Bernstein)?

Biden’s strong support for Amazon workers, and unions generally, is a welcome shift. Nothing like it has been heard from the chambers of power in many years. In a sharp reversal of Trump legislation, the tax changes raise incomes mostly for the poor, not the rich. Economic Policy Institute President Thea Lee summarizes the package by saying that it “will provide crucial support to millions of working families; dramatically reduce the race, gender, and income inequalities that were exacerbated by the crisis; and create the conditions for a truly robust recovery once the virus is under control and people are able to resume normal economic activity.” Optimistic, but within reach.

House Democrats have passed other important legislation. H.R. 1 protects voting rights, a critical matter now, with Republicans working overtime to try to block the votes of [people of color] and the poor, recognizing that this is the only way a minority party dedicated to wealth and corporate power can remain viable.

On the labor front, the House passed the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, [“a critical step toward restoring](#) workers’ right to organize and bargain

collectively,” the Economic Policy Institute reports, a fundamental right that “has been eroded for decades as employers exploited weaknesses in the current law.” It’ll probably be killed by the Senate. Even apart from party loyalty, there is little sympathy for working people in Republican ranks.

But even so, it’s a basis for organizing and education. It can be a step toward revitalizing the labor movement, a prime target of the neoliberal project since Reagan and Thatcher, who understood well that working people must be deprived of means to defend themselves from the assault.

Decline of union membership is by now recognized, even in the mainstream, to be a major factor in rising inequality — a phrase that translates to “robbery of the general public by a tiny fraction of super-rich.” The Economic Policy Institute has reviewed the facts regularly, most recently in a chart that [graphically demonstrates](#) the remarkable correlation between rising/falling union membership and falling/rising inequality.

More generally, there is a good opportunity to overcome the baleful legacy of Trump’s bitterly anti-labor Labor Department, headed by corporate lawyer Eugene Scalia, who used his term in office to [eviscerate worker rights](#), notoriously during the pandemic. Scalia was perfectly chosen for the transformation of the Republicans to a “working-class party,” as hailed by Marco Rubio and Josh Hawley in a triumph of propaganda, or maybe sheer chutzpah.

Michael Regan’s appointment as Environmental Protection Agency administrator should replace corporate greed by science and human welfare in this essential agency, a move toward human decency that in this case is a prerequisite for survival.

It’s easy to find serious omissions and deficiencies in Biden’s programs on the domestic front, but there are signs of hope for emerging from the Trump nightmare and moving on to what really should, what really must be done. The hopes are, however, conditional. The temporary measures of the stimulus on child poverty and many other issues must be made permanent, and improved. Crucially, activist pressure must not cease. The masters of the universe pursue their class war relentlessly, and can only be countered by an aroused public opposition that is no less dedicated to the common good.

*What do you think of Biden’s refusal to cancel \$50,000 in student loans?*

A bad decision. What the realistic options were, I don’t frankly know. Higher education at a high level should be recognized to be a basic right, freely available,

as it is elsewhere: in our Mexican neighbor, in rich developed countries like Germany, France, the Nordic countries, and a great many others, with at most nominal fees. As it substantially was in the U.S. when it was a much poorer country than it is today. The postwar GI Bill of Rights provided free education for great numbers of white males who would never have gone to college otherwise. There is no reason why young people of any race should be denied the privilege today.

*In light of the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, Biden has vowed to fight domestic terrorism by passing a new law “that respects free speech and civil liberties.” Does the U.S. need a new domestic terrorism agenda?*

A prior question is whether we should retain the current domestic terrorism agenda. There are strong reasons to question that. And any expansion should be a matter of serious concern. That aside, white supremacist violence is no laughing matter. Through the Trump years, the FBI and other monitors report steadily increasing white supremacist terror, by now covering almost all recorded terror. Armed militias are rampant — Trump’s “tough guys” as he’s admiringly called them. The problems can’t be overlooked, but have to be handled with great caution and a close eye on the temptations for abuse.

*Biden has proposed a plan to strengthen the middle class by encouraging unionization and collective bargaining, and his recent affirmation of the rights of workers to unionize, which was widely interpreted as support for Amazon workers’ rights to organize in Alabama, has spread considerable enthusiasm among progressives. Indeed, Biden’s support for unions is in pace with the highly favorable ratings that unions have been receiving in the last couple of years. What’s behind the support for unions in the present era?*

One reason is objective reality. The sharp rise in inequality is a growing curse, with extremely harmful effects across the society. As mentioned earlier, it closely tracks decline of unions, for reasons that are well understood. Historically, labor unions have been in the forefront of struggles for justice and rights. They also pioneered the environmental movement, as we’ve discussed before. Workers’ organizations are changing in character with the growth of service and knowledge-based economies. They have shared interests, and foster the values of solidarity and mutual aid on which the hope for a decent future rest. Many unions retain the word “international” in their names. It should not just be a symbol or a

dream. The dire challenges we face have no borders. Global heating, pandemics, disarmament will be dealt with internationally, if at all. The same is true of labor rights and human rights more generally. At every level, associations of working people should once again be prominent, if not leading the way, toward a better world.

*This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.*

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

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## **Phasing Out Fossil Fuels Is Possible. These State-Level Plans Show How**



*Robert Pollin*

When it comes to climate change, state governments across the United States have been way ahead of the federal government in providing leadership toward reducing carbon pollution and building a clean energy economy. For example, when Trump announced in 2017 his intention to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Agreement, the governors of California, Washington and New York pledged to support the international agreement, and by 2019, more than 20 other states ended up joining this alliance to combat global warming.

*Robert Pollin*, distinguished professor of Economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, has been a driving force behind several U.S. states' efforts to curb carbon emissions and make a transition to a green economy. In this exclusive Truthout interview, Pollin talks about how states can take crucial, proactive steps to build a clean energy future.

*C.J. Polychroniou: Bob, you are the lead author of [commissioned studies](#), produced with some of your colleagues at the Political Economy Research Institute of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, to fight climate change for scores of U.S. states, including Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Maine, Colorado, Washington, New York and California. The purpose of those studies is to show the way for states to attain critical reductions in carbon emissions while also embarking on a path of economy recovery and a just transition toward an environmentally sustainable environment. In general terms, how is this to be done, and is there a common strategy that all states can follow?*

*Robert Pollin:* The basic framework that we have developed is the same for all states. For all states, we develop a path through which the state can reduce its carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions by roughly half as of 2030 and to transform into a



zero emissions economy by 2050. These are the emissions reduction targets set out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (the IPCC) that are meant to apply to the entire global economy. The IPCC — which is a UN agency that serves as a clearinghouse for climate change research — has concluded that these CO2 emissions reduction targets have to be met in order for we, the human race, to have a reasonable chance to stabilize the global average temperature at no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above the preindustrial level, [the level of] about the year 1800.

The IPCC has concluded that stabilizing the global average temperature at no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels provides the only realistic chance for avoiding the most severe destructive impacts of climate change in terms of heat extremes, heavy precipitation, droughts, floods, sea level rise, biodiversity losses, and the corresponding impacts on health, livelihoods, food security, water supply and human security. Given that these emissions reduction targets must be met on a global scale, it follows that they also must be met in every state of the United States, with no exceptions, just like they must be met in every other country or region of the world with no exceptions.

By far the most important source of CO2 emissions entering the atmosphere is fossil fuel consumption — i.e., burning oil, coal and natural gas to produce energy. As such, the program we develop in all of the U.S. states centers on the state's economy phasing out its entire fossil fuel industry — i.e., anything to do with producing or consuming oil, coal or natural gas — at a rate that will enable the state to hit the two IPCC emissions reduction targets: the 50 percent reduction by 2030 and zero emissions within the state by 2050.

Of course, meeting these emissions reduction targets raises a massive question right away: How can you phase out fossil fuels and still enable people to heat, light and cool their homes and workplaces; for cars, buses, trains and planes to keep running; and for industrial machinery of all types to keep operating?

It turns out that, in its basics, the answer is simple and achievable, in all the states we have studied (and everywhere else for that matter): to build a whole new clean energy infrastructure that will supplant the existing fossil fuel dominant infrastructure in each state. So the next major feature of our approach is to develop investment programs to dramatically raise energy efficiency standards in buildings, transportation systems and industrial equipment, and

equally dramatically expand the supply of clean renewable energy sources, i.e. primarily solar and wind energy, but also geothermal, small-scale hydro, as well as low-emissions bioenergy.

For all but one of the states we have studied, we estimate that the amount of clean energy investments that are needed amounts to between 1-3 percent of all state economic activity, i.e. the state's GDP (Gross Domestic Product). That can be a lot of money — like \$6.6 billion in Washington State (1.2 percent of projected average GDP between 2021-2030), \$22.6 billion in Pennsylvania (2.5 percent of projected average GDP between 2021-2030) and \$76 billion in California (2.1 percent of projected average GDP between 2021-2030). But still, these spending levels, amounting to 1-3 percent of GDP, do still mean that something like 97-99 percent of all the state's economic activity can be devoted to everything else *besides* clean energy investments. West Virginia is the one outlier in the states we have studied so far. But even here, we estimate the investment program will need to be only somewhat higher, at 4.2 percent of the state's projected average GDP for 2021-2030, equal to \$3.6 billion per year.

A critical and totally straightforward result of these state-level investment programs is that they will create an abundance of jobs — something like, for example, 40,000 in Washington State, 150,000 in Pennsylvania, and 420,000 in California. This conclusion runs completely counter to the widespread, if not prevalent, view that any kind of climate stabilization program is going to be a jobs killer. This view, feasted on by Trump and many others of his ilk, is that you can, maybe, stabilize the climate, or you can increase job opportunities, *but you can't do both*. Our research shows exactly the opposite: that you can indeed do both, through the same program of building a clean energy infrastructure in each state.

Estimating the number of jobs that get created in each state, the types of jobs, what the pay levels are for these jobs at present in each state, and how to improve job quality is a big part of what we focus on in these studies. Raising unionization rates in the range of growing clean energy sectors will be critical for improving wages and working conditions. These new job opportunities must also become much more open to women and people of color.

It is true that the workers and communities in each state that are right now dependent on the oil, coal and gas industries for their livelihoods will be facing

major job losses and community dislocations. Recognizing this reality is exactly why the other major focus of our studies in each state is to develop a just transition program, for both the workers and communities that are now dependent on the fossil fuel industry. For the workers facing dislocation, the just transition programs that we develop in each state include pension guarantees and re-employment guarantees at pay levels at least equal to their previous fossil fuel jobs, along with retraining and relocation support as needed.

It turns out that the costs of even a generous program of this type are trivial as a share of the state's overall economy. For Ohio, we estimate the full costs of the program at around one one-hundredths of one percent of the state's GDP. In Pennsylvania, with a larger fossil fuel industry, the figure is higher, but still only to two one-hundredths of one percent of state GDP.

That's the overall approach that we have applied to all of the states. Of course, there are also significant differences between the various states that we also have to take into account. For example, the economies of Ohio and Pennsylvania are similar in many ways. But there are big differences between the energy infrastructures in the two states, with Pennsylvania, unlike Ohio, being a major producer of natural gas through fracking technology, a major producer of nuclear energy, and a large-scale electricity exporter to other states. We heard a lot about fracking in Pennsylvania during the 2020 presidential campaign, with even Biden insisting that he will not ban fracking in the state because of its negative impact on jobs. In fact, shutting down Pennsylvania's fracking industry will end up costing the state an average of about 1,000 jobs per year. Meanwhile, building Pennsylvania's clean energy infrastructure will generate about 160,000 jobs in the first year of the investment program, and that higher level of investments will continue at least until 2030.

*The latest study is for West Virginia, once a thriving state and the top coal producer in the country, but now, according to a report by West Virginia's University Bureau of Business and Economic Research, facing a dreary future as the coal industry has essentially collapsed and people are leaving the state. How would a clean energy investment program help to transform the West Virginia economy? More precisely, how many new jobs would be created, how much public money would be needed for the plan to be carried out, and how would the clean energy transition affect fossil fuel workers?*

As I mentioned above, we estimate that to bring down West Virginia's CO2 emissions by 50 percent as of 2030 will require about \$3.6 billion per year in both public and private investments in energy efficiency and clean renewable energy, equal to about 4 percent of the state's GDP. Those investments will produce about 25,000 jobs in the state, with that increased level of employment being sustained from 2021-2030. There will be new job opportunities for, among others, carpenters, car mechanics, material scientists, secretaries, accountants and truck drivers.

We also developed a plan to upgrade West Virginia's economy base through additional investments in manufacturing, infrastructure, land restoration and agriculture. This will entail another \$1.6 billion in investment spending within the state. It will generate an additional roughly 16,000 jobs in various industries including small-scale organic farming. We estimate that the combined investment program will generate about 41,000 new jobs, equal to about 5 percent of West Virginia's current labor force. Meanwhile, we estimate that about 1,400 fossil fuel industry-based workers will be displaced per year. All of these workers in West Virginia will receive pension guarantees, re-employment guarantees at their current pay levels, as well as relocation and retraining support. Even in West Virginia, this program will cost less than two-tenths of one percent of West Virginia's GDP.

How does West Virginia get the money to pay for all this? We estimate that the breakdown in spending in West Virginia would be about \$2 billion per year in public funds and \$3 billion in private funds, with the private funds being motivated by the incentives built into the state's clean energy policies. That would include what are termed "renewable portfolio standards," through which, for example, the state would require the privately owned utilities to cut their coal-burning to produce electricity by, say, 5 percent per year, or face heavy penalties. The \$2 billion per year in total public funding would be less than what the state would receive under the Build Back Better infrastructure program that President Biden promoted during his presidential campaign (assuming West Virginia's allocation of Build Back Better was only equal to its share of the U.S. population). So, the money should be there. This program should be seen as a huge opportunity to transform West Virginia's economy.

*What has been the reception of these studies so far by state officials and other interested parties?*

The earlier studies that we did, for New York and Washington States in 2017 and Colorado in 2019, were well received, due to the important organizing work by the groups that had commissioned our studies in each state. These included the broad coalition called NY Renews in New York and the AFL-CIO leadership in Colorado. New York and Colorado now have climate stabilization programs in place that reflect a lot of what we developed in our studies. At the same time, especially in New York, the experience has been that many great-sounding climate programs have passed into law with major fanfare, but a whole lot less has been accomplished in practice. In some ways, having great policies on paper that are not implemented seriously in practice is worse than nothing because it distracts people from seeing that real accomplishments are lagging far behind the promises.

As with Colorado, our study for Washington State was also commissioned by the state's AFL-CIO leadership. In fact, Washington's mainstream labor leadership had done a tremendous job organizing a broad coalition throughout the state to support a ballot initiative that would have implemented most of the program we had developed. But in the last month leading up to the November 2018 election that included this ballot measure, the big oil companies mounted a \$30 million propaganda campaign that succeeded in persuading a majority of Washington State's voters to oppose the initiative.

The struggle in Washington State and elsewhere is ongoing. The reception to our more recent studies in Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia has been positive so far. But we have a long way to go before we see good proposals being converted into truly transformative policies, not just on paper, but in real-life practice.

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*C.J. Polychroniou* is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. His main research interests are in European economic integration, globalization, the political economy of the United States and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published several books and his articles have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into several foreign languages, including Croatian, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese,

Spanish and Turkish. He is the author of [\*Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change\*](#), an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books.

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# The Current Hardships Facing Palestinian Refugees



[The United Nations' Relief and Works Agency](#) (UNRWA)—known as the main international relief and human development organization for Palestinian refugees—defined Palestinian refugees as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1

June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.” However, most notably, Palestinians displaced because of the 1967 war, and subsequent hostilities, are not referred to or registered as refugees by the Agency, but they are eligible to receive services by UNRWA. Despite this fact, within segments of the international community, Palestinians who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1967 war, and subsequent hostilities, are also regarded as refugees.

In the five areas where UNRWA is in operation, namely, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), the hardships faced by the Palestinian refugees has worsened in recent history.

Most recently, with respect to the coronavirus pandemic, the Palestinian refugee population is increasingly in a vulnerable position with little-to-no access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Within the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank, [COVID-19 cases are surging](#) with more than 2,236 fatalities and 16,000 active cases in these areas (including East Jerusalem). Meanwhile, Israel has been

[internationally lauded](#) for carrying out the world's speediest vaccination drive, with over 90 percent of Israelis above the age of 50 having been fully vaccinated as of February 2021. However, Israel has denied Palestinians living within the occupied territories significant access to the vaccines as Israel argues that the Oslo Accords places responsibility on the Palestinian Authority regarding issues of public health. But even under the Oslo Accords, Israel does have a commitment to help Palestinians living in the occupied territories fight the pandemic. [Article 17, stipulation 6 of the Accord states](#): "Israel and the Palestinian side shall exchange information regarding epidemics and contagious diseases, shall cooperate in combating them and shall develop methods for exchange of medical files and documents."

Moreover, given that Israel is the occupying power—under international law, namely, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, Israel has a responsibility to ensure the welfare of the population which it is occupying—namely, the Palestinian people in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. The West Bank remains occupied by Israel which "controls entrance and egress, much of the infrastructure, the roads, the currency...in short, all the means of Palestinian independence"—as pointed out by [Mitchell Plitnick](#), the former US director of the Israeli human rights organization, B'Tselem. In the case of Gaza, Israel since 2007 has imposed a land, air, and sea blockade of Gaza. Most notably, the effects of Israel's blockade, coupled with Israel's routine bombing of Gaza, has crumbled its infrastructure, led to massive poverty, food insecurity, [and resulted in less than 4% of the water in that territory](#), consisting of nearly 2 million people, being fit for human consumption. Israel thus, in addition to the West Bank, also continues to occupy the Palestinians living within the Gaza Strip, and therefore, Israel as their occupier has a responsibility to vaccinate Gazans. In February 2021, Palestinian officials condemned Israel for [blocking the entry of 2,000 coronavirus vaccine doses](#) into Gaza to assist its health workers. Despite evidence to the contrary, even if Israeli claims with respect to the Oslo Accords is valid, this is irrelevant, as stated by scholar [Yara M.Asi](#), "the [Geneva] convention specifies that no agreement between the parties supersedes its protections while occupation continues. This would include the Oslo Accords, signed in 1995 as an interim agreement." Furthermore, Israel, instead of first seeking to vaccinate Palestinians in the occupied territories, [pledged](#) to provide its spare vaccines to foreign allies such as Honduras and the Czech Republic.

In areas outside of the occupied territories, such as Lebanon which is home to an estimated 207,000 Palestinian refugees, according to UN figures, it has been [reported](#) that “Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are three times more likely to die with COVID-19 than the population as a whole.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations’ Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), responsible for providing healthcare and education to millions of Palestinians living both inside and outside the occupied territories, was “[recognized as a major contributor](#) to the containment of the COVID-19 virus”—having quickly adapted its provision of services in compliance with the World Health Organization recommendations. UNRWA [implemented](#) remote education curriculum practices, adopted door-to-door delivery of food and medicines, as well as innovative health and psychosocial support hotlines which have been regarded as a significant lifeline to the refugee population during the pandemic. Moreover, UNRWA is also responsible for [waste disposal and sanitation services](#) to Palestinian refugee camps across the Middle East — “this includes disinfectant treatments to roads and installations to prevent the spread of COVID-19.”

However, due to the United States’ complete [termination of funding](#) to UNRWA under President Trump in 2018, the operations of the Agency were almost brought to a complete halt.

When the pandemic broke out, UNRWA was operating on a shoestring budget with Elizabeth Campbell, UNRWA’s director in Washington, [stating in May 2020](#) that due to America’s termination of funding, “We are basically operating on a month-to-month basis. Right now, we have funding to pay our 30,000 health care workers until the end of this month.”

Even once the COVID-19 pandemic is over, it does not appear that there will be any end in sight to the suffering faced by Palestinian refugees. The hardships faced by Palestinian refugees will continue until the central issues of contention are fully addressed within a final settlement to the conflict. The central issues of contention as it pertains to Palestinian refugees is, firstly, the right of return, secondly, the right of Palestinians for compensation from Israel due to the destruction of Palestinians’ homes, and their livelihoods as a result of the 1948 war, the 1967 war, as well as further hostilities, and the third issue of contention is the assimilation and resettlement of refugees in different countries. Most significantly on the first two points, there is serious doubt as to whether



right of return and compensation (both issues which are notably embodied within United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194) is politically feasible and there is doubt as to whether there are legitimate frameworks within international law that firmly allows stateless Palestinians to successfully advocate for the right of return and compensation.

The Taba Summit is widely regarded as perhaps the closest instance that a final settlement to end the longstanding conflict was almost reached between the Israelis and the Palestinians. At the time of the Taba Summit, the Israelis expressed an understanding on the issue of compensation, with Israel advocating that an international commission be created to gather, verify, and pay individual compensation claims. However, at that time, you had a government in Israel that, at least, gave the public impression that it was willing to negotiate on key issues required to reach a permanent settlement to the conflict. Presently, however, the center-left parties in Israel, such as the Labour Party, are a shell of its former self and a significant segment of the population in Israel strongly supports Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right Likud Party, which has been expanding Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, further jeopardizing any viable solution to the conflict. There is also disunity among the Palestinians with friction between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza. Lastly, unless the United States is willing to apply meaningful pressure on Israel to seriously negotiate a final settlement with the Palestinians, an end to the protracted refugee crisis will not be possible.

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## **Hiking The Minimum Wage To \$15 Is Key — But It's Hardly A Living Wage**



*Robert Pollin*

The federal minimum wage hasn't increased in over a decade. After a brief but failed attempt by the Biden administration to raise it to \$15 an hour, it will most likely remain at the current \$7.25 [for an indefinite time to come](#). This is a shame, for the economic benefits of wage hikes are beyond dispute, as many studies have shown, including those authored by Robert Pollin, distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Pollin is co-author of *The Living Wage: Building a Fair Economy* (1998) and *A Measure of Fairness: The Economics of Living Wages and Minimum Wages in the United States* (2008) and has worked with many U.S. non-governmental organizations on creating living wage statutes at both the statewide and municipal levels. In this interview, Pollin discusses why, even though we must continue to push for a \$15 minimum wage, we must also consider what a true living wage looks like.

*C.J. Polychroniou: The general argument against raising the minimum wage is that it is bad for small business and the economy in general. Is there any truth in this claim?*

*Robert Pollin:* Going through a bit of background will be helpful here. The federal minimum wage was last increased in July 2009, from \$6.55 an hour to \$7.25. So, no increase in 12 years. But actually, the situation is far worse than even what this suggests. That is because, at the very least, we have to factor in the effects of inflation on people's ability to buy the things they need to live. Inflation means that the prices of food, housing, transportation, clothing and other necessities have been rising. So the minimum wage today would need to be \$8.77 [in order to buy what \\$7.25 could buy in 2009](#).

But there is still much more to the story once we take account of inflation. That is,

after we factor in inflation, the U.S. minimum wage actually peaked in 1968, 52 years ago. In today's dollars, after factoring in inflation, the federal minimum wage in 1968 was \$11.90, 64 percent higher than today's \$7.25 figure. Further still, average labor productivity — i.e., the amount of goods or services an average worker can produce over the course of a day in the U.S. — has risen at an average rate of 1.9 percent per year since 1968. What if, starting in 1968, the federal minimum wage had risen every year in step with the 1.9 percent average increase in productivity as well as inflation? That would mean that minimum wage workers would get raises when they are producing more every day, but their raise would only equal exactly their 1.9 percent improvement in productivity but not a penny more. In that case, the federal minimum wage today would be \$31.67 an hour — *over four times higher than the actual federal minimum wage today.*

Now if we go back to 1968, when the federal minimum wage was approximately \$11.90 in today's dollars, in fact the U.S. economy was booming. The official unemployment rate was 3.6 percent, i.e., less than half of the average 8.1 percent unemployment rate over 2020. So it is obvious that the U.S. economy can function just fine at a much higher federal minimum wage rate than the \$7.25 rate that prevails today.

We also get basically the same result by looking at the experiences in recent years with minimum wage laws in U.S. states and living wage statutes in some municipalities that are higher than the federal minimum wage. Right now, [29 states along with the District of Columbia](#) operate with minimum wage rates higher than the federal minimum. The citywide minimum in Washington, D.C., is already at \$15.00, and the State of Washington is next highest at \$13.69. The evidence on the experiences in these states and cities is that businesses function at least as well if not better than those states that still operate at the federal \$7.25 minimum. The employment opportunities in these states and cities are also [at least as good if not better.](#)

It is fair to ask: If businesses are mandated to pay higher wages than they would choose to pay otherwise, then why is it that we don't see these businesses lay off employees or close up operations after they are forced to give raises? The answer is that the overwhelming majority of businesses don't want to be forced to raise wages for their employees, but they learn to adjust. They might raise their prices modestly to cover their increased payroll. The businesses' level of productivity is also likely to improve. This is because their workers become more committed to

their jobs when they are paid at minimally decent levels. These productivity increases will not be enough to compensate for the businesses' increased payroll, but they will help to partially cover some of their higher costs.

Finally, some businesses may just end up accepting modestly lower profits, even if reluctantly. To the extent this occurs, raising the minimum wage will end up advancing a more equal distribution of income between businesses and workers. This is after 40 years under neoliberalism in which inequality has risen relentlessly. The decline in the value of the minimum wage, after adjusting for inflation, has been a significant factor contributing to the overall rise in inequality under neoliberalism.

*Millions of Americans earn wages at or below the federal minimum. Are there estimates of the consequences of a wage hike to \$15 an hour on the lives of the working poor?*

According to a range of research compiled by the Economic Policy Institute, increasing the federal minimum wage to \$15 would deliver pay increases for [nearly 32 million workers](#), 21 percent of the entire U.S. workforce. Nearly 60 percent of workers whose families are currently living below the official poverty line would see their pay go up. The average affected worker with a year-round full-time job would earn an extra \$3,300 per year. This would have a major impact on the lives of these workers and their families. It would mean, for example, they would be able to take care of an elderly relative rather than work a second job to cover rent. It would mean they could get their car repaired when that becomes necessary without having to cut back on buying food. It could even mean that they could take a modest vacation.

It is also important to note that the minimum wage increase to \$15 an hour would disproportionately benefit Black and Latino workers — with 31 percent of Black people and 26 percent of Latinos getting raises through the minimum wage increase. Finally, we have to dispel the idea that a minimum wage increase largely benefits teenagers with after-school part-time jobs. Only 10 percent of the workers who would benefit from the \$15 minimum wage are teenagers. But it is also the case that teenagers deserve to be paid decently. A large share of them are making significant contributions to their families' overall income level.

*Is a \$15 minimum wage itself really enough for a worker to live on decently?*

We should be clear that raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour takes us only a small way towards establishing decent wage standards in the U.S. A critical question to ask here is: What would constitute a *living wage* standard in the U.S.? There have been various efforts at addressing this question. One of the most comprehensive efforts has been by a team of researchers at MIT, led by Professor Amy Glasmeier, who produce what they call a “[Living Wage Calculator](#).” The MIT researchers describe their living wage standard as follows: “It is a market-based approach that draws upon geographically specific expenditure data related to a family’s likely minimum food, childcare, health insurance, housing, transportation and other basic necessities (e.g. clothing, personal care items, etc.) costs.”

The MIT researchers also make clear what their living wage standard is capable of purchasing in all the various regions of the U.S. [They write](#):

*The living wage model does not allow for what many consider the basic necessities enjoyed by many Americans. It does not budget funds for pre-prepared meals or those eaten in restaurants. It does not include money for entertainment, nor does it allocate leisure time for unpaid vacations or holidays. Lastly, it does not provide a financial means for planning for the future through savings and investment or for the purchase of capital assets. The living wage is the minimum income standard that, if met, draws a very fine line between the financial independence of the working poor and the need to seek out public assistance or suffer consistent and severe housing and food insecurity. In light of this fact, the living wage is perhaps better defined as a minimum subsistence wage for persons living in the United States.*

Given this description of how the MIT researchers define a “living wage” standard, their results as to what constitutes a living wage in various regions of the U.S. are striking. For example, considering a family with a single parent and one child, the MIT Calculator finds that as a statewide average, the living wage would range from a low in Mississippi of \$26.74 to a high in Massachusetts of \$36.88. Wisconsin is in the middle of the state living wage average, at \$30.17.

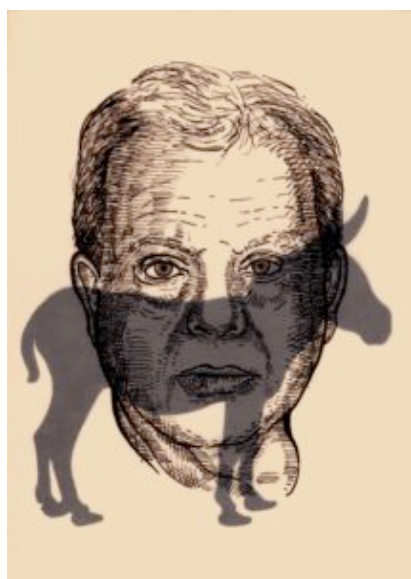
In short, the fight for a \$15 federal minimum wage needs to be won. But it should also be recognized as being an important but still small step toward reversing the impact of 40 years of neoliberal economic policies on the lives of working people in the United States.

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

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## **Bas Heijne - Leugen en waarheid. In gesprek over de grote kwesties van onze tijd**



*Bas Heijne. Ills: Joseph*

Essayist Bas Heijne gaat in deze bundel interviews op zoek naar het verhaal achter het huidige onbehagen met de moderniteit. Hij sprak twee jaar lang met zeventien internationaal bekende denkers en wetenschappers over kwesties die het hedendaagse debat bepalen, om greep te krijgen op deze verwarrende tijd. Over een breed gevoelde gewaarwording dat er de afgelopen decennia verkeerde afslagen zijn genomen, dat beproefde recepten niet langer voldoen, een belofte niet is ingelost. Traditionele verhalen voldoen niet langer. Vanuit een persoonlijke nieuwsgierigheid is hij op zoek naar resonantie voor hem en de lezer, een betekenisvolle uitwisseling van gedachten, zodat een noodzakelijke bewustzijnsverandering kan plaatsvinden, waardoor men anders kan gaan handelen.

In het interview met wetenschapshistoricus Lorraine Daston is het onderwerp de groeiende argwaan jegens de wetenschap en het recht op een eigen waarheid. Hebben we meer feiten nodig? Een van haar academische studies gaat over hoe ons begrip van objectiviteit zich door de eeuwen heen heeft ontwikkeld. Voor haar betekent objectiviteit dat je kiest voor de meest mechanische methode, die het mogelijk maakt om kennis te toetsen, juist omdat je je eigen oordeel niet vertrouwt. 'Dat is precies tegenovergesteld aan de gedachte dat iedereen er zijn eigen waarheid op na mag houden, omdat de waarheid nu eenmaal niet bestaat.' In haar essay *Against nature* probeert ze een verklaring te vinden waarom wij een bevestiging zoeken van onze morele of religieuze overtuigingen in de natuur. Natuur is overal om ons heen, het is rijk aan levensvormen, waarin je je eigen morele oordelen in kunt spiegelen, en de natuur is onveranderlijk. Natuur wordt gebuikt om morele normen te legitimeren, zoals wanneer het over ras gaat. Of de natuurlijke verschillen tussen man en vrouw. 'Wanneer je niet langer politieke excuses hebt om iets tegen te houden, omdat de ideologie van gelijkheid uitgaat, wordt een beroep op natuurlijke verschillen gedaan.', aldus Daston. We moeten streven naar vergroting van eigen perspectief.

De teleurgestelde liberaal en historicus David Wootton gebruikt de geschiedenis om iets te zeggen over het heden. 'Veel van waar wij tegenwoordig mee worstelen, gaat terug op het mensbeeld waar de Verlichting ons mee heeft geïmpregneerd.' Het verlichtingsdenken heeft ons vooruitgebracht, maar zit ons nu dwars, met name door de gedachte dat groeiende welvaart ons ook gelukkiger

maakt, een menselijk streven zonder einde. Er ligt geen moraal aan ten grondslag en uiteindelijk leidt dat tot het verdedigen van een commerciële consumptiemaatschappij waar het gemis wordt gevoeld van gedeelde waarden, dat leidt tot de huidige onvrede en een felle reactie tegen het liberalisme. 'We hebben het gevoel van betekenis en waarden verloren, we hebben in de maatschappij onze relaties tot een reeks berekeningen teruggebracht. ... Alles wordt instrumenteel gemaakt.' Maar we zijn geen rationeel calculerende wezens. We moeten ons goed realiseren dat mensen geborgenheid nodig hebben en als je daar niet voor zorgt ontstaan fascistoïde reacties.

Journalist, onderzoeker en auteur Peter Pomerantsev van *Dit is geen propaganda. De oorlog tegen de waarheid* constateert dat hedendaagse propaganda geen poging meer is om ideologisch te domineren, maar als doel heeft mensen verder uiteen te drijven. Hoe kun je het ideaal van een gedeelde, publieke zaak herstellen in een wereld waar digitale desinformatie wordt ingezet om opponenten en critici in diskrediet te brengen en conflicten aan te jagen? Een veelheid van informatiekkanalen drijven mensen uiteen en fragmenteert de publieke ruimte met als resultaat een agressieve polarisatie, verwarring en onzekerheid. En dan ontstaat de behoefte aan een sterke man. Het idee van objectiviteit is niet langer geloofwaardig. Er is gebrek aan een toekomstgericht vergezicht mede veroorzaakt door de groeiende feiten vrijheid. Als je nu succes willen hebben al politicus moet je er meer dan een ideologie op na houden, tegenstrijdige dingen beweren, waardoor veel verschillende mensen zich herkend voelen. Hij pleit voor herstel van de publieke ruimten en een debat dat op argumenten wordt gevoerd.

Politicoloog David Runciman en auteur van *How Democracy ends* is weinig optimistisch over de veerkracht van de democratie.

'Ik geloof nog altijd dat juist het vermogen om je door een crisis heen te rommelen de grote kracht van de democratie is. ...Maar het probleem is dat burgers nooit een groots moment van de waarheid zullen beleven waarin alles helder wordt, wie het verkeerd had, wie schuld heeft. Kijk naar de bankencrisis van 2008.' De stabiele wereld bestaat niet meer, men wil een politiek die recht doet aan dat gevoel van gekwetstheid. Maar niemand deugt, iedereen is verdacht. En iedereen noemt zich democraat, hetgeen de bitterheid alleen maar groter maakt. Het is niet meer een strijd tussen ideologieën, maar een strijd om de betekenis van woorden op persoonlijke gronden, een uit de hand gelopen



familieruzie. Mensen hebben het gevoel dat de democratie hun van hun waardigheid berooft en ook de problemen niet oplost. Vandaar de hang naar autoritaire leiders.

Er moet een nieuwe politiek worden uitgevonden die er niet van uitgaat dat de oplossing ligt in het samenbrengen van jong en oud, van hoog- en laagopgeleiden, stads- en plattelandsbewoners, want dat gaan we niet meer beleven, aldus Runcicam.



*Bas Heijne - Leugen en  
waarheid. Prometheus  
2021 - ISBN  
9789044644241*

Socioloog en filosoof Hartmut Rosa ziet de coronapandemie als symbolisch voor ons laatmoderne levensgevoel. Er voelt iets helemaal niet goed, maar we kunnen er onze vinger niet op leggen. Zijn kritiek op de neoliberale orde richt zich niet in de eerste plaats op de groeiende ongelijkheid, maar op de frustratie en woede van het nooit-genoege. We krijgen nooit wat we verlangen. Je regelt zelf alles wat je wil, autonoom en vrij, maar we blijken machteloos te staan tegenover sociale ongelijkheid, klimaatverandering e.d. We missen resonantie in onze relatie met de natuur, de geschiedenis, met andere mensen en ook in die met onszelf, ons lichaam, aldus Rosa. We moeten streven naar resonantie in onze relatie met de wereld om ons heen, in levendig contact staat met iets buiten jezelf, en dat kan risicovol zijn omdat je je openstelt voor iets wat je niet kunt beheersen. Je moet kwetsbaar durven zijn. We zijn verslaafd geraakt aan parametrische

optimalisering.

Met wetenschapsjournalist Angela Saini en socioloog Nathalie Heinrich gaat Heine in gesprek over identiteit. Angela Saini, auteur van *Superieur* constateert dat pogingen om bewijs voor raciale verschillen te vinden de laatste jaren in de wetenschap aan kracht hebben gewonnen en dus niet alleen bij hooligans. Als oorzaak ziet zij een diepe, existentiële angst, de angst om een minderheid te worden dat gepaard gaat met verlies. '... als nationaliteit louter een kwestie zou zijn van een paspoort, dan kan in principe iedereen erbij horen, zolang je aan een aantal praktische voorwaarden voldoet. Maar als kleur, ras en etniciteit een rol spelen, dan is dat niet langer het geval. Dat is waarom er in bepaalde kringen zo gretig aanspraak gemaakt wordt op biologische argumenten.' Dan gaat het niet om burgerschap maar om biologische verschillen.

(zie <http://rozenbergquarterly.com/Angela+Saini>)

Nathalie Heinrich, auteur van *Wat onze identiteit niet is* definieert identiteit als volgt. Identiteit bestaat uit hoe je jezelf ziet, hoe je jezelf naar buiten presenteert en hoe je van buitenaf wordt gezien, aldus Heinrich. Identiteit is voortdurend in beweging, open en veel hangt af van de context. Identiteit wordt steeds meer gezien als assimilatie met een groep, aldus Heinrich, je bent deel van een collectief, in plaats van een individu. Er is sprake van een crisis wat identiteit betreft, mede veroorzaakt door de constante vergelijking van jezelf met anderen, o.a. via sociale media. Maar ook voldoen oude verhalen niet meer en dat voelt alsof je je identiteit kwijtraakt.

Na zeventien indrukwekkende interviews kunnen we constateren dat de resonantie is verloren gegaan door de moderniteit met het verlangen naar beheersing, dominantie en controle. De wereld blijkt niet beheersbaar te zijn, ondanks alle techniek. Er is geen gedeelde waarheid meer, als de verhalen je uitsluiten creëer je je eigen waarheid en verhalen. Er is wantrouwen en een afkeer ontstaan van de politiek. De politicus biedt weinig toekomstvisies en bevlogenheid.

We moeten met een nieuw verhaal komen voor een goede maatschappij, waarbij mensen worden betrokken. De politiek moet meebewegen met de maatschappij en niet alleen reageren op de maatschappelijke kwesties.

We moeten voorwaarden voor het geluk organiseren, niet via meetbare zaken, die echte resonantie hinderen. We moeten echte resonantie aangaan, niet gefixeerd op economische groei, maar op gelukkig zijn.

Zie ook:

*Linda Bouws - St. Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten*