

THE FUTURES OF THE WORLD SYSTEM:

Can the club transform?

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We are in the last stages of the capitalist system. The contradictions in capitalism are due to the self-centred profit motivated psychology and the accumulation of wealth for the few rather than the welfare of all. Hence, capitalism is not congenial to the integrated growth of human progress. A day is therefore sure to come when capitalism will burst like a firecracker (Sarkar, 1992: 88, 98).

All systems are historical – that's true for physical and chemical systems, biological systems, and a fortiori for social systems. They all have lives: they come into existence at a certain point, they survive according to certain rules, and then they move far from equilibrium and can't survive anymore. Our system has moved far from equilibrium. So the processes, which one can describe, that maintained a moving equilibrium for five hundred years no longer function well, and that's why were in this structural crisis. So no, it won't go on forever, it won't even go on for more than forty or fifty years, and furthermore those years will be very unpleasant. (Immanuel Wallerstein in Schouten, 2008).

1.0 THE CRISIS OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM

Will the current world system – capitalist in economy, nation-state in polity, tribal in culture – continue over the next 100 years?

Our main argument is that the crisis within the system ensure that it is highly unlikely to continue and that dramatic changes are likely to occur.

First what are the crises that suggest change. These are well known and generally based on

1. The ecological crisis, the endless need for products creating tipping points in the natural world such that regeneration of nature becomes more and more difficult. The result is the base of the system, nature, is no longer sustainable. There is no planet B.
2. The crisis of inequity. Since the beginning of the neo-liberal revolution there has been a dramatic rise of inequity throughout the world. This does not mean the middle class has not prospered; however, it does mean that the gap between the wealthiest and the poor continues to rise between nations and within nations. And expectations in a global internet world have not been reduced; indeed, everyone now wishes to become a bitcoin billionaire.
3. The crisis of meaning, the search for purpose, joy, and happiness in a world where the latter is defined primarily by the accumulation of material goods.

4. The crisis of work in a world where artificial intelligence and advancement in new technologies is likely to end the job or at least dramatically negate the possibility of one stable job over one's lifetime (Inayatullah, 2020).
5. The crisis of governance. Governance is regulated within nations but generally poorly regulated outside of the nation state. It is a wild west, making global agreements around critical issues – pandemics, taxation, criminal activity, and climate change extremely difficult.
6. The crisis of inclusion. Even as a few get more of the pie, the others: women, nature, the previous colonies, wish for entrance into the club. The current exclusionary system challenges the ability of the club to maintain its structure. More know about the club and more wish to enter, however, the club is designed for the few.

The contradictions are such that in one 2020 worldwide survey, 57% said that "capitalism as it exists today does more harm than good in the world" (King, 2021).

Essentially the trajectory of the last few hundred years is more and more seen as unviable. These crises all suggest, as the world systems thinker Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) has argued, the challenges of the current system cannot be resolved within the terms of the system i.e., capitalism, the nation-state, and global cultural tribalism. COVID-19 has exacerbated these changes suggesting to many that we have entered the Age of Pandemics.

2.0 ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

Will the current trajectory of capitalism continue? Are there alternatives, and what might these look like? Using the change progression scenario method (Milojevic, 2002; Inayatullah, 2020), I offer four possible scenarios.

2.1 NO CHANGE – MEMBERS ONLY

In this future, the current system does not change. It continues to provide value by convincing those outside of the system that they too can get rich if they work hard enough or are able to work smart and invest in global markets. Individuals do not smite the rich because they wish to become rich. The system stays stable as the middle class continues to grow and efficiencies from new technologies create a reduction in absolute poverty. Globalization of course slows down as near-shoring takes off (Inayatullah, Jacob, and Rizk, 2020). 3d printing and AI continue to create enough creative destruction so that the system can maintain its vitality. Nation-states are renewed as national policies are found to be the most effective in COVID-19 mitigation strategies. The rich via the new platforms continue to consolidate financial power. Culturally we remain customers searching for the best deal. The invisible hand continues.

2.2 MARGINAL CHANGE – MEMBERSHIP EXPANDS

In this future, the current system retains its vitality by bringing more people to the table. Downturns are managed as are disruptions from Artificial Intelligence through a universal basic income/assets regime and other ways to ensure purchasing capacity. This is done nation by nation with coordination from the global financial system agencies. As well, COVID-19 forces nations to adopt a universal health care scheme. Efficiency and effectiveness are gained through expanding membership. More and more females, for example, enter corporate boards (Zukis, 2020). The transition from the fossil fuel system to renewables is made step by step. As old industries die, new ones are created. The digital and peer-to-peer era creates its own new skill sets. As climate change and pandemics (caused by encroachment into wildlife areas) continue,

nature is brought into the club (the rights of nature) and novel economic models are trialed – for example, the circular economy, the doughnut economy, the regenerative economy, and the *prama* economy (Sarkar, 1992: 46). Even as individuals aspire to become billionaires, they wish to ensure that minorities are included and nature recovers, if not thrives. As East Asia takes over as the information engine, becoming the microchip of the new world system (Inayatullah and Na, 2018). Along with stakeholder (inclusive) and green capitalism, the region saves the day.

2.3 ADAPTIVE CHANGE – THE NEW CLUB

In this future, the numerous crisis and contradictions force the creation of a new club. Instead of the single bottom line, a quadruple bottom line is created: prosperity, people, planet, and purpose (spirit). We shift from the corporatist model to the cooperativist model. New platforms are created that do not just enhance efficiency, as with the sharing economy, but to ensure that labour-knowledge become far more important than capital ownership. Nations give way to global governance, first through multilateralism and second because of the severity of crisis, through regional confederations creating a world government structure. From accumulation for the sake of accumulation, we shift to a world of meaning making. There is abundance at all levels. Wellbeing – of self, others, nature, and community - becomes far more important. Indeed, the shift from GDP to Wellbeing as the dominant metrics is successful. Identity shifts from nationalism, and I shop therefore I am to I create and contribute; therefore, I and we are. With purchasing capacity guaranteed because of Artificial intelligence led productivity and Universal basic income/asset schemes ensuring safety and security individuals can begin to move toward identity abundance. The social contract is expanded (Bjonnes and Hargreaves, 2016). We are all on a journey together.

2.4 RADICAL CHANGE – AFTER THE CLUB

Dramatic gains in artificial intelligence end the scarcity-based world economic system. Cellular agriculture plays a pivotal role in ending hunger. Global renewable energies including direct beaming of sunlight through modified Dyson spheres (Hirsch, 2019) create a world with an abundance of energy. Ownership disappears as we live in a world of flow. Capitalism becomes a distant memory. Money too disappears as needs can be directly met. Work is design based and about resolving conflicts between individuals and collectivities. The emotional and spiritual economy thrive. Notions of tribal identity disappear, indeed, with the invention of the artificial womb, procreation is forever delinked from the body. We are co-creators with technology and nature. The discipline of the previous scenario gives way to flow.

FOUR FUTURES	MEMBERS ONLY	MEMBERSHIP EXPANDS	THE NEW CLUB	AFTER THE CLUB
MEASUREMENT	Single bottom line - GDP	Triple bottom line	Quadruple bottom line	Beyond the bottom line
SYSTEMIC CHANGES	Large corporations Crises continue and contradictions are enhanced	Inclusive corporations Rise of East Asia The next industrial revolution Technology is used to disrupt and change the rules	Platform cooperatives Global government Renewable energy Spiritual identity The Prana – dynamic equilibrium - economy	Star Trek economy Abundance Work = Design and conflict resolution Monitoring AI
WORLDVIEW	Neo-liberal capitalism	Stakeholder capitalism	Cooperative progressive/Wellbeing	Co-creation
METAPHOR	The invisible hand	Inclusion saves the day	All on a journey together	Flow

This table summarizes the four scenarios according to the litany – how we measure the world, the system, the worldview, and finally the core metaphor.

3.0 WHICH FUTURE?

Which future will actually become the true future is near impossible to forecast. This is because of several factors.

First, humans have agency and personal, institutional, national, and planetary decisions can be made to enhance any scenario. A taxation on the flow of capital or information can be used to create greater equity or to stifle creativity. A universal basic income can reduce fear and increase inclusion or can lead to lethargy. New global regulations can mitigate climate change if done swiftly or can merely forestall real action if done at a marginal level.

Second, there is a collective pull of the future, a desire to create and imagine a different world. However, there are also competing pulls to return to the past – feudal and fascist societies - as there are pulls to find technological solutions to problems instead of systemic adaptive shifts. As Paul Mason (2015) writes: " The main contradiction today is between the possibility of free, abundant goods and information; and a system of monopolies, banks and governments trying to keep things private, scarce and commercial. Everything comes down to the struggle between the network and the hierarchy: between old forms of society moulded around capitalism and new forms of society that prefigure what comes next."

Third is macrohistory, or the grand patterns of change.

Using Shri P.R. Sarkar's theory of history, we can eliminate the first two futures. For Sarkar, there are four types of power. The worker, the warrior, the intellectual, and the accumulator of capital. Each type of power corresponds to a particular era in history. Each type has positive aspects, and negative, when their power becomes entrenched. Currently, in this model, we are at the end of the capitalist era. He argues that the next phase in this cycle is a revolution or evolution from the workers. This is possible through violent revolutions as those at the bottom no longer believe the system can provide their basic needs or through non-violent peer-to-peer networks, i.e., the economic and social commons expanding with the concomitant reduction in state and private spaces (Ramos, 2010).

The revolution or evolution, however, is short lived in Sarkar's model, as the warriors – police, military, governmental regulatory authorities – align with citizens to end the chaotic conditions caused by the end of capitalism.

The question is what will this new system look like? To a large extent it links to scenario three and somewhat to the fourth future. Scenario three – the new Club – as argued above East Asia led. That means a far more disciplined and collectivist society. It is focused not just on more wealth but on ensuring basic needs are met. It is less the invisible hand and more the circle of hands. Rules around protection – children, the aged, youth, nature – are necessary to tame capitalism, to ensure systems made vulnerable are restored. This will require regional and global governance as national governance is unable to deal with the planetary crisis as hand. The disciplined society thus fits into scenario three (Dator, 2009). Ravi Batra argues that this system will lead to a planetary golden age (Batra, 1978). COVID-19 has been an excellent training ground. Those nations that locked down and put the collective before the individual have generally done far better. Those that have let the virus run have generally done far worse. Market mechanisms have not worked: biosecurity and public health advise has.

Thus, if we are to use Sarkar's theory of macrohistory – which asserts that the end of the era of accumulators is a natural part of the cycle – then scenario three seems likely. Of course, the details of that future are impossible to predict at this stage. What we can say is that 1. It will be far more inclusionary. 2. New technologies will lead to cycles of cycles of innovation in the material spheres but also in post-material areas. 3. There will be a shift from corporate to platform cooperative structures. 4. Gender equity will become the norm. 5. Governance will move to the regional and then planetary levels. 6. To alleviate climate change, there will be a shift toward cellular agriculture and a reduction in livestock production (Clifford, 2020). 7. Identity will slowly become less past focused and more liminal, future-focused, and planetary. 8. Insofar as the warrior mindset searches for spatial challenges, we can anticipate space exploration to prosper. And finally, 9. Energy systems will shift from fossil fuel to integrated and decentralized renewable-led.

And what of scenario four, the radical future? In Sarkar's macrohistory, the end of era of warriors/disciplined society leads to the advent of the Intellectual era. This is a renaissance of self and society linking the European renaissance with the Axial Age, that is, an explosion of inner and outer creativity. New immersive/AI/robotics/IOT/sensing technologies, new discoveries from space, new inner (meditation) discoveries all point to massive disruptions in what we know, how we know, and who we can become. Adding the works of Pitirim Sorokin to Sarkar, there is a pendulum shift from the five-hundred-year sensate materialistic system to an ideational/spiritual system (Sorokin, 1957). The integration of consciousness in matter – mind in technology – creates revolution after revolution (Sarkar, 2018: 68-77). While we cannot give dates to the emerging futures, if we shift to the disciplined society, the new club in this century, then we can begin to see scenario four becoming the norm by the 22nd century. It will be the true co-evolution of humans, nature, and technology guided by spirit.

Fourth is leadership. Leaders can use narrative to exclude and create what has been termed by Moises Naim (2010) as ideological necrophilia – commitment to ideas that no longer work – or used futures. Leaders can also anticipate the future and use narrative to construct societies indeed civilizations that create more inclusive and that enhance inner and outer peace. In the current electoral cycle, it is often easier to use negative narratives that inspire fear of the other to gain reelection. Constructive narratives that inspire transformation are more challenging since humans tend to be past-oriented. Sarkar and others suggest the need for leadership that can ensure leadership and ideas continue to circulate, transforming the cycle of history to a virtuous spiral. When leaders fail, and they do, then other systems need to be present to curtail their powers: the judiciary, citizen movements, and parliaments. Currently these operate at a national level, however, our crises are global and thus leaders can assist in greater integration of the world system or create the conditions for further fragmentation.

4.0 THE FUTURE

To the question of which scenario is more likely, first, we do not know as the future is unknown. Agency and leadership can make significant differences as to which futures emerge. However, we operate in world systems. These systems emerge, some become victorious and become stable. All eventual die. We are in most likely at the end of a particular world system with a new one emerging. This essay has sought to envision what this new system could look like.

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