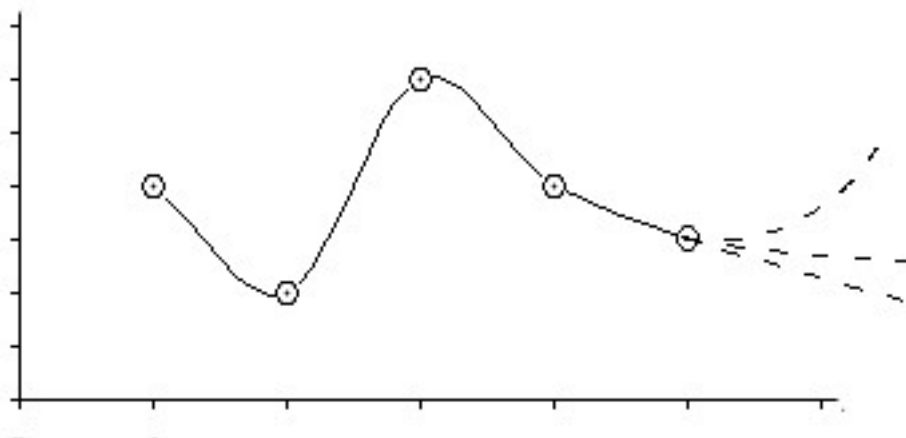
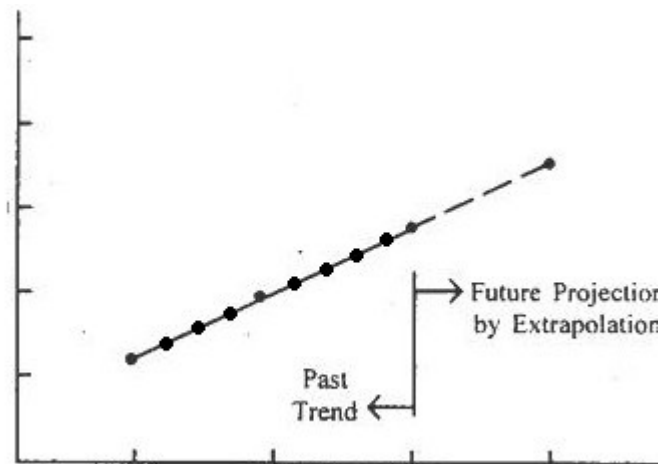
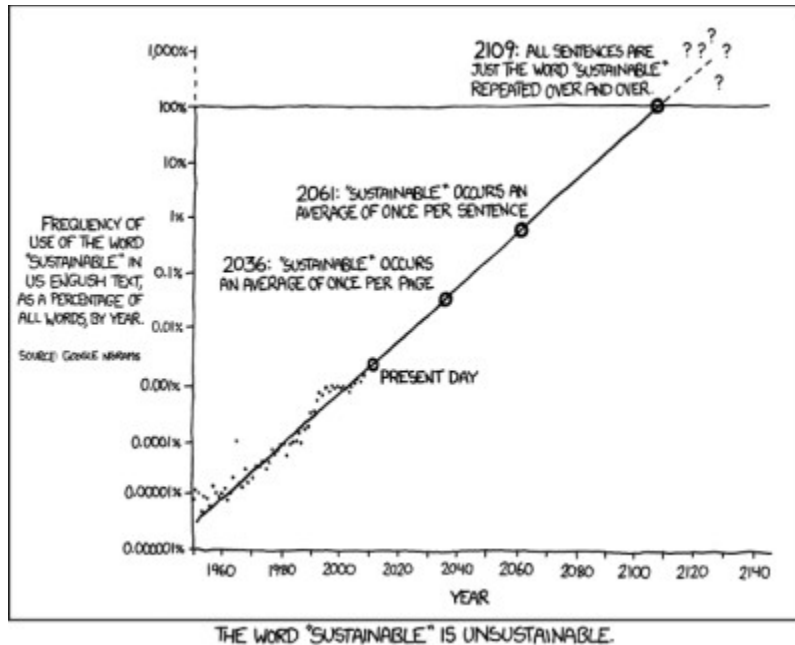
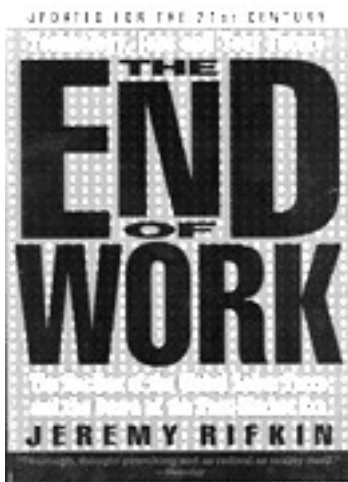


Capitalist futures

Bourgeois projections of the future have all been off the mark, and all based on taking some partial or temporary trend and extrapolating it. We can extrapolate with simpler systems, and in fact our brains are hard-wired to do so, but we can't do it accurately with something as complex as the world economy.





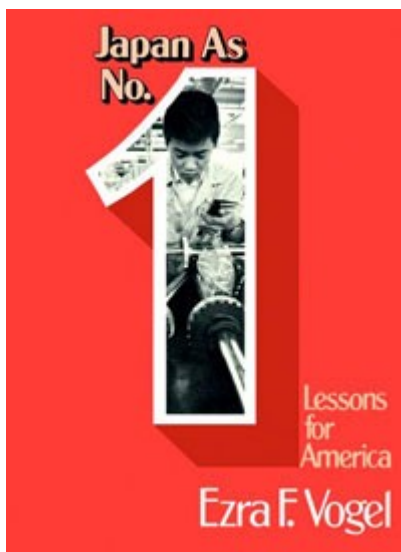
So in the 1990s they said we were in a "new economy" free of capitalist crises

As long ago as 1930 John Maynard Keynes wrote that "our grandchildren" (that means my generation, those in their 60s now, would work only 15 hours a week. In 1994 another book announced "the end of work".

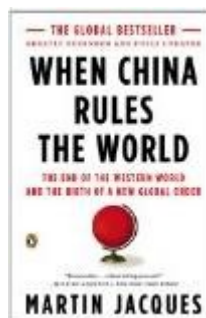


Back in 1973, Daniel Bell was already announcing that society was "post-industrial". Since then many "service" sectors have been industrialised, and vast new factories have been built in East Asia.

In the 1980s many were convinced that Japan would soon dominate the world.



Now the line is that China will rule the world.



Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Gramsci, Trotsky, and the rest of them generally avoided making predictions beyond very broad tendencies. Those we do know:

The fundamental class structures of capitalism are self-reproducing and self-expanding

Capitalism has an inbuilt trend to social inequality and to economic accumulation without regard to natural and human limits

Crises are endemic in capitalism.

Sadly, when Marxists have gone in for grand prediction, they have done no better than bourgeois writers.

Neo-Fordism (Aglietta, 1974)	Post-Fordism ("Marxism Today"), 1988
Automation and computers	Automation and computers
State wage controls, trend to unify working class	Flexible pay systems, fragmenting working class
Union-busting	Unions become irrelevant
State capitalism	Thatcherite free enterprise
Increased class struggle	Class struggle out of date

Predictions by Mandel, "Late Capitalism", 1975 (and widely shared)	Outcome
Capitalism generally moves in long up-waves and down-waves about 25 years long. Next downwave 1966-7 to "198?"	Long wave theorists say the waves are variable length and the down-wave is still going. (They've also nudged its start forward to 1973)
The up-wave from 1945 to 1966-7 had been dynamised by new technologies of automation and nuclear power	Industrial automation really started to become widespread from mid 1990s, and has increased since then. Nuclear power marginal until early 1970s and stalled from 1979 until recently.
Industrialisation would be impossible in "Third World", which would remain in permanent "pre-revolutionary crisis"	Huge expansion of capitalism in East Asia. Stalinist "revolutions" overtaken by popular uprisings or pre-emptive reform from above.
US hegemony already collapsing; economic protectionism would revived	Capitalist free trade much expanded. US still hegemonic.
Capitalist economic policy more and more dominated by "programming" (quasi-planning) of industry	Capitalist economic policy geared to best integration in unplanned and unplannable world market
Bourgeois democracy replaced by regimes on model of De Gaulle's "strong state" in France	Bourgeois democracy spread very much wider (Eastern Europe, Latin America, etc.)
Gold must remain as the primary form of world money	Gold discarded as world money

Our realistic aim should be to accurately "predict the present" and discern the trends clearly enough to be able to act within them.

In history, wrote Gramsci, there is no "objective" prediction, because:

"If one excludes all voluntarist elements, or if it is only other people's wills whose intervention one reckons as an objective element in the general interplay of forces, one mutilates reality itself".

We can and should make short-term predictions, if only because when they're wrong that helps us improve our "predicting the present".



Thomas Piketty argues that there is a well-established trend for the rate of profit to exceed the rate of growth, which in turn generates a trend for social inequality to increase. The fact that inequality has increased in the slump since 2008 - though usually inequality narrows in slumps - suggests this trend for increased inequality will continue. But working-class revolt could change that.

In 2008, some people said that neo-liberal doctrine was shattered and we'd see re-regulated capitalism. In fact governments have mostly responded by sharpening neo-liberal policies. Short of a working-class revolt, that trend will probably continue.



For decades writers have been predicting a shift to a multi-polar world and a revival of economic protections. When the 2008 crisis broke, the first declaration of the G20 really said nothing but: don't increase protectionist measures. And on the whole it held. That suggests the forces for "imperialism of free trade" still dominate. The US is more cautious militarily since its fiasco in Iraq, but it has never been able to control world politics in detail. US hegemony will remain for the near future.

Other writers predict capitalism will create a "borderless world". The Mediterranean doesn't look like that, and nor does Raqqa. A fundamental reason for thinking that, unless working-class struggle revives strongly, new borders will emerge and existing ones be strengthened, is the ecological arguments. First, water supplies are under pressure. We use about 30% of the world's total accessible renewable supply of water. By 2025, that value may reach 70%. Billions of people lack basic water services, and millions die each year from water-related diseases. Climate change in coming decades will make some areas uninhabitable, and destroy economic life in others. Again, unless we act.

COMPETING IN A FLAT WORLD

*Building Enterprises for
a Borderless World*

