

Empire Declining? Richard Wolff on Capitalism, AI & Worker Power

May Day Special with Richard Wolff In this wide-ranging conversation, renowned economist Richard D. Wolff breaks down the growing divide between elite politics and working-class realities. Why are issues like student debt, rent control, minimum wages, and redistribution sidelined — even when they affect millions? And what does it take to organize when money dominates politics? We also explore the role of AI, the internet, and digital platforms in shaping the future of labor movements — will they empower workers or deepen inequality? Finally, Wolff lays out a bold vision for a working-class political economy in a world where U.S. global dominance is increasingly contested. Topics Covered: The crisis of representation in modern politics Organizing under money-driven systems Student debt, wages, and housing struggles AI, automation & working-class futures Capitalism, empire, and global shifts This May Day, what does working-class politics really mean? #MayDay #RichardWolff #WorkingClass #LaborPolitics #Capitalism #AI #StudentDebt #MinimumWage #RentControl #PoliticalEconomy

#Mudiar

Hello and welcome to another episode of India and Global Left. If you are new to the show, please hit that subscribe button. Also consider becoming a YouTube member, a patron, or donating a small amount using the link in the description box. Without further ado, let me welcome our guest tonight, Professor Richard Wolff. Professor Wolff is an American economist and critic of capitalism. Professor Wolff, welcome back to India and Global Left.

#Guest

Very glad to be here, and thank you for inviting me.

#Mudiar

I just asked you right before this about how you've been, and you said that you have never seen a greater distance between the people and, let's say, the ruling class in the United States. If you could tell our viewers a little bit more about what that means.

#Guest

Okay, I think what we have here in the United States now is a government that has been reduced to about a quarter, maybe 20% of the population that still supports this government. And let me tell you what that means. Since the inauguration of Donald Trump in his second presidency, that is, in

January of 2025, you have seen a decline in his popularity, in the support for him, in public polling, literally without interruption. It's a line that keeps going down. He got elected basically with a third, maybe a little bit more, of the vote and the support of the population, and he has lost maybe half of that, somewhere in that range.

How is that possible? Well, here is what the causes are, and here are the people that are leaving him. Within his own support, he has lost a significant number of his supporters because of the war — the war in this case against Iran — in which the United States, partnering with Israel, and I'm going to come back to that because that's important, attacked, as you all know, Iran about 50 days ago. This war, unlike previous wars of the United States, such as the war in Vietnam, the war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, and so on, was opposed by a majority of the American people, again, according to Gallup and other polling, from the beginning.

In those earlier wars, Americans had supported the war out of a kind of automatic patriotism, you might say, but then in the months and then the years of the war, the support eroded. Not this time. This time, a majority of Americans polled from the first days of the war were against this war. And Mr. Trump, having run for office against the, quote, "endless wars," end quote, of the United States, was here seen by his supporters as having betrayed their hopes. Not only did he not end the war in Ukraine, but he started—aggressively started—a war in Iran.

A war, by the way, which is called in American media a war of choice, since even here in the United States, a very small number of people believe that Iran represented any threat to the United States whatsoever. In fact, the only people who talk about the Iranian threat are Trump, Secretary of War Hegseth, people like that who are trying to find some justification. They try that, for example, that the Iranians have a nuclear weapon, which they don't, or that they were working to get one, which there's no evidence they were, etc. But to say it over and over again in the hopes of thereby providing a rationale or a justification—it's not working. The interesting thing about it is, it is not working.

The disaffection of the American people is expressing itself in a majority view against this war, which is why Trump doesn't know quite what to do. Second point goes back now to Israel. Probably the strongest single lobbying group in the United States, working in Congress all the time, working in many of the states all the time, pressuring legislators, giving large sums of money to this candidate against that candidate, is something called AIPAC, and that is a lobbying group that supports Israel and is led by people who want the United States to protect, to fund, to militarily give weapons to Israel. Now, they used to have a clear majority American perspective, pro-Israel. They were very successful for many decades, at least the last 40, 50 years.

In recent years, and particularly this last year and a half, because of Israel's behavior in Gaza, and now in addition Israel's behavior in Lebanon and Israel's partnership with the United States against Iran, for the first time, majority opinion has shifted inside the United States. The sympathy for Palestinians is now greater than the support for Israel. It's very close still, but the movement is away

from support of Israel and more and more sympathy with Palestine, and opposition particularly to the Netanyahu government in Israel. So to give you an example, I am sitting here in New York City, the largest city of the United States, where we have a new mayor who was just elected a few months ago named Zohran Mamdani. And why is this interesting? Because Zohran Mamdani, elected mayor, is a Muslim and a socialist.

And it used to be in American politics that either one of those would be enough to make it impossible for you to win an election. The idea that a man could win an election who is both a Muslim, a practicing Muslim, and a socialist in the city of New York is unthinkable. And one of the larger ethnic groups of voters in New York City, maybe the second or third largest, are the Jewish people here, and a majority of them voted for Mamdani. And Mamdani, during his campaign, said publicly that if Netanyahu visits New York, Mamdani will have him arrested. So it's a remarkable development here. The second reason that there is enormous disaffection has to do with the American economy. And the best way I can describe that to you is to say that the majority of Americans, and I'm talking here about 70 to 80 percent, are experiencing significant economic difficulty. They are unable to maintain their standard of living.

Each week, each month, it becomes either more expensive to buy things in the store, or the job you have is becoming insecure, or the income from your job is dropping. There are too many economic problems that are not only not being solved, but the situation gets worse. And Mr. Trump promised in his election that he would directly improve it, and he hasn't done so. At the same time, I should tell you, because it's part of the economic problem, that the disparity between rich and poor has also grown because of the problems of 70–80% of the people losing their economic security, their economic situation. For the rich, for the top 10%, it has been a good time.

The government is pushing money into the economy, and that money is not going to the mass of people; it's going into the stock market, where it fuels an inflation—by which I mean a rising stock market. If you own shares of stock, this looks very good to you. And so you have the top 10% of the people, the rich people, the employer class, those who own the mass media, the newspapers and television and all of that—for them, they look at their stock portfolio, the economy is doing great. For the mass of people, it isn't doing great at all. And so you have a deepening of the inequality and a corresponding growth of bitterness and anger and harshness in American politics, which is the immediate reflex of growing inequality, when this violates all of the promises and all of the commitments that this government made.

And so you have, even among their supporters, people who used to be enthusiastic endorsers of Trump turning against him, denouncing him, expressing publicly regret for having supported him. Tucker Carlson, if that name means anything to you, Marjorie Taylor Greene, a member of Congress here, who quit and turned against the president whom she had supported for the previous many years. And we still have, overhanging all of this, an immense sex scandal around Jeffrey Epstein, and that doesn't go away and sits there as a continuous moral collapse of this government. So it is an extraordinary time.

The Democratic Party, which has not made much of an opposition, clearly has a strategy of letting Mr. Trump destroy himself politically, and they all hope that in the elections coming this November, in a few months, there will be a swing of the voters from Republican to Democrat, which is likely to happen but may not get the result the Democratic Party wants, because the Republicans are using, how shall I put it, semi-legal mechanisms to redesign the voting districts so they can get more seats in the parliament. In terms of a democracy, we have not got that here. We haven't had it for a while, other than in the form. The reality has been money and power dominate. And what you see Mr. Trump doing around the world, he's doing domestically also, and it is isolating him so that the only way he can stay in power now is by being more and more dictatorial, because he can't stay in power based on anything else.

#Mudiar

Yeah, talking about this gulf between the ruling elites and working people, I just came back from a small gathering, mostly of activists, around the theme of Labor Day, because, as you know and others do, today is International Workers' Day, celebrated much more in China and large parts of India than probably in the United States, even though the beginning was the 1886 Haymarket Affair in Chicago, where workers were protesting for a maximum eight-hour workday. But yeah, I was invited there to speak a little bit about the history of the labor movement. I did talk a little bit about the history of labor movements across the world, but what I was thinking more, or what I tried to discuss more there, was precisely the gulf between working-class issues and high politics.

So we are in my home province of Assam, but there are other provinces as well where, two days later, we would have election results where, if you go by opinion polls, the BJP, the far-right party in India, would be doing extremely well. And this comes at a time when every piece of indicator about working-class conditions points in a different direction. I mean, I am also part of a very small bakery where my business partners asked me to recruit people, and there was one job post we made recently. It's a very, very low-paid job, unfortunately—barely above the federal minimum wage, which you know from your own experience is largely inadequate everywhere. And there were more than 350 calls for that single job in a very, very local small bakery.

I mean, that talks about the levels of underemployment and unemployment in India, but it does reflect something very global. So my question to you, Professor Wolff, is: what do we do at a time when money dominates politics, as you said, to raise these issues—issues around insurance, student debt, federal minimum wage, stronger worker protection, rent control, redistributive taxes, et cetera—that were there in the U.S.? We saw that during the Sanders campaign. How do we take these issues and make them very central to our political life at a time when money dominates our politics? And as a result, you get issues like hypernationalism, scapegoating China or scapegoating others. In India's case, you can scapegoat Muslims or Bangladeshis. I mean, these are common themes across the world. So on this Labor Day, what comes to your mind when it comes to labor politics?

#Guest

Well, I think the similarities are striking. I would argue that here in the United States, we are experiencing a resurgence of what's broadly defined as the left. In other words, it's not just New York City that voted for a mayor who calls himself a socialist. This is happening in more and more communities across the United States. It is a phenomenon. It looks right now as though the governor of the state of Maine will likely be somebody who is, if not calling himself a socialist, basically making the kinds of arguments that I'm about to give you as the ones that work in this society. And here they are. And if they sound to you like traditional arguments, let me begin by saying they are traditional—but the tradition of what the left is, is what was lost in this country.

Neither the Republican Party nor the Democratic Party dares—and this has been true for decades—to articulate the traditional socialist kind of argument. So for millions of Americans, when they hear the socialist argument that you and I know from our lives and our activities, it is in fact very new, very exciting, very original, very provocative, because it has been excluded from the public discourse. And now let me give you some examples. Mayor Mamdani here in New York has decided to do the following: to provide free public childcare for infants as young as, I think, two years of age and up. The city will initially, for all public employees, provide quality, safe daycare so that parents have a reliable, safe place for their children during the working day.

Okay, that's a traditional public service program, which we don't have in New York, so it's not—no one has done that. He's doing it, and it's going to be free. Well, then how is it going to be paid for? His proposal is to tax people who have more than one residence. If you own an apartment here in New York City, which many rich people do, where they only visit from time to time—mostly it sits empty and becomes a kind of investment for the future—that will now be taxed. There will be a special tax on what is called a *pied-à-terre*. It's a French phrase for having a place in the city that you go to. Rich people are screaming against this. They are threatening to sell the apartment, to leave New York City.

The threats are empty because there's no other city like New York. The reason they have an apartment in New York is because the theater is here, and the opera is here, and the movies are here, and the restaurants are here, and everything that they want to spend their money on is concentrated here. But it is very symbolic that this is enormously popular. It's popular to provide the daycare. It's popular to tax the rich to pay for it. And what I'm saying to you is what we need, and what the socialists among us ought to be doing is going out there and having the courage to say this, not to be afraid, not to accept the advice that you mustn't do that.

You can talk about ecology, or you can talk about foreign affairs, but you can't confront inequality and the class divisions. Right now, you will not be successful unless you rediscover the traditional socialist arguments, because you will discover that they are very powerful. That doesn't mean mimicry. Sure, you can adjust to the current situations that have some differences, of course. But

here in the United States, what's being learned is that re-establishing the old socialist kinds of programs that have a long history in the United States are the keys to being successful right now. The conditions are such that masses of people, working-class people, are now so alienated from Republicans and Democrats that they are open.

There are polls showing that even after all that has happened, the single most popular political figure in this country remains Bernie Sanders. And he was the one who brought back the old, quite moderate socialist programs. That's the first thing. The second thing is, we are experiencing a resurgence of our labor movement. After 50 years of decline, which has been staggeringly bad—50 years of declining union membership, union militancy, and all that—we are now seeing the curve turn up. Conditions are so bad, and the failure of the government to do anything is leading workers to see in the union a way forward if the union fights. And so I think you're beginning to see here in the United States what I didn't think I would live to see, which is a return of a real left here.

#Mudiar

Talking about the traditions and how we should learn from them in terms of articulating our own working-class politics, I wanted to ask you a little bit about the internet broadly, but also AI in its more specific forms. The New York Times recently reported that Amazon, the second-largest employer in the United States, laid off 16,000 workers. And some reports are that they are trying to accelerate research and investments in AI, mostly building data centers so that they can fire up to millions of workers. And, of course, that is hiking corporate profits, as you said earlier. I mean, Bloomberg says that this week has been a rally for the stock market, and the main explanation they give is high corporate profits.

Of course, Chevron, ExxonMobil, and others are the usual suspects during this time of war, with their corporate profits going up this month or a half. So my question to you is, how do workers fight in the age of AI, and more broadly in the age of the Internet, where the Internet itself has created a sense of alienation in terms of neighborhood politics and local cultures where working-class politics get articulated, as you were suggesting? There is a tendency among many, not all, to exclude those traditional spaces and instead be captured into the space of the Internet and social media. And I'm not trying to say that everything is bad within social media or the Internet, but I'm taking that as an objective reality that we are facing. How does that interact with the kind of revival or renewal of the traditional leftist politics that you referred to earlier?

#Guest

Well, I think what we have here is a need to separate a certain exaggeration, a certain over-excitement about the latest technical breakthrough. That has happened with everyone — with the steam engine, with electricity, with modern chemistry, with the development of the computer, with atomic energy. There is a lively debate. Let me begin with this: there's a lively debate in the financial press of the United States right now, participated in by the Financial Times, by The Economist

magazine, by The Wall Street Journal, publications like that, and many, many podcasters and so forth. And here's the debate: will AI live up to the exaggerated publicity it has received?

And the important thing at this point is to make it clear that the debate shows that we don't know the answer to that question. For every article that affirms it will replace millions of workers and blah, blah, blah, there's an article that says, we thought so, but in this industry or that industry, we have been buying AI, but it does, you know, we laid off 10,000 workers, we've now rehired 5,000 of them because we can't—the AI raises new sets of problems. I don't find that surprising. I think that has happened each time. You know, in this century, the 21st century begins in the year 2000 with a major crash on Wall Street. The spring of the year 2000 is a collapse of Wall Street and the stock market. It's called the dot-com crisis. Why?

Because the idea was the development of the Internet and all of the computers and Internet would replace millions of workers, and it would, and it would, and it was going to be so profitable that you had companies selling their shares for \$100 a share. These were companies that had never made a profit, that were predicting they would make a profit two or four or six or nine years from now. And there was excitement, and then it crashed. There are many people on Wall Street that I know, and I'm sitting here not very far from Wall Street. You can walk there from where I'm sitting. There are many people who are very worried that we're going to have another crash, which will be called the AI crash, in the same way that we had the dot-com crash in the year 2000. So that's the first thing.

Second, it is quite possible that for all kinds of reasons, Amazon and many others, Apple and others, may be firing tens or twenty thousands of people for all kinds of reasons that they don't want to explain to us. So, if you're now a public relations department of a large corporation and you're firing people for all kinds of reasons, you have an excuse that you're going to use which is acceptable: we are installing AI, we are making a technical improvement in progress. So there's this tendency to exploit the opportunity that AI gives you to make it appear that the advance of technology is what is losing people their jobs rather than corporations making different kinds of decisions on their own.

Very bad, because what it does is deflect the working class away from its relationship to the job, and instead make it think that it is the plaything of a technology that is a little bit like nature, you know. So that's an important ideological point. Number three, let's assume that it's at least partly or completely true that AI will replace workers. It is a wonderful lesson to be taught to our people, the left wing, the working class that we want to reach, that AI is not the problem. It's how AI is installed in capitalism that's the problem. And the way you do this is a little economics lesson. I'm going to do it now.

It's very simple, but it is something that could and should be used by activists everywhere. When a capitalist buys AI, the hope of the capitalist is to use the AI instead of a worker. So let's assume, just for the moment, that AI makes workers twice as productive as they were before. Before AI, you needed 100 workers in your bakery. Now, with AI, you can get the same amount of bread produced with 50 workers, because you have 50 with a... So what does the capitalist do? He fires 50 of his

workers. With the remaining 50, to whom he pays the same wage as he always did, he will now get the same amount of bread. And he will sell it. And let's assume the price is the same, so he gets the same revenue.

Same revenue, same amount of bread produced, half the workers. Why is this exciting? Because he can take the part of the revenue that he used to give to the 50 workers and keep it for himself because he fired them. And so he experiences a dramatic increase in his profits. So he installs the technology to gain himself. He wins an extra profit, and 50 workers lose their jobs. Good for him, horrible for the workers, and horrible for the local businesses who depend on those 50 workers. You know, the local food dispenser, the local... everybody suffers. The capitalist gets more profit. Now, let's give the alternative: socialism. Suppose the workers collectively owned and operated this enterprise.

So it's not a capitalist enterprise. The workers democratically vote on what to produce, how to produce, where to produce, and what to do with the profit. What would they do with AI? Here we go. Would they buy the AI? Yes. Would they install the AI? Yes. Would they use it to make each worker twice as productive as they were before? Yes. Well, then what would they do differently? Here it comes. They would fire nobody. Everybody keeps their job, but the working day goes from eight hours to four hours. Why? Because in four hours, the workers can produce as much bread as they used to require eight hours to do, because AI enables them to do that.

Well, what you've done here is shown that socialism could use AI to transform the lives of the majority—the workers, 50 people whose lives would be transformed because four hours every day they could do another job, they could spend time with their family, they could improve their home, they could be active politically, their lives would be better. You would have used AI to improve the lives of everybody, not just the profit of the capitalist. This is one of the most powerful lessons you can give, and this can be explained to every worker, and it would teach that worker the practical, immediate benefits of a socialist alternative to capitalism. And that's our job. And the AI revolution allows us to do that. These are the ways I would criticize it. I would talk about the bubble, I would talk about the insane profits that are being earned here at the expense of jobs.

I should tell you about jobs, just a footnote. I have students. I still teach at the university, so I have students. And my students now cannot find the kinds of jobs that I had when I was a young man. My students are talking about driving an Uber car, making a living basically being a taxi driver. You know, they have a PhD in economics. It wouldn't normally be necessary to do that. But they can't get jobs. We have closed several hundred colleges and universities in the United States over recent years. And the reality is the jobs aren't there. And so it's very important to understand that making a socialist lesson out of AI is exactly what we need. We need to take the realities of capitalism and use them as arguments for a better alternative.

#Mudiar

I agree. For that, we need a more powerful labor movement, because unless we have that, it's impossible for worker collectives to take control of that bakery. It would be a couple of people who had invested, and they would either borrow from the market, or if it's bootstrapped, they would put in their own money. But ultimately, the decision-making would be under the control of those couple of people, and the workers wouldn't be able to not fire those 50 people. And what you suggested, I think, makes a stronger case for worker consciousness about socialism.

#Guest

I would also argue that history is going to force this issue. And let me explain what I mean. If the existing working class is becoming more and more upset about capitalism's unequal reward for capitalists and investors on the one hand versus the mass of people on the other, they will turn first to the labor unions, because that's what history gives us — the labor movement, the labor unions. But if the labor unions are unable or unwilling to step up and take the leadership, well, then the working class is going to look to other solutions. And one of the solutions they're going to look at is worker cooperatives. In other words, here's the slogan: if the union cannot or will not do for the workers what they need, then the union is no longer the institution that the workers should support.

What should they do? They should mobilize to take over the enterprise. Instead of having a union to bargain with the employer, you become the employer yourself. Now, how would you do that? Well, let me give you an example from the British Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn. Not the current one — that's useless. The current one, beyond words, is horrible. But Mr. Corbyn said, here's what we'll do: the first bill we'll pass if we win the elections in Britain will be a bill that says before any company can go public with a stock offering, or leave the country, or close, or sell itself to another company — before it can do any of those things — it must give the right of first refusal to the workers.

In other words, it must offer its own workers the opportunity to take the enterprise. And when the press, listening to Corbyn and his assistant John McDonnell, explained this, they said, "But yes, but where will the workers get the money to buy the enterprise?" And Corbyn smiled and said, "From the government. We will give them very cheap loans so they can do it. And we're going to create... And now we will have an economy that has a capitalist sector and a socialist sector. And in the socialist sector, workers will be owning and operating their own enterprises, and now we are going to see a competition, and everybody's going to decide where to buy and where to work."

What this is, is an alternative strategy. And I'm not talking about it as a choice, like going into a restaurant and deciding what you're going to order to eat. It's history that's going to make that decision. The unions are going to go, and this is already happening here — the unions are going to become objects of enormous pressure from below. You either deliver to us a better contract with this employer, or we are going to go the other, the co-op route. And then the union — it's not so clear what the role of the union is. And this danger is going to move those unions, in many cases, to begin to be as militant as their members already are.

#Mudiar

Maybe a good way to end this conversation is to discuss a little bit about the broader economic system and put that in perspective of what we have discussed through the lens of workers' rights, workers' freedom. And the question I wanted to ask you is, so what kind of an economic system, if you could, can you envisage in the coming future? And I'm asking this in the context of the discussions we are having on the left about the decline of U.S. imperialism or empire, the decline of U.S.-led capitalism, the rise of BRICS and a new world order, whether political or economic, a crisis within fossil capitalism as the war and the blockade have led to a rush for the search for renewable energy across the world as a way out of the precarities of the choke points, and it goes on and on and on, the tremendous crisis within finance capitalism, and it never ends.

So from the perspective of what you just said, what kind of a vision of the larger political economy strikes your mind? I'm asking this because if we were to go back 100 years ago, the communist parties across the world put forth a vision. I'm not suggesting that it was the same everywhere, but you could definitely point to five or six large issues: end of landlordism, seizing of means of production, true nationalizations of major means of production, a worker-led party at the center which would be tilted towards the public sector and not be biased in favor of big capitalists. I mean, we can map that out in terms of what was the vision 100 years ago. So at this point, where we can see opportunities opening up as empires — capitalist or militaristic, imperialistic — are declining, what is that broad vision of the larger political economy from the perspective of workers, the working class?

#Guest

Well, the way I would answer it is, I would go back to, in a way, the philosophic origins of socialism. You might want to ask yourself the question, why did the struggle between the capitalist economic system, which is just a particular way of organizing the production and distribution of goods and services—capitalism is different from feudalism. In feudalism, lords and serfs did this. In a slave system, masters and slaves did this. In ancient village economies, various forms of village community organized these things. So why, if it's a particular economic system, did it get the name socialism for the future? Because that's a very vague term. And indeed, it is contrasted—usually socialism is contrasted—with individualism.

In one case, you sort of make the individual primary, and society is something individuals produce or create, versus socialism, which tends to emphasize the other way around—that societies shape and create the individuals born, literally born, into them. Well, I think it's because in the origins of socialism there was an insight that is now more pertinent than it's ever been. And that is that sooner or later, if what you're trying to do is talk about an economic system that serves a community, a

society, then it ought to be a social construction. It ought to be that we together, as a society, create an economic system that serves our needs. But we've never done that. Or let me put it differently: the closest we come is the ancient communities in Southeast Asia, like everywhere else.

That what happened to them was they broke apart the community into master-slave, lord-serf, employer-employee. And that what we really want is to break that from the tradition of allowing a small minority to control and shape the economic system that serves everybody. The whole society depends on producing and distributing goods and services. Otherwise, we starve to death, or we don't have clothing, or we don't have shelter. But why do we allow a small group of masters to preside over a slavery that we all depend on? Or a small group of lords to preside over a feudalism that we all depend on? Or, here we go now, a small group of employers to preside over a capitalist system that we all depend on? I remind people all the time, the United States Census tells us that of the American people, 330 million Americans, 3% are employers. The other 97% are not.

#Guest

And yet the employers make the decision—what gets produced, how it gets produced, where it gets produced, and how it gets distributed. What socialism is, first and foremost, is the insistence that what the society has as an economic system has to be socially constructed, socially determined. Everybody has to have their power to participate in deciding what to produce, how to produce, where to produce, and how to distribute what you've produced. Capitalism can't do that. Capitalism, structurally—this has nothing to do with a good capitalist or a bad one—capitalism structurally excludes the employee from making those decisions. Those are given to the employer, and that's what we have to teach.

We have to teach people we are finishing a historical process. You know, you might wonder, why did Marxists refer to the economic system before slavery that Marx talked about as including something he called primitive communism? Because there was something way back then in many of those village economies that was close to a social arrangement, a society that made certain collective decisions. And there's something there in the ancient human experience that can be recovered in a modern situation, that can pinpoint what's wrong with capitalism, what's inadequate about capitalism, and it's key in that word socialism.

We want an economic system that democratizes the economy, that makes it clear that democracy doesn't just mean a political decision about your political system, assuming that you have that. Democracy doesn't stop at a border called the enterprise. Democracy has to be in the enterprise as well as around it; otherwise, you don't have democracy. And one of the reasons that the democracies we have are so formal and so unreal is because they are not embedded in an economic system. And I think that is a very powerful message that working-class people will respond to if we have the courage to make that clear as part of our activism.

#Mudiar

Just a quick follow-up, and it could be as short as you can, because I know we are just about to hit the one-hour mark. I was just thinking as you were speaking, and I was listening very carefully and with enormous interest and excitement to some extent. What kinds of spaces of organizing people or the working class come to your mind? Of course, on our show with you, you once spoke about cultural spaces in Manhattan, and this was in the context of Zohran Mamdani winning the election, and you spoke about how those spaces could be galvanized. I've been thinking about the parties and their decline as neoliberalism, neoliberal authoritarianism, dismantled center-left parties across the world, from the Labour Party, Blair onwards, to Clinton onwards.

And I'm not romanticizing the Labour Party. I come from the Global South. Who knows what the Labour Party's history has been, how complicit they have been with the imperial apparatus. But something did change in those years following the 90s and early 2000s, even within those centrist parties. So even for the US, the Democratic Party under Clinton underwent massive transformation, which could be distinguished from Lyndon Johnson or Kennedy. So as hedge fund managers and the financial class took more power, there was a shift of the party, effectively making the working class party-less. And then the rise of the Internet, in my assessment, has greatly atomized the youth.

And even in terms of—one final note—you are right that the lack of, or the unpopularity of, this war has been unprecedented in U.S. history, particularly when you add the fact that right from the get-go it has been unpopular, which distinguishes it from the Iraq War or the Vietnam War. The Vietnam case took years, in fact decades, before mass protests erupted. But we haven't seen as many street protests. I mean, even when you compare that to 2003, large parts of the disaffection have come through the Internet and social media. So as leftist forces try to organize people into the kind of things or around issues that you just spoke about, what kind of spaces come to your mind that could be potential places for organizing people?

#Guest

Well, I think in a way the answer to your question is embedded in your question. Here's what I mean. I am a Marxist, but I also have learned a great deal from Marx's teacher, Hegel. And I look at everything in terms of the contradictions within it—the lesson of Hegel and how to think about the world. So for me, what I see is the Internet allowing a level and an intensity of political discussion and information and education that was not possible before, that went much slower before. I mean, even this conversation—you know, I'm in New York City, you are in South Asia—I mean, this is fantastic that we can talk in this way, as we have in earlier discussions and as I hope we will in the future. We are exchanging opinions. We are learning about each other. We could do much more. We should do much more.

But this is helping to develop very serious understanding. I've lived my whole life in the United States. I was born in Ohio. I lived and worked in the United States. The openness now to Marxian thinking is greater than it has ever been in my lifetime. What is that? How do you account for it?

Why is it possible? I have a radio and television program I do every week, half an hour. It goes all over the United States and globally through YouTube. So what's going on here? How is it possible that I can do that, that there's an audience big enough to sustain this? It's because these lessons are being learned. Now, you're right. They have not yet translated into a number of forms we would like to see—mass street demonstrations, powerful political parties. But let me tell you, they are emerging.

For example, what's called the Democratic Socialists of America, and it's a very moderate socialism. Its membership is part of that, okay? That's now got 100,000 people across the United States. That's a more powerful socialist organization than we have had in over half a century, and that's a product of the last five, ten years. That's all. And it's beginning, and it's building, and we're having new labor movements. We're having the passing of the Cold War generation of labor leaders, and a whole new generation that's much more open to the left than the last one was. The last ones were leaders who were caught up in the Cold War and were not open to the left for fear that the government would come down and destroy them. All of that is now changing. And I think that we're going to be surprised.

And let me close with a quote from a famous political leader who was approached by his colleagues, who said to him, "My God, it's taking so long, it's going so slowly. For decades, nothing happens." And he turned to them and smiled at them. He said, "This is the way it works. For decades, nothing seems to happen, and then, in a few weeks, decades happen." I think, obviously, I'm wishing for this to be true, and I have no guarantees. I think that's what's going on. Every experience I have, moving around, talking, gives me that sense. And you're not going to be able to stop this generation. They are very different. They are very determined. And the interest in socialism goes up the younger you get. The people now in their 20s are the strongest supporters for all of this. And I think that's a sign of where things are going.

#Mudiar

We'll leave it there, and I think it's a great point to end on — a May Day, a Labor Day, with the spirit of the Russian Revolution. Yeah, and thank you so much, Professor, for joining and for this insightful and wonderful discussion. Have a wonderful rest of the day ahead.

#Guest

You too, and to all the people listening, we are in May Day solidarity.

#Ayushman

Hi, my name is Ayushman. I, along with Jyotishman, have started this platform. Over the last two years, we have tried to build content for the left and progressive forces. We have interviewed economists, historians, political commentators, and activists so far. If you have liked our content and

want us to build an archive for the left, I have two requests for you. Please do consider donating for the cause — the link is in the description below. Also, if you are not able to do so, don't feel sad. You can always like our videos and share them with your comrades. Finally, don't forget to hit the subscribe button.