

# Neoliberal Globalization Is Pushing Humanity “Towards the Edge”

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Theme: [History](#)

*There have been a number of harmful consequences as a result of the neoliberal era, which emerged in the late 1970s, taking off during the tenures of Ronald Reagan (US president, 1981-1989) and Margaret Thatcher (British prime minister, 1979-1990). There has been an explosion of private power, splintering of societies, destabilization of the financial system, and so on.*

Neoliberal globalization has been an important factor too in political parties shifting further to the right, and succumbing to the power of increasingly dominant multinational corporations. This is most notable in America where the Republican Party (or organization) has moved so far off the spectrum that traditional republicans from previous decades would hardly recognize it today.

The US Democratic Party has also drifted noticeably to the right since the 1970s, and now holds roughly the same political position as the republicans of half a century ago. Such has been the rightward lurch in the political landscape that Bernie Sanders, who is somewhat to the left of today's democrats, is considered a radical and almost extreme figure. Sanders' policies, which are those of a New Deal democrat, resemble some of the ideals expressed by president Franklin D. Roosevelt. Sanders' political stance would not have perturbed former republican leaders like Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Regarding the prevailing neoliberal ideology, it is in fact proving so malevolent that it has become an existential threat to mankind, though hardly reported. In early June 2017 Noam Chomsky, the renowned American scholar and scientist, said that neoliberalism is directly behind humanity's failure to deal with its two greatest challenges: that of either dismantling the threat of nuclear war or addressing climate change, both of which are becoming more ominous.

Chomsky outlined that,

“it's not just inequality, stagnation. It's terminal disaster. We have constructed a perfect storm. That should be the screaming headlines every day. Since the Second World War, we have created two means of destruction. Since the neoliberal era, we have dismantled the way of handling them. That's our pincers. That's what we face, and if that problem isn't solved, we're done with”. (1)

The modern neoliberal era was formulated in America a little over 40 years ago, the world's strongest economic and military power. The term itself, neoliberalism, is misleading as this ideology is neither based upon anything new or

liberal.

Neoliberalism was originally developed in Europe during the interwar period (1919-1938), among the many repercussions of the First World War (2). Thereafter, the more extreme version of neoliberalism that we see presently, was formed by American business communities and its elites; before inevitably spreading across the world as a result of Washington's vast economic influence, courtesy of US-based financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank.

This assault unfolded principally in order to defeat popular activism that sprang up in the mid-1960s - with the American public, some entering political circles for the first time, railing against the crimes committed by US forces during the war in Vietnam, along with protests against domestic problems such as poverty and racism. This was viewed with deep concern by those occupying positions of power in Washington and New York. A swift response ensued by the establishment to put the people back in its place, so to speak, mainly through wide-scale use of propaganda techniques.

The population's declining influence is having potentially deadly ramifications. Chomsky [affirms that](#),

"The one barrier to the threat of destruction is an engaged public, an informed, engaged public acting together to develop means to confront the threat and respond to it. That's been systematically weakened, consciously"; and he further recognizes, "So there's the two existential threats that we've created, which might in the case of nuclear war maybe wipe us out; in the case of environmental catastrophe, create a severe impact, and then some". (3)

The continued attacks on populations have worked extremely well for a small percentage, in both hemispheres. Wealth has accumulated in the top 1% of societies, and more broadly the top 10%. In the most powerful country, real wages for American workers are just slightly higher by comparison to mid-1960s levels.

The US, thanks to its government, military and scientific apparatus, was also behind the unwarranted creation in 1945 of nuclear bombs, the globe's silent grim reaper. Moreover, America has constituted easily the largest producer of carbon dioxide emissions in history. This century, since 2006, has America been surpassed in its carbon production levels by China. Yet on per capita terms the Americans remain well clear at the top, having less than a quarter of China's populace.

Neoliberalism is centred on greatly favoring the private sphere over that of the public, with the role of government curtailed and restricted. Social programs benefiting the masses are cut, finance is deregulated, trade unions are attacked and austerity measures applied, which are intentionally harmful and unnecessary as even IMF economists admit.

The mainstream press performs a central role in promoting neoliberal ideology (4). The media, influenced by corporate advertising, carefully reduce the scope of what is discussed, so as to further push their neoliberal beliefs.

Cardiff University's Joanna Redden, an expert in assessing media content, wrote that "mainstream news coverage narrows and limits the way poverty is talked about in a way that reinforces the dominance of neoliberalism and market-based approaches to the issue".

An in-depth study of the mass media for example in Ireland, the world's largest corporate tax haven and a prominent neoliberal state, has revealed that major newspapers there all have a history of endorsing neoliberalism. This includes the most widely read dailies like the Irish Times and Irish Independent (5). Very rarely, however, is the word neoliberalism to be found in newspaper articles. It is obscured and left unclear.

Due to the particularly strong neoliberal influence in Ireland, it is no surprise that this small country produces very high emission levels, and has proven incapable of addressing it. Irish media support for neoliberalism is a trend seen in standard press coverage in other "free market states".

The media are very often a reflection of a nation's structure, mirroring the flaws of that system of which it is a central component. As part of the neoliberal agenda, the press have effectively been supporting our blind march to the precipice - with coverage of nuclear weapons at a minimum, and focus on climate change, though increasing in recent times, often diluted and put into a political context. (6)

Silly stories have been emanating for years about how Moscow supposedly swayed the US elections. These claims have done nothing to harm president Donald Trump's increasingly secure position; his approval ratings are at a personal best 49%, and he is a strong favorite to be re-elected in November. The American public, rather than paying much attention to assertions of Kremlin interference, are far more worried about real crises like insufficient healthcare, unaffordable education, and poverty (7). Trump's most dangerous policies, his attacks upon the environment and abandonment of nuclear weapons treaties, have received far less attention and criticism.

From the immediate years following World War II, humans have been under threat of destruction from nuclear weapons. The Danish-born scientist Hans M. Kristensen, a nuclear weapons analyst, revealed that during the Cold War,

"Every day, nuclear-armed warships of the US and Soviet navies were rubbing up against each other on the high seas in gung-ho displays of national determination. Some saw it as necessary for nuclear deterrence; others as dangerous nuclear brinkmanship. Many of those who were on the ships and submarines still get goosebumps when they talk about it, and wonder how we survived the Cold War". (8)

When examining the level of incidents between American and Soviet nuclear-armed instruments of war, it is hard to fathom that it did not eventually result in disaster for the world. Some of these accidents date to the 1960s, and were just as potentially lethal as the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

Pertaining to climate change, the attempts so far by world governments to tackle the crisis have been wholly inadequate, with global carbon emissions now at an all time high. Neoliberalism has indeed been at heart of this impotence. Even a 1.5 Celsius rise will have troubling reverberations for extensive sections of the globe. Today, out of almost 200 countries worldwide, only two are on course to meet their climate obligations, by applying policies which can meet the goals in limiting global warming to 1.5 Celsius above pre-industrial age temperatures.

The two countries in question are in Africa: Morocco and The Gambia, both of which are situated in the continent's north-west, and are firmly on a path towards dependence upon renewable energy, along with other strategies like large-scale reforestation. Morocco and The Gambia are anything but what can be considered affluent nations. This makes it all the more damning that the world's rich countries, with ample resources at their disposal, have proven incapable of upholding their climate commitments.

The top 10 carbon producing states account for almost 70% of world greenhouse emissions (9). By themselves the globe's two biggest emitters, China and the US, generate 43% of all known greenhouse gases. China, largely abandoning communist ideology since Mao Zedong's death in 1976, is recording emission levels which are rising again. They rose by 2.6% in 2019, on top of a 2.5% increase for 2018. Still, with increasing focus on renewable sources in China, there are accounts that their emissions will peak by 2022 before falling off.

Dominating the neoliberal sphere are the hugely powerful, unaccountable corporations which control much of the international economy, dictating government policy formation in the United States, Britain, Ireland and elsewhere. An institutionalized requirement of big business is short-term wealth creation, something which corporate executives can go to desperate lengths in pursuing.

One can witness the spectacle of major automobile manufacturers, like Volkswagen and Nissan, deliberately falsifying emission levels in their vehicles (10); mostly due to the fact that low emission cars, less reliant on raw material consumption, are simply not as profitable to the fossil fuel industry.

There are about 1.5 billion vehicles in operation globally, which in total produce 20% of world carbon emissions. Of this, just six million consist of electric cars. Prospects of electric vehicles are discouraged by fossil fuel corporations like Shell and ExxonMobil, because they are not run on oil-based substances, therefore yielding less profits.

ExxonMobil chief executive Darren Woods even stated last September that he did not understand why electric cars were needed at all. ExxonMobil, headquartered in Texas, are one of the world's biggest carbon emitting companies. They create more emissions than the vast majority of countries on their own.

Neoliberalism has been a driving cause too in the degradation of ecosystems, with an alarming drop in animal species recorded since the 1970s alone. Perhaps the first government leader to highlight our planet's environmental decline was Cuba's president, Fidel Castro, someone seldom quoted outside of Cuba, and who said [during a visit](#) to South Africa in the autumn of 1998 that,

“Neoliberal globalization is rapidly destroying nature, poisoning the air and the waters, killing the forests, causing soil desertification and erosion, depleting and wasting the natural resources, changing the climate”. (11)

Castro was reiterating what he said six years before at the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Brazil, where among the presence of over 100 heads of state, he spoke in splendid isolation of the unfolding ecological catastrophe. Castro was addressing above an audience in the city of Durban, South Africa, a country at the time led by Nelson Mandela, a close ally of his Cuban

counterpart.

Mandela was nevertheless a firm advocate of neoliberal policies which he implemented during his presidency, as the South African leader acknowledged in an interview with the experienced journalist John Pilger, who grilled him on the subject (12). Two decades following Mandela's departure from office in June 1999, South Africa has today the highest level of inequality in the world, though he cannot be blamed for all of this.

In more recent times, by late 2018 a "60% decline" in animal species was widely reported by the media, who misread the facts, as the National Geographic magazine demonstrated (13). Yet there can be no doubt that animal numbers have been steadily declining overall, a symptom of the Anthropocene epoch in which humans are having a severe impact on planetary ecosystems.

Meanwhile, a ray of sunshine is breaking out on a dark horizon. There have been indications for some years that neoliberalism is in trouble. Growing protests against its ravages have been taking place around the globe, in Latin America, in Europe, in the Middle East. The public, as can be recalled, possesses a great deal of power, borne out by the hard-fought achievements gained in the past as a result of sustained activism.

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## Notes

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