Also by Immanuel Wallerstein
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After Liberalism
UTOPISTICS

OR HISTORICAL CHOICES OF
THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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1—The Failures of the Dreams, or Paradise Lost?

Utopias? Utopistics? Is this just a play on words? I do not think so. Utopia, as we know, is a word invented by Sir Thomas More, and it means literally “nowhere.” The real problem, with all utopias of which I am aware, is not only that they have existed nowhere heretofore but that they seem to me, and to many others, dreams of heaven that could never exist on earth.¹ Utopias have religious functions and they can also sometimes be mechanisms of political mobilization. But politically they tend to rebound. For utopias are breeders of illusions and therefore, inevitably, of disillusions. And utopias can be used, have been used, as justifications for terrible wrongs. The last thing we really need is still more utopian visions.

What I mean by utopistics, a substitute word I have invented, is something rather different. Utopistics is the serious assessment of historical alternatives, the exercise of our judgment as to the substantive rationality of alternative possible historical systems. It is the sober, rational, and realistic evaluation of human social systems, the constraints on what they can be, and the zones open to human

1. I have analyzed the social function and limitations of utopias in “Marxisms as Utopias: Evolving Ideologies,” in Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 170–84. This article compares the concepts of utopia of More, Engels, and Mannheim.
creativity. Not the face of the perfect (and inevitable) future, but the face of an alternative, credibly better, and historically possible (but far from certain) future. It is thus an exercise simultaneously in science, in politics, and in morality. If the close link between science, politics, and morality appears not to be in the spirit of modern science, I appeal to what Durkheim said about science: "Now if science cannot assist us in choosing the best goal, how can it indicate the best path to arrive at the goal? Why should it commend to us the swiftest path in preference to the most economical one, the most certain rather than the most simple one, or vice versa? If it cannot guide us in the determination of our highest ends, it is no less powerless to determine those secondary and subordinate ends we call means."  

Our moral codes also presume, of course, to offer us a guide to the best goals. And politics is about the terrestrial achievement of these goals, or at least it claims to be. Utopistics is about reconciling what we learn from science, morality, and politics about what our goals should be—our overall goals, not those secondary subordinate ends we call means. The latter are also no doubt important, but they constitute the ongoing problems of the normal life of a historical system. Establishing our overall goals is something we usually have difficulty doing effectively. It is only in moments of systemic bifurcation, of historical transition, that the possibility becomes real. It is at these moments, in what

I call transformational TimeSpace,\(^3\) that utopistics becomes not merely relevant but our prime concern. We are at that moment now.

The discussion turns necessarily around the concept of substantive rationality, a concept put forward by Max Weber in opposition to that of formal rationality. By it, he meant the choice of ends under a criterion of “ultimate values” (*wertende Postulate*). Weber tells us the concept is “full of ambiguities,” and that “there is an infinite number of possible value scales for this type of rationality.” In this sense, he adds, “the concept ‘substantive’... is an abstract, generic concept.”\(^4\)

These values, as Weber’s original German expression tells us, are “postulates,” and obviously we may disagree about postulates. Indeed, it is quite certain we shall disagree. In this way, our moral preferences lead us directly to political struggles.

Where then does science come in? How can social knowledge help us in making these moral and political decisions? In the political arena, using this phrase in its broadest sense, no one merely asserts political choices. In the modern world at least, we all have to appeal for support for our arguments from a much wider group of people than those who share our immediate interests and prefer-

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ences. That is what accounts for legitimacy. Legitimacy is the result of a long-term process that involves as a central component persuasion of a particular sort: it involves persuading those who seem to be doing poorly in the short run that they will do better, even much better, in some longer run, precisely because of the structure of the system, and that consequently they should support the continued functioning of the system and its decision-making process. It is this loss of legitimacy that is a major factor, in my view, for the systemic crisis in which we now find ourselves. Re-creating some kind of social order is a matter not only of constructing an alternate system but also, in very large part, of legitimating that constructed system.

It is possible to legitimate systems—we still do it to some degree—by appeals to authority or to mystic truths. But these days we also legitimate systems, and in probably larger part, by so-called rational arguments. These arguments are delivered in the discourse of science, and assert their validity on the grounds of accepted scientific knowledge. Of course, not everything that scientists assert as true is necessarily correct. And there is even more doubt about the validity of the deductions that people in the political arena draw from what they believe, or affect to believe, has been scientifically demonstrated. The validity of our collective knowledge, and particularly the conclusions we can draw from it about our historical systems, is thus a central issue in the struggle about what constitutes substantive rationality. Therefore, utopistics involves a close reconsideration of the structures of
knowledge, and of what we really know about how the social world works.

Ever since we’ve had dreams—big dreams, political dreams—we seem to have had disillusionments. The French Revolution stirred many millions and astonished all those who took part in it. It seemed the dawn of a new era. And not too long thereafter, one of its earliest admirers, William Wordsworth, wrote his bitter dirge, the Preludes, for the terrible ravages it inflicted. The Russian Revolution, which started out as the Ten Days That Shook the World, became for many, a generation later, The God That Failed. And this story, so clear for the bellwether French and Russian Revolutions, has been endlessly repeated for the many other political happenings we have called “revolutions” in the modern world.

For conservative thinkers, ever since Burke and De Maistre, this is the reflection of what inevitably occurs as a result of social engineering. And the greater the ambition, the greater the damage, say they. The heart of conservatism as a modern ideology is the conviction that the risks of conscious collective intrusion into existing social structures that have historically and slowly evolved are very high. At best, they argue, a few changes may be enacted, provided they are assessed with great prudence and are deemed absolutely necessary. And even then, they should be instituted very cautiously and minimally. There is a mixture, in this conservative doctrine, of theological doubts about human tampering with God’s world, and skepticism about human capacity to be wise, or rather human capacity to make reasoned, wise, collective decisions.
There is no doubt good historical reason for such skepticism. And one can see how intelligent, caring people might conclude that in general it is best to go slowly with political change, lest things become even worse than they are presently. The problem with such honest conservatism is that it represents the position (and the interests) of those who are better off at the moment in terms of their economic and social position and in all other matters relating to the quality of life. What this position leaves for all those less well off, and especially for those really badly off, is merely a counsel of patience tempered, perhaps, with some immediate charity. But since, by virtue of the conservative doctrine, the patience required is in some sense without any time limits (and conservatives are often wont to talk about the inevitability of social hierarchy and therefore of permanent social inequality), it offers little improvement that is concrete in their lifetimes for the majority of the world’s people, and little that is concrete even in their children’s lifetimes.

The origins of so-called revolutionary upheavals in the modern world is a difficult and contentious question, and I for one am ready to concede that these upheavals have not represented, for the most part, spontaneous uprisings of oppressed masses seeking to transform the world, but rather, the seizing of opportunity—at least initially—by particular groups in moments of breakdown of state order (to which these groups have only sometimes even contributed themselves). But however these revolutions have been set in motion, those that have lasted are those that have attracted considerable
popular support. I think the explanation for such post hoc support is simple. The patience that conservative thinkers have counseled the less-well-off to manifest has never been widely or deeply or enthusiastically embraced, and the faith that such undergroups actually have in the wisdom of the traditional structures and their leaders has been quite limited. Rather, undergroups have suffered authority, tending to regard it as at worst inevitable or at best difficult to affect, much less to overturn. What revolutionary upheavals offer the populations they claim to represent and whose moral and political support they seek is a disruption of social expectations, the sudden intrusion of hope (even great hope) that all (or at least much) can really be transformed, and transformed quickly, in the direction of greater human equality and democratization. If we do not understand that it is this hope, for themselves and their children, that makes the Mmes. Lafarge of this world knit while the aristocrats are being guillotined, we cannot begin to understand the political history of the last two hundred years of the modern world-system.

This is not to say that the ordinary people applauded the Terror or the Gulags. Some did, but many did not. Some gave their support knowingly to the Terrors; some gave their support to the revolutions despite the Terrors; and many persuaded themselves that they were unaware of the Terrors. But they did indeed give their support to the revolutions, at least for a long time, and this was because the revolutions inspired hope in situations that seemed to them otherwise hopeless, hopeless
not merely before the revolutions but prospectively hopeless after any counterrevolutions.

To be sure, revolutions of all sorts deteriorate, for both external and internal reasons. Externally, they are combated, and combated ferociously. Internally, they have all degenerated. Those in power fall into deep disunion, in part over tactics but in large part out of power rivalries. The revolutions begin to eat their children, and they begin to show an ugly face, and thus they begin to lose much of the support they had acquired.

Today, it is widely, albeit not universally, accepted that the French Revolution was not a bourgeois revolution and the Russian Revolution was not a proletarian revolution. So if not, what were they? And were they revolutions? It depends, of course, on what one means by a (political and/or social) revolution. The very concept of a modern revolution presumes the centrality of state boundaries to analysis and action and their relative autonomy in evolution. It assumes that states in the modern world can be characterized as feudal or capitalist or socialist or something else. It follows then that we can talk about the disjunctures that mark the transformation of any particular state structure and call such disjunctures revolutions. It then also follows that we can intentionally provoke (or try to provoke) such disjunctures.

This is essentially what we have meant by revolutions and revolutionary activity. To be sure, there has been great disagreement about what criteria distinguish so-called ordinary political change (even if this be by violent means) and so-called truly revolutionary change. But these disagree-
ments do not affect the basic model of both sides to this argument that basic transformations can occur at the state level, and that indeed (for many, if not most, analysts) such changes can only occur at the state level. I shall offer a different model, one that argues that there have been no revolutions at all in the states comprising the modern world-system, and that there could not have been, if we mean by revolutions a change that transforms the underlying social structure and mode of functioning of the state that presumably had a revolution. I shall argue that, nonetheless, these so-called revolutions have been very important elements in the evolving history of the modern world-system because they have indeed changed important parameters of how the world-system as a whole has been evolving. And I shall finally argue that, as a consequence of this shift of emphasis, neither the illusions nor the disillusions have been justified and therefore do not represent reasonable attitudes to have taken vis-à-vis these political events.

The modern world-system, which is a capitalist world-economy, has been in existence since the long sixteenth century. It was created originally only in a part of the globe, primarily much of Europe and parts of the Western Hemisphere. It eventually expanded, by an internal dynamic, and gradually incorporated other regions of the globe into its structure. The modern world-system became geographically global only in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and it has only been in the second half of the twentieth century that the inner corners and more remote regions of the globe have all been effectively integrated.
The creation of the states structure (so-called sovereign states operating within the constraints of an interstate system) was part and parcel of the creation of a capitalist world-economy, and was a necessary element in its structuring. The evolution of state structures, their ability to gain in strength internally and in relation to other states in the world-system, reflected the evolution of the modern world-system as an integral whole. States never were autonomous entities but rather simply a major institutional feature of the world-system. They had power, but not unlimited power, and of course some states had more power than other states. It was the world-system as a whole that could be characterized as having a mode of production. The modern world-system was, and is, a capitalist system, that is, a system that operates on the primacy of the endless accumulation of capital via the eventual commodification of everything.

States within this system are institutions of the system, so whatever the particular forms, they are in some way responding to the primacy of this capitalist drive. Therefore, if by revolution one means that a state formerly feudal became capitalist, or that a state formerly capitalist became socialist, this has no operational meaning and is a deceptive description of reality. To be sure, there are many possible kinds of political regimes, and no doubt it matters greatly to people living within particular states the nature of their regime. But these differences have not changed the basic fact that all these regimes have been functioning elements of the modern world-system, that is, the capitalist world-
economy. Nor could it have made a difference heretofore.

I can hear the objections. I have heard them many times. How can one assert that the ex-socialist states (or indeed those that continue to be governed by Marxist-Leninist parties) were (or are) capitalist? How can one assert that states still governed by traditional hierarchies are capitalist? I do not make such assertions because I do not think states can have such attributions. I assert that these states are located within a world-system operating on a capitalist logic and that if the state political structures, or the state enterprises, or the state bureaucracies seek to make decisions in terms of some other logic (and of course they often do), they will pay a heavy price for it. As a consequence, they will either change their mode of operation, or they will lose power or their capacity to affect the system. I would suggest that this is the clear lesson we can learn from the so-called collapse of the Communisms, although I do not accept that it is only since the Communist parties are no longer in power that the primacy of the law of value has operated effectively in these areas. I believe they were already operating on this basis for a long time before this.

One constant rebuttal we hear to such a characterization of the so-called socialist regimes is that it may be true, but it did not have to be true. This is the view that asserts that these regimes were impure, inadequately socialist, even betrayers of the dream. I do not accept this assertion either. Most revolutionaries intend to be revolutionaries, certainly at the beginning of their efforts. Most revo-
volutionary regimes do in fact intend to change the world. They do not sell out their ideals. They discover that, as individuals and as regimes, they are constrained by the structures of the world-system to behave in certain ways and within certain parameters or else they lose all capacity to be important actors in the world-system. And so they bend their intentions to the realities, if not sooner, then later.

It comes down to understanding how systems of any kind operate. Systems have boundaries, even if they are shifting ones. Systems have rules, even if they are evolving ones. And systems have built-in mechanisms to return them to equilibrium, such that relatively large swings—intentional or accidental—from the expected patterns tend to result in only relatively small medium-run changes. It is not that systems are static. Far from it. They have built-in contradictions, and as a result of trying to deal with them, systems manifest secular trends. And over some longer run, the systems consequently move far from equilibrium, and when they do, they can no longer survive as such. They reach points of bifurcation and are consequently transformed into, or succeeded by, other systems.

The crucial question is to distinguish between the normal, ongoing life of a system and its two moments of transformation: at its beginning and at its end. The French and Russian Revolutions and all the others we are discussing occurred within the normal, ongoing life of the capitalist world-economy. Although they represented relatively large swings from expected patterns, they resulted nonetheless in relatively small medium-run
changes. The enthusiasms for the revolutions shown by some, and the enormous hostility shown by others, were part of the mechanisms of the system. The fact that enthusiasms were cumulative was one mechanism; the fact that enthusiasms gave way to disillusionments was another. The revolutions never worked the way their proponents hoped or the way their opponents feared. That does not mean that they were irrelevant. In fact, the repeated pattern of such upheavals has been a major element in establishing certain secular trends in the system, secular trends whose impact we are feeling only today, since 1945, and even more since 1989.

Most of the illusions and disillusions about the French and Russian Revolutions (and most of the writings about them) concern their impact on France and Russia, and the debate about the merits of what actually happened engages the rhetoric of fiercely opposing views. I take a view of the longue durée about the internal impact, a view similar to that which Tocqueville took. If one compares these countries at a moment twenty years before the revolution and one twenty years after it is generally considered to have ended, it is not clear that the changes one sees are greater than those found in comparable countries that did not have a so-called revolution. However, this would distinctly not be true if one looked at the world-system as a whole. One can trace major changes in the geoculture of the world-system as a result of these two revolutions, changes that are reflected in the secular trends of the world-system as a whole. And this is true—even though the revolutions may be said
to have "failed"—in the sense that the revolutionary governments (and those immediate successors who claimed to be or were seen as heirs) were overthrown by a counterrevolution.

We all know the basic claims of the French revolutionaries. They opposed hereditary privilege. They asserted the moral and juridical equality of all people. They insisted on the centrality of the concept of citizenship, that is, membership in a community called a nation that offered, in principle, equal participatory rights in the political arena (at least to all adult males). No doubt these demands were expressions of a larger pressure than merely that of the people who made the French Revolution. But it was the French Revolution—by its very violence, enthusiasm, and sweep—that made these demands seem to emerge from the marginal realm of wild ideas into the arena of normal, even obvious, elements of any political system. The fact that these demands were then disseminated, no doubt quite ambiguously, by the Napoleonic attempts at conquest played no small role in their taking root in popular mentality.

The significance of the transformation can be seen after 1815, after the Restoration in France. For between 1815 and 1848, the basic concepts of the French Revolution continued to make their way into the category of widespread assumptions of what is accepted as the legitimate premises of political action. There were really three such concepts that gained this kind of legitimacy. The first was that political change was continuous and normal rather than exceptional and essentially illegitimate. The second was that sovereignty resides in
the people rather than in the ruler or in a corporate aristocratic body. The third was that the people residing in a state constitute a nation, of which they are citizens.

To be sure, none of the three concepts were accepted as legitimate by the state authorities in the post-Napoleonic era, at least at first. Indeed, the ideology of the Holy Alliance was in explicit opposition to these concepts, which specifically and energetically asserted their illegitimacy, indeed their immorality. The concepts, however, were powerful enough to require clear and reasoned denunciation, not simply brute suppression, which was already a recognition of their power. Thus it was that conservative ideology was formulated in rejection of the French Revolution and in turn stimulated the development of liberal ideology which, although it was ambivalent about parts of the French Revolution, did in fact endorse its basic concepts.

The reality was that the French Revolution opened Pandora's box and gave rise to popular aspirations, expectations, and hopes which all constituted authorities—both conservative and liberal—found difficult to contain. Essentially, conservatives and liberals differed in their basic strategies about how to contain potential popular insurrection. Conservatives banked on reinforcing the authority of traditional institutions and symbolic leaders, desiring the damage that legislated change could inflict on the social order. Thus, monarchy, church, local notables, and patriarchal families were the rallying points of choice.

Liberals argued essentially that it was historically
too late for such institutions to function well either in governance or in appeasing popular discontents. They advocated conceding the theoretical principles demanded by popular forces—normality of change, popular sovereignty, and citizenship—but managing the change that might occur under their aegis. Their program for such management was the gradual implementation of these principles under the control of experts who would rationally analyze the pace and engineering necessary to ensure that change was gradual and did not displace governing families and groups. Liberals, in short, wanted change that was controlled, and they conceded just enough so that they could continue hold on to most of what they had. Liberals thought, nonetheless, that some change was needed soon, whereas conservatives tended to let their wariness override their capacity to judge unrest, or to count on repressive action to contain the unrest.

This struggle between conservatives and liberals among the governing minorities took place in all the major states in the world-system between 1815 and 1848. The story of those years is of a steady heating up of popular unrest in various modes and places. Still, what we might call the world (or world-system) revolution of 1848 was unanticipated and a shock to everyone in power. For one thing, it showed that two popular groups were able to mobilize more seriously than anyone had believed possible previously. These were, on the one hand, the urban/industrial workers and, on the other hand, oppressed nationalities/nations. The uprisings started in France as a social revolt and
quickly spread to other countries, often as a national revolt. It seemed to be the French Revolution beginning again, but this time against not only the conservatives (that is, the spokespersons of the ancien régimes) but against the liberal ideologists as well. The revolutions of 1848 constituted therefore the moment of emergence of a third ideology, a left ideology that broke from what was now deemed a centrist liberalism and set itself in opposition to it as well as to rightist conservatism. This left ideology was diversely named, but generally began to be called socialism.

We should consider the world revolution of 1848 in two time frames: the immediate happenings and consequences, and the long-term effects. As a set of events occurring over a period of several years, one could say it was like a phoenix. It flamed up very rapidly, and burned itself out almost as quickly. The most radical time in France, for example, was only four months long. These uprisings (and even the less radical ones) were put down everywhere with force, which the radical elements were unable to oppose. Still, it seems clear that those in authority were quite frightened by these uprisings, and their fear had the consequence of a coming together of conservative and liberal forces in defense of the established order. In retrospect, it seems as though there was a tacit agreement between the conservatives and the liberals. The conservatives would have their way in the short run: the reassertion of repressive authority, and in particular the outlawing of all radical elements. But the liberals would have their way in the medium run: the eventual institution of a series of
rational, graduated reforms, not only with conservative support but with conservatives competing to see if they could outdo the liberals at their own game.

The socialists, proponents of the third ideology, were as deeply affected by 1848 as were the conservatives and the liberals. Whereas the proto-socialists of the pre-1848 period were largely into either conspiratorial insurrectionism (Carbonari, Blanqui) or utopian withdrawal as a strategy (Owen, Cabet, and many other variants), the failures of 1848 (the fact that the spontaneous uprisings had no significant political effect) imposed a cold shower of political realism on the left. They turned to organizing, a strategy that ultimately could only take the form of a stage theory of political action. We know the one socialists worked out in the second half of the nineteenth century. In stage one, they would seek to obtain power in each sovereign state; in stage two they would transform the national society by the use of this state power. Still later, the socialist camp would divide on the tactics of stage one—whether they would obtain state power via the ballot box or via planned insurrection (which would become the theoretical difference between the Second and Third Internationals).

What should be emphasized about the socialist strategy of the organized search for state power was that, in the long run, it was not that different from the liberal strategy of rational change managed by experts. It was only that the experts were located in the party structure rather than in the bureaucracy. So in the post-1848 period, two clear patterns
emerged. On the one hand, we had a triad of ideologies—conservatives, liberals, socialists—competing politically almost everywhere. On the other hand, centrist liberalism became the dominant ideology worldwide, precisely because the programs of both the conservatives and the socialists tended to become mere variants of the underlying liberal theme of managed reform. Both patterns would hold true not only until 1917 but until 1968.

We can consequently argue that the long-term result of the French Revolution was that, by legitimating a set of concepts that had previously been marginal, it gave rise to a trio of ideologies concerned with how to contain a now legitimated popular pressure for change. In turn, this political conflict among the three ideologies had the outcome that one of the three—centrist liberalism—would become dominant and was able to impose itself as the geoculture of the world-system, thereby establishing the parameters within which all social action was to take place for more than a century.

The whole evolution could be seen as a dialectic of processes. The unleashing of popular passions, and in particular the legitimation of popular objectives, forced the governing groups to make important concessions over the middle run via the program of liberalism, the most important of which were the suffrage (ultimately universal) and partial economic redistribution (the welfare state). These concessions were the consequence of popular pressure fueled by hope and expectations, but the concessions themselves reinforced hope and expectations. At the end of the liberal rainbow,
there seemed to stand the vision of the democratic society. But this very hope, these very expectations, rendered the popular strata much more patient, much less insurrectionary. In short, liberal concessions led to some significant democratization of the sociopolitical structures (presumably the objective of the French Revolution) but also to a lowering of the pressure for more fundamental changes (presumably the desideratum of those who opposed the French Revolution). In that sense, liberalism as an ideology was supremely successful in maintaining the underlying political order of the capitalist world-economy. But in that sense, too, the French Revolution left its mark on the structuring and the secular trends of the modern world-system.

The nineteenth century was not only the century of popular demands for democratization and of the emergent dominance of liberal ideology as the most effective way to contain these popular demands. It was also the time of the emergence of nationalism/ethnicity, of racism, and of sexism as basic underlying themes of the geoculture. It is not that the passions or practices underlying these themes were first known in this century; it is that they first became explicit, theorized parts of the geoculture and thereby took on new and far more dangerous meaning.

At first glance, all three of these themes seem in direct contradiction to liberalism, and would therefore seem to negate the asserted dominance of liberal ideology. But, in fact, they turn out to have been in hidden symbiotic relationship with liberalism. Nationalism is inherently Janus-faced. It
is the protest of the oppressed against the oppressors. But it is also the tool of the oppressors against the oppressed. This has been so everywhere. But what gives nationalism this property? It is essentially its link with citizenship. Citizenship was invented as a concept of inclusion of the people in the political processes. But that which includes also excludes. Citizenship confers privilege, and privilege is protected by not including everyone. What citizenship did was to shift exclusion from an open class barrier to a national, or hidden class, barrier.

This double characteristic of nationalism—inclusion and exclusion—is crucial to the liberal objective of managing the social change, of offering concessions that appease but do not undo the basic capitalist system. Inclusion of everyone, truly of everyone, would have made impossible the maintenance of the endless accumulation of capital, because it would have spread the surplus value much too thin. Inclusion of no one, the true maintenance of the ancien régime, would have made impossible the maintenance of the endless accumulation of capital, because it would have led to popular anger and destruction of the political carapace of the system. The halfway house of citizenship—the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others—served precisely to appease the most dangerous strata of the countries of the core zones, the working classes, while still excluding from the division of the surplus value and political decision making the vast majority of the world’s populations.

Hence the nationalism of the powerful nations (such as England/Great Britain and France)
helped preserve the global status quo. But so did
the nationalism of the oppressed nations, which in
the nineteenth century still meant primarily the
nationalism of the oppressed European so-called
historic nations and their transformation from eth­
nicities into states. In their case, nationalism meant
the inclusion of their middle classes and to some
extent their urban working classes in the global
division of the pie. Provided these nations came
into political sovereignty a few at a time, their in­
clusion caused no greater problem than an exten­
sion of the suffrage within already sovereign
powerful nations, and was perfectly compatible
with the global program of liberalism. Of course,
nationalism is a concept that inherently has no
geographic limits, and this would cause some prob­
lems later, as we shall see.

Nationalism/ethnicity and racism have, in turn,
been intertwined. Racism, the explicit theorizing
of the superiority of the White race, or of Aryans,
flourished during the nineteenth century in north­
ern and western Europe as well as in the countries
elsewhere dominated by European settlers. What
was the essential message? It was that inclusion
into the liberal polity involved a sort of superciti­
zension, a citizenship of the powerful states col­
lectively, excluding people from the rest of the
world, including those originating ethnically from
the rest of the world but currently resident in the
powerful nations, as well as the indigenous peoples
in White settler countries. Nationalism plus racism
added up to the ideological justification for impe­
rialism, and there was no shyness about expressing
these views openly.
Sexism was also part of this picture. What sexism as an explicit ideology involved was creating and sanctifying the concept of the housewife. Women had always worked, and most households had been patriarchal historically. But what occurred in the nineteenth century was something new. It represented a serious attempt to exclude women from what would be defined arbitrarily as income-producing work. The housewife was placed in tandem with the male breadwinner of the single-wage family. The result was less that the women worked more or harder but that their work was systematically devalued.

What purpose could this possibly serve? We should bear in mind that this was occurring at a time when there was popular working-class pressure for inclusion—politically, economically, and socially—and an effort by the governing classes to appease these demands by offering limited inclusion while simultaneously retaining most privilege by limiting the extent of that inclusion. The creation of the concept of housewife served this objective in three different ways.

The first was that it obscured how much surplus value was really being reallocated to the working classes. The single-wage male wage-earner might seem to have increased his income as a result of the exclusion of female (and child) competitors in the labor market, but in fact part of these wages were being subsidized for the family income by the housewife, and hence total family real income may well not have kept pace at all with the increase in the levels of capital accumulation. Thus, in material terms, the result may have been a sleight-of-
hand, negating with one hand what was being offered the dangerous classes with the other.

The second was a sociopsychological effect. The value of inclusion went up with the reality of the large group excluded. White women were simply added to the non-White world as excluded groups, and no doubt this made male suffrage and male wage employment in the powerful states seem all the more satisfying, or at least made the status of the male working classes seem to be less humiliating (and hence their potential revolutionary zeal less activated).

Finally, let us not forget that one of the key features of the liberal states constructed in the nineteenth century was that a corollary of citizenship was military service (in some countries all the time, in others only in wartime). The limited attractiveness of such service was clearly enhanced by proposing it as a crucial attribute of male citizens, patriotic machismo. It is doubtful that the mass armies mobilized on all sides during the First and Second World Wars would have been so easily recruited without this ideological element.

Liberal ideology proposed the protection of presumably basic human rights, but in practice it was always proposed for a minority of the world's population. In the ancien régimes, a very small group comprised the privileged strata. Liberal states asserted that, following the ideals of the French Revolution, privileges would be abolished. What they really meant was that privileges (or at least some privileges) would now be extended to a large group called citizens, but this was still a group that encompassed a minority. The combination of na-
tionalism, racism, and sexism was there to define the boundaries of who was included and who was excluded.

The Russian Revolution marked another turning point in this story. But this turning point was not the one either its supporters or opponents claimed it to be. Bolshevism was originally a denunciation of socialist movements for having become avatars of liberal ideology. Its proposed solution lay in the reassertion of socialist faith via the creation of a cadre party committed to a truly antisystemic revolution. The Russian Revolution, as we know, was not the outcome of a planned insurrection by the Bolsheviks, but rather of the fact that the Bolsheviks were better organized to take advantage of a complete breakdown of political order in Russia, which was caused by a combination of severe military defeats and widespread hunger among the population. We know also that the Bolsheviks immediately after coming to power were waiting for a revolution in Germany, as their theoretical position led them to expect and which they deemed necessary to their own capacity to carry through their national revolution.

The German revolution never took place, and the Bolsheviks had to adjust to that reality. The result was socialism in one country—Stalinism, the Gulags, later Kruschchev and Gorbachev, and eventually the end of the USSR and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1991. In this sense, the Russian Revolution, like the French Revolution, seems to have been a failure, since once we are able to make the comparison of Russia twenty years before the revolution and twenty years
after its end, it is doubtful whether we shall be able to argue that more will have changed than in comparable countries that did not have the experience of the revolution. Still, I wish to argue that the Russian Revolution did have a profound effect on the geoculture, but in a way quite different from what Bolshevik theory had emphasized.

The message of the Russian Revolution had different effects on the world of powerful nations, what we may call by shorthand the pan-European world, and on the extra-European world. There seems little question, in retrospect, that the threat of a more militant working-class stance in the powerful nations, a threat that seemed to be symbolized by the world Communist movement, galvanized an acute response by the governing classes of these countries. It achieved the result of raising the ante considerably for what would be necessary in the liberal package to appease the working classes in the pan-European countries. It led especially to a major extension of the welfare state component of the package, especially in the post-1945 period when Soviet military and political strength seemed to loom so large. A world without the Russian Revolution is very unlikely to have seen the kind of pan-European Keynesianism we experienced.

But however important this result may be, and I believe it is quite important, it pales before the impact of the Russian Revolution on the extra-European world. The extra-European world was not part of the original Bolshevik vision, and when Sultan Galiev tried to make it so, he was purged. Still, beginning with the Baku Congress of 1920,
the Bolsheviks began to become reflexive about this unexpected popularity of the Russian Revolution in the extra-European world and to seek to channel the political energy that resulted therefrom—unsuccessfully, it should be added.

What really happened was that the Bolshevik effort came too late for the European world. The pan-European dangerous classes had been largely tamed by the liberal compromise, and the Bolshevik menace only reinforced that process by improving the bargaining power of the pan-European working classes. Meanwhile, the germ of nationalism had spread beyond the frontiers of pan-European “historic nations.” By the beginning of the twentieth century, we had nationalist movements and uprisings not only in the three remaining imperial structures within Europe’s boundaries—Austria-Hungary, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire—but we had the beginnings of serious nationalist movements in Asia (e.g., China, India, Philippines), the Middle East (Afghanistan, Persia, Egypt), Africa (South African Blacks), and Latin America (e.g., Mexico).

The lesson of the Russian Revolution for all these movements was that an extra-European country (as Russia was being defined by all these movements) could achieve a liberation from European control and could achieve industrialization and military strength (especially clear after the Second World War). Whereas the French Revolution infused hope, expectations, and increased aspirations in the dangerous classes of the pan-European world, the Russian Revolution infused hope, expectations, and increased aspirations in
the dangerous classes of the extra-European world.

This twentieth-century movement had the same ambiguous impact of the analogous nineteenth-century movement. The mobilization of what came to be called the national liberation movements of Asia, Africa, and Latin America meant that liberal ideology had to become global in application and their concessions given global content. Global liberalism took the form of the self-determination of nations (decolonization) and the project of the economic development of underdeveloped nations (a version of a global welfare state). In some ways, this program was as meaningful and as successful as the nineteenth-century pan-European program. Just as universal suffrage became the norm, so did the end of formal colonization everywhere. And just as the pan-European working classes seemed to renounce definitively any thoughts of insurrection, so the extra-European states seemed to renounce any thought of global civil war. In short, the liberal objective of somehow arranging for political order by limited concessions without sacrificing the basic priority of endless capital accumulation seemed to have been achieved.

It seemed so, until the world revolution of 1968, which played a role comparable to that of 1848 in terms of its impact on the geoculture. The world revolution of 1968 represented a dramatic combination of apotheosis and mutation of the spirit of the Russian Revolution just as that of 1848 had represented apotheosis and mutation of the spirit of the French Revolution. But it was a mutation in an opposite direction. For whereas the world revo-
volution of 1848 had led to the installation of liberalism as the underpinning of the geoculture of the world-system, the world revolution of 1968 led to the dethronement of liberalism from this very role.

For one thing, the participants in the 1968 uprisings were as critical of the Leninists for having become avatars of liberalism as the Leninists had been of the Social Democrats. In addition, they took as their target precisely the dominant role of liberalism in the geoculture, and sought in every way to tear liberalism down from this position. The revolution of 1968, just like that of 1848, should be analyzed in two time frames: the immediate happenings and consequences, and the long-term effects. As a set of events occurring over a period of several years, one could say in this case too that it was like a phoenix. It flamed up very rapidly (and of course more globally than in 1848), and burned itself out almost as quickly. But in the long run, its effects were system-shattering.

The dethronement of liberalism as the self-evident metalanguage of the world-system led to the disentanglement of both conservatives and radicals from liberal ideology. The world returned to a truly trimodal ideological division. The revived political right, who were sometimes labeled neoconservatives and sometimes (rather confusingly) neoliberals, stood for a very traditional social conservatism—the central sociomoral role of church, local notables and community, and patriarchal household—plus an extreme antiwelfarism (both of which would have been quite congenial to the pre-1848 conservatives) combined uneasily with a naive rhetoric about laissez-faire that might
have shocked their conservative forebears. The role of the liberal center has been taken over largely by the parties that still call themselves social democratic, who have for the most part renounced all remaining vestiges of their historic opposition to capitalism as a system and have openly embraced the Benthamite-Millsian tradition of reform managed by experts, plus a mildly "social" economy.

And the radicals? The three decades following the world revolution of 1968 were decades of increasing disarray. Although the various Maoist sects of the early 1970s emphasized 1968 as the apotheosis of 1917 rather than as a mutation, they soon faded away. The so-called New Left movements were more interested in mutation. As movements, however, they all soon became embroiled in strong internal struggles, divided between those who were looking for new apocalyptic transformations and those who were interested primarily in revising the reformist agendas of state politics. The latter tended to prevail sooner or later.

To concentrate on the internal politics of the post-1968 "new" movements is, however, to miss the forest for the trees. The most important thing that was happening in the three decades after 1968 was the turning away of popular support from the traditional antisystemic movements (the so-called Old Left) in all parts of the world wherever they were in power, which was in fact in very large parts of the world in the 1970s. In much of Asia and Africa, the states were governed by national liberation movements. In much of Latin America, they were governed by populist govern-
ments. In the so-called socialist bloc, they were governed by Marxist-Leninist parties. And in Western Europe, North America, and Australasia, they were largely governed by parties from a social democratic tradition (considering New Deal Democrats in the United States as a variant of this tradition).

The essential element in this popular turning away from these parties was disillusionment, the sense that these parties had had their historic chance, that they had obtained support on the basis of the two-step strategy for transforming the world (achieve state power, then transform), and that they had not fulfilled their historic promise. There was an acute sense in very large arenas of the world that the gap between the wealthy and the poor, the well-off and the suffering, far from having diminished, had been increasing. And this after one to two centuries of continuous struggle. It was more than a temporary disappointment with the performance of a particular governmental team. It was a loss of faith and of hope. It culminated in the spectacular (and virtually bloodless) dismantlement of the Communisms in east and central Europe and in the former Soviet Union.

The loss of hope reflected a sense of serious doubt that the polarization of the existing world system was in any way self-correcting or could be effectively countered by state reformist action. It was therefore a loss of belief in the ability of the state structures to achieve this primary objective of improving the commonweal. It resulted in a widespread and amorphous antistatism, of a kind totally unknown in the long period between 1789 and
1968. It was debilitating and aroused fear as well as uncertainty.

Popular antistatism was ambivalent. On the one hand, it implied a general delegitimation of state structures, and a turn to extrastate institutions of moral solidarity and pragmatic self-protection. The revived conservative movement sought to use this sentiment to dismantle welfare state provisions, and met much resistance by popular strata seeking to hold on to acquired benefits and opposed to measures that would, in reality, diminish their real incomes still further. Whenever neoliberal agendas have been pursued too intensely, there have been electoral reactions, sometimes quite dramatic ones, and this in all parts of the world. But such electoral reactions have been primarily interim defense measures and not triumphal moments of renewed social transformation. There has been no enthusiasm. The absence of hope, and of faith, remains pervasive and corrosive.

Far from representing the triumph of liberalism, and even less of renewed conservatism, this pervasive antistatism, by delegitimating the state structures, has undermined an essential pillar of the modern world-system, the states system, a pillar without which the endless accumulation of capital is not possible. The ideological celebration of so-called globalization is in reality the swan song of our historical system. We have entered into the crisis of this system. The loss of hope and the accompanying fear are both part of the cause and the major symptom of this crisis.

The era of national development as a plausible goal has ended. The expectation that we could re-
alize the objectives of either the French or the Russian Revolutions by some change in who controls the state structures now meets with the widespread skepticism history has demonstrated it merited. But the fact that most people are no longer optimistic about the future and therefore essentially patient about the present does not mean that these same people have abandoned their aspirations for the good society, for a better world than they know. The desire is as strong as ever, which makes all the more despairing the loss of hope and faith. This ensures that we are entering an historic transition. It ensures also that this will take the form of a time of troubles, a black period that will last as long as the transition lasts.
2—The Difficult Transition, or Hell on Earth?

We are living in the transition from our existing world-system, the capitalist world-economy, to another world-system or systems. We do not know whether this will be for the better or for the worse. We shall not know until we get there, which may not be for another fifty years now. We do know that the period of transition will be a very difficult one for all who live it. It will be difficult for the powerful; it will be difficult for ordinary people. It will be a period of conflicts and aggravated disorders, and what many will see as the collapse of moral systems. Not paradoxically, it will also be a period in which the "free will" factor will be at its maximum, meaning that individual and collective action can have a greater impact on the future structuring of the world than such action can have in more "normal" times, that is, during the ongoing life of an historical system. I shall address successively what are the difficulties that the powerful face, and what are the difficulties that the ordinary people face.

Let us start with what seems today the strongest element, but is in fact the weakest link, of the modern world-system: the continued viability of the capitalist mode of production. Capitalism is a system that permits and validates the endless accumulation of capital. It has been marvelously successful in doing this over the last four to five hundred years. Of course, in order to maintain such a sys-
tem, capitalists (or at least some capitalists) must make large profits on their investments. It is less easy than we think to make large profits. For one thing, competition is inimical to large profit making, since competitors drive down prices and therefore profit margins.

Any product costs $x$ to produce and is sold at $y$. $Y - x$ is the profit. It follows that the higher the $y$ and the lower the $x$, the greater the profit. To what degree can any capitalist firm control either $x$ or $y$? The answer is, to some degree, but not totally. This partial control creates the basic dilemmas of capitalists, operating both individually and collectively. Another way of saying this is to assert that the "hand" that determines supply and demand, cost and price, is neither invisible nor fully visible, but is located in a shadowy world in-between, what Fernand Braudel calls the "opaque zones" of capitalism.

Price is affected first, as capitalist theory asserts, by the strength of competition. It follows that the more monopolized the actual market to which given producers have access, the higher the price can be set by the seller, within the limits that the elasticity of demand affords. Obviously, then, any individual capitalist prefers to increase his share of the market, not only because it increases total profit (at the current rate of profit) but also because it increases the future rate of profit. And equally obvious, the degree to which any individual capitalist can monopolize a given market depends in large part on state action, which can legitimate the monopoly by requiring it, or by offering licenses and patents that protect monopolies. This state
action can be direct (and therefore defined as political) as well as long-term and indirect. An example of the latter would be the efforts to impose the use of a specific language or currency in the world market. Such actions are sometimes designated by the analyst as cultural effects, or the invisible hand of the world market, but their state underpinnings can easily be traced with a little diligence.

In short, prices are largely political constructs within some limits that derive from the fact that no single state can totally control the world market, which means that there exists a socially constructed economic band (albeit quite wide) within which prices must fall. States therefore matter for capitalists seeking to increase their sales prices. Not just any state, however, but preferably strong ones with which they have some standing and connection. Japanese capitalists depend primarily on the Japanese state, but not exclusively. They may also depend (usually to a lesser degree), on the Indonesian state and the U.S. state, for example. The point is double. All capitalists need some state or states. And their competitors may depend on a different set of states. Geopolitics is not a minor element in determining the degree to which particular producers may or may not increase their sales prices significantly.

Traditionally, capitalist theorists, following Adam Smith, have deplored the "interference" of states in the markets, and have asserted that this interference has negatively affected rates of profit. Since capitalist entrepreneurs have paid virtually no attention to this theory in their practice (except
when arguing that this theory could affect direct competitors negatively), I believe it is safe to say that the assertion that unlimited laissez-faire is a pillar of capitalism is simply dust in our eyes.

Sales prices are, however, a function of two things: not only the degree of monopolization of a possible market, but also the effective demand in that market. And this creates a further dilemma for capitalists—the strain between the wages they pay, which increase worldwide consumption, and the wages they do not pay, which increase their savings/investment. The more consumption the more current effective demand; the more savings/investment the greater the accumulation of capital. It is in part a difference of time-span of objective. It is in part the interests of one group of capitalists against another at any given moment. No doubt this is a long-standing problem, but it is one that has become much more acute today because of the way it impinges upon costs of production. Effective demand is a function ultimately of the total expenditure on wages and salaries, since at the end of every commodity chain there must be individual consumers. It follows that it is simultaneously and paradoxically true that the larger the overall wage bill, the higher the potential profits, and the smaller the overall wage bill, the higher the immediate profits. The first statement is true about the world-economy as a whole, the second about the individual firms.

Let us turn to $x$, the costs of production. We may divide these costs into three main crude divisions: the wage bill, the tax bill, and the purchase of
machinery and inputs. The cost of machinery and inputs, of course, leads producers to seek technologies that will reduce these costs. But it also pits given sets of capitalist producers against all others. The lower the others' \( y \), the lower the given sets of producers' \( x \). This accounts for part of the political activity of any given set of producers, who tend to act against those state actions that result in increasing the sales prices of other sets of producers. Reducing the cost of inputs, however, may not lead to higher profits, since, via market competition, it may merely reduce sales prices, leaving the margin of profit constant or nearly constant.

Capitalist producers therefore spend much energy seeking to reduce the wage bill and the tax bill. Once again we must see this as a dilemma. If the wage bill were near zero, no doubt the immediate margin of profit would soar, but the middle-run impact on effective demand would be disastrous. The same is true of the tax bill. Taxes are payment for services that producers need, including the efforts of the states to ensure partial monopolization of markets for given sets of producers. So too low a tax rate would have equally negative results. On the other hand, each rise in the wage bill and the tax bill cuts into the margin of profit. It is Scylla and Charybdis, and each producer must navigate as best he can. Indeed, this is the testing ground for success among capitalists, a game in which the most astute and/or the most politically well-connected win.

What is of interest to us is not the mechanisms by which given capitalists maneuver to be more suc-
cessful than others in this difficult game, but what the overall historical trends have been. In the last ten to twenty years, we have seen a massive ideological onslaught intended to reduce everywhere the wage bill and the tax bill, and because this onslaught has seemed to be so successful, we miss the reality that the recent downturn in wages and taxes has been short-term and minor amid their long-term, continuing historic rise globally, and this is so for structural reasons.

The part of surplus value that is transferred to individual employees in the form of wages and salaries above the socially defined costs of reproduction is the result of the class struggle, fought in the workplace and in the political arena. Schematically, this is how it works. A local group of workers organize, either in the workplace or in the political arena or more likely both, and make the producers' cost of refusing real wage increases higher than the cost of accepting them, at least in the short run. Of course, an increase in the wage bill is also an increase in effective demand, and therefore is a plus for some set of producers, but not necessarily for the set that is providing the increased wages. When such an increase begins to seem onerous to a given set of producers, and they cannot effectively combat it politically in the local arena, they may seek a solution by relocating of part or all of their production to areas where the historical wages of workers are lower, which means that the workers there are politically weaker, for whatever reason.

The cost of labor in the area to which the pro-
duction is relocating must be significantly lower, since the producer is paying not only the costs of transfer of site (a one-time cost) but almost surely higher transaction costs (a continuing cost). This is why such relocations, which occur especially in times of cyclical downturn, tend to go to the nearest areas where workers are politically weak, eventually reaching the areas where workers are weakest. Historically, the weakest groups of workers are those brought for the first time into urban production zones (or at least more fully monetized production zones) out of zones that were rural and less monetized. The reasons for initial political weakness are both cultural and economic. On the cultural side, there occurs a certain disorientation and disorganization due to the physical migration of the workforce, plus a certain degree of inexperience on their part with the available local politics, or at least lack of local political influence. On the economic side, the wages in the urban production zone that are extremely low by world standards often represent in this local arena an income that is higher than the one that had been available in the previous rural setting, or at least that had been politically available.

Neither of these conditions for political weakness (the cultural and the economic) is inherently long-lasting. One can posit that any particular group of workers in such a situation has been able to overcome these weaknesses in about thirty to fifty years, and today it probably can be done in even fewer years. This means that, from the point of view of the relocating producers, the advantage of the move is rather temporary and that, if they
are to maintain such an advantage, they must contemplate repeated middle-run relocations. This has in fact been one of the principal stories of the capitalist world-system for five hundred years. But the curve designating the percentage of the globe where possible zones of relocation exist is reaching an asymptote, like so many curves that are drawn to represent trends in a system. The planet is running out of such zones. This is called the deruralization of the world, which is proceeding at a dizzying pace. And as the number of such zones diminish, the worldwide bargaining power of workers increases. This has resulted in a global trend of increase in the wage bill. If the prices of products were infinitely expansible, this might cause little worry. But they are not, because of the limits imposed by competition and the ability of the states to impose monopolization.

The cost of labor is often discussed in terms of something called the efficiency of production. But what is efficiency? It is in part better technology, but it is in equal part the will of the worker to perform tasks well at a reasonably fast speed. But how fast should the speed be? Taylorism was the doctrine that the speed should be as fast as physiologically possible. But this assumes that this top speed does not harm the organism. To the degree that it does, we are buying short-run speed with long-run depletion of the capacity of the organism to survive. Even as a strictly short-term economic cost from the point of view of the employer, the maximum speed in an hour may not at all be the optimal speed over a week or a month. At this point, however, a conflict of values enters the pic-
ture: for example, the value to the worker of psychic pleasures of "leisure" versus the needs of the employer. The employer may then hope to invoke the psychic pleasures of "work satisfaction" as a spur to the worker, but that assumes that the employer is willing to structure the work situation such that there is some "satisfaction" in work completion. The issue then becomes a political one, resolved by bargaining power. Hence, defining efficiency brings us right back to looking at the political strength of labor.

The same problem of an asymptote limiting a trend is visible in the tax bill. The basic cause of the historic trend to increase the tax bill has been the confluence of two pressures: the demands on the states by the capitalist producers for more and more services and financial redistributions on the one hand, and the demands by the rest of the population, which we can place under the heading and impulsion of "democratization." This translates into, among other things, demands on the states for more and more services and financial redistributions. In short, everyone has wanted the states to spend more, not merely workers but capitalists as well, and if states are to spend more, they must tax more. This results in an obvious contradiction: as consumers of state expenditures, taxpayers demand more; as furnishers of state income, taxpayers naturally want to pay less, and this feeling escalates as the tax percentage of their income rises. The pressures on the states to spend more but simultaneously tax less is what we mean by the "fiscal crisis of the states."

There is a third curve that is reaching an asymp-
tote. It is the curve of exhaustion of the conditions of survival. The demand for attention to the ecological damage to the biosphere has become very strong in recent decades. This is not because the modern world-system has become inherently more destructive of the ecosystem in its ways, but because there is much more "development" and hence much more destruction, and because this destruction has for the first time been reaching two asymptotes: the point of serious—in some cases irreparable—damage; and the point of absolute depletion, not of economic but of social goods. We should elaborate on the latter asymptote. If all the trees in the world were cut down, it might be possible to invent artificial substitutes for the uses of wood products as inputs to other production, but their value as an esthetic element in our environment, that is, as a social good, would still disappear.

The main reason that capitalism as a system has been so incredibly destructive of the biosphere is that, for the most part, the producers who profit by the destruction do not record such destruction as a cost of production but, quite the opposite, as a reduction of cost. For example, if a producer dumps waste in a stream and thereby pollutes it, that producer is saving the cost of other safer, but more expensive, forms of disposal of the waste. Producers have been doing this for five hundred years, and in increasing quantity, as development of the world-economy has proceeded. This is called, in neoclassical economics, the externalization of costs. It is usually defended as the production of public goods, but most often it is public
evils that are created. The externalization of costs is merely the shifting of costs from the producer to either the state or the "society" at large, thereby significantly increasing the rate of profit of the producer.

Now that this process has become a central political issue, states are under pressure to consider ways of preserving the environment. The essential economic reality is that any measures to deal with this problem must increase the producers' costs, either directly, by forcing them to internalize costs that were previously externalized, or indirectly, by increasing their tax bill to furnish funds with which the states can engage in repair work, or more probably both. Were the bill for such repairs and for the prevention of further damage a small one, we might think of this effort as simply one more minor welfare cost imposed on capitalist producers. But the bill is not small; it is monumental, and growing daily. And it is already increasing both the profit squeeze on the producers and the fiscal crisis of the states, although in fact it is fair to say that the ecological problems have scarcely begun to be addressed as yet. If a more urgent crisis were to capture world public opinion, say a greater widening of the hole in the ozone layer necessitating a far higher level of expenditure, we could expect a serious increase in the worldwide profit squeeze and the fiscal crisis of the states.

To reiterate, there is a long-term worldwide trend increasing the wage bill of producers, resulting from the long-term improvement in the worldwide bargaining position of workers (primarily the consequence of the deruralization of the world).
There is a worldwide trend of increasing state expenditures resulting from the demands both of capitalist producers and of workers, which has been increasing the tax bill of producers. There is a worldwide trend of increasing demand for paying for repair of the global ecology and adequate preventive measures for the future, which threatens to increase both the tax bill and the other costs of productive activity for the producers. What capitalists need at this point, obviously, are pressures to weaken the bargaining position of workers, a reduction of their tax bill without a reduction of state services (direct and indirect) to capitalist producers, and severe limits on the internalization of costs. This is, of course, the program of neoliberalism, which has appeared to be so successful in the last decade.

It suffers, however, from two inherent limitations. The increasing bargaining position of the workers is long-term and structural, and must lead—is already leading—to a serious rebound against the neoliberal agenda at the level of the political activity of the states. But second, and much more important, capitalist producers need the states far more than do the workers, and their principal long-term problem will not be that state structures are too strong but that they are in the process of declining, for the first time in five hundred years. Without strong states, there can be no relative monopolies, and capitalists will have to suffer the negatives of a competitive market. Without strong states, there can be no state-mediated financial transfers to producers, and no state-sanctioned externalization of costs.
But why are the states growing less strong? Insofar as analysts talk of this, they usually argue that it is because transnational corporations are now so truly global that they can circumvent the states. The transnational character of firms is nothing new, however, merely more talked about. Furthermore, this argument assumes that transnational corporations want weak states, which is simply false. They cannot survive without strong state structures, and especially strong state structures in the core zones. Strong states are their guarantee, their lifeblood, and the crucial element in the creation of large profits. States are growing less strong not because of the apotheosis of the ideology of liberalism and the strength of transnational corporations but because of the growing collapse of the ideology of liberalism and the vulnerability of the corporations, for the reasons we argued previously. The ideology of liberalism has been the global geoculture since the mid-nineteenth century. It is only in the last twenty years that it has suffered a serious loss of capacity to provide legitimacy to the state structures, and it was this capacity that in fact had contained worker pressure for over a century. What global liberalism had promised was reform, amelioration, and the growing narrowing of the social and economic polarization of the capitalist world-system. It has lost its magic because of the widespread realization in the last twenty years that not only has there been no narrowing of polarization, but that the story of the last one hundred twenty-five years, indeed of the last five hundred years, has been one of constant and growing po-
larization at a global level. And this polarization is continuing apace today.¹

The consequences of the global profit squeeze might perhaps be mitigated by the intervention of strong states, and its effect postponed. But even this consolation is not there for capitalist producers, because the power (and therefore the will) of the states is slipping away. We hear all around us the voices of antistatism. I have been arguing that the neoliberal antistatist voices are in part hypocritical, in part self-defeating. Conservative antistatism is aimed at weakening the bargaining power of the world workforce. But the most significant antistatist voices are coming from the world workforce itself, and these are the product of disillusionment with the reformist agenda of the liberal states—whether in the modulated Western “social economy” model, or in the now-discredited Soviet model, or in the Third World “developmentalist” model.

The growing vulnerability of the transnational corporations derives from the increased democratization of the world and the delegitimation of the states linked to it. The world workforce will, of course, still struggle to retain acquired benefits that involve state redistribution. But they no longer legitimate the states, and they no longer expect that reforms will really lead to an end to worldwide polarization. That is why we have entered a time of troubles, or an age of transition for the existing world-system.

¹. The argument about the historic role of liberalism and the present situation is spelled out in After Liberalism (New York: New Press, 1995).
In addition to neoliberalism, there is a second program that can respond to the profit squeeze: the extension of the mafia principle. Mafias are not at all an invention of the twentieth century. They have always been an intrinsic element of the modern world-system. I mean by mafias all those who seek to obtain substantial profits either by evading legal constraints and taxes or by extorting protection costs, and who are ready to use private force, extensive bribery, and corruption of the formal state processes to ensure the viability of this mode of accumulation of capital. The distinction between mafias and what were called in the nineteenth century "robber barons" is rather blurred. What we can say is that mafias are among the most important of large-scale accumulators, and that the top accumulators, whether they are mafiosi or are technically legal, always seek actively to legitimate their wealth, certainly in the second generation.

Strong states are, to be sure, constraints on mafias, just as mafias exist to undermine the strength of state mechanisms. Over time, a certain degree of equilibrium has usually been reached, whereby the mafias have remained somewhat marginal to the overall process of the accumulation of capital, and were self-liquidating via the process of the personal assimilation of the successful mafiosi (or their heirs) into positions of legitimate wealth and power—self-liquidating but, of course, always being renewed in some other corner of the world-economy.

The situation has changed today, which is why the world press is so full of discussion of the mafias. The bureaucracies and politicians of weak states
(and even of the stronger ones), becoming even weaker and losing popular legitimation (and consequently some popular control), have tended in many cases to merge their interests with those of extrastate mafias. In some cases, it may not be useful or meaningful to distinguish the two groups. This blurring of roles may momentarily solve the problem of how to counteract the overall profit squeeze, but it delegitimates the states still further.

Thus far, I have merely analyzed the problems of the powerful. What about ordinary people? It should be noted at the outset that “ordinary people” are a very heterogeneous category. They are of all continents and cultures and represent multiple layers of real-income level. They are in no sense a group. The one characteristic they do share with each other, perhaps the only one, is that they are none of them powerful individually. That is to say, they are not in a position to prevail in disputes with powerful people, in matters small and large, by using some influence out of the public eye, some combination of debts that others owe them plus their capacity to make real threats to others in the present or near future, which will lead these others to bend real decisions in their favor. The powerful have muscle. That is what makes them powerful.

What ordinary people normally rely on instead is either collective influence via the state mechanisms, or individual access to the powerful as clients, or the creation of collective extrastate self-defense structures. By turning against the state, which is the result of their disillusionment about the possibility of effective state action that might
serve their interests, they in turn have weakened the ability of the states to respond to their demands. This is a vicious, downward circle, one we have already entered. This means inevitably that, instead of relying on altering state decisions, ordinary people will have to place more emphasis on individual clientelism and on extrastate self-defense, or on a combination of the two. Let me point out that this is a reversal of the secular trend of the modern world, which for almost five hundred years has been the story of the reduction of the role of clientelism and of extrastate self-defense as ways that ordinary people could protect their interests. Indeed, the ideologues of the modern world have boasted of precisely this decline, and have often measured the performance of individual states by the degree to which they have been able to reduce clientelism and extrastate self-defense mechanisms within their frontiers. That boast sounds hollow today, as the trend is being reversed.

For ordinary people, the single biggest and most immediate result of the decline of state legitimacy is fear—fear for their livelihoods, fear for their personal security, fear for their futures and those of their children. Fear, as we know, is often not the wisest counselor. We can see the expressions of this fear in two obvious realities, of which the media regularly inform us: crime, and so-called ethnic conflict. Let us look at each.

It is commonplace to complain, virtually everywhere as far as I can tell, of the increase of the rate of crime as well as of the increased brutality of crime. This is in part most probably a correct em-
pirical observation, but it is certainly a widespread perception. As the Thomases told us a long time ago, "If men perceive a situation as real, it is real in its consequences." For as soon as people perceive an increase in the rate of crime, they act in consequence thereof, which usually means three things. They avoid areas thought to be crime-ridden, which, by reducing the density of use, makes these areas in fact more open to criminal acts. They place pressure on the states to increase repressive and penal structures, which eventually overtaxes the system, both in terms of legitimacy and in terms of fiscal resources, and is probably a factor in the long run in increasing, rather than decreasing, the rate of crime. And they begin to provide their own police protection. They purchase guns; they organize community patrols; they erect fences. And these latter acts, even if they do reduce somewhat the immediate risk of assault, transform the quality of life of everyone, and decrease the sense of moral community.

Now all of this has been going on in both the rich countries and the poor countries. Perhaps there are a few exceptions, but this is one of the central stories of the past three decades. Once again, let us notice how this is changing a trend. The creation of the very concept of police forces dates only to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The whole idea was to end an ambiance of fear that had led to individual policing and vigilantism. The concept spread throughout the world-system and was probably at its maximum efficiency in the twenty-five years following the end of the
Second World War. Now the trend is distinctly in the other direction.

The spread of crime, grand crime and petty crime, is debilitating to the states, less because of the criminal activity itself than because of popular response to criminal activity. It expresses itself in great popular impatience with the manifest inability of the states to cope. Furthermore, insofar as people invest in extra-state self-defense, they see less point in paying for the taxes that are supposed to provide them with state-guaranteed individual security. Another vicious circle.

But there is a further problem. As the rate of crime increases, and self-defense increases, police forces react with ever greater and less restrained force. The line between illegitimate criminal activity and illegitimate police activity narrows, in reality but even more so in public perception. As more people are repressed and penalized, police action begins to affect an ever larger number of families. What had been a small minority of the criminalized now becomes a rather large minority. And groups that had legitimated police action earlier begin to be more skeptical, if not outrightly hostile. What had been seen by many as the friendly protective police officer comes to be seen as the somewhat dangerous and often arbitrary police officer.

A good example is the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States. Once idolized as heroic pursuers of gangsters, and later seen by most Americans as crucial defenders against the presumed Communist menace, the FBI has become in recent years a structure vilified for its lawlessness
and its incompetence, and this vilification has been even more likely to come from the political right than from the political left. It is not really that the FBI is acting in new ways. It is that it is being perceived very differently.

The problem of drug use, which is also so widely discussed, is real, if by that one means that large numbers of people worldwide are consuming various drugs that are illegal—and of course someone is producing and marketing these drugs. It is not a question of whether the blame (or the explanation) lies with consumers or with sellers. The consumption is obviously one additional sign of anomie and social breakdown, or of rebellion, or of delegitimation of the existing historical system. And the industry is consequently one of the most profitable there is today, and must necessarily be conducted by mafias, who must necessarily engage in corruption of state officials on a massive level. The fact is that, after some thirty years of apparent concern by governments everywhere, the level of profits and the level of use is probably higher than ever.

But crime, even drug crime, seems to pale next to so-called ethnic conflict, which has been rediscovered as a central reality of the modern world. I say rediscovered because the general discourse up to a decade or so ago was that ethnic conflict was an archaism, a leftover from premodern times, and therefore a dying phenomenon. Today it is quite clear that, far from being a leftover, it is a phenomenon created by the modern world-system, and that it—whatever it is—is likely to increase radically in the decades to come.
When there is murderous warfare between two or more groups that define themselves and are defined by others in some particularistic terms (religion, language, presumed common descent, or anything analogous)—as has occurred spectacularly and recently in Lebanon, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Somalia, Rwanda, and of course Ulster (to name just some of those receiving the most extensive media coverage)—the usual analysis is that these are primordial quarrels. But of course this explains absolutely nothing. In the first place, the ancient quarrels are often inventions of contemporary imagination. And even when they are not, what needs then to be explained is less the current hostilities than the very long periods in which such hostilities did not display themselves. Not so very long ago, both Somalia and the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were hailed as models of the absence of interethnic strife. And of course there exist other zones with mixed populations where at the moment there is no sign of such ethnic strife.

We must start by noticing that “ethnic” identity is not a thing in itself, or for eternity. It is an identity asserted within the framework of a state structure, a modern state structure. It is an identity that is constantly reforged, both in the eyes of the group that claims it and through the recognition by others that such an identity exists. The very names have historical lives. They divide, merge, and quite often simply disappear. The history of ethnicities is tied up very much with the evolving power and class structures of individual states and with the dividing lines within the modern world-system as a
whole. It is a largely irrelevant exercise to try to reconstruct past disputes as an explanation of present-day ones. Such reconstructions are more often elements in the process of ethnic mobilization and mythmaking than a form of either scholarly or political analysis.

Ethnic identities, in their acute combative form, are first and foremost a mode of political action, and become acute and combative precisely when the existing state structure is delegitimized as incapable of guaranteeing a minimal level of fair play, and when other lines—the presumably more acceptable ideological political dividing lines—have come to seem politically irrelevant. The rise in ethnic strife is a prime indicator of state delegitimization. It matters not that quite often there is a call for a new state structure, with ethnically pure or purer boundaries. For even newly installed ethnically pure state authorities have a very hard time commanding legitimacy as state leaders.

The kind of ethnic strife we have been seeing in the last two decades is not at all comparable to the wave of nationalism the world-system knew from the early nineteenth century up to the mid-twentieth century. Those nationalisms were for the most part state-centered, territorial, and only “ethnic” in tone insofar as they needed to distinguish themselves from imperialist overlords. But above all, they were secular, optimistic, and self-consciously modernist in orientation. Those nationalisms appealed to the traditions of the French and Russian Revolutions. The current proponents of ethnic purification act precisely in rejection of this tradition. They are not optimistic but desper-
ate. They do not look forward to glorious tomorrows but backward to glorious yesteryears that may never be recovered. That is why the conflicts are not only so bloody but also nearly impossible to terminate.

Nor is this, as it is sometimes alleged, a phenomenon of the poor nations, with the subtext that it is a phenomenon of the backward peoples, the primitive peoples. It is quite clear that we are witnessing the emergence of this kind of desperate strife in the richer nations, which claim they are more civilized. We see this in the breakdown of mediatory structures and legislation, the emergence of an open racism centered around a claimed invasion by the barbarians, called migrants, who bring crime and degeneracy in their wake. We have known this malady before, but the world-system reacted, albeit quite late, to the severe malady and performed surgery on the fascisms. But this surgery was performed as part of a struggle between Germany and the United States for hegemony in the world-system, and with the necessary assistance of the USSR. Who is there now to perform such surgery if the new racial purity doctrines that are being propagated throughout North America, western Europe, and Australasia move from the margins of political life to the mainstream?

For there is still another element to put into the picture. As the world moves into the twenty-first century, there undoubtedly will be a Kondratieff upturn, a renewed expansion of production and employment in the world-economy, and therefore renewed opportunities for investment and capital
accumulation. This should set off an intense competition between the United States, the European Union, and Japan to decide who among them is to be the leading beneficiary of the upturn and to serve as the prime locus of the capital accumulation. This sort of competition will be nothing new, and the struggle will be pursued in most of the same ways as previous such struggles have been. There will, however, be one main difference. Not only is world polarization at a level it has never before reached, but the next Kondratieff A-phase should widen the gap even further. Given the disillusionment that already exists, and the absence of the old antisystemic movements that had canalized the discontent and the reformist drives, this period will be, as I have suggested, particularly explosive.

This eruption will take at least three forms, none of which is totally new but all of which will have crossed a threshold of significance in the ongoing life of the system, and engage the centrifugal forces inherent in the structural crisis, the period of bifurcation. One element is the delegitimization of the ideology of inevitable progress that was a major pillar of world stability for at least two centuries. We shall see very strong movements—we are already seeing very strong movements—particularly in the non-core zones (which include not only the erstwhile Third World but the erstwhile socialist bloc of states), proclaim their total rejection of the fundamental premise of the capitalist world-economy, the endless accumulation of capital as a governing principle of social organization.

This is in a sense far stronger than the long-
standing Marxist rejection of capitalism, which involved an argument that capitalism was a historical stage necessarily en route to communism, that it was therefore historically progressive, and that in any case its technological advances represented its principal virtue. The arguments we are now hearing reject any progressiveness whatsoever to the existing system, and therefore any modality of coming to terms intellectually with it. The large number of movements we so negligently call "fundamentalist" reflect this attitude, often clothing the argument in religious language.

There are several things to note about this phenomenon. It is definitely not restricted to the Islamic world. There are Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and other varieties of this species. What they share is this theoretical rejection of Western modernity and the capitalist ethos. The source of their wide popular support lies in the disillusion felt with the classical antisystemic movements and the state structures they constructed, because of their perceived inability to overcome the polarization inherent in the existing world-system. Their common emphasis is antagonism to the very concept of a secular state, so they propagate an aggravated antistatism. Such movements have no interest in helping the structures of the world-system overcome their difficulties. They constitute a force for disintegration. To be sure, particular movements are continuously co-opted, and these movements by themselves would probably effect little fundamental change. But in the context of factors beyond their doing—the global profit squeeze and the global disillusion with reformist
liberalism—they wreak considerable havoc to the structure.

An even greater disintegrating force is the democratization of world armaments. The whole history of armaments, for several thousand years, has been for the powerful to stay ahead by expensive innovations as soon as the weak obtain access to the previous generation of armaments. Although this has not really changed, the thresholds of the ability to inflict harm have changed. A few rather antiquated atomic weapons can do incredible damage; bacteriological warfare is not technically very difficult. In my view, nuclear proliferation is unstoppable. The United States has worked very hard to slow it down, with some success, but there are probably a dozen countries besides the official six that have or could rapidly produce nuclear weaponry today, and I would bet on twenty more in the next decade. Furthermore, some weaponry may already be (or soon will be) in the hands of non-state groups. The same is probably true of bacteriological and chemical weapons. Aum Shinryiko has shown us the damage a non-state group can inflict with chemical weapons. No doubt the strong countries are still stronger than the weak ones, but the weak or intermediate ones are now often strong enough to do real damage to the strong.

What we can deduce from this is really very simple. It will be possible for nations of intermediate strength located in the non-core zones to challenge militarily the powerful states, singly or even collectively. Saddam Hussein showed the way. And while he lost the first round, it took very strenuous political mobilization for the United
States to pull it off, something it might not be able to repeat, and something it would be impossible to handle if several such challenges occurred more or less simultaneously. I think we shall see many such challenges in the next twenty-five to fifty years.

Finally, the greatest challenge is no doubt to be found in the least violent and least containable act, that of individual immigration from the poorer states to the richer ones. It has been going on for five hundred years, and with the improvement of transport it has been going on at an ever more rapid pace in the last fifty years. The structural reality is that the world is polarized not only economically and socially but demographically as well. The core zones absolutely need some immigration, but they do not want to admit as many as want to come, especially during Kondratieff downturns. So they put up barriers, nastier ones as time goes by. But the barriers are largely ineffective. They reduce the flow by a small percentage, but probably not by very much.

Hence, the White pan-European world is becoming, de facto, far less White. Not all the migrants are non-White, of course, but they are all so defined socially. While the pan-European bloc of countries probably cannot stop the actual flow of migrants and their subsequent faster demographic progression within the pan-European world, they can rig the political structure so that these migrants have no (or fewer) political and social rights than "citizens," and can certainly rig it so that the migrants have the least well-paying jobs. In fact, legislation to such effect is passing in state after state.
This kind of manipulation might not affect internal political stability if the groups defined as migrants (often defined in ways that include the second, third, and even fourth generation descendants of actual migrants) is relatively small. But when the group so defined reaches a significant percentage, we have a recipe for civil strife. Furthermore, the migrants (or those socially defined in this way), who will often be physically recognizable and will most probably acquire a strong sense of ethnic identity, will face off with racist, right-wing nativists seeking ethnic purification. Since there is also likely to be neighborhood and area quasi-segregation, it will not be difficult to organize both sides. And since virtually all the separate states will have their own tinderboxes, any flare-up of hostilities could easily spread across boundaries, like a forest fire on the loose.

At this point, we are no longer talking of fundamentalists in zones far from the rich countries, or so-called rogue states ready to try their hand at warfare, but of deep instability in the heart of the capitalist world-economy. Capitalist entrepreneurs will not only have to worry about profit squeeze but about personal safety. The personal insecurity they already feel in, let us say, Colombia—not to speak of the high-risk factor of being a banker in Russia today—could spread to, say, Canada or Denmark.

The picture I have been painting is not a pretty one. It is a scenario of great disorder and personal uncertainties and insecurity. It is a picture of fundamental structural problems for which there is not only no easy solution but perhaps not much
prospect of alleviation. It is a picture of an historical system in great crisis. Some will say this is pessimistic. I contend it is realistic, but not necessarily pessimistic. Of course, if you are certain that we have been living in the best of all possible worlds, you will not be happy to hear that it is coming to an end. But if you have even some level of doubt that this is so, you will face the future with slightly more sangfroid.

Three things should be underscored about the present and coming period of disorder, disarray, and disintegration. Though it will be terrible to live through, it will not go on forever. We know that chaotic realities produce, by themselves, new orderly systems. This may not be much consolation if I add that such a process might take as much as fifty years to complete. The second thing to bear in mind is that the science of complexity is teaching us that, in such chaotic situations resulting from a bifurcation, the outcome is inherently unpredictable. We do not know—we cannot know—how this will come out. What we do know is that the present system as such cannot survive. There will be a successor system or systems. It may be better; it may be worse; it may not be too different in its moral quality.

It is the third thing about such chaotic situations that offers the rosier side of the story. In ongoing historical systems, as in all ongoing functioning systems, even great fluctuations have relatively small effects. That is what we mean by a system. A system has mechanisms that try to restore equilibrium, and succeed up to a point. That is why, in the long run, the French and Russian Revolutions could be
perceived as "failures." They certainly accomplished less in social transformation than their proponents hoped and expected. But when systems are far from equilibrium, when they are bifurcating, small fluctuations can have great effects. This is one of the main reasons that the outcome is so unpredictable. We cannot even begin to imagine the multitude of small inputs that will have crucial impact.

I translate this conceptual framework into the ancient language of Greek philosophy. I say that when systems are functioning normally, structural determinism outweighs individual and group free will. But in times of crisis and transition, the free-will factor becomes central. The world of 2050 will be what we make it. This leaves full rein for our agency, for our commitment, and for our moral judgment. It also means that this period will be a time of terrible political struggle, because the stakes are much higher than in so-called normal times. It is to the question of the nature of this struggle and the issues in this struggle that I turn next.
3—A Substantively Rational World, or Can Paradise Be Regained?

If, indeed, as I have been contending, we are in a long and difficult transition from our existing world-system to another one or ones, and if the outcome is uncertain, there are two large questions before us: what kind of world do we in fact want; and by what means, or paths, are we most likely to get there? These are long-standing questions that many have posed for a long time, certainly over the past two centuries. But the first question has usually been asked in terms of utopias, and I wish to address it in terms of utopistics, that is, the serious assessment of historical alternatives, the exercise of our judgment regarding the substantive rationality of possible alternative historical systems. And the second question has been asked in terms of the inevitability of progress, and I wish to present it in terms of the end of certainty, the possibility but the non-inevitability of progress.

We are all familiar with the principal claims about our existing historical system. Those who argue that it represents the best of all possible worlds tend to emphasize three asserted virtues: material abundance and convenience; the existence of liberal political structures; the lengthening of the average life span. Each of these is argued by comparison with all known previous historical systems. On the other hand, the case against the merits of our existing historical system argues virtually
the opposite of this same list of three. Where the advocates see material abundance and convenience, the critics see acute inequality and polarization, arguing that material abundance and convenience exist only for the few. Where the advocates see liberal political structures, the critics see the absence of significant popular participation in decision making. Where the advocates see longer life spans, the critics stress the seriously degraded quality of life.

These are indeed hoary debates, but it might be useful to review the criticisms in the light of the positive assessments, in order to see what conclusions we might draw about what needs to be satisfied in any alternative system we might want to construct, now that the issue will be before us. It should be evident from what I have already said, that I fall on the side of the critics and do not consider the present world-system the best of all possible worlds. I am not even sure it is the best of all worlds we have already known. Still, I do not want to reargue this case here.¹ It is in some ways irrelevant to demonstrate what I consider to be the limitations of our existing world-system. I have been arguing that enough people consider it to have limitations such that it is not going to survive. The real question before us is what we want to replace it.

Before I can address that question, however, I

¹. I have already done so in the Wei Lun Lectures at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1992, entitled “Capitalist Civilization,” which have been reprinted as the second part of Historical Capitalism, with Capitalist Civilization (London: Verso, 1995).
must lay one ghost to rest. It is the misdeeds of what some have taken to calling, in recent years, "historical socialism," referring primarily to the set of Marxist-Leninist states that were once called the "socialist bloc." But by analogy and extension, the term is often used to cover many of the national liberation movements and even the Social Democratic parties in the pan-European world. Let us review this story briefly because it has been used to suggest that no alternative to our existing system is realistic or even remotely desirable. The three main charges against historical socialism are (1) the arbitrary use of state (and party) authority; at its worst, state-directed terror; (2) the extension of privileges to a Nomenklatura; and (3) extensive economic inefficiency deriving from state involvement in the economy and resulting in holding back rather than promoting the increase of social value.

Let me start by admitting that these charges are largely true, certainly the first two charges, as a historical assessment of the state regimes that existed under the aegis of these parties. What one can immediately say, however, is that it has been equally true that a lot of regimes not under the aegis of these parties could also be said to have made arbitrary use of state authority and even state-directed terror, to have given extensive and excessive privilege to groups linked to or preferred by the state authorities, and to have been incredibly inefficient, thereby no doubt holding back the increase of social value. It does not excuse the authorities of any so-called socialist state to note that these characteristics have been standard fare of
most state regimes throughout the historical trajectory of the modern world-system. Indeed, these practices are so widespread that one might wonder why their vices are not laid at the feet of the system itself, rather than at institutions (regimes) within the system. May it not be that it was the system as a whole that bred such regimes and that needed this kind of regime for its smooth functioning?

To be sure, some will reply, not all state regimes have been like this. But even the best of regimes, at their best moments, were scarcely innocent in terms of these various vices. More important, to the extent that some regimes were (or looked) better, they were those of the so-called liberal states. And all these liberal states were to be found in a very narrow corner of the world-system, located in the wealthy areas, and known only in recent times. It is not difficult to explain the reasons. They are those that are usually offered: the very large middle stratum resident within the boundaries of these countries; the relative satisfaction of this group with their share of the global pie; the consequent institutionalization of the "rule of law," which protected this middle stratum, although it also served to protect others somewhat. But, all these features were dependent on the reality of the polarization of the existing world-system. To assert that the roots of the liberal regimes were internal and "cultural" is to misread history and to ignore the relative strength of various contributing factors to the global results. In any case, as we have often seen, the liberalism of liberal states was always more precarious than we are wont to admit.

Whatever the explanation for the limitations of
so-called socialist states, it should be remembered that they were never autonomous entities and always operated within the framework of the capitalist world-economy, constrained by the operations of the interstate system, and did not—could not—represent the workings of an alternative historical system. That is not to say, however, that we cannot learn from this experience in pursuing our exercise in utopistics. We have gotten useful lessons about the consequences of particular mechanisms, which are at the very least food for thought.

If we are making a fundamental historical choice in the next fifty years, what is it between? Clearly, our choice is between a system (analogous to the present one in some fundamentals) in which some have significantly greater privileges than others, and one that is relatively democratic and egalitarian. All known historical systems have in fact been of the former kind up to now, although some have been worse in this regard than others. Indeed, I would argue that our existing system has been quite possibly the worst, in that it has shown the greatest polarization precisely because of its presumed virtue, the incredible expansion of the production of value. With much, much more value produced, the difference between the top stratum and the rest could be and has been far greater than in the other historical systems, even if it is true that the top stratum of the present system has included a larger percentage of the system’s overall population than that of preceding historical systems.

Still, the mere fact that all prior historical systems have been unequal, undemocratic systems is no argument that one could not envisage one that
was relatively democratic and egalitarian. After all, we have been talking about this possibility for a long time now, and it is clearly attractive to a lot of people. In our present system, what guarantees the inequalities and therefore necessarily the absence of real democratic participation in collective decision making is the primacy of the endless accumulation of capital. What people fear is that if one eliminates this primacy, one would have to sacrifice either relative productive efficiency or a free and open society. Let us investigate if either of these consequences is a necessary correlate of eliminating the primacy of the endless accumulation of capital. Could one devise a structure that would give primacy to maximizing the quality of life to everyone (presumably the original Benthamite liberal ideal) while at the same time limiting and controlling the means of collective violence so that everyone felt relatively and equally secure in their person and enjoyed the widest possible range of individual options without threatening the survival or equal rights of others (presumably the original John Stuart Mill ideal)? This might be called realizing liberal ideals worldwide in the context of an egalitarian system, or democracy as it is theorized, as opposed to the modified and hidden autocracies we have deceptively labeled democratic regimes.

This would not by itself fulfill the objective of a democratic, egalitarian system. It would have to be the case that everyone would be able to work at a satisfying job or jobs, and that, in case of special as well as unexpected need, assistance would be socially available. And finally, we would need to know
that the resources of the biosphere were being adequately preserved, so that there would be no intergenerational losses and therefore no intergenerational exploitation.

What might accomplish this? Let us start with the issue of remuneration. Generally, it is argued that monetary reward is an incentive for quality work. And I suppose generally this is sometimes true. But it is one thing to reward an artisan for quality artisanship and another thing to reward an executive for obtaining extraordinary profits for a corporation. They are different in two ways. It is clear that good artisanship is quality work. But the obtaining of extraordinary profits is only quality work if one accepts the priority of the endless accumulation of capital. It is hard to justify it on any other grounds. The second difference is the size of the reward. Increasing an artisan's income by 10 or even 25 percent for quality work is quite different from increasing an executive's income by 100 or even 1000 percent.

Is it really true that an industrial manager will only work well if he receives the kind of bonuses he can obtain in the present system? I believe it is absurd to think so. We have the clear example of many kinds of professionals (such as university professors) who are stimulated to work well not primarily by the relatively small increases in material rewards but rather by a combination of honors and increased control over their own work time. People do not usually win Nobel Prizes because they are spurred on by the endless accumulation of capital. And there are a remarkably large number of persons in our present system whose incentives are not
primarily monetary. Indeed, if honor and increased control of one's own work time were more generally available as rewards, would not many more people find them inherently satisfying?

If we then added to this somewhat changed set of social priorities a much improved system of career selection, such that more people were able to do the kind of work they found, for whatever reasons, more satisfying, perhaps anomie would be greatly reduced. And if we allowed, encouraged, and organized multiple career roles, within each year and/or successively over time, who knows with what arrangements we might increase general satisfaction? This would, in addition, make much more possible the equalization of family responsibilities, about which we have been talking so much in recent years—and doing so relatively little, I should add.

Greed is a very corrosive emotion, and our present system encourages it, virtually lauds it, because it rewards it. Are we really arguing that no society can be free if greed is morally leashed in some way, and in which countervalues are incorporated into our superegos? Some say charity can balance greed. But charity does not demonstrate the absence or even the diminution of greed. It can well be merely the guilt offering of the greedy. Charitable contributions only represent true charity—that is, dearness, affection, high regard, as its etymology tells us—when it is performed as a duty derived from the claims of justice, not when it is a peace offering to the gods.

Efficiency is a desirable phenomenon, but it is a means to some end. What is the end to which we
have been putting it? Can we put it to other ends? For example, if we increase the production of steel or computers or grain—that is, if we demonstrate that they can be produced at the same level of quality for lower cost of real inputs—why are we doing this? If there were no rewards for increasing capital accumulation but there were rewards for meeting real needs or for extending distribution, is it truly inconceivable that those who ran the operation would not work efficiently? Surely that can’t be so, or we could not justify the entire range of activities we call professional activity. Is it really clear that, on average, today’s big businessmen are more efficient than small-town architects or garage mechanics? I have never seen evidence to this effect, and it contradicts my initial observations of the social scene. If efficiency at capital accumulation were the only consideration, are not the drug lords of the world magnificent tributes to the capacity of greed to stimulate productivity?

Are large organizations more efficient than small ones? Once again, it depends on the criteria. Surely size affects cost, but not always in a strictly linear direction. In any case, in our present system, the size of productive operations has to do with a lot more than productive efficiency. It has to do with optimizing the evasion of taxes and regulations, or the benefits of relative monopoly versus the benefits of reducing coordination costs, or of shifting risk burdens in times of world economic expansion versus times of world economic contraction. These are all considerations that disappear once you eliminate the priority of the endless accumulation of capital. Left to itself, considerations
of efficiency would probably lead to a great variety in terms of sizes of economic activity. There would be fewer giant structures, no doubt, and a greater number of medium-size ones, instead of the relentless juggernaut of increase of size—the world concentration of capital and therefore of ownership and organized structures—that exists in the present system.

Suppose all economic structures were defined as nonprofit structures, but non-state control were an open, even a very widely used, option. We have known this system for centuries now in the so-called nonprofit hospitals. Are they notoriously less efficient, and less medically competent, than private or state hospitals? Not at all, to my knowledge. Indeed, probably the opposite. Why must this be restricted to hospitals? Could one not have a nonprofit electricity company on the model of the nonprofit hospital? Of course, one might argue that the trend today, even in hospitals, is to move toward the model of private-for-profit structures. No doubt, but this is precisely the result of the commodification of everything, which is at the base of our present system. Is it improving efficiency? Is it improving health care? The main argument its proponents use is that it will keep down health costs. Personally, I doubt that it will do this. What it will more likely do is reallocate money that has heretofore been expended on health care to the accumulation of capital. Is that really desirable? Who desires it?

So the first structural element I offer as a possible base of an alternative system is the erection of nonprofit decentralized units as the underlying
mode of producing within the system. It could offer the same incentives for efficiency—probably greater ones—than our present system. And it would avoid the fear that centralization, especially through state mechanisms, makes experimentation and diversity unlikely and leads, over time, both to authoritarian decision making and to bureaucratic sloth. But this still leaves questions of how these units might relate to one another, and on what basis. It also does not address the issue of the internal organization of these production units, what we might call workplace democracy.

How would multiple nonprofit productive enterprises fit together? Perhaps precisely in the way the theoretical model of laissez-faire tells us: through the market, the real market and not the monopolistically controlled world market we have in the present system. Would we need some kind of regulation? Some, no doubt, akin perhaps to traffic lights on a busy road. It need not involve agencies engaging in planning the production. The regulation might be limited to counteracting fraud, improving information flows, and sending up warning signals about over- and underproduction.

Nor is it necessary that these nonprofit production units be internally autocratic. The interests of workers might still differ from those of managers. Some mode of negotiation would continue to be essential, with unions or some such institution representing collective worker interests. And some form of worker participation in decision making at the top would still need to be implemented. A mode of worker freedom to move between employing organizations, without losing lifetime benefits,
would need to be established. (That is to say, the lifetime benefits would have to be vested in some structure outside the production organization itself.) Also, a method for adjusting the size of the workforce to the needs of production would need to be developed, along with some kind of mechanism to ensure that workers could find alternative, satisfying employment. Finally, a system of penalizing true sloth and incompetence would have to be constructed. We could long debate the details of how to meet each of these needs. And even once decided, they would be constantly under renewed discussion. The point is that none of them presents an inherently insuperable obstacle that people of good will could not resolve, more or less, within the framework of a world-system not driven by the endless accumulation of capital.

What, then, about the issues we have been discussing so much and so vigorously in recent years: the inequalities of race, of gender, and of nation. Any world-system that does not do a whole lot better than our present one in this regard is not worth struggling to achieve. I will not say that eliminating the priority given to the endless accumulation of capital will automatically ensure equality of race, gender, and nation. What I will say is that it would eliminate one of the most potent reasons for the inequalities. After that, the real work begins, unencumbered by this heavy constraint. Perhaps with the elimination—or at least reduction—of economic fears, at the very least the murderous element may disappear.

One of the central issues that has been under discussion has been the outcomes within the
present system in terms of distribution of positions and rewards. The reality of the existing system is that the outcomes of job allocation and actual quality of life are deeply tilted in terms of race, gender, and nation. The defenders of the existing system argue that this is simply the result of using meritocracy as the criterion, and that this criterion represents a morally virtuous mode of distribution. The critics say that meritocracy hides institutionalized biases in distribution, which affect the ability to compete on adult age “tests” long before the candidates come to the starting line.

In fact, both are right. Meritocracy does represent a democratizing pressure, but it is also true that in our present system, the decks are stacked. Let us analyze what meritocracy really involves, however. Suppose we give a test, any test, to a group of one hundred people and get quantified results. Is it the case that person 38 in the ranking is truly and significantly more qualified than person 39? The very idea is absurd. What we could probably say, if this is a test of competence, is that the top ten are quite good and the bottom ten quite poor, and that the eighty that are in-between are just that, in-between. Suppose, then, we were asked to allocate fifty positions as the result of such a test. Should we give them to the top fifty? Another possibility would be to award ten places to the top ten, eliminate the bottom ten from consideration, and draw lots among the in-between eighty for the forty positions. Of course, I am inventing the exact percentages, but testing of any kind is a limited mechanism of discerning capacity and certainly cannot rank people plausibly
throughout the continuum. Yet it is true that there is always a minority that is exceptionally qualified and another minority that is exceptionally unqualified. As long as we take account of this but remember that these two categories are relatively small, we can move toward a random distribution of positions among the rest. Just doing that would drastically reduce institutionalized racism-sexism.

Remember, I am not proposing utopia. I am proposing routes to greater substantive rationality. The serious reduction of these inequalities will take much collective work. Still, it should be intrinsically possible to envisage a social world in which the discriminations had become at most minor, instead of continuing to be fundamental to the operation of the historical system as they currently are. Today, they poison all of social life, everywhere. They dominate our mentalities. They wreak untold havoc, physical and psychological, not only on those who belong to the oppressed groups but on those who belong to the dominant groups. The evil results are not getting better; they’re getting worse. These inequalities are morally unacceptable and unresolvable within the framework of our existing world-system. Fortunately, this system is on its way out. The question is, what is on its way in?

Would we then have a classless society? This too I doubt, in the sense that ending polarization does not mean ending variation, including variation in class position. But as with race, gender, and nation, it means transforming the distinction from one that is deep-rooted and corrosive into one that could be relatively minor and limited in its impact. There is no fundamental reason we could not over-
come the three greatest consequences of class differences: unequal access to education, to health services, and to a guaranteed decent income throughout life. It should not be difficult to place all three of these needs outside commodification, to be provided by nonprofit institutions and paid for collectively. We do this now for such things as water supply and, in many countries, libraries. Some say that the worldwide costs would then get out of hand. They might, but there are many solutions to the question of collective cost allocations other than commodification. It is a social decision we cannot avoid and should not want to avoid.

Could we prevent the creation of Nomenklaturas? Since public office would no longer be the only rapid guarantee of better access to education, health, and lifetime minimal income (because these would be universal), and because there would be no outlets for profit-making economic structures, what would be the point of a Nomenklatura? We might actually attain, for the first time, the Weberian ideal, a disinterested civil service, in which all members entered it because it offered them job satisfaction, and not for all the other reasons they enter it today. Of course, an essential element in avoiding a Nomenklatura would be a truly democratic set of political institutions. And here the idea of limited terms of office, so dear to conservative forces at the present time, might be quite useful. But nothing will work unless the majority of the population feel that they really have a considerable impact on political decision making, an impact that has to go far beyond the simple veto
power of being able once every few years to vote against the “ins.”

Here we run into the question of how one gets widespread participation, and sense of participation, in ways that cannot be channeled, and thereby distorted, by the massive investment of money in media campaigns. Once again, a knotty question, but scarcely an insurmountable one. For one thing, where will the huge sums come from if there is not the endless accumulation of capital? And, given the technological advances these days in information flows, could not matters be organized in such a way that there were not financial imbalances between competing points of view? Once again, not at all technically impossible. This might not be enough to guarantee a sense of real democracy, but it would be a beginning. Here, too, the real work would only begin, not end, with the establishment of this kind of historical system.

As to the preservation of the biosphere, there is one simple, viable, and necessary element in its achievement. We must require all production organizations to internalize all costs, including all costs necessary to ensure that their productive activity neither pollutes nor uses up the resources of the biosphere. That is, immediate restoration and/or cleanup costs would become integral to the production process and therefore to production costs. This, of course, would not be enough by itself, but it would, at the minimum, ensure that waste would never be casual. There would still be differences of views about the consequences of particular productive activity to the biosphere. There are no scientifically definitive answers. Ultimately,
these questions come down to political choices. Is $x$ really more important than $y$? It is often a choice between present and future consumption, between generations living and yet to be born, between risks calculated in one realm of the universe against risks calculated in another. These are social judgments and should be made democratically, involving all who are affected by the decisions.

The underlying issue is the measured evaluation of social costs, and the problem is how to make such evaluation truly collective. It is not a question restricted to ecological issues. When we consider health costs, should we spend more on the children or more on the aged? Should the real income of the healthier, mid-lifetime working population be reduced, and by how much, to cover the more marginal of these health expenditures for the young, the old, and those needing special care? In our present system, these are choices made on the basis of individual egotisms, tempered perhaps by some limited collective interference. As the costs go up, and as the social demand for democracy and equality goes up, the results of our present system seem more and more absurd and unreasonable. But how do we collectively evaluate this? What is substantively rational in terms of the allocation of our less-than-unlimited resources? Surely, we cannot know without open, wide-ranging discussion involving as many people as possible. But how can we best institutionalize this, and on a world level, without removing the arena of decision from the inputs and control of ordinary people?
In this search for substantive rationality, for the good society (or at least the better society), one thing we have on our side is human creativity. Here, there is no limit to the potential. What we know about complex systems is that they are self-organizing and that they repeatedly invent new formulas, new solutions for existing problems. I do not, however, wish to sneak in here a concept of inevitable progress, because creativity is not necessarily or always positive. What works is not necessarily what is morally good. And the morally good is not achieved simply by preaching it. As almost all the religions of the world tell us, God gave us free will, and therefore the intrinsic possibility of both good and evil. Hence, we come to the political question, how do we get there, or what can we do in the next twenty-five to fifty years that will move us to a more substantively rational historical social system?

This brings us back to the period of transition, to the period of hell on earth. We shall not witness a simple, laid-back political debate, a friendly discussion among choir boys. It will be a struggle, conducted on a life-and-death level. For we are talking about laying the bases for the historical system of the next five hundred years. And we are debating whether we want to have simply one more kind of historical system in which privilege prevails and democracy and equality are minimized, or whether we want to move in the opposite direction, for the first time in the known history of humanity.

The first thing to look at is how those who currently have privilege will react, are indeed reacting. One cannot expect that any significant segment of
those who have privilege will relinquish it without struggle, simply on the ground of some appeal to their ethical responsibilities or even to their historical vision. One must assume that they will seek to preserve privilege. Any other presumption is implausible and unrealistic. Even so, we do not know what their strategy will be.

The optimal strategy by which to defend privilege—the one most likely to be efficacious—has long been a matter of debate among those who hold privilege, and it is not a question upon which social science has offered us any definitive evidence up to now. To start with the simple, there is the division of views between those who believe that repression (at least judicious repression) is the key, and those who believe that concessions that give away a small portion of the pie in order to save the rest are the secret. One can try a mix of both formulas, of course, but then the question remains, in what proportion and in what sequence?

The fact that historically both methods have been used is not in itself evidence that both methods work equally well, or that the one or ones that worked well in the past will work well in the present, or that the one that worked well during the ongoing normal trajectory of our present historical system would work well in the period of bifurcation and transition. What we can say is that the accumulated knowledge of world history and the vastly improved means of world communication ensure that there will be more intelligent reflection, more conscious decision making on the part of the privileged during this historical transition than during any previous one. The privileged
are inevitably better informed and thereby socially smarter than they have been. They are also far wealthier, and they have far stronger and more effective means of destruction and repression than they ever did before.

One would think they would be able to do very well. Of course, they will have the standard problem. They are not an organized, disciplined sectarian group. They are an amorphous, quite varied group of beneficiaries of the existing state of things. Some are more powerful and wealthy than others, and by far. Some are more intelligent and sophisticated than others. Some are indeed organized into smallish groups, others quite adrift. And of course, they are in competition with each other just as much as they have a collective, class interest in certain outcomes.

Still, they find themselves collectively in structural difficulties, as I have been arguing. This means that they have to do something. The question, however, is not only what but when. Shall they simply pursue short-run advantage now until the system more visibly cracks? Or shall they take their losses immediately, on the presumption that a stitch in time will save nine? This question is all the more difficult depending on whether we are talking of the superpowerful or merely the ordinarily privileged. The former may find it easier to take short-term losses than the latter, in order to safeguard their long-term privilege.

The biggest problem for those with privilege comes with the awareness of systemic crisis, if and when they finally attain it and fully integrate this expectation into their operational procedures. At
that point, it is quite probable that they would seek to implement the di Lampedusa principle—to change everything (or seem to do so) in order that nothing change (although it seems to do so). This is extremely tricky. The first problem is to invent the change (less easy and less obvious than one might think). The second is to delude a large part of one’s own camp. The third is to delude the opponents.

What kind of alternative can they invent? I am not at all sure. Could anyone have predicted in fifteenth-century Europe what kind of alternative a disintegrating feudal stratum would invent to save itself? And if one had predicted, how likely is it that one would have foreseen our present capitalist world-economy, which has had precisely the di Lampedusa result: a capitalist system that is different in most ways from the feudal system except in the crucial outcome of ensuring inegalitarian results, and in many cases to the very same strata, at least for the first several centuries. I am certainly not going to try to do the invention for them. I would guess, however, that the method most likely to succeed would be one that incorporated a lot of the terminology of the discontented. Twenty years ago I would have said that the program would come in the guise of Marxism, but for many reasons this seems far less likely now. It may well come under the pretext of ecology, or of multiculturalism, or of women’s rights. I am not suggesting anything suspect about the current proponents of these various causes, all three of which seem to me to be indispensable forms of rebellion against the abuses of our current world-system. But rhetoric is
co-optable, even when movements resist co-option. And movements, as we have seen, find it very difficult over time not to bend in the wind, especially if they can obtain some portion of their immediate objectives thereby.

The privileged need more than merely adopt a radically different rhetoric, however. They have to use the rhetoric to establish a radically different set of institutions. And here they have two more problems. One lies in their own camp, and in two forms. The first is that what may be good for a group as a worldwide whole may not at all be good for subgroups among the privileged. The losing subgroups will, of course, be unwilling to go along, and that can disrupt the political viability of the operation. It is impossible even to attempt to predict the details.

But the second form of difficulty within the camp of the privileged presents even greater dilemmas. Suppose that some clever group works out an effective di Lampedusa strategy. Many of their camp may not understand what is going on, and so may not be willing to support it politically (or indeed financially). What can be done then? The proponents could, of course, spell it out in black and white, but that defeats the whole purpose of a di Lampedusa strategy. So they will have to argue for it discreetly and indirectly, which may or may not rally the troops.

And this leads directly to the third form of difficulty: how to persuade the vast majority that the non-change is really change, that transformation is indeed in the direction of a more substantively rational world, rather than merely changing the
form of substantive irrationality. The key element of a di Lampedusa strategy is never to proclaim the real strategy too openly, but to insist on the surface strategy. An Ayn Rand approach, the glorification of the right of strong individuals to reap their unequal returns, has never really worked, to my knowledge. It is even less likely to work now, although the momentary attraction of neoliberal theorizing may seem to be counterevidence. I would contend that the public reaction is already there and quite visible, and that we shall hear distinctly less of neoliberal arguments as we move into the twenty-first century. Still, the camp of the privileged must tread a difficult tightrope: explaining enough to their side to rally the troops, but not so much that it will afford the other side evidence and motives for fierce opposition. It will not be easy, and it is another element absolutely impossible to foresee in detail.

As for those who are the oppressed in our existing system, how will they act? They have at least as many problems as do the privileged. If the latter are a heterogeneous, amorphous group, the oppressed are even more so. If the camp of the privileged contains a wide range of immediate and even long-term interests within their camp, so does the camp of their opponents. And of course, compared to the privileged, the oppressed have less current power, less current organization, less current wealth at their disposal to pursue any global political battle. Especially, one should add, a battle that will take place in such multiform ways—open violence, quasi-polite electoral and legislative battles, theoretical debates within the structures of
knowledge, and public appeals to strange and often muted rhetoric.

I cannot really say more about this, except that the concept of a rainbow coalition is probably the only viable one, but one tremendously difficult to implement. And the tactic of demanding that the privileged live up to their liberal rhetoric would no doubt wreak havoc, but is again very difficult to implement. What should be clear is that I have not proposed a program but merely some elements that should enter into the discussion of a program—of how one could institutionalize a more substantively rational historical system, and of how one might traverse the period of transition in order to end up there. These proposals need to be debated, supplemented, or replaced by better ones. And the debate must be worldwide.

We must now return to the original assertions about the structure of systems. Remember the pattern. They are born; they live long lives according to some rules; and at some point they come into crisis, bifurcate, and transform themselves into something else. The last period, the transition period, is particularly unpredictable, but also particularly subject to individual and group input, what I have called the increase in the free will factor. If we wish to seize our opportunity, which seems to me a moral and political obligation, we must first recognize the opportunity for what it is, and of what it consists. This requires reconstructing the framework of knowledge so that we can understand the nature of our structural crisis, and therefore our historical choices for the twenty-first century. Once we understand the choices, we must be ready to
engage in the struggle without any guarantee that we shall win it. This is crucial, since illusions only breed disillusions and are therewith depoliticizing. Finally, our tactical action—our intellectual, moral, and political judgments—must be at one and the same time straightforward and clear, but nonetheless subtle and medium-run. We are called upon to be wary of a deceitful opponent and trusting in the fundamental good faith of allies who do not share all our backgrounds or needs or predispositions, or indeed interests. This may seem like a formula for superpersons. I believe it is rather a formula for those who hope to achieve a more substantively rational, better world than the one in which we live.

There is one final question I must address. Will people in power just yield their privilege? Of course not; they never do. Sometimes they concede parts of it, but only as a tactic to retain most of it. People in power have never been as powerful or as wealthy as they are in the contemporary world. And people out of power (or at least many of them) have never been as badly off, certainly relatively, and to a considerable extent, absolutely. So the polarization is the greatest it has ever been, which means that noble renunciation of privilege is the least likely outcome.

That being said, it is irrelevant to my thesis. I have argued that there exist structural limitations to the process of endless accumulation of capital that governs our existing world, and that these limitations are coming to the fore currently as a brake on the functioning of the system. I have argued that these structural limitations—what I have
called the asymptotes of the operative mechanisms—are creating a structurally chaotic situation that will be both unpleasant to live through and thoroughly unpredictable in its trajectory. Finally, I have argued that a new order will emerge out of this chaos over a period of fifty years, and that this new order will be shaped as a function of what everyone does in the interval—those with power in the present system, and those without it. This analysis is neither optimistic nor pessimistic, in the sense that I do not and cannot predict whether the outcome will be better or worse. It is, however, realistic in trying to stimulate discussion about the kinds of structure that might actually serve us all better and the kinds of strategies that might move us in those directions. So, as they say in East Africa, harambee!
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