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Ending the Illusion: Interrogating Neoliberalism and Class Action

Abstract

The neoliberal political economy is best framed and analyzed by identifying how it services the economic domination of the capitalist owners of production, the bourgeoisie. This work examines how the combination of expanded corporate power, the arrangements of national and international state apparatuses (roused by a reorientation of economic policy), and newly imposed limitations on collective action has helped to maintain the epoch of capitalism by stifling the development of a counter-hegemony that seeks emancipation. Within this analysis rests a critique. With the long-term effects of capitalist crises jeopardizing us once again, we have an opportunity to further the effort for revolutionary change. How then do we step into engaging that political project? How do we elucidate the truth, end the illusion, and create action?

Keywords

neoliberalism, neoliberal capitalism, capitalism, class warfare

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The neoliberal political economy is best framed and analyzed by identifying how it services the economic domination of the capitalist owners of production, the bourgeoisie. Here I will examine how the combination of expanded corporate power, the arrangements of national and international state apparatuses (roused by a reorientation of economic policy), and newly imposed limitations on collective action has helped to maintain the epoch of capitalism by stifling the development of a counter-hegemony that seeks emancipation.

Within this analysis rests a critique. It is imperative that we historicize the neoliberal period by removing any semblance of obscurity regarding the actors, their objectives, and their tools. Unfortunately, this is not common practice. Our economic, political, and social understanding rests so heavily on the presumptions of the ruling class that the collective masses fail to operate with the same conceptual framework that animates and contextualizes the machinations of the bourgeois. With the long-term effects of capitalist crises jeopardizing us once again, we have an opportunity to further the effort for revolutionary change. How then do we step into engaging that political project? How do we elucidate the truth, end the illusion, and create action?

Class Warfare

From the late 1960s to the 1970s a series of events would mark the coming devolution of the class compromises that characterized the period of embedded liberalism. Building from the analysis provided by David Harvey and many others, this period was characterized by stagflation, the expansion in the volume and seriousness of fiscal crises, and the end of the fixed exchange rate system¹. The introduction of such volatility was evidence enough that the practice of Keynesian management could not resolve the contradictions of capitalism and the class interests of the bosses and the workers simply could not be reconciled. The building momentum of socialist people's movements would make clear that the status quo was being rejected and the economic and political comfort of the ownership class could potentially see a reckoning.

Alas, that time would not come. A capitalist class threatened with lowered profit margins would execute a multitiered plan that would more completely capture the state and reorient the world's governing apparatuses towards the forceful reintroduction of economic concentration. The logic of neoliberalism – explicated by the Mont Pelerin Society and inaugurated as an intellectual tradition – would transition into a policy era initiated by the political maneuverings of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the global north and by Deng Xiaoping in China². The agenda was clear: the expansion of private management of the world economy. Fundamentally authoritarian, the masses of poor and working people would become the subjects of a flat-out assault on the quality and democratic control of their lives. Social well-being, the environment, and labor itself would be offered as a sacrifice to the capitalist class that would usher in a time of widening inequality, destruction of working class organizations and an exponential deepening of a global climate crisis.

Complicity abounds. The political capital necessary to initiate the neoliberal order required the steady cultivation of strategic political alliances that would come to comprise the

¹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12.

² Harvey, 1.

modern political right. The 1970s was a time of tremendous social examination and change; burgeoning conceptualizations of individual freedom characterized by civil rights, feminism, and sexual autonomy would be coupled with an anti-war sentiment. Using this dynamism, a wicked analysis would develop. Feeling the pressure of public sentiment, the capitalist class would direct these ideals "...against the interventionist and regulatory practices of the state..."³. This was made possible by the morphing of neoliberal ideology into a politics of individualism, turning emancipatory movements away from class alliances in favor of a narrow framing of "interests." Liberalism created a corporate identity body politic that aligned the interests of oppressed groups with the meritocratic strategy of ascending the ladder of capitalist hierarchies. On the political right, a powerful movement formed within the Republican Party, utilizing neoconservative principles, and formally uniting the Christian right and some cultural nationalist white workers with the interests of the capitalist class⁴.

Those motivated by conservative ideology have always been made to facilitate the machinations of the ruling class. Corey Robin historicizes conservatism from the time of Edmund Burke and identifies a through line that isn't rooted in an antipathy for government, a fixation on freedom, or even hostility to change⁵. Rather, most instrumental to understanding conservatism is via a fetishism of hierarchy and thus, a revanchist intellectual movement that sees emancipation as disorder and chaos. Using Robin's framework, we can reconcile the progressive social sentiments of the 1970s with the political success of the capitalist class. With the expansion of social and civil rights, the conservative right necessarily employs – as Robin describes it – a strategy of counterrevolution, animated by how it "adapts and adopts... the language of democratic reform to the cause of hierarchy."⁶. Consequently, freedom cannot coincide with the liberation of racial minorities, women, and other historically marginalized communities but the ethos of "freedom" must be made to correspond with the aggrievement of the ruling class and its political constituency. For the neoliberal period this is tantamount to the *freedom to participate in the market, freedom from the care and protection of the state, and freedom from each other* (individualism).

This fraudulent conception of freedom would be divorced from its material consequences: an intense stratification of wealth on a global scale. Of course, this was the intended effect. Due to the presence of moneyed interests in politics and education both the mainstream parties of the U.S., Britain and the political apparatuses in China would tacitly endorse the transition and at every step the mainstream left would fail to provide a serious alternative. With the state firmly within the grasp of the capitalist class, the neoliberal project would commence.

Freedom to participate: In line with the ethos of free market competition, the neoliberal state would deregulate economic activity. Corporations would be left to their own devices and – once unmoored to any significant form of public accountability – would pocket massive profits while externalizing the costs of their activity unto the wider public. Of course, free market competition only resulted in the expansion of monopoly and oligopoly power. The ideologues who celebrated this system said it would result in a diverse economy; they claimed it would

³ Harvey, 42.

⁴ Harvey, 49–50.

⁵ Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 16.

⁶ Robin, 50.

empower entrepreneurship and innovation, and they alleged that it would empower the consumer. In truth, it resulted in the consolidation of near immutable corporate power.

Freedom from the care and protection of the state: Identifying the state as the primary force operating against the will of the people would empower the capitalist class to rebuild and expand the private ownership of the commons. Institutions and spaces that were relatively accountable to the concerns and management of the community would be offered to corporations and the affairs of the people would be managed privately while totally subordinate to profit incentives. Ironically, the state would be used to facilitate this shift.

Freedom from each other: By abandoning any semblance of a regulatory apparatus and any sense of checks and balances in the economy, steeply hierarchal systems become the norm. By frivolously identifying the state as the source of harm without accurately accounting for its unique position as an executor of political action, a general breakdown of democracy should have been expected. From the perspective of the proletariat, the actions associated with these developments would prove to be antithetical to their aggregate needs. “Freedom from each other” clarifies that the economic and political apparatuses of society would be structurally reshaped to deter collective action, proscribing the unity of spirit and effort needed to combat and reverse the unique form of class domination found in neoliberal capitalism.

The results? In a period of concentrated corporate power, labor’s influence is undermined as union density drastically declines. In a period of “consumer democracy” (where dollars equal “votes”), corporate conglomerates and governing bodies respond almost exclusively to the interests of a wealthy few while the debts of poor and working people rises drastically. Economic reordering has led to a dynamic where those who hold a minimum wealth of a million dollars (0.8 % of the population) account for 44.8 % of all accumulated wealth⁷. In a period of globalization, multi-national corporations (MNC) extend their power transnationally via deregulated capital flows while the movement of people remains constrained by political and financial barriers. In fact, from 1980-2012 the global south has transferred a net \$16.3 trillion of wealth to the global north⁸ orchestrated by neo-imperial/neo-colonial corporate structures. As described by John Glenn, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank remain primarily and disproportionately responsive to the developed nations of the global north while consistently prioritizing investment opportunities for northern MNC’s over effective development in the South⁹. In a period of production capability on a scale never before imagined, corporations are restructured to deemphasize production and elevate financial assets and intellectual property rights as the means of growing profit. In a period of “market correction”, capitalist debt crises proliferate globally, culminating in the 2008 collapse of the world economy.

David Harvey would describe the neoliberal order, not by its ability to generate wealth or to fulfill the needs of the masses but by its talent for dispossession and redistribution to the economic elite¹⁰. The material work of the capitalist class that has characterized the neoliberal

⁷ Anthony Shorrocks, Jim Davies, and Rodrigo LLuberas, “Global Wealth Report 2018,” 2018, 20.

⁸ Global Financial Integrity, “Financial Flows and Tax Havens. Combining to Limit the Lives of Billions of People.,” 2015, 16.

⁹ John Glenn, “Global Governance and the Democratic Deficit: Stifling the Voice of the South.,” *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2008): 217–38.

¹⁰ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

period has been completed and, in this respect, the coordination of class action has been one-sided.

Class Experience

By examining this economic project and accounting for the way it operates in society as a structural force, we have laid out its material foundation and implicitly characterized the nature of the political and legal apparatuses that orchestrate these conditions. Building on Marx's conceptual framework: the *agency* of the individual is contextual, and we should be able to examine who we are as actors within a system that validates or incentivizes specific efforts and a certain disposition.

To expound on this point, the key to successfully analyzing our social lives is the ability to identify connectivity. In this respect our world can be thought of in a Newtonian fashion. Our institutions, our communities, and us, are like objects in space that do not move or shift without being acted upon by a force. Since our perspective requires a social framing it is not one that revolves around the literal forces of nature. Instead, we are interested in power: its distribution and its articulation. The dominant relations of our society require us to think beyond the limitations of nation-state borders, ethnic/racial disputes, or differences in religious dogma. Rather, a class-based analysis becomes an increasingly imperative framework by which to position these relevant issues. As such, our analysis is materialist in its first instance; it does not eliminate the space for analyzing agency, but it positions it by highlighting context and placing emphasis on sources rather than its symptoms.

During the neoliberal era we see our lives being transformed on a global scale. Modern technological innovations (*forces of production*) are set into motion concomitant to modern private property rights (*relations of production*); evidenced by a new era of enclosure, intellectual property, corporate concentration, and the weakening position of the property-less. This mode has amounted to an experience with capitalism that is simultaneously scaled and intimate. No organization can escape having to negotiate with the institutions and assumptions that constitute neoliberalism. Every governing body, from villages to international apparatuses; every social institution from educational to religious; every social body from the individual to de facto group identities (race, gender, etc.) None are exempt, none are absolved.

Who are we in all of this?

The dictum that has marked the neoliberal era is not only initiated and affirmed by a set of policy prescriptions, but it is expressed as social and cultural phenomena as well. "Neoliberal culture" operates as a form of education, an education that seeks to enforce and validate a political and economic agenda. Julie A. Wilson, in her own cultural studies analysis of neoliberalism, successfully distills these truths which combine to form a new social ontology. This ontology posits the supremacy of freedom enacted through the market, establishes that same market as a supreme governing apparatus, and finally, shifts responsibility for the quality of our lives solely onto the individual.¹¹ The privatization of the economy and the systematic

¹¹ Julie A. Wilson, *Neoliberalism* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 52.

undermining of the social safety net demands the individual to take up “personal responsibility” as their mantra. There is no help, trust not in each other; in fact, lean on your own understanding.

Thus, we observe an escalated discourse on individual human capital. Each individual is asked to treat themselves – their mind, their body, their identity – as an asset subject to investment, manipulation, financialization, and *commodification*. Each individual is asked to draw purpose, fulfillment, and sustenance from skillfully expanding their market value, whereas, failing to do so is indistinguishable from a personal commitment to ignorance, shiftlessness, and poverty. Discourse on competition establishes antagonistic and antisocial elements to our relationships with one another. The logic is simple: resources we need to subsist are scarce and therefore can only be available to those who “earn it”. By internalizing the ideological framework that neoliberal ontology establishes we begin to monitor ourselves and each other; measuring and correcting ourselves accordingly. We model our behavior to standards that are defined in large part by those with disproportionate shares of capital. Most significantly, we ignore opportunities to scrutinize our public systems and hold institutions accountable for the way that they service our communities.

It should be carefully noted that this dystopia is not an immutable characteristic of society. It does not have to be this way. As if birthed out of the political imagination of Ayn Rand, neoliberalism and thus capitalism is best serviced if it can be conceived of as “human nature”. This framing makes resistance implausible, as it would require one to defy or transcend humanity itself. Once one accepts the futility of resistance initiated and affirmed by one’s economic reality, the place of salvation becomes clear: the *self*.

We can consider this the dominant ideological framing of neoliberalism. This ideology is first explicated to us by our material conditions and enforced by the coercive power of the state. But, as Louis Althusser would further elucidate, it is also disseminated to us via a series of ideological state apparatuses (religious, educational, familial, legal, political, labor, media, and cultural institutions¹²) that are useful as *pedagogical instruments* of the ruling class. In the case of neoliberalism (as with other hegemonic systems of the past), acting in this fashion contributes to an attempt to “interpellate” the individual, thus, developing the consciousness, informing behavior, and establishing norms.

Yes, these pedagogical instruments are significantly influenced by the state and the state is directed by the class that provides its goal orientation and mode of operation. However, we must remember that the *active* dissemination of ideology is only a complementary tool to the knowledge production birthed from our material conditions. Therefore, an ideology is only the framing device for information.

Well, what does this mean? First, economic, political, and social ideology aren’t solely disseminated by the state or birthed from the ruling class. Second, human agency and subjectivity expands the field of ideological possibility. Finally, we can conclude that the resulting perspectives that we deploy to examine the world around us are insufficient *if* they do not contain an epistemological examination of knowledge production. This allows us to detail competing diagnostic frameworks (ideologies), position them in the discourse, and to pursue a broader analytical framework that can be translated towards developing counter-hegemony.

¹² Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2014), 243.

The concrete manifestation of this is the contemporary deployment of identity politics. Political alliances based solely or mostly on identity – iterations of race, gender, religion, ethnicity, culture, etc. – are instigated by a set of experiences that radiate from a shared history. This attempt at historicism has been an effective galvanizer because it allows political agents to easily access commonalities and a social group can (hopefully) detect and pursue policy objectives that are in line with their emancipation. This subjective understanding of self and community is then transposed into an ideological framework that can counter or conform to those expressed dominantly. However, these subjective frames of analysis often misidentify the source of their material conditions and the beneficiaries of these political divisions. In fact, after peering behind the curtain it becomes clear that this analysis is indeed ahistorical; detached from the process of capitalist exploitation that drives these histories. Social hierarchies are cultivated by the economic elite for the express purpose of furthering the economic exploitation of working people collectively.

Let us correct the record. Eras of expanded wealth accumulation preempt and thus correspond to the development of new forms of social meaning and self-definition. Thus, our sense of self is increasingly contingent upon our material conditions. In capitalism those material conditions are quite plainly dictated by the capitalist owners of production. By segmenting the identities of the property-less the capitalist class can justify varying degrees of exploitation as “identity first” movements within the proletariat coordinate political agendas that are inevitably exclusive and depend on antagonistic relationships with the “other”. Consequently, these partitioned social groups compete to be favored by the bourgeois state rather than coalesce to liberate themselves from the economic impositions that characterize their histories and limit their futures.

Like other social frameworks, a class-based understanding can spurn an ideological framework that calls us into being. However, unlike an evaluation solely motivated by a perfunctory sense of identity, a class-based perspective orients us towards a cross-sectional critique that carries far more political force and stymies subjective distortions. The aggrandizement of one’s subjectivity is a strategic narrative and a pedagogical tool that serves the economic interest of the capitalist class. Politically, it refrains from finding commonalities to direct political coalition building. Building consent in the neoliberal era is systematically undermined by the *politics of distortion* which voids our collective ability to historicize as a class and limits the options for resistance.

This does not mean that subjective experiences cannot inform the building of anti-systemic political coalitions. However, although these identities can frame valid perspectives by offering social, political, and economic analysis, they are insufficient if they are not placed in conversation with the conditions that solicit these perspectives.

Whiteness, a notable identity construction, has historically served the interest of capitalism. The racial ideology of slavery was indeed the intellectual movement that coincided with the economic usefulness of free labor. To be clear, a slave did not reside in the home of every white family and therefore, the period of slavery requires a nuanced perspective that considers its industrial scale and its service to wealthy property owners. In his publication “Capitalism vs. Slavery”, Eric Williams documents the development of racial ideology and its correlation to capitalist accumulation by identifying how this ideology services exploitive practices that were simultaneously levied against white, black and other. The reason for slavery,

Williams would clarify, "... was economic, not racial; it had to do not with the color of the laborer, but the cheapness of the labor."¹³ As such, the logic behind white supremacy is not simply explained by the bad ideas of poor and working white people but it is explained by its service to those who gain the most from the economic exploitation of labor under capitalism¹⁴, the owners of production. Asad Haider carefully examines the political history of black radical movements and identifies a historical pattern that reconciles the economic ordering of society with the specific consequences of racial hierarchy¹⁵. This sophisticated analysis transitions these emancipatory movements away from a race-only framework – one that could easily be subsumed by the black capitalist elite – toward a critical class-race combination that accurately addresses the major forces at work.

Even gendered hierarchy is contextualized by its service to capitalism. Silvia Federici documents how cis women perform roles as reproducers of the labor force.¹⁶ For women under capitalism, the body and its reproductive capacity is always vulnerable to attempts to be managed for the continued exploitation of labor power. Federici would go on to historicize how identities are parsed in the service of capitalism's continued practice of accumulation...

Primitive accumulation, then, was not simply an accumulation and concentration of exploitable workers and capital. It was also an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class, whereby hierarchies built upon gender as well as "race" and age, became constitutive of class rule and the formation of the modern proletariat.¹⁷

Of course, identity formulations are inextricably linked to social and historical realities and marginalized communities are incentivized to be animated politically by a set of lived experiences. Despite this, these marginalized communities need to be equipped with the tools to critically engage with the material conditions that contextualize the formulation of identity in the first instance. This allows for the development of a unifying set of political objectives that responds to the key social relation that compels these systems of domination: the relationship between the owning class and the working class.

There are serious consequences to using an ideological framework whose analytic tools are relegated to a disjointed blend of individualism and identity. The neoliberal state's emphasis on the individual incentivizes an effort to personalize both success and harm; recognizing success as a testament to one's personal effort and attributing their experience with harm to the moral and legal failing of the state. The resolve for this is to better position oneself to be a beneficiary of the state's economic and political machinations. However, as is already made clear, the state's behavior is contextualized by class domination. Hence, this effort transitions into a political framework that misunderstands how power is situated and does not address the root of one's vulnerability. Understanding "the contemporary deployment of identity politics" specifically speaks to the distinct hyper-subjectivity found in neoliberalism which narrows the scope of analysis.

¹³ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 19.

¹⁴ Wilson, *Neoliberalism*, 39.

¹⁵ Asad Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2018).

¹⁶ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004), 63.

¹⁷ Federici, 63–64.

This dynamic devolves into an unsophisticated conclusion: If only *this* marginalized group could overcome the specific injustices inflicted upon *them* then they could take part in the economy, in politics, in society. This ignores the relations that animate capitalism; the fact that for this economic system to ever be “successful” *someone* must be excluded. Thus, the penchant for a hyper-subjective analysis lifts our understanding of identity from its materialist base and subverts opportunities to develop a collective critique of capitalism.

The “accumulation by dispossession” that occurs during the neoliberal era has made use of identity-based divisions amongst the proletariat. A strategy to combat the crises of capitalism that preempted the neoliberal period would be parlayed into a new era of enclosures, cuts to the social welfare system and the inevitable expansion of the police state. For the capitalist class to effectively combat a falling rate of profit, as well as a litany of other problems, they must separate themselves and their material wealth from any obligation to maintain the commons. The expanded private management of the economy would largen the gap between communities and sources of subsistence, culminating in protracted social harm. This is made possible due to an implicit acceptance of harm for the “other”, a true exhibition of the antagonisms found in the neoliberal ontology.

The disintegration of the social democratic state may not have been possible if it did not cultivate consent using misplaced identitarian biases. Already marginalized communities would be hardest hit by the burgeoning dynamic, but the entire proletariat would be subject. Communities that reflect the cursory identifiers of the ruling class (a sliding scale dependent on location and time period) essentially became marginal beneficiaries of a stratified system while communities outside of the mainstream were disproportionately forced into economic exile: even developing illicit economies to cope with dwindling economic options. The criminalization of poverty and the racialization of both poverty and crime was strategically effective in developing the consensus to unleash the police state. In his book “The End of Policing” Alex Vitale documents the history of policing and directly ties the development of the institution to the expansion of wealth accumulation. Vitale chronicles the economic crises that preceded and characterized the neoliberal period and draws the parallel between this economic reality and the use of law enforcement and mass incarceration to manage the disproportionately black and brown *surplus population*¹⁸.

There is an international context for this behavior as well. The bifurcation of national and class identities would complement international policies that coordinated the deindustrialization of the global north and the super exploitation of the global south. The capitalist class – interested in expanding markets and weakening the power of labor – globalized the production process using the power of developed countries in the West and international institutions to facilitate regional trade agreements that took advantage of poorer, less developed countries. They would also spur the U.S. and its allies to pursue foreign policy that would employ military and economic coercion to guarantee markets in the name of corporate profits. Like the domestic progression, we must consider the degree to which these actions correspond with a failure to develop a truly an international proletarian perspective that refuses to allow identity to create divisions. If worker’s across borders are unable to establish connections that recognize how they are similarly positioned to be exploited, then they are unable to develop an adequate defense against their increasing precarity. From immigration policy to war, the political discourse on

¹⁸ Alex S. Vitale, *The End of Policing*, Paperback (Brooklyn: Verso, 2017), 50–51.

foreigners, migrants, and citizens constantly frames these laborers as having interests that are oppositional. This framing is useful to dissolve the class consciousness of the exploited, a necessary component in building political coalitions and achieving political objectives.

Simultaneously, the cosmopolitan nature of the mainstream left could only yield a more inclusive framework for domination. Unmoored to any materialist understanding of identity, the mainstream left has categorically failed in both resolving systemic issues for marginalized communities and in presenting an inclusive framework for successful political action.

Beyond the Illusion

Neoliberalism has come to describe not *just* a series of economic moves initiated and informed by the interests of the capitalist class. As Karl Marx would clarify, the economic character of a society corresponds with its “legal and political superstructure” as well as the social being of its participants¹⁹. As such, “neoliberalism” just as clearly describes an evolution in the state’s policy agenda and, ultimately, a reorganization of social consciousness. Only via the acknowledgment of interlocking economic, political, and social conditions can we effectively navigate our way to change.

The decisions made during the neoliberal period are the direct result of a bourgeois class looking to reassert itself by further subjugating and expanding the collective ranks of the proletariat and preying on the stratification of oppressed groups. Therefore, a proletarian response that demands emancipation must necessarily develop counter-hegemonic apparatuses that reorganize our epistemology (by introducing us to alternative economic structures), reframes our pedagogy, and produces a new social ontology.

There are three major pathways that intersect to confront the capitalist class of our time. Politics via *radical disruption*, the development of *alternative economic and political apparatuses*, and the concomitant *birth of new stories*.

Radical disruption: from labor strikes, sit-down strikes, occupations, walkouts, the general strike, to political disruption. These direct actions are the only way in which to affect the material interests of power. For too long, political action has been relegated to parliamentarism and to casual protest. There are two major concerns to highlight regarding the nature of contemporary parliamentarism. Firstly – as explicated by Rosa Luxemburg in her piece “Reform or Revolution” – because the parliamentary system exists within the confines of the bourgeois state, its attempts at reform (what it could never resolve) only could mature the antagonisms and contradictions that are endemic to the capitalist mode of production²⁰. The revolutionary action required to transition society from capitalism necessarily extends the range of political action beyond the methods that the bourgeois state accepts.

The second and more immediate concern apparent in parliamentarian politics is its systematic failure to be responsive to democracy. As such, we see the limits of bourgeois politics as the capitalist class has effectively developed the political and economic institutions of the state

¹⁹ Karl Marx, “{Marx} on the History of His Opinions,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978), 4.

²⁰ Rosa Luxemburg, “Capitalism and the State,” in *Reform or Revolution*, 1899.

to absorb the resentment of the masses. The casual protest – moments of genuine anger and political courage – produces only passive marches and social media posts. None of the material interests of power are jeopardized and no political action indicative of a revolutionary imagination is pursued. In many ways this penchant for passivity is the manifestation of the neoliberal ideology working within us. The transition of all public concerns to being managed by private institutions (who are incentivized to seek profits) and the expansion of discourse on human capital has resulted in a dynamic where the political is facilitated through the individual.

The glorification of individual action is inadequate to solve collective issues as it is too heavily rooted in the antagonisms that animate capitalism. This is apparent in solutions such as corporate social responsibility and philanthropy. In his book “Winners Take All”, Anand Giridharadas documents how business building and entrepreneurship has been equated with humanitarianism²¹. It becomes clear that the only acceptable pathway to changing the world is when one becomes a part of the global elite. Undergirded by the belief that what is in the interest of the capitalist elite is in the interest of everyone, this autocratic group not only holds the keys to our collective salvation but is sure to manage the economy in a fashion that does not obstruct their power. For the rest of us, our political agency has been reduced to being consumers and this *supply-side politics* can only express itself in ways that can be simply managed by a strategic marketing strategy. Liberal democracy and oligarchy are distinctions without a difference and submission to the assumptions and formal framing of liberal democracy is in effect a submission to the interests of the ruling class.

The truth is that the standpoint that ascribes meritorious value to people’s movements based upon bourgeois values is baseless. The bourgeoisie’s own effort towards achieving political goals are strategic to their economic interests and are not governed by any deeply held moral convictions. The underclass, they say, must be demure and high-minded; always bemoaning the potential for aggression and rage, conveniently ignoring the emblematic brutality and violence of capitalist class domination. This includes the daily violence of inequity and poverty; being left without resources, lacking adequate housing, healthcare, proper working conditions, or education, as well as the increasingly impactful environmental devastation wreaked for the benefit of corporate profits. The people are always asked to find ways to manage the externalities of corporate behavior. It is correct to view these series of actions as violence and an active deterrent to the political mobilization of the proletariat.

Other aspects of ruling class violence include the initiation of violence for the sake of capitalist expansion and the physical and economic coercion that accompanies imperial projects. Military forces are active participants in a global enclosure effort, often commissioned to secure resources for extraction or privatization. Economic institutions are charged with facilitating capitalist expansion via tools such as capital flight, trade wars, sanctions, and other forms of isolation. The profiteering of the military industrial complex serves the needs of arms manufacturers and the cyber security industry, as well as the management of crises by financial institutions. The growth of the police state is linked to the undermining of labor rights and labor movements and the continued enclosure of public resources and goods. It is imperative that we think of all these things as forms of violence, necessary conditions for maintaining the status quo, and specific tools of a bourgeois class whose interests are counterposed to workers.

²¹ Anand Giridharadas, *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018), 47.

The sliding scale of acceptable political action and the limits of the current political apparatuses invites us to think more radically about the field of political action. Besides, how can one allow their opposer to oversee the terms of resistance? Will change not be dictated by their interests? Will they ever prescribe to the working masses an effective program to accomplish their objectives? The ruling class is clear in its intent and aggressive in its behavior. By characterizing the working masses as shiftless or violent ignores the shiftlessness of the bourgeois and the violence that the masses must navigate daily. Glorifying the philanthropy of the privileged avoids confronting the antidemocratic nature of our daily lives. Radical disruption must be pursued internationally and bolstered by a collective solidarity that is blind to borders or identity. Instead it should be informed by the shared condition associated with our position as a class. All of society must seize up, halted by the political intentions of the proletariat.

Alternative economic and political apparatuses: empowering workers to manage themselves, restoring the commons (thus dismantling the power of the market), deemphasizing the power of certain state apparatuses (especially those that repress), and empowering communal governmental bodies that are democratically accountable. Herein lies the articulation of the demands that organizes the focus of radically disruptive political action; coalescing around shared concerns such as the need for healthcare, a response to the climate crisis, or the overall precarity of capitalism's contradictions. The general reorganization of the state is the manifestation of a people's movement.

Careful and strategic, a transition away from the vestiges of bourgeois democracy must protect the gains of workers in the past and continue to empower them. We must put workers in position to control the terms of their labor by reversing a strategy to disarm and disband unions and the continued neglect of worker's rights. Improving union density and providing workers more legal and economic tools places laborers in position to better negotiate the terms and nature of their efforts.

Ultimately, ending the relationship of exploitation that exists between boss and worker requires more than improved unionization and shifts in the legal code. The very ownership and management structure of the workplace ought to be radically transformed towards total worker control at the enterprise level. Worker-owned cooperatives position workers to govern their labor conditions and is indicative of a more democratic orientation of the economy.

This democratic mode of production becomes more evident via an expansion of publicly managed institutions. This includes devolving the economy (and politics) away from market forces and providing the means by which communities can respond to their own unique needs, divorced from the presuppositions of privatization. Unhindered by a bourgeois understanding of property, we rid ourselves of the arbitrary decision making of the neoliberal marketplace, mitigate and soon eliminate the outsized voices of the economic elite, restore elements of positive and negative freedom, and ardently pursue the progressive and continuous democratization of the economy and politics.

Birthing new stories: George Monbiot, in his book "Out of the Wreckage" emphasizes the need to build new stories or narratives that can replace the ones we have been told²².

²² George Monbiot, *Out of the Wreckage* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2017), 3.

Neoliberal pedagogy has packaged a narrative that positions all human experience as a series of antagonisms. Responding to that framework is a story that articulates the need to build solidarity via a series of coalitions. We abandon otherizing, especially when the people share more than they differ. We abandon an abstract sense of sovereignty that fails to cultivate community. Instead, we embrace the politics of belonging.²³ We introduce a new pedagogy that frames our world through its connections and a shared responsibility to one another as part of the process of change. This is a story that everyone can contribute to telling.

The bourgeoisie have accomplished much during the neoliberal period. The economic project that has been pursued has scaled capitalism in a fashion that perhaps many could not have predicted. But despite its machinations, its unique tools, and its style of interpellation... it is still capitalism. We peak beyond the veil, demanding a full account of its processes and illuminating the nature of class warfare. Ending the illusion means casting aside our delusions regarding the true nature of the beast. The illusion exists while the picture is incomplete, and our reality remains obscured by divisions amongst common people and an ahistorical recollection of how we got here.

What is presented as liberation is truly an era of restriction and what is described as progress is in fact a regression, who we are asked to be has nothing to do with realizing our potential or validating our aspirations but more to do with submitting our labor to be used. There is no individual there is only an “us”, a “we”; the realization that our personal fulfillment is intimately tied to the progress of others. Like puzzle pieces, the edges of our subjectivity are pressed together to create a more wonderful collage, a perfect portrait of fragments. The illusion exists as long as the picture is incomplete.

We recognize that our economic, political, and social future rests upon rejecting the assumptions made in the neoliberal era and relentlessly pursuing the reorganization of our world and thus, the reorganization of our social being. Together, we interrogate our society in hopes that knowledge will compel action.

²³ Monbiot, 183.