

Global Megacrisis and the P2P Response

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The world today is confronting not one crisis, but possibly several at the same time. Each crisis has different temporal aspects, but all are involved in different subphases of development.

The most evident crisis is the crisis of one form of the capitalist system, which I would like to correlate with the Kondratieff cycles. As outlined in Carlota Perez' book, **TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTIONS AND FINANCIAL CAPITAL**, Kondratieff cycles have a positive and productive high-growth phase, and a financialized, predatory, non-productive phase of decline and slow growth, with the totality of these two subphases ending with a "Sudden Systemic Shock". Examples of such crisis were 1873, 1929, and 2008. What we witnessed was the end of one such Kondratieff cycle, which means that the old synergy of productive elements cannot possibly work in the next phase. Typically, Sudden System Shocks are followed by on average 15 years of dislocation, deleveraging, social crisis and chaos, until they are superseded with a new constellation of productive elements, forming a new logic of accumulation. Such a scenario would mean that we have entered such a period of chaos, but that we may get out of it after a certain period of pain.

The second crisis is a crisis of capitalism itself, and this crisis has many different aspects. One aspects is a growing energy crisis, i.e. Peak Oil which was reached in 2006, with competing opinions of whether renewable energies are able to compensate for declining fossil fuels in time to relaunch a new form of productive capitalism. It has been questioned whether industrial capitalism can cope with ever increasing prices of energy, and whether it can reformulate itself around some form of green capitalism. The second aspect of the crisis of capitalism is the emergence of a new hyperproductive system of value production, i.e. peer production. As Marx posited, a system of production will likely be replaced, if it has exhausted its possibilities and a more productive alternative is on the horizon. These two conditions are now fulfilled, albeit in seed form. This brings us to the issue of temporality. Both the energy crisis and the emergence of an alternative, are only in a emergent stage. The positive hypothesis then becomes: if we assume that capitalism finds both an answer to the energy crisis (green capitalism), and some form of adaptation to the new productive system (not unlikely, as both the Roman system and the feudal system successfully composed with proto-elements of their successor systems for at least two centuries). Then we may see emerge, after the period of chaos described above, some Kondratieff wave in a renewed form of capitalism, which would have green and p2p elements as part of the new mix.

However, there is a third aspect of the crisis which may derail the above possibility in the mid-term (say maximum three decades). Indeed, if we take a pessimistic view of the energy crisis (no answer to Peak Oil as renewables cannot replace lost fossil fuels), coupled with the emerging sever-

ity of the biospheric crisis, and with the inability of the current financial predatory class to solve any of the issues at hand; then, in that case, a fundamental and successful re-orientation of the capitalist system would be impossible. In this case, the current period of inter-Kondratieff chaos, eventually followed by a rather short capitalist green-p2p accomodation; would be followed by a severe crisis of civilisation, i.e. of industrial and capitalist civilisation, and a fundamental reorientation to a new civilisation and political economy. Here we have to outline two possible subscenarios:

1. the high road scenario, the development of a new globalism under peer production, preserving the best elements of industrial-capitalist civilisation, and finding sustainable ways to maintain relatively high living standards;
2. a low road scenario, in which the dislocation is of such depth, and of such duration, that the p2p phase transition can only occur in a context of intensive relocalization and breakdown of globality; though substantial aspects of a global cultural commons of cooperation may subsist, if we are able to save the essential aspects of the inter-networks. As a historical analogy, think the end of the Roman empire and the long time needed for the new feudal system to reach some stable point of take-off.

So here is the timeline that we propose:

1. a period of chaos and dislocation following 2008, which may possibly lead to a revival (2015-2020) of social movements, and secondly a structural reform of capitalism to a green/p2p upswing with capitalism; after two-three decades this adaptation is superseded by the deepening biospheric and social crises related to Peak Oil and Climate Change, and the stage is prepared for a phase transition, in 'high road' or 'low road' mode, of a p2p-commons centered civilisation; or failing that, a breakdown of civilisation into nightmarish realities.
2. if capitalist adaptation fails, we go straight from the end-of-Kondratieff to the end-of-capitalism and end-of-industrial civilisation chaos; but the possibilities to high-road/low-road/dislocation transition remain; However, a failure of capitalism to integrate green/p2p elements would in my view make the transition more painful.

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