

Present state of wealth gap:

<https://time.com/5508393/global-wealth-inequality-widens-oxfam/>

<https://therealnews.com/stories/dor0307ep30mexico>

Wealth of top 26 richest people =

Wealth of bottom 3.7 billion people

Last year it was ~43 richest...

## What is “Neoliberalism”?

### Definitions

- The expansion of the logic of finance to all dimensions of life
- A “new war” (between financial centers) “for the conquest of territory”—1. The continued expansion of capitalist acquisition of resources, markets, and labor; 2. The specific extension of the capitalist system into the previous spheres of influence of “Real Socialism.”

### Typical features

- Increase of wealth inequality→increase in inequality of power
- Offshore production
- Destruction of union power
- Growth of unemployment (though production goes up and certain indices declare the economy to be “progressing”)
- Operation/dominance of the World Bank / IMF / (and on another level, the UN)... operating specifically through predatory lending at the scale of countries and the deployment of “structural adjustment plans.” This is “globalization” in its clearest guise.
- Global distribution of the “American Way of Life” and thus destruction of the cultures that this “way of life” replaces
- Wide distribution of WARS: “regional wars”; “internal conflicts”... leading to
- Mass waves of migration
- The production/categorization of “useless people”—surplus population—people who don’t produce for the global market, who don’t consume from it, and who don’t take loans. Such people—for example indigenous people—under this system *have no role...* they’re useless and therefore *expendable*.

## The role/fate of the “Nation-State”

- Previous definition of “state power” (from Engels): the state is that entity which has a “monopoly on legitimate violence.” But that monopoly has broken down, and continues to break down.
- State power is now distributed across a vast web of corporate/security companies (eg Palantir), mercenary companies (eg Blackwater), and the armies of organized crime/cartels. What used to be “state” function is now distributed more broadly.
- But the “state” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century also included the “welfare state” and control over multiple dimensions of infrastructure and social services. Under neoliberalism, these

functions are aggressively diminished and destroyed. “The State” will only be a focal region within the net of systems of force.

- Previously the power of the state rested upon “material bases of sovereignty”:
  - control over natural resources, by regulations, taxation, tariffs
  - control over internal markets, and tax revenue from these markets
  - control over labor supplies
- ... but now these controls are breaking down. This is another dimension of “globalization.” National boundaries cease to exist... *for capital* and *for trade*... but *not* for people...
- For *people*... neoliberalism involves a perpetual *strengthening* of borders, checkpoints, walls, and also of class, racial and even gender divisions.
- Previously state functioning has involved “politics.” In the simplest reading, state actions were determined through “political” processes. But “politics” in this sense is disappearing. “Media democracy” still offers spectacles to the viewing masses, but real decisions come from entities that are beyond and above the nation-state—corporate power—and Marcos says the state ends up as a *manager* directing things on behalf of this absentee landlord.

### Resistance

- From “civil society”—as also in Rojava... “Civil Society” here = “the web of voluntary associations”
- From certain “pockets”—specifically of those populations made disposable... and groups like the Zapatistas
- From the “Nation-State”?

## Possible Discussion Questions

### **Empirical/analytical**

- Does this analysis of the contemporary world order sound correct?
- Is it correct to understand the wide array of “regional wars” and “internal conflicts” as a part of “globalization”?
- Have you seen the effects of neoliberalism in your own work? Your own history? Your own education?
- Should we understand large-scale migration, say of people from the Middle East and Northern Africa into Europe, or of people from South and Central America into the U.S., as the consequence of “regional wars and internal conflicts” stemming from neoliberalism?
- Is it true that the “Nation State” is eroded in the period of neoliberalism?
- What are the consequences of the breakage of the “monopoly on legitimate violence” and the accompanying distribution of “legitimate” use of force to a web of private concerns, both legal and illegal?
- Is it true that “politics” is disappearing? What’s left?
- How does all of this affect us, right here? Does it?

### **Ethical**

- *Should* everything be subjected to the logic of finance? Should “the markets” determine patterns of life?
- Should neoliberalism be “resisted”?
- Is it possible to resist? Who is resisting? How?
- Is it just or acceptable that wealth inequality—and consequently power inequality—grows year by year and day by day?
- Do you agree that the global distribution of “the American way of life” is equivalent to the destruction of other cultures?
- Should the “nation-state” be defended *against* neoliberalism? To what extent is the re-empowerment of the nation-state a viable alternative, and how likely is it that resistance can occur at this level?
- What should we do?