

Crisis gives new life to capitalism's critics

Kevin Libin, National Post

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The recent economic crisis and government responses to it have emboldened anti-capitalism activists.

Richard Wolff has only a short time to talk before he's off to give another speech. Then there's another, later the same day. The last year has been "heady," says Mr. Wolff, an economics professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. In just the past few months, he's been interviewed by the BBC twice and the Turkish press, and appeared on countless talk-radio shows. He stars in an Al Gore-style documentary - *Capitalism Hits the Fan* - making the university campus circuit. In November, he's off to lecture in Brussels, then Berlin. "I'm in a whirlwind."

Since the 1980s, Mr. Wolff, though a graduate of America's finest universities, has quietly toiled away, promoting a model of Marxism.

Nothing like the discredited Chinese or Soviet versions, he hastens to clarify, but rather a kind of complex of commercial-industrial kibbutzes, with shared profits and decentralized management - largely unnoticed. This last recession changed that. Suddenly, he says, audiences are growing, open to his arguments that "the human race can do better than capitalism" with its roller-coaster vagaries that seem not to end, no matter what regulations governments install. "It's been lean for the last 25 years, until about 14 months ago, and then everything changed. I do two to three interviews a week. Sometimes more," he says. "It's very nice. It's a little exhausting."

That a man who not just critiques capitalism - who doesn't? - but argues it should be dismantled and replaced should be so popular in the fall of 2009 is a curious thing. Certainly, this time last year, it seemed natural for *the Washington Post* to feature a story entitled "The End of American Capitalism?", that a Reuters columnist would posit that "capitalism as we know it is on its deathbed" and that, no surprise, leaders of Iran and Venezuela both crowed about "the end of capitalism." A year ago, after the jolting collapse of Lehman Brothers, many were quite convinced our economy was in a death spiral worse than that of the Great Depression. But now? Retail sales and home sales are at least stabilizing, the Dow Jones index is up nearly 50% from its spring trough, and the U.S. unemployment rate, while an unsightly 9.7%, hasn't yet reached even 1982 levels, let alone the miserable 25% rate of the '30s. Virtually every

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