

Understanding social change

A theme and variations

The wider context for NOREL

Three presentations:

The economic, cultural, political and social context

- the moderately long term changes that lie behind the work that the NOREL group is doing

Religious change in Northern Europe

- the factors to take into account

State versus market

- which is the most helpful framework for understanding religion in 21st century Europe?

Social change 1938-2008

A theme and variations

The theme:

- modern and late modern societies
- are all late modern societies the same? If not, why not?
- the distinctiveness of the Nordic countries
- four starting points as we consider these questions:
economic, cultural, political and sociological

The Variations

The four starting points:

Economic transformations (political economy)

- fordism, post-fordism and beyond

Cultural change

- from modern to late/post-modern

Political transformations

- globalization and the nation state

Class and ethnicity

- thinking about social difference

A topical example

American versus European views of the market

Two examples of 'modern' societies, both caught up in the same series of events, which raise profound questions concerning the relationship of the state and the market

- should we/ should we not regulate the market?
- how do we regulate what has become known as financial capitalism?
- political implications, at home and abroad

The differences between Europe and the US

Attitudes to:

Risk – winning and losing/ protection from the vicissitudes of life (the welfare state)

The state – what do we understand by the state and what is its function?

Profit as a motive – is this a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ thing?
Questions of exploitation. Is it possible to run services/churches for profit?

The three/four stages of capitalism

Laissez-faire: from the industrial revolution to the 1920s

Fordism: from the 1920/30s to 1970s

Post-Fordism: from 1970s to the present

What is happening *now*? Is something new emerging? A fundamental change in the nature of state intervention? What should be done?

The point to grasp is shifting nature of the economy and its effects on human living

Mid 20th century assumptions

Fordism

- as an economic system – state intervention is an integral part of the system
- as a social system – the welfare state and the assumptions that lie behind this
- as a political system – consensus politics; full employment is a primary goal

Begins in the 1930s and lasts through the 1960s – a supremely confident decade

- 1968 – an iconic moment

The collapse of Fordism

Early 1970s – inflation and the oil crisis

Collapse of stable markets

Multi-nationals begin to emerge

Strains and tensions at home and abroad

- in Britain, wage inflation, rising unemployment, social unrest
- breakdown of the monetary system, flexible rather than fixed exchange rates, economic instability on a global scale
- a widespread loss of confidence

New ways of doing things

A rolling back of the state

Individualism versus collectivism

Personal responsibility

Neo-liberalism

- an explicit ideology, accompanied by a distinctive style of governance

Service delivery

- the emergence of non-profit and for-profit actors in the provision of welfare, healthcare and education

A parallel story

Enlightenment confidence – the implication that ‘modern’ is necessarily ‘better’

Reason, rationality, science, progress

- not a ‘neutral’ view; an inherent optimism
- philosophies of social science develop from this

Post-modernity/post-modernism – a radical questioning of Enlightenment ideals

- a shift that takes place in the 1970s – is this a coincidence? A marked change in mood

In parenthesis

The French Enlightenment opposed the obscurantism of the Catholic Church; it championed a 'freedom from belief'

- Voltaire's famous 'écrasez l'infâme' – meaning the Catholic Church

The American Enlightenment, conversely, was carried by religion – in this case many different forms of Protestantism; it became a 'freedom to believe'

The British case – somewhere in between

The Nordic countries – over to you

The 'normality' of the nation state

Different accounts of the nation state, its origins and its durability

The early modern period in European history

What do we mean by the state?

The state as an 'ideal type' – heavily dependent on the historical experience of two very different cases (Britain and France)

The relationship between the state and the state churches of (Northern) Europe

- *neither* exist in the US

Challenges to the nation state

Different ways of approaching the question:

- the process known as globalization
- the building of a European Union

How do these relate to each other – is the latter part of the former, or is it a way of coming to terms with the pressures of globalization?

In either case, the implications for identity

Who are we? Who will we be? Are we always the same?

The religious factor in this debate; the time sequence

Class and political divisions in the mid 20th century

The influence of social class on European politics – this is pervasive

The division between right and left

In Britain – the emergence the Labour Party as the dominant part of the left

In continental Europe – the further split between communist and socialist parties

The role of the trades unions in political life

Later post-war decades

A whole series of changes take place in *post*-industrial societies, leading to:

The emergence of new classes

New lines of cleavage; the two thirds, one third society

New forms of political association, which replace class-based parties

- the growing significance of new social movements

New ways of marking social difference

- the growing importance of consumption

'Religious decades'

1950s Post-war reconstruction; mostly conservative

1960s Radical change in both society and the churches;
secular confidence (1968)

1970s Declining confidence – new forms of religiousness

- 1979 a pivotal moment

1980s The dominance of the market

- 1989 the end of the cold war

1990s A new world order

- the significance of Islam

2001 9/11 The unthinkable happens

- the implications for research