

Historical Perspectives on System Change



❖ As we speak of human social, political and economic systems, keep in mind that they are nested in the evolving ecological and geologic systems of our planet, which in turn moves within a solar system that is part of one of many billions of galaxies in the Universe .

Colonial and Founding Period



- ❖ The political System was headed by a hereditary monarch. Local leadership elected by white land owning males who competed with Parliament for authority. Sovereignty of Native People's not honored by the Colonists.
- ❖ The local agricultural and resource economy was based on cheap land taken from Native peoples, abundant forests, slavery and indentured servants.
- ❖ There was rapid environmental degradation of soil, game, water and forests.

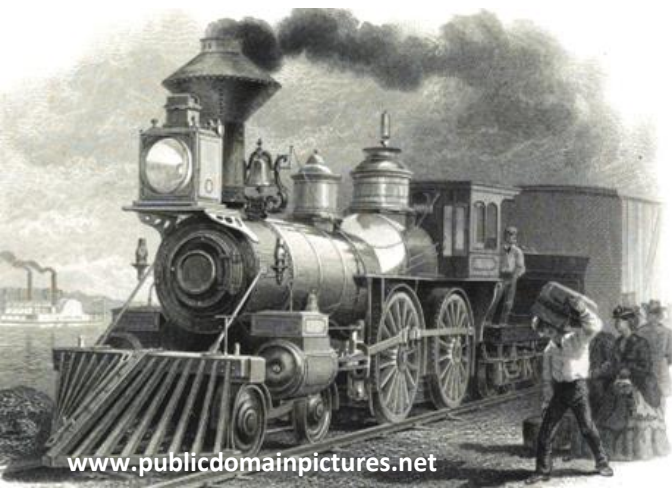




Industrial Revolution and Creation of the Party System



- ❖ The Federalists of 1796 led by Adams and Hamilton favored a strong federal government. The opposition led by Jefferson and Madison called themselves Democratic-Republicans and said they were for the people rather than the elites.
- ❖ The Democratic Party emerged with the election of Jackson in 1828. Abolitionists created the Republican Party whose candidate, Abraham Lincoln won in 1860.
- ❖ This period was marked by industrialization and westward expansion.





The New Deal Coalition



- ❖ Roosevelt's New Deal in 1933 forged a coalition of unions, religious, ethnic, and racial minorities (Catholics, Jews and Blacks), Southern whites, poor people and those on relief.
- ❖ Organizational heft was provided by big city machines, with access to millions of relief jobs and billions of dollars in spending projects.
- ❖ These voting blocs formed a majority of voters and handed the Democratic Party seven victories out of nine presidential elections (1932-1948, 1960, 1964), as well as control of both houses of Congress during all but 4 years between the years 1932–1980.
- ❖ The term "liberal" was used in US politics to indicate supporters of the coalition, "conservative" its opponents.



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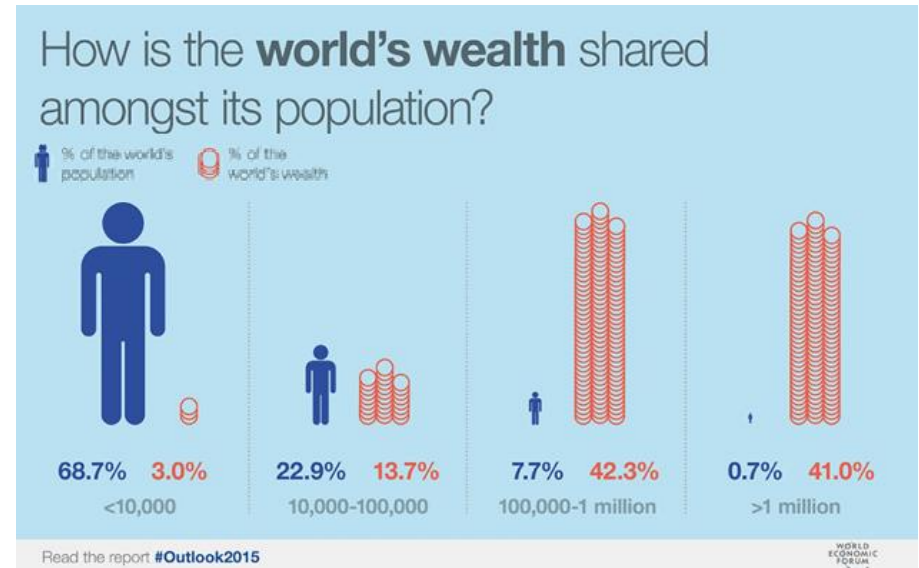
Neoliberalism

❖ Neoliberalism refers to the resurgence of 19th century ideas of *laissez-faire* economic liberalism beginning in the 1970s and 1980s. Its advocates support privatization, fiscal austerity, deregulation, free trade, and reductions in government spending in order to enhance the role of the private sector in the economy.

❖ The transition towards neoliberal policies and the acceptance of neoliberal economic theories in the 1970s are seen by some academics as the root of financial capitalism that developed between 1980 and 2010, in which financial leverage tended to override capital, and financial markets tended to dominate over the traditional industrial economy and agricultural economics. Increased concentration of personal wealth, corporate mergers, and the financial crisis of 2007–08 were three of the results.



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Who owns the capital in the economic system?



- ❖ Feudalism was structured around who controlled productive land -- namely the lords, church, and king, and not the peasants.
- ❖ Nineteenth-century free-enterprise capitalism was largely structured around small- and medium-scale competitive entrepreneurial capitalist ownership (coexisting with an element of large landholding and chattel slavery).
- ❖ State socialism in the Soviet Union & Eastern Europe was based on state ownership.
- ❖ Corporate capitalism – the system we have today – has broad varieties:
 - *Fairly pure corporate domination as emerged in the late 19th century (and to which the trends may now be pointing again unless a different path is developed).*
 - *“Managed corporate capitalism” balanced by labor union strength. The system mainly operating in the United States circa 1945-1980.*
 - *Fascism—corporate capitalism managed by authoritarian rule of the kind that existed in Germany, Italy, and Spain during the 1930s and 1940s and (in different form) among some Latin American dictatorships.*
 - *“Socialism with Chinese characteristics” has been a mix of corporate plus state ownership, with authoritarian rule.*





The Next System

❖ *“Ideas usually don’t matter all that much in the history of the world -- except at those points of protracted crisis where old systems have stopped working and new systems begin to take their place. At those key moments in history, ideas -- and the moral vision that animates them -- become capable of sparking far-ranging transformative change.*

❖ *“The question is no longer, ‘how will the capitalist system mend itself, and renew its forward thrust?’, but rather, ‘what will replace this system? What order will emerge from this chaos?’*

❖ *Alternatively we can choose a radically different system, one that has never previously existed -- a system that is relatively democratic and relatively egalitarian.”*

Gar Alperovitz



A Fork in the Road

“The question is no longer, ‘how will the capitalist system mend itself, and renew its forward thrust?’, but rather, ‘what will replace this system? What order will emerge from this chaos?’



❖ *We can choose collectively a new system that essentially resembles the present one: hierarchical, exploitative and polarizing. There are many forms this could take, and some could be harsher than the capitalist world-system in which we have been living.*

❖ *Alternatively we can choose a radically different system, one that has never previously existed -- a system that is relatively democratic and relatively egalitarian.”*

“Thirty glorious years.”



- ❖ In the United States and much of Western Europe the Great Depression and World War II set the stage for an extended period of broad-based economic growth that permitted both increased profit for capital and higher real living standards for labor.
- ❖ The years after 1945 saw the most powerful economic boom in modern history. Between 1945 and 1970, the U.S. economy grew at an annual rate of over 3 percent per year, and median family income came close to doubling.



How Glorious Really?

- ❖ Why not simply go back to “Golden Age” of liberal regulation and tax-and spend redistribution? Could enough power be put together to tax corporations and the wealthy, to spend for schools, roads, bridges, and health care and regulate corporations to achieve health, environmental, safety, and other outcomes of social importance?
- ❖ For many the “Golden Age” was no such thing – not for women, minorities, nor even many blue-collar workers . Whether viewed from the standpoint of “People’s History,” “Indigenous People’s History,” or “Environmental History,” the period was marked by racism, sexism, imperialism, war, and environmental destruction.



History does not stop in the present



As we evolve, and as the world evolves around us, we are growing in awareness. We have ever greater opportunities to notice systems and together, to take conscious steps more in harmony with each other and with nature. We can begin to look ahead to systems of symbiosis by choice.

*So where do we go from here?
What is our next system?*