

What are the points to watch for and what is Marx's timeline for the collapse of capitalism?

AI Overview

Marx argued that capitalism is inherently self-destructive, destined to collapse due to internal contradictions, primarily the falling rate of profit, overproduction, and extreme wealth concentration, leading to increased crises and intense class struggle. He did not provide a specific date but believed increasing crises and proletariat uprising would inevitably replace capitalism with socialism.

Points to Watch for the Collapse of Capitalism

- **Falling Rate of Profit**: As capitalists invest more in machinery and less in labor (the source of value), the overall rate of profit tends to decline.
- **Overproduction and Underconsumption**: Capitalists produce more goods than workers can afford to buy, leading to unsold goods, business failures, and economic crises.
- **Concentration of Capital**: Larger firms absorb smaller ones, resulting in a shrinking number of capitalists holding immense power and a growing, impoverished proletariat.
- **Intensifying Class Struggle**: The widening gap between the bourgeoisie (owners) and the proletariat (workers) fosters revolutionary consciousness.
- **Periodic Crises**: Each economic slump is worse than the last, acting as a mechanism for clearing out weaker, smaller firms and intensifying the system's instability.

Marx's Timeline for Collapse

- **No Specific Date**: Marx did not set a rigid calendar date for the collapse, viewing it instead as a historical process.
- **Historical Stages**: Marx positioned capitalism as a transitory phase between feudalism and socialism/communism.
- **Accumulating Crisis**: The collapse would occur when the contradictions reached a breaking point, potentially triggered by a massive, global crisis or war.
- **Evolutionary View**: While initially expecting rapid, imminent revolution in the mid-19th century, his later work suggested a longer, more complex process of decay.

Note: Critics note that long-term economic stagnation and the predicted level of social decay have not materialized in the way Marx predicted in many advanced capitalist countries.

1. Key Points to Watch (The "Internal Contradictions")

Marx identified several systemic flaws that he believed would eventually make the capitalist system unsustainable:

- **The Falling Rate of Profit**: As capitalists compete, they invest more in machinery (constant capital) and less in human labor (variable capital). Since Marx believed value only comes from labor, the rate of profit across the system tends to decline over time.
- **Concentration of Wealth**: Competition leads to winners and losers. Over time, wealth becomes concentrated in fewer and fewer hands (monopolies), while the middle class is pushed down into the working class.
- **Crisis of Overproduction**: Capitalism is incredibly efficient at producing goods. However, because workers are paid less than the value they produce, they eventually cannot afford to buy the products. This leads to "gluts," market crashes, and depressions.

- **Class Consciousness:** As the gap between the wealthy (bourgeoisie) and the workers (proletariat) widens, and as workers are gathered into large factories, they realize their collective power. This shift from a "class in itself" to a "class for itself" is the catalyst for revolution.
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2. Marx's Timeline: Evolution, Not an Appointment

Marx's timeline was based on **Historical Materialism**—the idea that history moves through stages based on how a society produces things.

The Stages of Progress:

1. **Primitive Communism:** (Hunter-gatherers)
2. **Slave Societies:** (Ancient Rome/Greece)
3. **Feudalism:** (Lords and Serfs)
4. **Capitalism:** (Current stage; Bourgeoisie and Proletariat)
5. **Socialism:** (Transitional phase where workers own the means of production)
6. **Communism:** (A stateless, classless society)

Why didn't he give a specific date?

Marx believed the "collapse" would happen only when capitalism had **fully matured**. He argued that no social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed.

"The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers." — *The Communist Manifesto*

3. Why the "Collapse" Hasn't Happened as Predicted

Critics and modern economists often point to a few things Marx didn't fully anticipate that altered his timeline:

Factor	Impact on Marx's Theory
The Rise of the Middle Class	Instead of disappearing, a massive managerial and service class emerged.
Government Intervention	Safety nets (Social Security, unemployment) softened the "crises" of capitalism.
Global Expansion	Capitalists found new markets and cheaper labor abroad, delaying the falling rate of profit.
Adaptability	Capitalism proved more flexible at reinventing itself through technology and credit than Marx expected.

Summary of the "Endgame"

For Marx, the collapse isn't just a "market crash"—it is the moment when the system becomes a **fetter (a chain)** on human production. When the system can no longer feed its workers or manage its technology without causing constant chaos, he believed the working class would seize control. **Would you like me to dive deeper into his "Falling Rate of Profit" theory or perhaps explore how modern neo-Marxists explain why capitalism is still standing?**

Marx's

Law of the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall (LTRPF) is what he called the "most important law" of political economy because it suggests capitalism has a structural, "built-in" expiration date. The core logic is a mathematical paradox: the very thing that makes a capitalist successful in the short term (automation) destroys the profitability of the entire system in the long term.

1. The Basic Formula

To understand the fall, you must look at Marx's three components of capital:

- **Constant Capital (**
): Money spent on "dead labor"—machinery, raw materials, and factory space.
- **Variable Capital (**
): Money spent on "living labor"—worker wages.
- **Surplus Value (**
): The profit extracted from workers over and above their wages.

The Rate of Profit calculation is:

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2. The Paradox of Automation

Marx's argument rests on the **Labour Theory of Value**, which states that *only* living human labor can create new value. Machines merely transfer their own existing cost to the product over time (depreciation).

1. **The Incentive:** To beat competitors, a capitalist automates to produce goods cheaper and faster.
2. **The Shift:** This increases **Constant Capital (**
) while decreasing **Variable Capital (**
). Marx called this a rise in the **Organic Composition of Capital**.
3. **The Result:** Because the source of profit () is tied to workers (), but the capitalist is spending more and more on machines (), the denominator in the profit formula grows faster than the numerator.
4. **The Crash:** Eventually, the rate of profit across the whole economy drops so low that capitalists stop investing, leading to stagnation, bankruptcies, and crises.

3. Why It Is a "Tendency" (Counteracting Factors)

Marx noted that profit doesn't just drop in a straight line; several "counter-tendencies" can temporarily push it back up:

- **Increasing the Rate of Exploitation:** Making workers work longer or harder for the same pay.
- **Cheapening Constant Capital:** If the machines themselves become much cheaper to buy, the "investment" cost () drops.
- **Foreign Trade:** Offshoring to countries with cheaper labor or cheaper raw materials.
- **Devaluation of Capital:** During a major depression or war, factories and machines are destroyed or sold for pennies on the dollar. This "resets" the system by drastically lowering , allowing a new cycle of high-profit growth to begin.

4. Modern Empirical Debate

As of **2026**, economists continue to debate if this law is visible in modern data. Some Marxist researchers, such as Michael Roberts, argue that the world rate of profit has shown a long-term downward trend since the mid-20th century. Critics, however, argue that modern industries like software and finance don't fit Marx's "factory-based" model of constant capital, or that constant innovation prevents a permanent fall.

explore how modern neo-Marxists explain why capitalism is still standing?

Thinking

It is a fascinating question because, by Marx's original logic, the "internal contradictions" of the 19th century should have led to a revolution long ago. Modern Neo-Marxists have spent the last century trying to figure out why the "grave-diggers" (the working class) haven't finished the job. They generally point to four major reasons why capitalism has survived far longer than Marx anticipated.

1. Cultural Hegemony (Antonio Gramsci)

Perhaps the most influential Neo-Marxist, Gramsci argued that capitalism is maintained not just by police or money, but by **culture**.

- **The Idea:** The ruling class stays in power by making their own values—individualism, competition, and the "American Dream"—the "common sense" of society.
- **The Result:** Workers don't revolt because they believe the system is natural and inevitable. They view their own failure as a personal lack of effort rather than a systemic flaw. They adopt the worldview of the people exploiting them.

2. The "Safety Valve" of the Welfare State

Neo-Marxists often argue that the state stepped in to "save capitalism from itself."

- **Managed Crises:** Through Keynesian economics, governments began using social security, unemployment benefits, and labor laws to soften the blow of economic crashes.
- **Buying Loyalty:** By providing a minimum standard of living, the state reduced the "misery" that Marx thought would drive workers to revolution. The "proletariat" became "consumers" who had too much to lose to risk a total systemic collapse.

3. The World Systems Theory (Immanuel Wallerstein)

Wallerstein argued that capitalism survived by expanding its borders, turning the entire planet into a single economic machine.

- **Core vs. Periphery:** High-income countries (the Core) outsourced the "misery" Marx described to the Global South (the Periphery).
- **Exporting Exploitation:** The reason the working class in the West didn't revolt is that they became a "labor aristocracy." They benefited from cheap goods produced by even more exploited workers in other countries. Capitalism didn't solve its problems; it just moved them to a different zip code.

4. The "Culture Industry" (The Frankfurt School)

Thinkers like Adorno and Horkheimer looked at how mass media and entertainment changed the revolutionary spirit.

- **Mass Distraction:** They argued that the "Culture Industry" (movies, pop music, advertising) churns out standardized, mindless entertainment that keeps the working class passive and distracted.
- **Commodity Fetishism:** We are taught to find fulfillment in buying things rather than in our work or community. In this view, capitalism didn't collapse because it successfully turned the "revolutionary subject" into a "satisfied shopper."

Summary: A Summary Table of Modern Perspectives

Factor	Neo-Marxist Term	Why Capitalism Survived
Ideas	Cultural Hegemony	People think capitalism is "the only way."
Politics	The Managed State	The government fixed the worst parts to prevent revolt.
Geography	Global Chains	Exploitation was moved to poorer countries.
Psychology	The Culture Industry	People are too distracted/entertained to care.

Is a collapse still "inevitable" for them?

Many Neo-Marxists believe that these are only **delaying tactics**. They argue that factors like **climate change** or **total automation (AI)** represent the final limits that capitalism won't be able to "buy its way out of" or "distract us from."

Would you like me to explore one of these modern "threats" to capitalism, such as how Neo-Marxists view the impact of AI and automation on labor?

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rich: the state of existence of a class or person whose income and accrued wealth derives from economic or literal rents that tax the profits of the real work done by the rest of the population.
synonym: parasite [whose existence threatens the survival of the human race.]

AI: How does financialization of the Economy alter Marx's Theory?

Modern financialization alters Marx's theory by shifting the center of capital accumulation away from tangible production and into the realm of

fictitious capital—financial assets that represent legal claims on future value rather than active means of production. While Marx identified this "M-M'" (money making money without producing goods) as a parasitic form of "usury capital," modern analysts argue it has become the dominant mode of the global economy, creating a separate but intrinsically connected dynamic of financial accumulation alongside real production.

Financialization impacts Marx's core "Falling Rate of Profit" theory in several critical ways:

1. The Proliferation of "Fictitious Capital"

Marx introduced the concept of fictitious capital in *Capital, Vol. 3* to describe assets like stocks, bonds, and securities.

- **Detachment from Production:** Fictitious capital represents contractual claims on future income produced elsewhere. Unlike "real capital" (machinery and labor), these assets do not directly create value; they only appropriate a share of the surplus value generated in production.
- **Autonomous Valuation:** The market value of these assets is determined by **capitalization**—calculating their worth based on expected future returns and the current average interest

rate—rather than their cost of production. This allows their value to fluctuate independently of actual changes in the physical reproduction of capital.

- **The "M-M'" Circuit:** In financialized capitalism, capital increasingly seeks to expand through a "sterile" circuit () that bypasses the productive process () entirely.

2. A Counter-Tendency to Falling Profits

Some Marxist analyses view financialization as a temporary counter-tendency to the long-term decline in general profitability:

- **Equalization of Profits:** Financialization allows for a constant flow of investment among firms and countries, establishing a more uniform rate of profit across the global economy.
- **Financial Expropriation:** Profits are increasingly derived from "expropriation in circulation" (similar to usury) rather than direct exploitation in factories. This includes extracting interest from household debt, such as mortgages and credit cards.
- **Squeezing Productive Capital:** Interest-bearing capital (IBC) can dominate industrial and commercial capital, appropriating a larger share of the surplus value produced before it is distributed as industrial profit.

3. Masking Systemic Stagnation

Financialization can create the illusion of economic health while underlying productive forces stagnate:

- **"Zombie" Firms:** Approximately 40% of total corporate debt is owed by "zombie firms"—companies that are effectively bankrupt but kept alive by constant bank credit.
- **Wealth vs. Anti-Wealth:** Financialized wealth can be seen as "anti-wealth"—legalized claims on future production that become unsustainable as debts grow exponentially. This creates a "scissors" effect where the total price of financial assets far exceeds the actual values produced, leading to inevitable crashes when these must reconcile with material reality.
- **Capital Gains as "Wealth Creation":** Modern accounting often treats asset-price inflation (capital gains in real estate and stocks) as wealth creation, whereas Marxists argue this merely shifts the fiscal burden onto labor and productive industry.

4. Changing the Role of the State and the Worker

- **State as Guarantor:** Unlike the 1857 crisis Marx observed, modern states (such as during the 2008 bailout) actively intervene to preserve fictitious capital by using public funds to buy depreciated financial assets at nominal values.
- **Workers as Stakeholders:** Workers in modern economies are often tied to fictitious capital through pension funds and retirement accounts, making their future financial security dependent on the very speculative markets that exploit them.

Would you like to look closer at how modern Marxist economists calculate the "real" rate of profit by stripping away these "fictitious" financial gains from national accounts?

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Calculating the "real" rate of profit is the "Holy Grail" for modern Marxist economists like Michael Roberts, Anwar Shaikh, and Andrew Kliman. To find the "truth" behind the economy, they have to peel back the layers of official government data (like GDP or Corporate Profits) which they view as distorted by accounting tricks and financial bubbles.

The goal is to find the **Rate of Profit** () using Marx's original formula:

Here is how they strip away the "fictitious" elements to get to the "real" numbers.

1. Redefining the "Numerator" (Surplus Value,)

In standard national accounts (like the BEA in the US), "Profit" includes interest earned, capital gains from selling stocks/real estate, and rent. Marxists argue these don't reflect new value creation.

- **Stripping Financial Gains:** They subtract **capital gains** (profit from asset price increases) because no new goods or services were produced; wealth was simply redistributed.
- **The "Productive" Filter:** They often separate workers into "productive" and "unproductive" labor.
 - *Productive:* Labor that produces a commodity (factory workers, coders, farmers).
 - *Unproductive:* Labor that merely circulates value (bankers, HR managers, advertising agents).
- **The Adjustment:** They treat the wages of "unproductive" workers as a **cost** to the system rather than a source of value. Therefore, the "real" surplus value is only the profit generated in the productive sectors.

2. Redefining the "Denominator" (Capital Stock,)

This is where the biggest distortions happen. Official data often looks at "Book Value" or "Historical Cost," which can be misleading.

- **Current Replacement Cost:** Modern Marxists use "Current Cost" (what it would cost to replace a machine today). This accounts for inflation and technological change.
- **Removing Fictitious Assets:** They strip out the value of **financial assets** (stocks, bonds, derivatives) from the total capital stock. If a company's "value" is mostly its stock price rather than its factories and software, Marxists exclude that "paper wealth" to see the health of the underlying industrial base.
- **Circulating Capital:** They include the cost of raw materials and energy used up in the cycle, which is often glossed over in simplified corporate reporting.

3. The "Productive" vs. "Financial" Profit Divergence

One of the most famous methods (used by Anwar Shaikh) is to compare the **General Rate of Profit** to the **Interest Rate**.

- **The Logic:** If the rate of profit in the "real" economy (making things) falls below the interest rate, capitalists stop building factories and start "rent-seeking" (lending money or buying stocks).
- **The Calculation:** By subtracting the "interest-bearing" portion of profit from the total, they can show that while Wall Street looks healthy, the "Real Rate of Profit" in manufacturing and services has been trending downward for decades.

What the Data Usually Shows

When these economists run the numbers, they typically find a "Scissor Effect":

1. **The "Official" Profit Rate:** Looks volatile but relatively stable or high due to financial bubbles and tech monopolies.
2. **The "Marxist" Profit Rate:** Shows a clear downward trend from the mid-1960s to today, with brief "resets" during recessions.

Comparison Table: Official vs. Marxist Accounting

Feature	Official National Accounts (GDP/GNP)	Modern Marxist Calculation
Capital Gains	Counted as income/wealth.	Excluded (Fictitious).
Finance/Banking	Counted as "Productive" output.	Excluded (Cost of circulation).
Depreciation	Varies by tax law.	Calculated via physical wear/tear.
Goal	Measure total market activity.	Measure the health of value creation .

The Verdict

For modern Marxists, the reason we see "secular stagnation" (slow growth) in the West despite high stock markets is that the **Real Rate of Profit** is too low to encourage investment in the real world. Capitalists would rather gamble on the "fictitious" side because the "real" side is no longer profitable enough.

Would you like to see a specific example of how this explains a historical event, like the 2008 Financial Crisis or the current "Everything Bubble"?

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Thinking

To understand the

2008 Financial Crisis through this lens, we have to look past the "subprime mortgages" and see them as a symptom of a deeper, Marxian crisis of profitability.

Modern Marxists (like Michael Roberts and Guglielmo Carchedi) argue that 2008 was not just a "banking mistake," but a **reconciliation** between the fictitious world and the real world.

1. The Setup: The "Profit Vacuum" (1997–2007)

Leading up to 2008, the **Real Rate of Profit** in the productive sectors (manufacturing, non-financial services) was struggling.

- **The Problem:** Capitalists had too much capital but nowhere "real" to put it that would yield a high return.
- **The "Solution" (Financialization):** Instead of building new factories, capital flowed into the financial sector. Banks created "fictitious capital" (Mortgage-Backed Securities and CDOs) to manufacture artificial returns.
- **The Result:** A massive gap opened between the **Price** of financial assets and the **Value** being produced by the working class.

2. The 2008 Crash: The "Law of Value" Asserts Itself

In Marxist terms, a crisis is the moment where **Prices** are forced to drop back down to meet **Value**.

- **The Trigger:** When homeowners (the working class) couldn't pay their mortgages, the "stream of surplus value" that supported those billion-dollar financial assets evaporated.
- **The Collapse:** Suddenly, the "fictitious" wealth—the trillions of dollars in derivatives—was revealed to have no basis in real-world labor.
- **The Marxist Explanation:** This wasn't a "liquidity crisis"; it was a **devaluation of capital**. The system needed to "burn off" the excess fictitious capital to make the remaining "real" capital profitable again.

3. The "Everything Bubble" (2010–Present)

If 2008 was the "reconciliation," why are markets at record highs now? Modern Marxists argue we are currently in an even more dangerous phase.

- **Quantitative Easing (QE):** After 2008, central banks printed trillions of dollars. In Marx's view, this didn't create *value*; it simply prevented the "cleansing" of the 2008 crash.
- **The "Zombie" Economy:** By keeping interest rates at zero, the state allowed "unprofitable" firms (the "zombies") to survive on cheap debt. This prevented the "Falling Rate of Profit" from bottoming out and resetting.
- **The "Everything Bubble":** Because the real rate of profit remains low, that printed money didn't go into high-paying jobs or new industries; it flooded into **fictitious assets**:
 - **Real Estate:** Prices detached from local wages.
 - **Tech Speculation:** Stocks valued at billions despite never making a profit.
 - **Crypto/NFTs:** Pure fictitious capital with zero link to production.

4. Summary: The Marxist Anatomy of the Crisis

Phase	What the Public Sees	What the Marxist Sees
Pre-2008	"Innovative financial products."	Capital escaping low industrial profit rates.
2008 Crash	"Greedy bankers and bad loans."	The Law of Value correcting the Price/Value gap.
Post-2008	"Economic recovery and growth."	State-funded life support for fictitious capital.
Current Day	"The Everything Bubble."	A massive overhang of debt that <i>must</i> eventually be devalued.

The "Grave-Digger" Moment

For modern Marxists, the "Everything Bubble" represents a "dead end." They argue that the state has used up its tools (low interest rates and money printing). When this bubble pops, the state may no longer be able to "buy" its way out, potentially leading to the systemic "collapse" or transition Marx originally predicted—not because people *want* a revolution, but because the old system simply stops functioning.

Would you like me to look at how "Green Energy" or "AI" is being viewed by these economists as a potential "final attempt" to find a new surge of real profitability?

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Thinking

Modern Marxist economists view

AI and **Green Energy** not just as neutral technologies, but as "**Systemic Resets**." In their view, capitalism is currently trapped in a "long depression" of low profitability. To escape, it needs a massive surge in productivity or a wholesale replacement of old, expensive infrastructure.

Here is how these two frontiers are analyzed as the "final attempts" to restore the Rate of Profit.

1. AI: The Ultimate "Variable Capital" Killer

From a Marxist perspective, AI is the most aggressive attempt in history to raise the **Rate of Surplus Value** by gutting the cost of labor ().

- **The Goal:** By replacing "expensive" human cognitive labor with "cheap" algorithmic labor, capitalists hope to drastically reduce their wage bills. If one AI can do the work of 1,000 paralegals or coders, the surplus value extracted from the remaining workers skyrockets.
 - **The Marxist Trap (The AI Paradox):** Here is where the "Falling Rate of Profit" returns with a vengeance. If *everyone* uses AI, the "Value" of the products falls because they require less human labor to produce.
 - If a commodity takes zero human hours to produce, its **Value** (in Marx's terms) trends toward zero.
 - Competition will force prices down, and eventually, the massive investment in AI servers and chips () will outweigh the shrinking pool of human labor ().
 - **The Verdict:** AI might provide a "golden age" of profit for the first few companies to master it (like Nvidia or Microsoft), but once it becomes a general utility, Marxists argue it will accelerate the collapse of the profit rate across the whole system.
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2. Green Energy: The Great "Capital Destruction"

Marx noted that one way to "reset" the rate of profit is the **destruction of old capital**. Usually, this happens through war or a massive depression. "Green Energy" acts as a peaceful version of this destruction.

- **Devaluing the Old:** To transition to "Green," the global economy must effectively "trash" trillions of dollars worth of fossil-fuel infrastructure (oil rigs, gas plants, internal combustion engines). In Marxist terms, this is a **forced devaluation of Constant Capital** ().
 - **The New Investment Cycle:** By making old machines illegal or obsolete, the state forces capitalists to invest in an entirely new set of Constant Capital (turbines, grids, EV plants). This creates a massive "investment boom" that can mimic growth for a few decades.
 - **The Trap:** Green energy (wind/solar) tends to have a very low "Energy Return on Investment" (EROI) compared to the "free" energy of gushing oil. Marxists argue that while it creates jobs and investment, it might actually raise the underlying costs of production for all other industries, further squeezing profit margins.
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3. The "State-Led" Final Frontier

Both AI and Green Energy share one trait that makes them "final" attempts: **they are heavily reliant on the State**.

- **Subsidies as "Profit Transfers":** Since "real" profit is low, the state is now directly funding the "Green Transition" and AI research. This is essentially the state taking tax money (value from workers) and handing it to corporations to ensure they stay profitable.
- **The Limits of the State:** Marxists argue the state cannot print "Value"; it can only move it

around. If the underlying "Real Rate of Profit" doesn't actually rise through these technologies, the state will eventually run out of credit, leading to a "Great Devaluation"—a crash larger than 2008.

Comparison: AI vs. Green Energy in Marxist Theory

Frontier	Mechanism for Profit	The Marxist "Catch"
AI	Slashes wages () through automation.	Eliminates the source of Value (human labor), crashing the long-term profit rate.
Green Energy	Forces the destruction/replacement of old machinery ().	High costs and lower energy density may squeeze margins across the entire economy.
Both	Require massive State intervention.	Depends on debt-fuelled "fictitious" funding that eventually must be paid back.

Conclusion: A New "Long Wave" or the Final Stand?

Economists like **Nikolai Kondratiev** (and later Marxists) spoke of "Long Waves" of 50–60 years.

- **The Optimistic Marxist View:** AI and Green Energy represent the start of a "6th Wave," providing another 50 years of capitalist stability.
- **The "Collapse" View:** These technologies are different because they are hitting the **physical limits of the planet** (ecology) and the **social limits of labor** (AI). In this view, capitalism is finally running out of "outside" spaces to expand into.

Would you like to explore what Marxists think comes *after* this—the transition to "Post-Capitalism" or "Fully Automated Luxury Communism"?

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