

INTERNATIONAL HYBRID SYMPOSIUM ON

# Today's Socialisms and Human Rights

Thursday, April 7, 2022 9:00-3:30

In the United States, the term “socialism” has been widely misunderstood and used to discredit even modest reforms. This symposium will explore achievements and missteps in implementing socialism in China, India, Scandinavia, and Latin America. It will weigh socialism’s value in addressing global challenges of climate change, economic inequality, and human rights abuses.

## PROGRAM

9:15 Welcoming Remarks

**9:30-11:30 Understanding Socialism: Achievements and Missteps**

**Moderator: Paul Zarembka**, Professor Emeritus of Economics, University at Buffalo

### **“Socialism in China: Past and Future”**

**Ying Chen**, Assistant Professor of Economics, New School for Social Research

Distinction between socialism in theory and in practice must be marked when discussing the concept of socialism. This talk will feature China as the main case study in discussing how socialist ideas were implemented in a specific historical context and the resulting contradictions. Additionally, after more than four decades of neoliberal dominance in the global economy, interests in socialist ideas seem to be on the rise in the world, especially among young people, including in China. In light of this recent development, this talk will offer some reflections on the possible contradictions for future socialism.

### **“Experiments with Socialism in India: Comparing Kerala and West Bengal”**

**Jayati Ghosh**, Professor of Economics, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Two states in India have had fairly prolonged rule by socialist/communist parties: West Bengal (for 35 years) and Kerala (intermittently over the past half century and currently). There are obvious difficulties in implementing socialist policies in a sub-national federal context, where most economic and political powers remain with the (typically antagonistic) central government. Nevertheless, the different experiences in the two states reveal some of the possibilities and problems of socialist strategies, which have special relevance in the 21st century. Some of the problems that emerged have much wider resonance, such as the rigidity of bureaucratic structures, lack of recognition of other forms of discrimination than those based on class, continued exploitation of nature, and reliance on the support of large capital to achieve economic development. Some experiences also point to the possibilities of creative solutions, such as the emphasis on decentralisation, new forms of promoting democratic accountability, recognition of social discrimination, etc.

**9:30-11:30 Understanding Socialism: Achievements and Missteps** *(continued)*

**“Would Democratic Socialism Be Better?”**

**Lane Kenworthy**, Professor of Sociology and Yankelovich Chair in Social Thought, University of California San Diego

The case for a modern democratic socialism is that capitalism is bad, or at least not very good, and that socialism would be an improvement. To fully and fairly assess democratic socialism's desirability, we need to compare it to the best version of capitalism that humans have devised: social democratic capitalism, or what is often called the Nordic model. I take a close look at the evidence about how capitalist economies have performed on an array of outcomes. I conclude that social democratic capitalism achieves most of what contemporary democratic socialists say we should want.

11:30-12:30 Lunch

**12:30-1:50 Socialism as a Response to Global Problems**

**Moderator: Ted Schmidt**, Professor of Economics and Finance, Buffalo State College

**“Eco-Socialism and the Green New Deal”**

**Robert Pollin**, Distinguished Professor of Economics; Co-Director, Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Advancing a global Green New Deal is the focus of my lecture. This is a realistic program for both advancing climate stabilization and egalitarianism on a global basis. It therefore is fully aligned with the main aims of eco-socialism. The program begins with phasing out, on a global scale, the consumption of fossil fuels to produce energy. It correspondingly entails creating a new clean energy infrastructure in all regions of the globe. The clean energy investments will be a large-scale source of new job opportunities, and thus of also raising job quality standards and organizing efforts. The program also includes just transition measures for the workers and communities that currently depend on the fossil fuel industry.

**"Why 21st Century Socialism will Focus on Democratizing Workplaces, not Government Economic Interventions"**

**Richard Wolff**, Visiting Professor, The New School; Professor Emeritus of Economics, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Socialism, like capitalism, constantly changes. Over the last century socialism mostly meant varying kinds and degrees of government intervention in economies ranging from regulating them (Scandinavia) to having the government replace private owners and operators of enterprises (USSR). That socialism had successes but also failures and problems. The resulting self-criticism generated a new kind of socialism that refocuses not on the government vs. private debate but rather towards a radical democratization of workplaces (factories, stores, offices). enterprise. This new socialism for the 21st century advocates transition to worker coops as the basis of economies instead of the typical capitalist hierarchy where a tiny minority number of "owners" or corporate boards of directors decided - exclusively - what, how, and where the workplace produces and what is to be done with its revenues. Then all persons engaged in the workplace will each have one vote with majority rule governing. The basic idea is that to make an economy serve all the people one needs to put the people in charge of its workplaces and processes.

## 2:00-3:20      **Socialism and Human Rights**

**Moderator:** Curtis Haynes, Associate Professor of Economics and Finance, Buffalo State College

### **Latin America’s “Left Turns”: Socialism, Democracy, and Social Citizenship Rights**

**Kenneth Roberts**, Richard J. Schwartz Professor of Government, Cornell University

The early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have seen 14 of Latin America’s 18 democracies elect a left-of-center president, many of them from parties or movements with roots in the region’s socialist tradition. This so-called “left turn” is a product of widespread social and political mobilization against the economic inequalities associated with Latin America’s free market, or “neoliberal,” economic restructuring in the 1980s and 1990s. Although it has proven to be exceedingly difficult to translate this mobilization into well-defined socialist alternatives to neoliberalism, Latin America’s leftist governments have experimented with a wide range of social reforms intended to recognize or expand social citizenship rights, going well beyond the market-based programs of the neoliberal era. These experiments shed new light on the processes by which democratic citizenship rights can be extended to new spheres of social and economic relationships in highly unequal societies with large informal economies and dualistic labor markets.

### **“Rethinking Economics for Social Justice: The Radical Potential of Human Rights”**

**James Heintz**, Andrew Glyn Professor of Economics, University of Massachusetts Amherst

The desire for an economic system that advances social justice motivates demands for a transition to socialism. Yet the ethical foundations of a call for socialism are often not well developed or explored. There is frequently an assumption that all proponents of socialism share a common understanding of what is meant by social justice. Yet this assumption is questionable. The human rights approach represents a normative framework for evaluating economic outcomes and institutions that incorporates an explicit definition of social justice. However, the human rights framework is frequently dismissed as being too individualistic and reformist. This mistrust of human rights represents a misunderstanding of the radical potential of this approach. In this presentation, I will explore the relationship between human rights, with an emphasis on economic and social rights, and the relationship to concepts of socialism.

## 3:20-3:30      **Closing Remarks & Wrap-Up Discussion**



**Sponsors:** Alison Des Forges Memorial Committee; University at Buffalo: Departments of Comparative Literature, History, Political Science, and Africana and African-American Studies; Gender Institute; Humanities Institute; James Agee Chair in American Culture; Office of the Vice Provost for International Education, The Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy; Jack Walsh in Honor of Connie Walsh.

This symposium honors the life and work of human rights activist Alison Des Forges (1942-2009), see [www.alisondesforges.org](http://www.alisondesforges.org).

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## SPEAKERS (in order of appearance)



**Ying Chen** is Assistant Professor of Economics at the New School. She holds a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. As a political economist, her work explores the contradictions within capitalism and how they exhibit themselves. Her fields of research include Economic Development, Ecological Economics, Comparative Economic Systems, and the Chinese Economy. She has published in various peer-reviewed journals, including *Environment and Development Economics*, *Economics and Labor Relations Review*, *Journal of Labor and Society*, *Review of Radical Political Economics*, *International Review of Applied Economics*, and so on. Her most recent article, Global Green New Deal: A Global South Perspective, was published in *The Economic and Labor Relations Review*. She was consulted for the working of the UNCTAD Trade and Development Report 2021. She also serves on the Executive Council of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE).



**Jayati Ghosh** is currently Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and taught economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi for nearly 35 years. She has authored and/or edited 20 books and more than 200 scholarly articles. Recent books include *The making of a catastrophe: Covid-19 and the Indian economy* (forthcoming 2022); *When governments fail: Covid-19 and the economy* (co-edited 2021); *Women workers in the informal economy* (edited 2021); *Never Done and Poorly Paid: Women's Work in Globalising India* (2009); *Elgar Handbook of Alternative Theories of Economic Development* (co-edited 2014); *After Crisis* (co-edited 2009); *Demonetisation Decoded* (co-authored 2017). She has received several prizes, including the Adisheshiaiah Award for distinguished contributions to the social sciences in India, the International Labour Organisation's Decent Work Research Prize, and the NordSud Prize for Social Sciences. She has advised governments in India and other countries, including as Chairperson of the Andhra Pradesh Commission on Farmers' Welfare, and Member of the National Knowledge Commission of India. She was the Executive Secretary of International Development Economics Associates (2002-2021). She has consulted for international organisations, including ILO, UNDP, UNCTAD, UN-DESA, UNRISD and UN Women, and is member of several international boards and commissions, including the UN High Level Advisory Board on Economic and Social Affairs, the Commission on Global Economic Transformation of INET, the International Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation (ICRICT). In 2021 she was appointed to the WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All, chaired by Mariana Mazzucato.



**Lane Kenworthy** is professor of sociology and Yankelovich Chair in Social Thought at the University of California San Diego. He is the author of *Would Democratic Socialism Be Better?* (2022), *Social Democratic Capitalism* (2020), *The Good Society* (online), *How Big Should Our Government Be?* (2016, with Jon Bakija, Peter Lindert, and Jeff Madrick), *Social Democratic America* (2014), *Progress for the Poor* (2011), *Jobs with Equality* (2008), *Egalitarian Capitalism* (2004), and *In Search of National Economic Success* (1995).



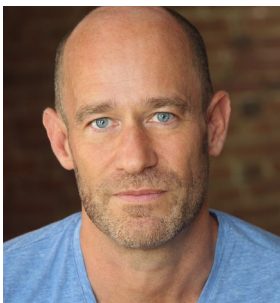
**Robert Pollin** is Distinguished University Professor of Economics and Co-Director of the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. His books include *A Measure of Fairness: The Economics of Living Wages and Minimum Wages in the United States* (co-authored 2008), *Greening the Global Economy* (2015), *Economic Analysis of Medicare for All* (co-authored 2018), and *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (2020). He has worked as a consultant for the U.S. Department of Energy, several agencies within the United Nations system, and numerous non-governmental organizations in several countries and in U.S. states and municipalities on issues that include building high-employment green economies, advancing living wage programs, single-payer health-care measures, and regulating financial markets. He was selected by *Foreign Policy* magazine as one of the “100 Leading Global Thinkers” for 2013.



**Richard D. Wolff** is Professor of Economics Emeritus, University of Massachusetts Amherst, and a Visiting Professor in the Graduate Program in International Affairs of the New School University. He is the founder of Democracy at Work and host of their nationally syndicated show *Economic Update*. His latest book is *The Sickness is the System: When Capitalism Fails to Save Us from Pandemics or Itself*, which can be found along with his other books *Understanding Socialism* and *Understanding Marxism* at [www.democracyatwork.info](http://www.democracyatwork.info).



**Kenneth M. Roberts** is the Richard J. Schwartz Professor of Government at Cornell University. He received his Ph.D. from Stanford University, with a specialization in comparative and Latin American politics. His research focuses on democracy and the politics of inequality, including work on political parties, social movements, and populism. His publications include, most recently, the co-edited *Democratic Resilience: Can the United States Withstand Rising Polarization* (Cambridge University Press); *Changing Course in Latin America: Party Systems in the Neoliberal Era* (Cambridge University Press); *Deepening Democracy? The Modern Left and Social Movements in Chile and Peru* (Stanford University Press); and the co-edited volume *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left* (Johns Hopkins University Press). He has been a Fulbright scholar at the Universidad Carlos III-Instituto Juan March in Madrid, Spain and the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) in Santiago, Chile. He has also been a visiting fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, the Centre on Social Movement Studies at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Florence, Italy, the Stone Center for Latin American Studies at Tulane University, and the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame. He has served as the director of Cornell’s Latin American and Caribbean Studies program; the director of Cornell’s Institute for the Social Sciences; and as Senior Associate Dean for the Social Sciences in Cornell’s College of Arts and Sciences. He is currently working on a book project analyzing polarization and democracy following Latin America’s “left turn.”



**James Heintz** is the Andrew Glyn Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He has written on a wide range of economic policy issues, including job creation, global labor standards, the distributive consequences of macroeconomic policies, and the intersection between economics and human rights. He has worked with numerous national and international institutions, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Labor Organization, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations Development Program, the Human Development Report Office, the South African Human Rights Commission, the International Development Research Center (Canada), and UN-Women.