

The Agonies of Liberalism: What Hope Progress?

We meet on a triple anniversary: the 25th Anniversary of the founding of Kyoto Seika University in 1968; the 25th Anniversary of the world revolution of 1968; the 52nd Anniversary of the exact day (at least on the US calendar) of the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese fleet. Let me begin by noting what I think each of these anniversaries represents.¹

The founding of Kyoto Seika University is a symbol of a major development in the history of our world-system: the extraordinary quantitative expansion of university structures in the 1950s and 1960s.² In a sense, this period was the culmination of the Enlightenment promise of progress through education. In itself, this was a wonderful thing, and we celebrate it here today. But, as with many wonderful things, it had its complications and its costs. One complication was that the expansion of higher education produced large numbers of graduates who insisted on jobs and incomes commensurate with their status, and there came to be some difficulty in answering this demand,

at least as promptly and as fully as it was made. The cost was the social cost of providing this expanded higher education, which was only one part of the cost of providing welfare in general for the significantly expanding middle strata of the world-system. This increased cost of social welfare would begin to lay a heavy burden on state treasuries, and in 1993 we are discussing throughout the world the fiscal crises of the states.

This brings us to the second anniversary, that of the world revolution of 1968. This world revolution started in most countries (but not all) within the universities. One of the issues that served as tinder for the fire was no doubt the sudden anxiety of these prospective graduates about their job prospects. But, of course, this narrowly egoistic factor was not the principal focus of the revolutionary explosion. Rather it was merely one more symptom of the generic problem, concern with the real content of the whole set of promises contained in the Enlightenment scenario of progress—promises that, on the surface, had seemed to have been realized in the period after 1945.

And this brings us to the third anniversary, the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was this attack that brought the US into the Second World War as a formal participant. In fact, however, the war was not a war primarily between Japan and the US. Japan, if you will pardon my saying so, was a second-rank player in this global drama, and its attack was a minor intervening event in a long-standing struggle. The war was primarily a war between Germany and the US, and had been de facto a continuous war since 1914. It was a 'thirty years' war' between the two principal contenders for succession to Great Britain as the hegemonic power of the world-system. As we know, the US would win this war and become hegemonic, and thereupon would be the one to preside over this world-wide surface triumph of Enlightenment promises.

Hence, I shall organize my remarks in terms of this set of themes which in fact we mark by these anniversaries. I shall discuss first the era of hope and struggle for Enlightenment ideals, 1789–1945. Then I shall seek to analyse the era of Enlightenment hopes to be realized, but falsely realized, 1945–89. Thirdly, I shall come to our present era, the 'Black Period' that began in 1989 and will go on for possibly as much as a half-century. Finally, I shall talk of the choices before us—now, and also soon.

The Functions of Liberalism

The first great political expression of the Enlightenment, in all its ambiguities, was of course the French Revolution. What the French Revolution was about has itself become one of the great ambiguities of our era. The bicentennial in France in 1989 was the occasion of a very

¹ This lecture was given at the 25th Anniversary of the founding of Kyoto Seika University, 7 December 1993.

² See John W. Meyer et al., 'The World Educational Revolution, 1950–1970', in J.W. Meyer and M.T. Hannan, eds, *National Development 1950–1970*, Chicago 1979.

major attempt to substitute a new interpretation of this great happening for the long-dominant 'social interpretation', now asserted to be outmoded.³

The French Revolution itself was the end point of a long process, not in France alone but in the entire capitalist world-economy as a historical system. For, by 1789, a goodly part of the globe had been located inside this historical system for three centuries already. And during those three centuries, most of its key institutions had been established and consolidated: the axial division of labour, with a significant transfer of surplus-value from peripheral zones to core zones; the primacy of reward to those operating in the interests of the endless accumulation of capital; the interstate system composed of so-called sovereign states, which however were constrained by the framework and the 'rules' of this interstate system; and the ever-growing polarization of this world-system, one that was not merely economic but social, and was on the verge of becoming demographic as well.

What this world-system of historical capitalism still lacked, however, was a legitimating geoculture. The basic doctrines were being forged by the theoreticians of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century (and indeed earlier), but they were to be socially institutionalized only with the French Revolution. For what the French Revolution did was to unleash public support for, indeed clamour for, the acceptance of two new world-views: that political change was normal and not exceptional; and that sovereignty resided in the 'people', and not in a sovereign. In 1815, Napoleon, heir and world protagonist of the French Revolution, was defeated, and there followed a presumed 'Restoration' in France (and wherever else the *anciens régimes* had been displaced). But the Restoration did not really, could no longer really, undo the widespread acceptance of these world-views. It was to deal with this new situation that the trinity of nineteenth-century ideologies—conservatism, liberalism, and socialism—came into being, providing the language of subsequent political debates within the capitalist world-economy.⁴

Of the three ideologies, however, it was liberalism that emerged triumphant, and as early as what might be thought of as the first world revolution of this system, the revolution of 1848.⁵ For it was liberalism that was best able to provide a viable geoculture for the capitalist world-economy, one that would legitimate the other institutions both in the eyes of the cadres of the system and, to a significant degree, in the eyes of the mass of the populations, the so-called ordinary people.

³ For a magnificent and quite detailed account of the intellectual debates surrounding the bicentennial in France, see Steven Kaplan, *Adieu 89*, Paris 1993.

⁴ For an analysis of this process, see my 'The French Revolution as a World-Historical Event', in *Unbinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms*, Cambridge 1991.

⁵ The process by which liberalism gained centre stage and made its two contestants, conservatism and socialism, into virtual adjuncts instead of opponents, is discussed in my 'Trois idéologies ou une seule? La problématique de la modernité', *Genèses* 9, October 1992.

Once people thought that political change was normal and that they in principle constituted the sovereign (that is to say, the decider of political change), anything was possible. And this of course was precisely the problem that faced those who were powerful and privileged within the framework of the capitalist world-economy. The immediate focus of their fears was to some extent the small but growing group of urban industrial workers. But, as the French Revolution had amply demonstrated, rural non-industrial workers could be quite as troublesome or fearsome from the perspective of the powerful and privileged. How were these 'dangerous classes' to be kept from taking these norms too seriously, and thereupon interfering with the process of capital accumulation by undermining the basic structures of the system? This was the political dilemma that was posed acutely to the governing classes in the first half of the nineteenth century.

One obvious answer was repression. And repression was amply used. The lesson of the world revolution of 1848, however, was that simple repression was not ultimately very efficacious; that it provoked the dangerous classes, worsening tempers, rather than calming them. It came to be realized that repression, to be effective, had to be combined with concessions. On the other hand, the putative revolutionaries of the first half of the nineteenth century had also learned a lesson. Spontaneous uprisings were not very efficacious either, since they were more or less easily put down. Threats of popular insurrection had to be combined with conscious long-term political organization, if they were to speed up significant change.

In effect, liberalism offered itself as the immediate solution to the political difficulties of both Right and Left. To the Right, it preached concessions; to the Left, it preached political organization. To both, it preached patience: in the long run, more will be gained (for all) by a *via media*. Liberalism was centrism incarnate, and its siren was alluring. For it was not a mere passive centrism that it preached, but an active strategy. Liberals put their faith in one key premiss of Enlightenment thought: that rational thought and action were the path to salvation, that is, to progress. Men (it was rarely a question of including women) were naturally rational, were potentially rational, were ultimately rational.

It followed that 'normal political change' ought to follow the path indicated by those who were most rational—that is, most educated, most skilled, therefore most wise. These men could design the best paths of political change to pursue; that is, these men could indicate the necessary reforms to undertake and enact. Rational reformism was the organizing concept of liberalism, which therefore dictated the seemingly erratic position of liberals concerning the relation of the individual to the state. Liberals could simultaneously argue that the individual ought not to be constrained by state (collective) dictates and that state action was necessary to minimize injustice to the individual. They could thus be in favour of *laissez-faire* and factory laws at the same time. For what mattered to liberals was neither *laissez-faire* nor factory laws per se, but rather measured deliberate progress toward the good society, which could be achieved best, perhaps only, via rational reformism.

This doctrine of rational reformism proved in practice to be extraordinarily attractive. It seemed to answer everyone's needs. For those of conservative bent, it seemed as though it might be the way to dampen the revolutionary instincts of the dangerous classes. Some rights to suffrage here, a little bit of welfare-state provisions there, plus some unifying of the classes under a common nationalist identity—all this added up, by the end of the nineteenth century, to a formula that appeased the working classes, while maintaining the essential elements of the capitalist system. The powerful and the privileged lost nothing that was of fundamental importance to them, and they slept more peacefully at night (fewer revolutionaries at their windows).

For those of a radical bent, on the other hand, rational reformism seemed to offer a useful halfway house. It provided some fundamental change here and now, without ever eliminating the hope *and expectation* of more fundamental change later. It provided above all, to living men, something in their lifetime. And these living men then slept more peacefully at night (fewer policemen at their windows).

I do not wish to minimize a hundred and fifty years or so of continuous political struggle—some of it violent, much of it passionate, most of it consequential, and almost all of it serious. I do however wish to put this struggle in perspective. Ultimately, the struggle was fought within rules established by liberal ideology. And when a major group arose, the fascists, who rejected those rules fundamentally, they were put down and eliminated—with difficulty, no doubt; but they were put down.

There is one other thing we must say about liberalism. We have asserted it was not fundamentally anti-statist, since its real priority was rational reformism. But, if not anti-statist, liberalism was fundamentally anti-democratic. Liberalism was always an aristocratic doctrine; it preached the 'rule of the best'. To be sure, liberals did not define the 'best' primarily by birth status but rather by educational achievement. The best were thus not the hereditary nobility, but the beneficiaries of meritocracy. But the best were always a group smaller than the whole. Liberals wanted rule by the best, aristocracy, precisely in order not to have rule by the whole of the people, democracy. Democracy was the objective of the radicals, not of the liberals; or at least it was the objective of those who were truly radical, truly anti-systemic. It was to prevent this group from prevailing that liberalism was put forward as an ideology. And when they spoke to those of conservative bent who were resistant to proposed reforms, liberals always asserted that only rational reformism would bar the coming of democracy, an argument that ultimately would be heard sympathetically by all intelligent conservatives.

Finally, we must note a significant difference between the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the main protagonists of the demands of the dangerous classes were still the urban working classes of Europe and North America. The liberal agenda worked splendidly with them. They were offered universal (male) suffrage, the beginning

of a welfare state, and national identity. But national identity against whom? Against their neighbours to be sure; but more importantly and profoundly, against the non-White world. Imperialism and racism were part of the package offered by liberals to the European/North American working classes under the guise of 'rational reformism'.

Meanwhile, however, the 'dangerous classes' of the non-European world were stirring politically—from Mexico to Afghanistan, from Egypt to China, from Persia to India. When Japan defeated Russia in 1905, it was regarded in this entire zone as the beginning of the 'roll-back' of European expansion. It was a loud warning signal to the 'liberals', who were of course primarily Europeans and North Americans, that now 'normal political change' and 'sovereignty' were claims that the peoples of the entire world, and not just the European working classes, were making.

Hence, liberals turned their attention to extending the concept of rational reformism to the level of the world-system as a whole. This was the message of Woodrow Wilson and his insistence on the 'self-determination of nations', a doctrine that was the global equivalent of universal suffrage. This was the message of Franklin Roosevelt and the 'four freedoms' proclaimed as a war aim during the Second World War, which was later to be translated by President Truman into 'Point Four', the opening shot of the post-1945 project of the 'economic development of underdeveloped countries', a doctrine that was the global equivalent of the welfare state.⁶

The objectives of liberalism and of democracy were once again, however, in conflict. In the nineteenth century, the proclaimed universalism of liberalism had been made compatible with racism by 'externalizing' the objects of racism (outside the boundaries of the 'nation') while 'internalizing' the de facto beneficiaries of universal ideals, the 'citizenry'. The question was whether global liberalism of the twentieth century could be as successful in containing the 'dangerous classes' located in what came to be called the Third World or the South, as a national-level liberalism in Europe and North America had been in containing their national 'dangerous classes'. The problem of course was that, at a world level, there was no place to which one could 'externalize' racism. The contradictions of liberalism were coming home to roost.

Triumph and Disaster

Still, in 1945, this was far from evident. The victory of the Allies over the Axis powers seemed to be the triumph of global liberalism (in alliance with the USSR) over the fascist challenge. The fact that the last act of the war was the dropping of two atomic bombs by the US on the only non-White Axis power, Japan, was scarcely discussed in the US (or indeed in Europe) as perhaps reflecting some contradiction of

⁶ The nature of the promises made by liberalism at the world level and the ambiguity of the Leninist response to global liberalism are explored in my 'The Concept of National Development, 1917–1989: Elegy and Requiem', in G. Marks and L. Diamond, eds, *Reexamining Democracy*, Newbury Park 1992.

liberalism. The reaction, needless to say, was not the same in Japan. But Japan had lost the war, and its voice was not taken seriously at this point.

The US was by now by far and away the strongest economic force in the world-economy. And, with the atomic bomb, it was the strongest military force, despite the size of the Soviet armed forces. It would within five years be able to organize the world-system politically by means of a four-fold programme: i) an arrangement with the USSR guaranteeing it control over a corner of the world in return for remaining in its corner (not of course rhetorically, but in terms of real policy); ii) an alliance system with both western Europe and Japan, which served economic, political, and rhetorical objectives as well as military ones; iii) a modulated, moderate programme to arrive at the 'decolonization' of the colonial empires; iv) a programme of internal integration within the US, amplifying the categories of real 'citizenship', and sealed with a unifying ideology of anti-Communism.

This programme worked, and worked remarkably well, for some twenty-five years, that is, precisely up to our turning point of 1968. How then shall we evaluate those extraordinary years, 1945–68? Were they a period of progress and of the triumph of liberal values? The answer has to be: very much yes, but also very much no. The most obvious indicator of 'progress' was material. The economic expansion of the world-economy was extraordinary, the largest in the history of the capitalist system. And it seemed to occur everywhere—West and East, North and South. To be sure, there was greater benefit to North than to South, and the gaps (both absolute and relative) grew in most cases.⁷ Since, however, there was real growth and high employment in most places, the era had a rosy glow. This was all the more so in that along with growth went greatly increased expenditures on welfare, as I've already mentioned, and in particular expenditures on education and health.

Secondly, there was peace once again in Europe. Peace in Europe, but not of course in Asia, where two long, wearing wars were fought—in Korea and Indochina. And not of course in many other parts of the non-European world. The conflicts in Korea and Vietnam were not however the same. Rather the Korean conflict is to be paired with the Berlin Blockade, the two occurring in fact almost in conjunction. Germany and Korea were the two great partitions of 1945. Each country was divided between the military-political spheres of the US on the one side and the USSR on the other. In the spirit of Yalta, the lines of division were supposed to remain intact, whatever the nationalist (and ideological) sentiments of Germans and Koreans.

In 1949–52, the firmness of these lines was put to the test. After much tension (and in the case of Korea enormous loss of life) the outcome was in fact the maintenance of boundary status quo ante, more or less.

⁷ See a summary of the data in John T. Passé-Smith, 'The Persistence of the Gap: Taking Stock of Economic Growth in the Post-World War II Era', in M.A. Selligson and J.T. Passé-Smith, eds, *Development and Underdevelopment: The Political Economy of Inequality*, Boulder, CO 1993.

Thus, in a real sense, the Berlin Blockade and the Korean War concluded the process of the institutionalization of Yalta. The second outcome of these two conflicts was the further social integration of each camp, institutionalized by the establishment of strong alliance systems: NATO and the US–Japan Defence Pact on the one side, the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet–Chinese accords on the other. Furthermore, the two conflicts served as direct stimulus of a major expansion in the world-economy, fuelled heavily as it was by military expenditures. European recovery and Japanese growth were two immediate major beneficiaries of this expansion.

The war in Vietnam was of a quite different type from that in Korea. It was the emblematic site (but far from the only one) of the struggle of national liberation movements throughout the non-European world. While the Korean War and the Berlin Blockade were part and parcel of the Cold War world regime, the Vietnamese struggle (as the Algerian and many others) was a protest against the constraints and structure of this Cold War world regime. They were therefore in this elementary and immediate sense the product of antisystemic movements. This was quite different from the struggles in Germany and Korea, where the two sides were never at peace but only at truce; that is, for each, peace was *faute de mieux*. The wars of national liberation, were, on the contrary, one-sided. None of the national liberation movements wanted wars with Europe/North America; they wanted to be left alone to pursue their own paths. It was Europe/North America that was unwilling to leave them alone, until eventually forced to do so. The national liberation movements were thus protesting against the powerful, but they were doing so in the name of fulfilling the liberal agenda of the self-determination of nations, and the economic development of underdeveloped countries.

That brings us to the third great accomplishment of the extraordinary years, 1945–1968: the worldwide triumph of the antisystemic forces. It is only an apparent paradox that the very moment of the apogee of US hegemony in the world-system and the global legitimation of liberal ideology was also the moment when all those movements whose structures and strategies had been formed in the period 1848–1945 as anti-systemic movements came to power. The so-called Old Left in its three historic variants—Communists, Social-Democrats, and national liberation movements—all achieved state power, each in different geographic zones. Communist parties were in power from the Elbe to the Yalu, covering one-third of the world. National liberation movements were in power in most of Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean (and their equivalents in much of Latin America and the Middle East). And Social-Democratic movements (or their equivalents) had come to power, at least rotating power, in most of western Europe, North America, and Australasia. Japan was perhaps the only significant exception to this global triumph of the Old Left.

Was this a paradox? Was this the result of the juggernaut of social progress, the inevitable triumph of popular forces? Or was this a massive cooptation of these popular forces? And is there a way to distinguish intellectually and politically between these two propositions?

These were the questions that were beginning to create unease in the 1960s. Whereas the economic expansion with its clear benefits in living standards around the world, relative peace in large zones of the world, and the seeming triumph of popular movements all lent themselves to positive and optimistic appraisals of world developments, a closer look at the real situation revealed major negatives.

The Cold War world regime was one not of the expansion of human freedom but of great internal repression by all the states, whose justification was the presumed seriousness of the highly choreographed geopolitical tensions. The Communist world had purge trials, gulags, and iron curtains. The Third World had one-party regimes and dissenters in prison or exile. And McCarthyism (and its equivalents in the other OECD countries), if less overtly brutal, was quite as effective in enforcing conformity and breaking careers, where necessary. Public discourse everywhere was allowed only within clearly delimited parameters.

Furthermore, in material terms, the Cold War regime was one of growing inequality, both internationally and nationally. And while antisystemic movements often moved against old inequalities, they were not shy about creating new ones. The *nomenklaturas* of the Communist regimes had their parallels in the Third World and in Social-Democratic regimes in the OECD countries.

In addition, it was quite clear that these inequalities were not randomly distributed. They were correlated with status-group (whether coded as race, religion, or ethnicity), and this correlation held both at the world level and within all states. And they were of course correlated with gender and age-group, as well as with a number of other social characteristics. In short, there were groups left out, many such groups, groups adding up to considerably more than half of the world's population.

It was thus the realization of long-standing hopes in the years between 1945 and 1968, hopes that came to be thought of as falsely realized, which underlay and accounted for the world revolution of 1968. That revolution was directed first of all against the whole historical system—against the US as the hegemonic power of this system, against the economic and military structures that constituted the pillars of the system. But the revolution was directed just as much, if not more, against the Old Left—against the antisystemic movements considered insufficiently antisystemic: against the USSR as the collusive partner of its ostensible ideological foe, the US; against the trade unions and other workers' organizations who were seen as narrowly economic, defending the interests primarily of particular status-groups.

Meanwhile, the defenders of the existing structures were denouncing what they regarded as the anti-rationalism of the revolutionaries of 1968. But, in fact, liberal ideology had hung itself by its own petard. Having insisted for over a century that the function of the social sciences was to advance the boundaries of rational analysis (as a necessary prerequisite of rational reformism), they had succeeded only too well. As Fredric Jameson points out:

[M]uch of contemporary theory or philosophy... has involved a prodigious expansion in what we consider to be rational or meaningful behaviour. My sense is that, particularly after the diffusion of psychoanalysis but also with the gradual evaporation of 'otherness' on a shrinking globe and in a media-suffused society, very little remains that can be considered 'irrational' in the older sense of 'incomprehensible'... Whether such an enormously expanded concept of Reason then has any further normative value... in a situation in which its opposite, the irrational, has shrunk to virtual nonexistence, is another and an interesting question.⁸

For if virtually everything had become rational, what special legitimacy was there any longer in the particular paradigms of Establishment social science? What special merit was there in the specific political programmes of the dominant elites? And most devastating of all, what special capacities did the specialists have to offer that ordinary people did not have, did dominant groups have that oppressed groups did not have? The revolutionaries of 1968 had spotted this logical hole in the defensive armour of the liberal ideologues (and in its not-so-different variant of official Marxist ideology) and jumped into the breach.

As a political movement, the world revolution of 1968 was no more than a brushfire. It flamed up ferociously, and then (within three years) it was extinguished. Its embers—in the form of multiple, competing pseudo-Maoist sects—survived another five to ten years, but by the end of the 1970s, all these groups had become obscure historical footnotes. Nonetheless, the geocultural impact of 1968 was decisive, for the world revolution of 1968 marked the end of an era, the era of the automatic centrality of liberalism, not merely as the dominant world ideology, but as the only one that could claim to be unremittingly rational and hence scientifically legitimate. The world revolution of 1968 returned liberalism to where it had been in the period 1815–48, merely one competing political strategy among others. Both conservatism and radicalism/socialism were in that sense liberated from the magnetic field force of liberalism that had kept them in check from 1848 to 1968.

The process of demoting liberalism from its role as a geocultural norm to mere competitor in the global marketplace of ideas was completed in the two decades that followed 1968. The material glow of the 1945–68 period disappeared during the long Kondratieff-B downturn that set in. This is not to say that everyone suffered equally. Third World countries suffered first and worst. The OPEC oil rises were a first mode of trying to limit the damage. A large part of the world surplus was funnelled through the oil-producing states to OECD banks. The immediate beneficiaries were three groups: the oil-producing states who took a rent; the states (in the Third World and the Communist worlds) who received loans from OECD banks with which to restore their balance of payments; the OECD states who thereby could still maintain exports. This first attempt collapsed by 1980 in the so-called debt crisis. The second mode of trying to limit the damage was Reagan's military Keynesianism, which fuelled the

⁸ *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, NC 1991, p. 268.

speculative boom of the 1980s in the US. This collapsed in the late 1980s, pulling the USSR down with it. The third attempt was that of Japan plus the East Asian dragons and some surrounding states to benefit from the necessary and inevitable production relocations of a Kondratieff-B period. We are witnessing the limits of this effort in the early 1990s.

The net result of twenty-five years of economic struggle was a worldwide disillusionment with the promise of developmentalism, a keystone in the offerings of global liberalism. No doubt east and southeast Asia has been spared this sense of disillusion thus far, though this may be merely a time lag. Elsewhere however the consequences have been great, and particularly negative for the Old Left—first the national liberation movements, then the Communist parties (leading to the collapse of the Communist regimes of eastern Europe in 1989), and finally the Social-Democratic parties. These collapses have been celebrated by liberals as their triumph. It has rather been their graveyard. For liberals find themselves back in the pre-1848 situation of a pressing demand for democracy—for far more than the limited package of parliamentary institutions, multi-party systems, and elementary civil rights; this time for the real thing, a genuine egalitarian sharing of power. And this latter demand was historically the bugbear of liberalism, to counter which liberalism had offered its package of limited compromises combined with seductive optimism about the future. To the extent that today there is no longer a widespread faith in rational reformism via state action, liberalism has lost its principal politico-cultural defence against the dangerous classes.

The Collapse of Legitimacy

Thus it is we have arrived at the present era, what I think of as the Black Period before us, which can be said to have begun symbolically in 1989 (the continuation of 1968)⁹ and will go on for at least twenty-five to fifty years.

I have emphasized thus far the ideological shield that dominant forces had constructed against the claims put forward insistently by the 'dangerous classes' since 1789. I have argued that this shield was liberal ideology, and that it operated both directly and, even more insidiously, via an edulcorated socialist/progressive variant which had traded the essence of antisystemic claims for a substitute of limited value. And finally I have argued that this ideological shield was largely destroyed by the world revolution of 1968, of which the collapse of the communisms in 1989 was the final act.

Why however did this ideological shield collapse after a hundred and fifty years of such efficacious functioning? The answer to that question lies not in some sudden insight by the oppressed into the falsity of ideological claims. The awareness of the speciousness of liberalism had been known from the outset and asserted frequently with vigour

⁹ See G. Arrighi, T.K. Hopkins, and I. Wallerstein, '1989, The Continuation of 1968', *Review*, vol. 55, no. 2, spring 1992.

throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nonetheless the movements in the socialist tradition did not conduct themselves in ways that were consistent with their rhetorical critiques of liberalism. Quite the opposite, for the most part!

The reason is not hard to find. The social base of these movements—movements which all claimed grandly to speak in the name of the mass of humanity—was in fact a narrow band of the world's population, the less well-off segment of the 'modernist' sector of the world-economy as it was structured between say 1750 and 1950. These included the skilled and semiskilled urbanized working classes, the intelligentsias of the world, and the more skilled and educated groups in those rural areas in which the functioning of the capitalist world-economy was more immediately visible. This added up to a significant number, but not at all to the majority of the world's population.

The Old Left was a world movement supported by a minority, a powerful minority, an oppressed minority, but nonetheless a numerical minority of the world's population. And this demographic reality limited its real political options. Under the circumstances, it did the only thing it could. It opted for being a spur to speed up the liberal programme of rational reformism, and in this it succeeded very well. The benefits it brought to its protagonists were real, if only partial. But, as the revolutionaries of 1968 proclaimed, a lot of people had been left out of the equation. The Old Left had talked a universalist language, but had practised a particularist politics.

The reason that these ideological blinkers of specious universalism were tossed aside in 1968/1989 was that the underlying social reality had changed. The capitalist world-economy had pursued the logic of its ceaseless accumulation of capital so unremittingly that it was approaching its theoretical ideal, the commodification of everything. We can see this reflected in multiple new sociological realities: the extent of the mechanization of production; the elimination of spatial constraints in the exchange of commodities and information; the deruralization of the world; the near-exhaustion of the ecosystem; the high degree of monetarization of the work-process; and consumerism (that is, the enormously expanded commodification of consumption).¹⁰

All these developments are well-known, and are indeed the subject of continuous discussions in world media of communication. But consider what this means from the point of view of the endless accumulation of capital. It means first of all, most of all, an enormous limitation on the rate at which capital can be accumulated. And the reasons are fundamentally socio-political. There are three central factors. The first is a factor long recognized by analysts, but whose full realization is only being reached now. The urbanization of the world and the increase in both education and communications have engendered a degree of worldwide political awareness which both renders political

¹⁰ These points are elaborated in my 'Peace, Stability, and Legitimacy, 1990–2025/2050', in G. Lundestad, ed., *The Fall of Great Powers: Peace, Stability, and Legitimacy*, London 1994.

mobilization easy and makes it difficult to obscure the degree of socio-economic disparities and the role of governments in maintaining them. Such political awareness is reinforced by the delegitimization of any irrational sources of authority. In short, more people than ever demand the equalization of reward and refuse to tolerate a basic condition of capital accumulation, low remuneration for labour. This is manifested both in the significant worldwide rise in the level of 'historical' wages, and in the very high and still growing demand on governments to redistribute basic welfare (in particular, health and education) and to ensure steady income.

The second factor is the greatly increased cost to governments of subsidizing profit via the construction of infrastructure and permitting the externalization of costs by the enterprises. This is what journalists refer to as the ecological crisis, the crisis of rising health costs, the crisis of the high costs of big science, and so on. The states cannot at one and the same time continue to expand subsidies to private enterprise and expand welfare commitments to the citizenry. One or the other must give to an important degree. With a more aware citizenry, this essentially class struggle promises to be monumental.

And the third strain is the result of the fact that the political awareness is now worldwide. Both the global and the state-level disparities are racial/ethnic/religious in distribution. Hence, the combined result of political awareness and the fiscal crises of the states will be a massive struggle that will take the form of civil warfare, both global and state-level.

The multiple strains will have as their first victim the legitimacy of the state structures and therefore their ability to maintain order. As they lose this ability, there are economic as well as security costs, which in turn will render more acute the strains, and that in turn will further weaken the legitimacy of the state structures. This is not the future; it is the present. We see it in the enormously increased feeling of insecurity—concern about crime, concern about random violence, concern about the impossibility of securing justice in court systems, concern about the brutality of police forces—that has multiplied manyfold during the last ten to fifteen years. I am not contending that these phenomena are new, or even necessarily much more extensive than earlier. But they are perceived as new or worse by most people, and certainly as far more extensive. And the major result of such perceptions is the delegitimization of state structures.

This kind of escalating, self-reinforcing disorder cannot go on for ever. But it can go on for twenty-five to fifty years. And it is a form of chaos in the system, caused by the exhaustion of the systemic safety-valves, or to put it another way by the fact that contradictions of the system have come to the point that none of the mechanisms for restoring the normal functioning of the system can work effectively any longer.

New Fronts of Struggle

But out of chaos will come a new order, and this then brings us to the

last issue: the choices before us—now and also soon. Because it is a time of chaos, it does not mean that during the next twenty-five to fifty years we will not see in operation the major basic processes of the capitalist world-economy. People and firms will continue to seek to accumulate capital in all the familiar ways. Capitalists will seek support from state structures as they have done in the past. States will compete with other states to be major loci of the accumulation of capital. The capitalist world-economy will probably enter into a new period of expansion, which will further commodify economic processes worldwide and further polarize effective distribution of reward.

What will be different in the next twenty-five to fifty years will be far less the operations of the world market than the operations of the world's political and cultural structures. Basically, the states will steadily lose their legitimation and therefore find it difficult to ensure minimum security, internally or among themselves. On the geocultural scene, there will be no dominant common discourse, and even the forms of cultural debate will be a matter of debate. There will be little agreement on what constitutes rational or acceptable behaviour. The fact that there will be confusion, however, does not mean that there will be no purposive behaviour. Indeed, there will be multiple groups seeking to achieve clear, limited objectives, but many of these will be in acute direct conflict with each other. And there may be a few groups with long-term concepts of how to construct an alternative social order, even if their subjective clarity can have only a poor fit with any objective probability that these concepts will in fact be useful heuristic guides to action. In short, everyone will be acting somewhat blindly even if they will not think they are so acting.

Nonetheless, we are condemned to act. Therefore, the first need that we have is to be clear about what has been deficient in our modern world-system, what it is that has made so large a percentage of the world's population angry about it, or at the least ambivalent as to its social merits. It seems quite clear to me that the major complaint has been the great inequalities of the system, which means the absence of democracy. This was no doubt true of virtually all known prior historical systems. What was different under capitalism is that its very success as a creator of material production seemed to eliminate all justification for the inequalities, whether manifested materially, politically, or socially. These inequalities seemed all the worse because they did not divide merely a very tiny group from everyone else, but as much as one-fifth or one-seventh of the world's population from all the rest. It is these two facts—the increase of total material wealth and the fact that more than a mere handful of people but far less than the majority could live well—that has so exasperated the sentiments of those who have been left out.

We can contribute nothing to a desirable resolution of this terminal chaos of our world-system unless we make it very clear that only a relatively egalitarian, fully democratic historical system is desirable. Concretely we must move actively and immediately on several fronts. One is the active undoing of the Eurocentric assumptions that have permeated the geoculture for at least two centuries now. Europeans

have made great cultural contributions to our common human enterprise. But it is simply not true that, over ten thousand years, they have made much greater ones than other civilizational centres, and there is no reason to assume that the multiple loci of collective wisdom will be fewer in the millennium to come. The active replacement of the current Eurocentric bias by a more sober and balanced sense of history and of its cultural evaluation will require acute and constant political and cultural struggle. It calls not for new fanaticisms but for hard intellectual work, collectively and individually.

We need in addition to take the concept of human rights and work very hard to make it apply equally to us and to them, to citizen and to alien. The right of communities to protect their cultural heritage is never the right to protect their privilege. One major battleground will be in the rights of migrants. If indeed, as I foresee for the next twenty-five to fifty years, a very large minority of the residents of North America, Europe, and yes Japan, will in fact be recent migrants or the children of such migrants (whether or not the migration will have been done legally), then we all need to struggle to make sure such migrants have truly equal access to economic, social, and yes political rights in the zone into which they have migrated.

I know that there will be enormous political resistance to this on the grounds of cultural purity and of accumulated property rights. The statesmen of the North are already arguing that the North cannot assume the economic burden of the entire world. Well, why not? The North's wealth has in very large part been the result of a transfer of surplus-value from the South. It is this very fact which, over several hundred years, has led us to the crisis of the system. It is not a question of remedial charity, but of rational reconstruction.

These battles will be political battles, but not necessarily battles at the level of the state. Indeed, precisely because of the process of delegitimizing the states, many of these battles (perhaps most of them) will go on at more local levels among the groups into which we are reorganizing ourselves. And since these battles will be local and complex among multiple groups, a complex and flexible strategy of alliances will be essential, but will be workable only if we keep in the front of our minds the egalitarian objectives.

Finally, the struggle will be an intellectual one, in the reconceptualization of our scientific canons, in the search for more holistic and sophisticated methodologies, in the attempt to rid ourselves of the pious and fallacious cant about the value-neutrality of scientific thought. Rationality is itself a value-judgement if it is anything, and nothing is or can be rational except in the widest, most inclusive context of human social organization.

You may think that the programme I have outlined for judicious social and political action over the next twenty-five to fifty years is far too vague. But it is as concrete as one can be in the midst of a whirlpool. First, make sure to which shore you wish to swim. And second, make sure that your immediate efforts seem to be moving in that direction. If you want greater precision than that, you will not find it, and you will drown while you are looking for it.