

Idea-ology

A Critical Analysis of The West

Alan McGuire



Idea-ology: A Critical Analysis of the West

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Author: Alan McGuire

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You can contact the author via alanmcguire.com or on Twitter [@amcguirepain](https://twitter.com/amcguirepain)

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For Conchita

Preface

“Ideologies have no heart of their own. They’re the whores and angels of our striving selves.”

John Le Carre

On the 29th April 2020, the Financial Times predicted that the equivalent of 300 million full-time jobs could be lost worldwide because of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic.

The UN, which provided the figures, estimated that of the 64 countries that had implemented lock down procedures so far, 1.6 billion people would be affected. That is more than the whole population of China and just over 19% of the world’s population in 2020. These would be mainly people working in the gig economy that has become more widespread over recent years as companies seek to cut workers’ pay and increase their hours in the search of bigger profit margins. [1]

As economist Thomas Piketty explains in his book *Capital in the 21st century*, people’s economic capital, including inherited wealth, is outpacing economic growth, the amount of value created by the economy. This, along with income from things such as inheritance and money received from investments, is less evenly distributed than income from working. These two factors combined have increased income inequality. [2]

Income inequality increases dissatisfaction within nations, increases rates of health and social care problems, and it also stunts social mobility and economic growth. It disproportionately affects the working class, minorities, and women more. The USA has the highest income inequality, the gap between the lowest and highest earners, in the world. Out of the developed countries it also has the highest levels of health and social care problems from the number of prisoners to mental health issues. It is not about how poor or rich a country is, but about the gap between the riches and the poorest. [3]

Piketty has also shown that inequality had only ever slowed down twice since the birth of modern capitalism. This was following both the first and second world wars, and the reason was because of progressive tax rates on the wealthiest in society.

The coronavirus has put on display the injustices and inequalities in our society, in many cases it will also accelerate these problems and make them worse widespread. It has exposed class divides that many had convinced themselves no longer existed. Never has it been easier to spot the working class from the middle class. Most jobs that involved going outside during the pandemic involved manual labour. Some health care professionals aside, when most people in Europe were confined to their homes because of the risk of hospitals collapsing, the people that did go to work were mostly low paid people that work with their hands. Dustbin men, cleaners, shop assistants, carers, take away workers, Amazon delivery drivers, hospital porters, nurses and taxi drivers. The majority of people that could work from home, who were not all 'middle class', probably don't all consider themselves 'working class'. And even then, if you look a little closer, it shows

you how both classes would struggle without the help of the state. Most people, of either class, who were unable to work because of the pandemic relied on their pay being subsidised by the government. Not forgetting other measures legislated for to help the system function. These move alone prove that the government is capable of moving quickly to relieve society's problems. Much of it is down to political will.

The myth of the markets being effective and providing, without state intervention, has also been crushed, showing that the outsourcing of manufacturing to poorer countries has done the West no favours. Suddenly when we needed protective gloves, aprons and masks for health staff every country (that had underfunded their health system due to the austerity imposed following the 2008 financial crisis) was clambering for materials from the east. Even then western governments turned to private companies to develop track and trace systems, develop ventilators and vaccines. Governments literally threw money at them and most companies never delivered. There are only a handful of success stories, (I am willing to eat my shorts if this does not come true) and likely hundreds of stories of corruption to come out.

21st century imperialism and its brother from the same motherland, monopoly capitalism, are both in crisis. With the coronavirus many will question what is happening, others will embrace the change and hope for more and some will do all they can to return to normal. This is the battleground of ideology and for hegemonic rule in a time of covid and crises.

Hegemony and Ideology

“My dear, religion is like a penis. It's a perfectly fine thing for one to have and take pride in, but when one takes it out and waves it in my face we have a problem.”

Maggie Smith

Antonio Gramsci was an Italian philosopher and politician imprisoned by Mussolini in 1926. In prison, for the last 11 years of his life, he wrote 30 notebooks worth of theories and thoughts on Marxist philosophy, politics and Italian nationalism. Whilst there he developed Marx's concept of ideology, and his own concept of cultural hegemony which both remain important today.

Wait. Wait. *What is ideology?* It is how you form your view of the world and relate to it. It is literally reality.

The word ideology has been repurposed over the years. Its original meaning is the study of ideas in the world. Later, and to this day, it has been used to describe approaches to society and beliefs on how it should be organised (To be a fascist, a liberal or have a socialist idea). Furthermore, in the modern age, it has become a slur to use against people who think differently to us.

There are various major political ideologies: liberalism, socialism, conservatism, fascism, and communism. These *-isms* cross over and diverge on various topics such as how society is organ-

ised, how economic markets should function, what is ethical or legal, the role of the state, and who gets what and when. They each have their characteristics, often organised into right, centre and left political ideologies, which many of you are probably aware of.

Often they battle over the meaning of concepts such as ‘freedom’ ‘responsibility’ and have different views on how to organise society both on a practical level like *should religion be part of the school curriculum* and on ethical levels such as abortion. But to take the concept of ideology further, the study of ideology is the exploration of how these ideas collide in our reality. On the news, in the pub, in science journals, the management of pandemics even within ourselves. Ideology is everywhere. This analysis is ideological.

We can never leave ideology, but we can question it. To distinguish between the political ideologies, and where they sit in the world today, I have chosen various labels and theories from across the board to help structure this reflective account of ideology. It will also set the basis for further writings on a range of issues.

Gramsci says that ideology, of which today’s dominant one is called neoliberalism, is how most of society relates to the world, from its values to deciding how society should function and be organised. Our subjective reality is partly constructed by ideology, often it is referred to as the glasses that we see the world with but that cannot be removed, you can however change the lenses or even break them! (Check out Zizek’s film *The Perverts Guide to Ideology*) [4].

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We are influenced by ideology as we dialectically develop our identity by flowing in and out of society and back into ourselves. This is done by wanting to be a part of the world whilst at the same time wanting to build an individual identity for ourselves as a human being. When I was younger I wanted a Game Boy to play Pokemon like everyone else, but obviously I didn't want the same colour console as my brother! [5]

Sometimes, if an ideology only covers a specific area, such as feminism or nationalism, they are called *thin* ideologies. They don't concern themselves with the big questions of who gets what and how, but they concentrate on more specific questions like how to make the world more equal for men and women. Often, they are attached to or interpreted by bigger ideologies which morph with them or reinterpret them various ways.

Whilst ideologies are not everything, such as love, it influences everything from who we find attractive to how we structure our families. This also changes over time. Fat men were thought to be rich and powerful less than a 100 years ago, now they are seen as unhealthy, lazy and poor. Often, the dominant ideology directs how society is constructed economically, we call this the *economic base*.

The dominant ideology is often a combination of various political ideologies working together to keep a system that benefits the ruling classes in place, at the moment, in most countries, this includes economic liberals and conservatives. This economic base is not just concerned with how we use money, but also who owns the businesses (communists and socialists believe the workers should own the companies, were as liberals and conservatives

believe that individuals can), where the profits go, and what the purpose of the various project are (to help people or for profit). Are profits going to shareholders, the state or the workers? How is work directed and what are society's priorities?

The economic base is managed by the ruling class, and all other classes that enjoy its current form. They sustain its dominance via hegemony. This economic base influences the larger structures in the society. These include culture, nationality, stereotypes, parenting skills, teaching methods, sleep patterns, attitudes to work, people's anxiety, the police, courts, laws, our ethnics, the media, parliament, society's health and social care problems, what we think beauty is and our prejudices. This influence is not just one way, these structures reinforce the economic base and justify its very existence. It is a yin yang type relationship; both need each other to exist and should one change, it can influence or change the other. Gramsci's interpretation of this was that the superstructure, both civil and political parts of it, were a reflection of the economic base's form.[6]

Overtime as the material economic base changes (who owns what and how things are produced and by whom) so does the super structure and ideology that helps us interpret this reality. Ideology arises from material changes that come before it. As history moves forwards, the ruling classes of the time have to form new alliances and fight ideological battles to maintain their dominance. These ideologies carry their own history and regional differences. Often their alliances and their legacy will affect how they deal with events that arise as part of the course of history.

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Large ideologies do not fall overnight, but they are often built of various strands of ideologies that fight for dominance with in the dominant ideology itself, a bit like footballers in the same team trying to become top goal scorer.

Marxists have debated for years how to change society. Some say you can just change the economics and society will follow (vulgar marxism) whilst others say you have to change society first. This is not the place for this argument, however I personally agree more with the latter whilst also also championing the former.

A very bad football analogy

Forms of political ideologies are like football teams; they are always changing positions and want to stay at the top of the league. The positions in the league are different, and there can only be one champion.

Since the Premier league was started in 1992, Manchester United have won the title 13 times. They were the dominant team in the league for over 20 years until around 2013. Everyone wants to continue to be the dominant ideology. The one that tries to maintain its dominance over mainstream opinion and thought. To be and remain the common sense. In those 20 years, mainly when Alex Ferguson was manager, if you said that United would one day in the future be a second rate team in the Premier league, then fans would have looked at you oddly. It was only when Ferguson left that the team started to unravel and this started to become a possibility. The same could be said for neoliberalism and

the financial crisis of 2008. Dominance does not last forever, the ideologies become part of history.

When I talk about common sense, I mean how people judge if a decision, approach, or opinion is within the boundaries of being acceptable and realistic for most of that society. What might be deemed an excellent investment in northern Europe may be considered too self-interested in China, or as not going far enough in the USA. What is considered a good idea or common sense can change depending on the dominant ideology and those ideas that challenge it. Slavery was once thought of as normal, and gay marriage was looked upon as immoral. The two have traded places. This is changing ideology, but as you can see it doesn't happen on its own. The dominant ideas of the day change with history, and just like with the football teams, they need to be challenged and sometimes debunked.

This makes up the world of ideology, the battle over ideas and widening, or narrowing, the scale upon which people discuss and accept certain opinions. In political science this is called the Overton Window. These discussions can range from a chat in a bar between friends about whether the country needs to have a king, or maybe they are presented in the form of a newspaper article which may give an opinion about if leaving an international institution is a good idea or not. At certain times topics will be more acceptable to people than at others (like free broadband for everyone before and after the pandemic). What might have sounded like a crazy idea in the 80s or 90s, will now be considered normal or even 'backward' for not doing it. Teaching sex education that includes LGBTQ+, whilst it seems strange to some, will hopefully be normalised and de-politicised in years to come,

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in certain parts of the world that would be difficult to envisage. Hegemony is both regional, cultural and time orientated.

Creating and exploiting those moments is when ideology really comes to the forefront and can change public opinion. Colliding forces will try to push their ideology, or try to negotiate for concessions to their views, thus changing the landscape on which they compete.

There are also battles within ideologies (both the dominant ideology and the opposing ones) for different internal strands of that ideology to become the leading force. Brexit, for example, was about fighting for the direction of the Conservative party, remember David Cameron held the EU referendum to appease a small handful of eurosceptics and to gain a few UKIP voters. Economically, neoliberalism is pretty safe in the party, but how that plays out is a different matter as some members might be more globalist (remainers) whilst others more traditionally conservative nationalists.

In the British Labour Party the battle is often between reformist and socialists that want to go a bit further and faster, the former sabotaged Jeremy Corbyn's leadership for over 4 years. Macro-ideological battles happen within ideologies, but when it comes down to the bigger match against an opposing ideology, it is normally about who can get more people to agree with them and work together. The right are often better at this than the left as they are defending a system that is already in place whilst the left are trying to replace it, hence all the splits in left wing parties, they all think their version will replace capitalism. [7] [8]

Why does it matter if certain opinions are acceptable or not? because they persuade people to vote a certain way, they can push people to join groups or protests, support initiatives, sign petitions and can even dictate the validity of a revolution. The dominant ideology have to also keep their finger on the pulse. French President Emmanuel Macron is ramping up his Islamophobic rhetoric hoping it will play well in the up and coming presidential elections where he will likely face off against famous far-right bigot Marie Le Penn.

The people that don't agree with the dominant ideology often form an opposing world view. This is called a radical or opposition ideology, and often there is more than one (as there can be for the dominant ideology). If they play the game correctly, then they can become the dominant ideology. However, this depends on the thing they are trying to change. Often at elections or during large events, they will try to convince various groups, and other smaller ideologies, to agree with them and to change public discourse in their favour, and, if possible, overturn the dominant ideology. Often these coalitions of ideas form the basis for the future society, but even after winning an election, or cutting off the head of the king, the ideology has to fight on to cement itself.

Hegemony is the name of the battleground (or the football league if you will). Sections of society battle for hegemonic dominance to influence ideological change. This might be on specific topics to sway public opinion in their favour to get a law changed. Yet, it is not always about the bigger battle to become the dominant team, in fact more often than not, it is the smaller battles that matter, building up and changing public opinion bit

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by bit. It can push society in various ways, with distinct parts battling over the hegemonic areas. Or in other cases, such as the Russian Revolution, some groups can seize the opportunity to take power quickly whilst the ruling class is still working out what is going on. Revolution can be on the streets or at the ballot box. This is another reason why the ruling class has to maintain its dominance, for fear of revolution, even if this means giving concessions. You didn't think they were nice and just gave us the welfare state do you?

Louis Althusser, a French structural Marxist, came up with the theory of ideological state apparatus. He claims that these apparatuses are used to maintain ideological dominance. They are part of, and keep the form of, the superstructure. He splits the apparatus into two forms: ideological apparatus such as family, religion, education, culture, the media, politics, law, and various others. They work by pushing and reinforcing the dominant ideology's beliefs and ideas which we individually come to terms with. Each arm has a separate function such as entertainment, which keeps us hooked to Netflix rather than forming a union and demanding higher wages.

He says that, without a doubt, education is the most important arm. It teaches children to be 'good citizens' and obey the rule of law. It makes us obedient and also gives us the skills we need to work in the capitalist system. This is how capitalism reproduces itself and its ideology. Lets face it where else can you get some someone's attention for 8 hours a day for 12 years or more? Before schools it was the church that acted as the main ideological apparatus, you can still see its legacy in society today and in some parts of the world it remains a key source of ideology.

Then there is repressive state apparatus, such as the police and the army that enforce the dominant ideology via the threat, and at times, actual violence. However, this does not have to be in the form of a police truncheon, just knowing that it is there has enough power to encourage citizens to follow the rules. It could be that you mess around at school, don't follow the rules and get poor grades. This then excludes you from university or well-paying jobs, thus the threat of a poor lifestyle encourages participation, and therefore support, of the dominant ideology. [9]

Language and symbolism are a huge part of the battle with ideologies weaponising and using language and symbols to maintain, or influence, the opposing one.

Each ideology has unique views on topics and ultimately the word and vocabulary associated to it. Equality in neo-liberal speak means everyone gets what they have based upon merit (despite some people getting a head start by being rich), whilst in socialism it means helping to level the playing field. Freedom for libertarians means freedom from government interference in all forms, where as for a communist it means being free from capitalism's wage slavery.

In Spain, during the pandemic, there has been a battle over the symbols of nationalism with certain political parties trying to wield the national flag and constitution to get people to agree with their vision of the country. [10]

Often the dominant ideology will assimilate what it cannot conquer. From mobile phones for children to Pride, over time it all becomes part of society's normal life or common sense. Not

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that everyone accepts it, but consensus outweighs the minority view. That said, there are also regional forms of ideology. The perfect example of this is when the majority of western companies change their logo to rainbow colours for Pride in June, yet if you look at their accounts in the middle east, the logo won't be changed!

Ideology changes, sometimes only slightly, depending on various factors. Things that may influence how we act or how we perceive things, the customs and things we say that are specific to where we are from or living. Anyone who has lived abroad will probably tell you it has changed them; they had a taste of a different ideology. These interactions with ideas can fuse with various other ideologies or past ideological beliefs left over from previous dominant ideas (such as what it means to be a man or American), experiences and values are built into our identities.

The whole population takes part in the hegemonic battle, whether they know it or not. In the past this was done via several routes from the church "we are all sinners and must repent!" to the ranks of the army "Our nation is superior to others". Nowadays this is done via the media, education and state institutions. The aim of this battle is to turn the dominant ideology into culture, making it appear natural to everyone. Making it common sense.

There are individuals that play a part in this process, Gramsci called them organic intellectuals. They are not intellectuals like the stuffy Oxford type, but individuals, from both the ruling and lower classes, that take part in public life setting and countering public discourse and therefore influencing public opinion. In the

modern day this could go from Piers Morgan to a person holding court on Instagram.

So how am I influenced by apparatus and ideology?

Althusser claimed that apparatuses interpolate the citizens with ideology. Interpellation is the concept that humans are presented with an idea and they come to believe in it, almost like they come to think of it as their independent thought and opinion. A blank slate being written on by ideology and its apparatus.

This idea has been partially contested by Slavoj Žižek, who argues that the apparatus simply presents the ideology and sways us to believe in it. We, as the subject, believe (or sometimes not) in the ideology. Žižek fuses ideology with Lacanian psychoanalysis further. He claims that ideology, with help from someone or thing to spread the ideas (the apparatus), becomes the way we see things, as we said before, the common sense. It does this by subconsciously influencing you and society itself. You end up believing the ideology, it doesn't brainwash you. You choose to believe it, even though sometimes you can see the cracks in the system that the ideology is masking. That is why we are cynical towards the system and make jokes about it, but nevertheless carry on going to work and paying bills. He says that this is a feature of our post modern society. It is the individuals and societies belief in the system that keeps it alive. Equally, it is their disbelief that can end it.

Žižek's famous line (adapted from Marx) is "they know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they do it anyway". He also stresses that believing in the ideology is not

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enough, and often we don't fully, but it is the actions we carry out, that are influenced by what we think, that really keep the system going. [10]

Zizek argues that when the ideology becomes the new common sense, it becomes part of how we see the world, it primarily does this via language, as this is how we communicate ideas. He says that capitalism has done this so well that it appears natural, in fact if you present people with an ideological idea, like abolishing private education, they may question it, but if it appears natural, like austerity, then it is a lot easier to accept subconsciously. There is a lot more on how people assimilate ideology but it is not the aim of this book.

Judith Butler argues that interpellation is achieved, on a certain level, by the use of apparatus due to their influence on society and the concepts it has constructed. An example of this is when a newborn baby is labelled a boy or a girl, effectively setting them on a course for life. It also interpolates the concepts that heterosexuality is the 'norm', and how the genders are constructed. Boys should grow up to be tough, and girls should play with dolls and become caring.

These ideas are obviously not fixed, and the battle for ideological dominance is always swaying. An example would be teaching about homosexuality in schools. As religion loses any dominance it once had, and progressive groups push for more representation in society, one group will take over another, but as you have probably seen it is not straight forward. Here, most of the above compliment Michel Foucault's work on how power is used in society, he claims power is distributed and everywhere rather than

in a specific place, it comes in the form of knowledge or accepted truths.

Ecology is an example of an ideology that has become more prominent because of international material problems coming into the public domain. This shows that ideologies can be dormant for a time and rise when their ideas become the answers to the problems the society faces. It's the dominant ideologies job to find its own answer or sweep aside the problem. It must do this before the formally dormant ideology challenges its position. This is a hegemonic battle. One thing maybe a radical ideology, socialism say, absorbing ecology to be a part of its hegemonic bloc to challenge the ruling neo-liberal ideology. Neoliberalism can either adopt its own position to counter it or it can downplay and oppose it. Donald Trump denying climate change is an obvious example.

Gramsci claims that a revolution cannot be successful unless oppressed groups agree on an alternative ideology to the current dominant one. This has not been done since the neo-liberal revolution. Can it happen after covid?

To summarise, ideology and hegemony are not linear concepts, just like history and time. In the words of the Doctor when talking about time *"People assume that time is a strict progression of cause to effect, but *actually* from a non-linear, non-subjective viewpoint - it's more like a big ball of wibbly wobbly... time-y wimey... stuff."* The same can be said for ideology and the hegemonic football league.

How are ideologies constructed?

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To nick a phrase from Shrek, it is better to think of ideology like an onion, they have layers (but in two ways). The first being time related. Ideologies build on and assimilate the ideology that comes before it, and before that and before that. This builds traditions and the illusion that things have always been this way (unless there has been a revolution of some form). They have to appear natural to be accepted or seen as a popular change. A common-sense idea fitting into the frame work of an ever moving window of acceptability.

The other layers, as described by Zizek, are for the analysis of ideology. The three levels include doctrine, belief and ritual. The doctrine concerns the theories and ideas that underpin the ideology. In neoliberalism this would be the work of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, and the beliefs of 19th century liberals that had been handed down to their modern-day counterparts. The narrative that comes from the doctrine often claims to be the best way to naturally organise the world, because it compliments 'human nature'.

The belief layer concerns the structure that is there to reinforce beliefs in the ideology, such as the ideological and state apparatus as described by Althusser. This might include a constitution, parliament, and stock markets. These reinforce the ideological doctrine's narrative that is taken on by the subject. The constitution may turn into a sublime object, something that is considered beyond debate, beyond ideology, when in fact it keeps everything in place.

The third layer of ritual becomes complicated and reflects into itself. Thus, it stops being a big ball of ideas and become an

idea in itself. Zizek claims that here Marx's theory of commodity fetishism is the perfect example. Here he furthers the example given by Marx: money. Marx said that money, like many other commodities, has qualities that are not material. Instead of being a direct reflection of the commodity, like the paper it is printed on (or in the case of a handbag, the social worth given to its brand) we are attracted to the worth of the object in a fantasmic form. Money's embodiment is wealth (the handbag depends on the brand), but money is just paper (and the handbag whether from Primark or Prada is just material). We know this, but at the end of the day we still act like it isn't, even though we know it is. This is because ideology turns money into a commodity, it can never be just paper to us. This is how ideology guides us and our views about certain things. And even if we reject this way of living, then we are merely just stepping into another ideology. [10]

My favourite example of this from my childhood was Pokemon cards. Was that shiny piece of card with Charizard written on it really worth 16 pounds (the guy had a pile of them behind the desk). Yet if the children's parents turned around and told them they were stupid for wanting that expensive card, you can bet that one of them would not flinch at buying branded clothes or food.

As I previously said, ideology is not everything. Terry Eagleton puts this clearly by saying "not everything in a culture is ideological, though anything in it might become so." [11]

Why all this fuss over ideology?

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Following the fall of the USSR in 1991 George Bush Senior announced that the battle between ideologies was over. Capitalism had won. This led to the theory called *the End of History* by political philosopher Francis Fukuyama. Here he claimed that liberal democracy was the ideal form of governance for all nation states. Obviously the Marxists never liked that.

It has been clear since the financial crisis of 2008, and even more so during this pandemic, that we live in an ideological world whether centrist dads like it or not. The ideological battles may have been quieter in the 90s, but they are not planning to get any quieter from here on out.

Creating the illusion

“Underlying most arguments against the free market is a lack of belief in freedom itself.”

Milton Friedman, *Capitalism & Freedom* (1962).

Via the manipulation of meritocratic values mixed with a misreading of Darwin’s theory of evolution (commonly referred to as *Social Darwinism*), a change in our concept of freedom, and pushing the narrative that humans are *homo economicus* (this is the idea that humans always act rationally and in their own economic self-interests) Neoliberalism, the name given to the ideology of late capitalism, tries to justify itself as natural (and very successfully) when in fact these things have become a contradiction into themselves.

Whilst these ideas have been disputed and heavily disproven on an academic and practical level, that does not change the fact that they remain central ideas to the ideology and have left marks on how people relate and view things. Unconscious bias towards certain groups, such as racial profiling by law enforcement or accepting the justification of austerity measures, that poorer people deserve to be poor and that they are in some way faulty, that a banker gives bring more value to society than a nurse, these are modern examples of how these ideas have become and remain prominent within our society.

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This common sense has changed how people feel about low-paid workers, our views on how the government should support its citizens and how much it should be involved in the martinet, furthermore it has become an excuse to give tax cuts to the rich. The demonisation of the working class in the form of reality television and talk of benefit scroungers was a further push for a hyper-meritocratic view of society. This has allowed politicians of all stripes to cut back the state and what it did for its citizens whilst making people feel bad for not making it.

This pandemic has shown us that society cannot function without the working class, but that it continues without stock brokers and bureaucrats.

Growing Pains

Neoliberalism has a long history, but it was in the time of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, the early 1980s, that it established itself in the UK and the USA. Since then it has been pursued by successive governments in most countries, including some 'left' wing parties, and international institutions the world over. Think: the EU, World Bank, IMF and so on.

After the Second World War, when the USA, France and the UK were scrambling against the USSR to establish a who would be top dog in the world, 44 nations got together at the Bretton Woods summit to stabilise capitalism in the face of communism. Following the summit there was a tremendous wave of investment into countries via the Marshall Plan, a series of large loans from the US to some European countries and investment in the US itself. Many saw this as the US empire laying foundations in

the West ready to take over as the new imperialist power after the UK. Capitalism was re-founded in many countries; they did this by implementing a progressive tax system on the rich, investing in trade and commodities and expanding the welfare state (many claim this was due to the threat of revolt). Many countries started universal health care systems, schools and made huge improvements in social housing, transport and other amenities.

This would lead to the foundations of the EU being built on the idea of free trade and cooperation between countries. This was the era of liberal social democracy, or New Deal thinking, and it was the dominant ideology until around the late 70s or mid 80s (many hail the 1968 Paris riots as a point where its hegemonic dominance started to kilter) During this period after the war, it was essentially a pact between liberal politicians and most of the left. The right also supported some incentives. The basis of this ideology was that the market provided and met a country's needs, but also that the nation state would be able to intervene. It was normal for the state to own key infrastructure (such as the health system, trains, buses, airlines, car brands, electricity companies and the postal service) and run services for the sake of the country, not for profit. These ideas gave us the skeletons of the infrastructure we still see today. [12] The counter culture (yes the hippies and that lot) were generally against 'the man' as they saw the state (both liberal democracy and communist countries) as oppressive. Freedom and peace were on the menu but no-one was serving it.

However, this ideology was not all-encompassing across the world, the USSR stood in opposition to liberal ideas with its version of communism. The Cold War was essentially a fight for

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hegemonic dominance but with nukes. Things changed after the USSR fell in the early 1990s, capitalism seemed to be the economic system of choice.

Not liking high taxes, the state running key industries, regulated markets, and holding the belief that man is at his best when his money and society were not regulated by the state, Friedrich Hayek formed the *Mont Pelerin Society*. Later key figure of neo-liberal thought Milton Friedman would also join the group. Thus, the ideology of neoliberalism was (re)born. That is not to say they created the ideas around neoliberalism, they already existed, they just updated them and promoted them. Ideas come from material realities. The political and economic consensus around the New Deal ideology was coming apart due to an oil crisis and inherit contradictions within the system. With the socialist project stumbling in the USSR, the Vietnam war and various levels of discontent and a taste for the future. [12]

The wealthy and politicians were looking for an alternative way to keep hold of their wealth and power and the system that gave them all that in the first place. At first neoliberalism looked absurd, it was only later that it got its shot. It was the answer they had been looking for.

The liberal part of the word come from 19th century *Classical Liberalism*; the belief man is better when he can do as he pleases without government interference with an emphasis on the economic part. Hayek set up the society to see how they could go about reviving it. It should not be confused with *Social Liberalism*, the belief that people should be able to choose how they want to live and that individual freedom should be respected

by the government as much as possible, but, also that the state has a responsibility to address issues such as poverty and climate change. Social liberals feel they can do this without changing capitalism, but just by managing it better or making it more human friendly.

Just to note, I use the word neoliberalism instead of late-capitalism, or even liberalism, as it is more specific regarding the problems of capitalism we face today, and this specific way of thinking that has been reborn since the crumbling of the post-war consensus. The ideology has flourished more since the fall of the Berlin wall and the USSR, this is also one of the problems with the dominant ideology of today. It is the new (neo) liberalist thought of the 21st century. There has always been an ideology, both before and after capitalism. Hence the phrase:

"The dominant ideology is the ideology of the dominant class"



Doctrine for the Masses

Neo-liberals believe that the free market is the best way to organise society. They claim that the government should be just an administrator, not a supervisor or a player in the market, even to the point that private companies should provide services such as hospitals, schools and prisons. This is a common misconception, or a slight of hand, as under neo-liberal control the state often is used for the benefit for capital, rather than against it. It does this by creating new markets, initially by selling of the state's companies/shares, or by invading or coercing other countries to exploit their natural resources and economies. All whilst reducing what

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it did for citizens, often monetising services or cutting them. (For more on this, read or watch the Shock Doctrine)

To justify their support for markets with minimal restrictions, they claim that the main interactions between people are 'economic' (*homo economicus*), or better put that people always act in their own interests to increase their capital (whether that be economic, social or cultural capital). It believes that this is the principal force behind human progress, and the individual drive for capital gain furthers progress in society. If this were true, then things such as Wikipedia would not exist. The internet may not have been given away by Tim Berners-Lee, and you might consider not having children.

Of course, this is opposed to the view that it is groups of people, or collectives, that fuel the engine of history. By stating this view, they argue that any barriers stopping individual progress are stopping humanity reaching its potential. This is where the great myth of trickle-down economics starts.

Neoliberalism encourages competition between people. It states that individuals will always act in their own interests, therefore if we allow competition, individuals will push further, thus increasing capital, improving standards and making progress. You might think this is common sense, and it works in certain circumstances, but does it work in places such as hospitals? schools? Competition like most things is okay within moderation. Whilst it may work with encouraging people to work harder, teams to work faster or in certain markets to improve standards, it does not work everywhere. Should it work to the extent children get anxious over exam marks? Where students are refused by schools

because of their low grades? or to the extent you take work home with you because you want your team to perform well or risk losing your job?

An example I have seen whilst working as a nurse. By allowing separate companies to bid for the contract to run the service, the NHS had to compete with outside companies. Each company put forward a proposal. We can treat X number of patients for Y amount of money. Now the NHS never had to make money, only balance the books, whilst outside companies had shareholders who expected profits. The companies with better bids, often seen as more efficient, got the contracts. So now the service had the money from the health service but they also had shareholders. Standards lowered as the service was treated more like a company than a clinic. Nurses left because of the tick box nature of seeing patients and the watering down of their conditions. Visits and treatments were limited to some of the most vulnerable and at-risk patients in the community. It became a production line instead of a health service. The effects spread throughout the other services, with the voluntary sector, the police, the hospital and mental health services filling in. Hardly efficient.

The same could be said for the privatisation of the UK's trains, standards lowered, and prices increased. Between 1994 and 1997 British railways were privatised, since then the average price has gone up 23%, and they have risen twice as fast as wages since 2009. It is estimated that the average UK citizen pays 5 times more in proportion to their salary when compared to the average European. Britain may have left the EU but its train lines are all owned by European countries that make a profit out of it. A similar model is about to be rolled out all over the EU.[13]

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Furthermore, neoliberalism encourages the privatisation of public services as it believes that the market is more effective at managing them, which given the amount of bureaucracy in working out who will provide what, this is easily contestable. I remember trying to get a light bulb replaced on a ward once. It took several phone calls, form filling and in the end it took 3 days to change the light bulb. Just think how many people that took. The person answering the phone, the electrician, the nurse to call and sign the paperwork, the person taking the paperwork to bill the NHS for changing the lightbulb and someone in the NHS to over see the payment. And they say the USSR was bureaucratic! (*Bullshit Jobs* is a great book on this)

PFI wasn't just hospitals either, most towns have a PFI legacy building in them whether that is a school, library, town hall, sports centre or theatre. It is reported that one hospital was charged 5,500 pounds for a sink, a schools was charged 25,000 pounds for 3 parasols and a police force was charged nearly 900 pounds for a chair. Some PFI contracts won't finish until 2040.[14]

Privatisation is the state working for capital, creating new markets, and not for the citizens that elect it. These actions have increased private wealth but decreased public resources and has curbed governments' abilities to deal with inequalities. It has led to companies getting so much money that they are no longer bothered by the state. They own so much that they can threaten to leave a country should a government want to do something that it does not agree with, like raising taxes or putting limits on pollution. Most of the time they push governments to water down policies that may affect their shareholders, such as fracking

or health initiatives, and after all that the politicians get a job with them once they have left office.

Back to competition, it harbours teamwork and can spark creative thoughts. Yet, it can enlarge or deflate people's egos, it increases aggression and pits people against one another despite them possibly being from unequal backgrounds. A student who has gone to the best schools and universities will have something over a person who got a job when leaving school or the student that never studied at school for various reasons outside of their control. It reinforces the view of meritocracy and keeps the system unequal for longer. Not only that, but does everything have to be a competition? No, but increasingly we are seeing life more as a competition. You only have to look at social media to see this.

Meritocracy: the friendly face of competition. This is the belief that humans advance through life depending upon their individual achievements. What you put in, you get out. Whilst this sounds like common sense, and mostly it is, this idea has been hijacked. In doing this, conservatives and neo-liberals have been able to keep alive old ideological values that had to be played down in the aftermath of the holocaust. By installing values of hyper-meritocracy, they feed the myth of *Social Darwinism*. The view that some people are more evolved, superior, and thus have more value than others. There is a difference, but one that has been played on.

Social Darwinism is the 19th century theory that says certain sections of society are more evolved than others, essentially a misapplication of Darwin's theory of evolution. Herbert Spencer

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was the purveyor of this theory. He claimed that humans passed on poor qualities, such as how moral a person was, to their offspring. He argued that by regulating capitalism; we were slowing down the extinction of certain parts of the human race, the inferior parts. If we supported the poor, then they would continue to exist, as would their negative qualities that were undesirable. [15]

This train of thought was hugely influential in the western world and was used to justify racism, slavery, capitalism and the British Empire. Eugenics, the pseudo-scientific term for this idea, was later embraced by the Nazis and was used as their justification for the holocaust. Following the war this form of science was all but abandoned by the scientific community. However, just because the exhibitions were removed, and it stopped being taught in universities, it does not mean that its influence has completely gone. Eugenics has been highly disproven but still remains active on the fringes of society in the form of the far-right. Its closely related narrative used to describe parts of society lingers in the media in tabloids, talk shows and people's opinions. Katie Hopkins's comment in *The Sun*, the UK's biggest newspaper, comparing refugees to cockroaches, is just one example. Elements of this viewpoint, often phrased as cultural differences, work their way into all media and influence public perception. [5]

These ideological double standards come up when we look at how the government deals with societal issues, often depending on which group of people are involved.

An example was pointed out by rapper and writer Akala on *Good Morning Britain* regarding the media's reporting and the

government's management of knife crime in the UK. Both portraying it as an enormous problem in black London communities, whilst not highlighting the knife crime rates involving white people in the rest of the country.

Whilst rates in London were high, the media's commentary focused more on the colour of their skin as if the community were barbaric. Often this is framed as part of their 'culture' rather than their race. Culture is more difficult to identify and has less of a Nazi ring to it.

When Glasgow had the highest murder rate in Europe in the early 2000's, the fact that the people were white, or their culture, never become part of the conversation, it was treated as a wider problem in the society. Eventually it was treated as a public health issue. The Scottish government increased social support in the areas, this has lowered the stabbing rates since.

Whilst that approach worked in Glasgow, the Conservative Party's approach in England was evidence of how they see problems from their own ideological perspective. They planned to put warnings on the side of fried chicken boxes to spread awareness. This was immediately highlighted as racial stereotyping that black men love fried chicken, and just goes to show how ingrained these beliefs are within the government.

David Lammy a black Labour MP responded "Is this some kind of joke?! Why have you chosen chicken shops? What's next, #KnifeFree watermelons?"

These viewpoints could also be extended to the image of working-class people being uneducated, dirty and culture-less, thus

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deserving to remain poor. The image of the Jeremy Kyle Show, Benefit Street, and Shameless. These are recycled images of reality, hyperreality. Sociologist Jean Baudrillard argues that the recycling of these images in the media led to a hyperreality where the audience failed to separate fiction from reality, thus giving the impression that all council estates were like Benefit Street or all people on benefits are scamming the system. [16]

We can see here how the concept of freedom has been repurposed for the 21st century. Ignoring the idea that freedom is to be free of pain, poverty, persecution, free from worries about having a home or a job, or being free to say what you want, to protest and form unions. These freedoms, many of which feel natural, are being eroded, whilst we are sacrificing them for selective freedoms. Freedoms that only a few will benefit from.

These new freedoms are the freedom to say what you want to who you want without persecution. The freedom to not pay taxes and hire and fire people as you want. The freedom to employ people on zero hours contracts. The freedom to charge high rents but not maintain a house to liveable standards. These freedoms are given as to *not hold people back, because if we hold them back then no one will benefit*, when in reality the only ones that benefit are the bosses.

You are free to sell your labour, and if you freely choose not to. Then you are free to die.

To quote Rosa Luxembourgh it is 'socialism or barbarism' (and we are no where near socialism)

How it Started

Over the past 40 years, neoliberalism has demolished trade unions and stripped away financial restrictions which has led to more wealth for people with money and a stagnation in wages for the rest of us. President Reagan imposed this in the USA and Thatcher did so in the UK. In later years, neoliberalism repurposed the function of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These global corporations, in charge of overseeing cooperation in international markets, lend money to poorer countries when they need money. With these loans comes a set of conditions which the country must adopt to get the money. These conditions are changes to the economic structure of the country and are often neo-liberal in flavour. They often stipulate that the loans cannot be spent on social programs, but that said countries should further austerity measures and the privatisation of state-owned companies. [12]

Many Western countries have a lot of influence over the direction of the IMF and World Bank. With developing countries being the recipients of the loans, this has been called a form of neo-colonialism in the modern age. There are currently calls to cancel the debts of many African and South American countries as they have had little benefit from these loans, in fact they have made these countries poorer.

In 1991, in Egypt, the IMF and the World Bank put in place the *Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Programme*. These neo-liberal reforms caused a deep social crisis in the country. This was as a result of privatising public companies, and prices and rents were liberalised causing increases. From 2005 there was unrest between the working class as many lost their jobs when the companies were sold. Later high food prices and increasing

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inflation settled in, all whilst companies celebrated increase profits. The World Bank's own report showed that inequality was on the rise in a country that had 60% of the population already living in poverty. The IMF policies merged with the regimes policies and they have ruined the Egyptian economy. These policies were like the ones imposed in Libya, Tunisia, India, and Syria. Neoliberalism's inability to adapt to the needs of the citizens created the environment for the Arab Spring in the early 2010's.[17]

This type of neo-colonisation is more common today as it would not be accepted by the vast majority as okay to invade countries for the resources. As we have seen with Iraq, it can be done under the cloak of delivering democracy and emancipation. However, it is a lot easier to do this by bending poor countries arms with loans and reforms. China is challenging this idea and setting up its own institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank which the USA has not joined. This is another chapter in the war for global hegemony.

Margaret Thatcher was more of a Marxist than most left-wingers today.

She understood that change at the economic base would change society itself. 'Economics are the method: The object is to change the soul'. She also understood that a revolution involved destroying or changing your enemies. In 2002 she said her greatest achievement was "Tony Blair and New Labour. We forced our opponents to change their minds."

This is how we ended up in an a-political world. A world where identity and aesthetics become the only form of politics. It was no longer viable to argue for change. The Left was dead in Europe the UK and the USA. The neo-liberal revolution was won and we are living in its post-modern remains.

Good Neoliberalism?

Nancy Fisher has since broken-down neoliberalism into ideological bite-sized chunks. She explains following on from its initial inception, after the right lost power, neoliberalism was like an alien trying to find a host body so it would not wither out and die.

It found a host in President Bill Clinton (not the only thing he has merged with whilst in office), neoliberalism merged with progressive forces to become capitalism with a smiling face: progressive neoliberalism. Under this fluffy disguise, sometimes called the third-way, neoliberalism was able to fuse liberal progressive movements that were fighting for better rights, the middle classes, modernisers, the media, and gigantic business. With the language of equality and freedom, *progressive neoliberalism* could please almost everyone. [18]

An example of this was in the UK from 1997 to 2010, New Labour under Tony Blair paid private companies to build hospitals and schools. The private companies got contractual rights to maintain the building for the next 20-30 years, and the government would pay off the mortgage at the same time (with added interest). A government credit card otherwise known as PFI (Private Finance Initiative). Most citizens were content as

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they got new public facilities, governments were popular, and the private companies were making money.

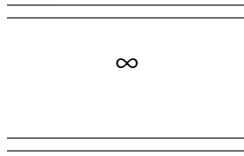
That was until the 2008 worldwide recession. Governments never directly caused the crisis, but this form of neoliberalism fed the machine. In truth, they never told the system when to stop eating. That caused it to explode. It wasn't the people who were too greedy; it was the banks and shareholders. Governments could have done something about it before but they chose not to believing the days of crashes were over.

Eventually government debt went through the roof because so many companies went under, and people lost their jobs. They had to resort to claiming benefits and then there was also the need to bailout banks. Austerity, the act of cutting public spending, was put in place throughout the UK and most of Europe in response to the crash, mainly to curb the deficit to pay off the debt. The allegory of household was used to justify these cuts, however a country's economy does not work the same as your current account. This failed to boost the economy and most countries have struggled to recover since. In fact, it was a good way of justifying the further privatisation of services and cutting taxes.

Not only does it hurt public services, when compared tot the USA, who invested in building and improving state infrastructure, their economy grew double the amount of the EU's after 2008. Before the crash they were equal. This obviously has effects on business, people and industry. It was a bad move.[19]

These mistakes are influencing how governments react to the coronavirus pandemic. Whilst austerity may not be on anyone's lips for now, pumping loads of money into a fragile and corrupt corporate system is also a questionable idea.

Austerity left services under-funded within the framework of PFI. This framework functions as long as there is plenty of money going in, enough for private companies to take their profit out. Yet, when there is less going in, the companies still want their profit, meaning less for the services and public. We are paying their directors bonuses. The welfare states, in both the UK and the EU, are a shell of what it was designed for, yet they have protected us during this pandemic.



Over the last 50 years in most of the Western world, the image of the state as being cumbersome and inefficient has been used to spur on the privatisation of services whilst the public view it with minor threat. Under the guise of efficiency and freedom of choice, public services have been hollowed out. Services (mental health, libraries etc.) have been closed if they are not deemed effective by the government, prioritising growth over people's well being. Yet it is forgotten that the state was instrumental in designing and inventing many things that private companies make money from today. The internet and GPS were both funded and developed by the American government. Not Google.

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This economic path has also promoted the financialization of the world economy. Globalisation has gone rampant which has left individual nation states powerless to combat illegal activities and toothless international institutions scared of the private sector. Industry and manufacturing have moved abroad to poorer countries to help lower costs (and increase dividends) whilst Western countries increased their financial service industries. Not only does this effect the working class in the west but also the working class internationally. With increased manufacturing and shipping the earth is also suffering so deviants can be paid out.

In the UK, and in many countries, the working class has been demonised through television shows, newspapers, and the media. Owen Jones points out in his book *Chavs*, the narrative use of overarching stereotypes, that all working class people are lazy and living off benefits, helped to justify the cutting of state help and institutions. People in lower-paid work were deemed to be worthless, as they never had a job that added to the growth of the economy. [20] Yet, it is the economy that has failed to provide secure and meaningful jobs in areas where manufacturing and other sectors have diminished, the blame for our societal flaws has been transferred to the individual. This move alone sums up the philosophy of neoliberalism. The rise of the individualism at the cost of the collective.

The myth that powerful individuals and the chase of individual goals furthers society has been cemented in the public's psyche as common sense. It gave the impression that people are free to follow their dreams and think more individually, but it took away

civil responsibility and a sense of community. Meritocracy is the new society.

The Diamond in the Rough

A good example of neo-liberal thinking is the film Aladdin. The 1992 animated film, produced by American giant Walt Disney Pictures, portrays a young down-and-out Arab boy being tricked by an evil sorcerer to obtain a magic lamp as only he can retrieve it.

In the original story, from the book *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, Aladdin is a lazy boy living in China. In the film, the Arabic society is portrayed as backwards, and it replaces the characters of the original story with Americanised stereotypes. It forgets to mention that at one point, probably close to the time Aladdin is set, that the Arabic world was light years ahead of their European counterparts in science, mathematics, and culture. Now, you may say it is just a film, but the appropriation of an Arabic story that is changed to promote western ideals is in itself capitalist, and popular such as films or computer games can give us an insight into the ideology of the time.

The view of the American dream, anyone can make it no matter what your background, is extended to even those beyond the borders of the USA. Whilst the moral of the story is like the original, there is more focus on the individual's behaviour and responsibilities. This is opposed to the original theme, which is wealth cannot make you happy, which is only passing in the retelling. It is this shift in the message that is ideological. Its' over the top portrayal of individualism is echoed in the theme that says that every diamond, even a rough one, is unique. This deepens further the strength of personal responsibility. Whilst en-

couraging self-responsibility is a good thing, too much can make society in-cohesive, in fact thinking you are different to everyone else can hinder collective action on issues that individuals alone cannot influence such as climate change. No doubt the people who refuse to wear masks in a global pandemic come to mind.

Another aspect of the film, common in most Disney films, is that our ultimate goal in life should be happiness. The film portrays happiness as what you must achieve at all costs, and that only you can do this. It goes on to depict freedom as a necessity to achieving happiness. Jasmine's ride on the magic carpet is symbolic here, and both the protagonist's efforts to break free from their situations furthers the narrative that freedom equals happiness. However, freedom is the ultimate illusion. This empty word has been revised so many times that if you were to ask various people what freedom means to them, they would all come up with different answers. Is freedom a black woman struggling for many years to break into journalism? Is freedom inheriting wealth sending your children to the best private schools in the country so that they can get one of the best paying jobs in the country. How can you be free if you have to work two jobs just to keep a roof over your head? You are free to suffer whilst the rich are free from their responsibilities to society, how is that freedom?

Thus, the belief that freedom equals happiness benefits the dominant ideology, and so does the narrative that anything that goes against your freedom is imposing on your right to happiness. The rhetoric of freedom is then used to justify economic freedom at the expense of people that it does not benefit, a similar use of the word is also used to justify war.

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Comparing the two versions of Princess Jasmine from the animation and the recent live action film is one way of seeing how culture reflects, reinforces the dominant ideology of the day. It is also evidence of how ideologies change with the times to maintain their position.

In the animated film from the early 90s, Jasmine is a passive character that things happen to and who wants to marry for love. Whereas in the live action film from 2019, she is a strong female character who wants the law to change, not so she can marry, but so she can be Sultan. She also gets her own song and makes things happen, rather than just being a female for the male character to save. This reflects the changing roles for women in society, how, in many respects, our society has progressed when it comes to equality of the sexes. Yet, this liberal championing of the single female individual, who is a princess, also echoes the thoughts of some of our society on gender and race. Yes, we have had black CEOs, presidents, celebrities yet this is not evidence of no or less racism in society. Or how women in prominent places don't take away the fact there are still gendered imbalances in society. Some women can now change their company if they have the right contacts, but many others have to fight collectively to change laws that govern their own bodies, laws often made by the middle and upper classes. We live in a dictatorship, a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

Children who were entertained by films such as the Lion King and Toy Story have now grown up with some of the ideals of Disney. This may have positive effects such as pro-social behaviour and the morals that promote helping others, yet on the other hand the films have strengthened images of gender, racial and

cultural stereotypes. Some even argue that the good versus evil plots of the films have led to political polarisation that we are experiencing in our society.

So, as we can see, beyond the obvious moral messages of a piece of media, there are often underlying representations of the society that we live in. Sometimes they highlight contradictions in our system that ideology covers up, and at others they reinforce those contradictions as naturally part of the world. Here the myth that you must have complete and utter individual freedom to make it as a person is peddled, and the down side to this is 'and if you don't, it is all your fault'. This is playing with the notion of freedom from the counter culture years. Elon Musk and Steve Jobs would have been long haired hippies battling against 'the man' and now they continue to be demi-gods showing the poor what they can achieve if we just keep the government out of our lives. For every Elon Musk there are 100,000,000 people labouring away so that he can have his space race with his friends.

Under progressive neoliberalism, people who were against the economic system were side-lined as archaic fossils of a by-gone era. With great rafts of the progressive centre, and right and left parts of society following this economic path, and not questioning it, there was nothing to push back. Neoliberalism, many thought, was the end of ideologies as the grand battles between capitalism and communism were over. 2008 later changed that. That is why we are so polarised.

Real politics is back and the demi-gods don't wanna change a thing.

The Lie That Was Told

“Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”

George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright and philosopher

Whilst I was in quarantine I started to blog again and I used the platform Medium. Here I quickly found many journalists, life coaches, and self-appointed gurus writing feature length predictions about what life may be like afterwards. Our predictions won't flourish post coronavirus as we cannot imagine an alternative to capitalism, instead it will morph into a further extension of what we already have.

The fact people see this pandemic as a life-changing event says something, but are we all willing and capable to change?

Coronavirus could be that change, but is humanity ready to see things differently?

Predictions throughout the pandemic sought to unleash the individual's inner good or they explored the way we could change society. From how we work out to how men interrupt in meetings on Zoom, every topic possible was and continues to be covered. Some people have made predictions on a larger scale, such as how our consumption may change, whilst others talk about how you can hack the system to get rich. There are already tales

of how people have already morphed into their future selves during the first year of covid-19.

In fact, the world after coronavirus is already here.

Designer masks, eating in greenhouses, and a fresh interest in epidemiology and medical innovations. People from all over are analysing the economic and political landscapes, and how this pandemic is already changing the world. Many ask for a return to normality despite it not being so great before. We are entering times of further change after a period of relative stability that lasted till around 2008. The populism of Trump was just the beginning.

Some business pundits claimed that remote working will increase; people will move to the countryside and that people prefer working remotely. Whilst that may be true for some, it is not possible for everyone. There is a clear divide between those that can work from home and those that cannot. The people that need to leave the house to work during the pandemic have been named *the essential class*. These are normally the people that keep the physical world running whilst the rest can work from the confines of their homes. Furthermore most of these physical jobs are not well paid, in fact, some are at risk of being replaced by computers and robots in years to come. Automation has been increasing for decades and the coronavirus will push it further and faster.

Working from home will benefit many. Children can be looked after by their parents, people can cook healthier meals, they won't need to take time off work to do errands, they can spend

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more time with their family and work in their pyjamas. It will also benefit their mental health by cutting down on commuting and having more flexibility. This is future many dreamed of in the 50s and 60s but sadly it will only be a reality for a select few.

On the other side people will be more disconnected from colleagues, making it more difficult to share anxieties, stresses, concerns and take collective action or even unionise. Not to mention the people that enjoy going to work with colleagues. These concerns could flow into the home, and work will infiltrate our ever-shrinking private lives.

As remote working technology improves so will companies' approach to it. First it will be technology to carry out the work, but then it will be management related. Imagine being micro-managed in your own home and let go if you could not complete tasks. This could stifle productivity, growth and creativity.

Whether or not you prefer working from home, having the option is a good thing. However, like social media, the state will be behind in regulating this activity and it will be a fresh way for large companies to exploit workers. It also opens up the prospect of employing people outside the host country. It mean that companies can shy away from their responsibilities as an employer such as paying social security, maintaining health and safety, and they also put the cost of working from home on to the employee.

So, whilst we may save on the commute, we may lose elsewhere. The future of work post-covid is not a given paradise of working from home and going to the office when needs be. It could also be literally bringing your work home, dissolving the space many

have between the office and the sofa. This is why the state will need to update itself quickly to keep with the times, otherwise the world of business might reach a future before our democratic institutions and cultures do.

Do you think that prediction seemed a bit negative? Whilst we would all love to have a four hour working day, or a four day working week, not enough people can imagine that happening. I would be inclined to bet that they would rather bet on my doomed Amazon at home type prediction rather than the Jetsons based one. But why is this? 20 years ago people would have laughed at the idea of a 4 day working week (for the same wages) but recently it has become a slight possibility. Are we starting to dream again?

Mark Fisher, a British theorist, wrote an abstract theory called *Capitalism Realism*. In his book of the same name he states that capitalism realism is “the widespread acceptance that there is no alternative to capitalism.” [21]

Capitalism realism takes on the same theory as Socialism realism. This was what happened at the peak of the Soviet Union under Stalin. Russia attempted to portray its alternative financial system as a utopian dream for workers. It did this in the form of movies and art. The people involved in the production were forced to produce output that fitted with the narrative. Eventually it fell along with the Berlin wall and we could see that all was not well inside the gates of Stalingrad.

Ironically, as the socialist dream faded, capitalism built its own facade. It set its course with British Prime Minister, Margaret

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Thatcher, claiming “there is no alternative”. As she did this, she carried Friedrich Hayek’s book *The Road to Serfdom* in her handbag. The bible of 21st century neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism peaked in the early 2000s and then crashed with the great recession of 2008. We now have record levels of income inequality, the gap between the richest and the poorest in a country, and increasing health and social care problems associated with this. [3]

Fisher explains as part of his theory that there are tears in the fabric of the capitalist veil. Like a cloak that protects the wearer, capitalism realism seeks to protect neoliberalism from people exploring alternative ways of structuring the economy and society itself. Even believing that there could be something else would be punishable by crowds of greying adults laughing at you. However, at points there will be tears in the facade that will allow us to see the truth of what is happening. 2008 exposed the crumbling veneer and allowed us to see that the system wasn’t working as we were made to believe.

I still remember the footage of bankers leaving Lehman Brothers with cardboard boxes. It shocked me, not because of their job losses, but because the system had failed. If someone had told me, “*don’t worry we will build a different financial system*” I would have laughed in their face, most people would. This is the conditioning effect that neoliberalism has had on us: we believe there is no alternative.

There has been a public appetite for change for many years, but politicians don’t seem to be able to break from neoliberalism.

Nancy Fraser, who coined progressive neoliberalism, described this with the story of the USA's first black president. She claims that in 2008, Barack Obama won the presidency on the language of *hope*, promising to change how the country thought about politics. Yet within months he was bailing out banks by throwing cash at them, but did little to help the 10 million Americans that lost their homes. The affordable care act barely touched the sides when put in the bigger picture. He had fully embraced the progressive neo-liberal model. Obama had similar politics to Clinton before him. In 2012, he used the rhetoric of Occupy to win re-election but did little to address their goals in his second term. [18]

In the UK in 2010, a socially liberal (it claimed), refreshed Conservative Party formed a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats. This saw *reactionary neoliberalism* rise, the very sort that Obama had seen off in the States had arrived in the UK and over much of Europe. This strand of neoliberalism had different variants depending on the country, but it was pro finance, pro austerity, and pro tax cuts. It claimed to stand up for the small businesses, manufacturing and the disenfranchised middle classes, yet it cut the services they needed. Using the metaphor of comparing a nation's economy to a household, the reactionaries were able to privatise more public services and sell off the shares of the banks they bailed out to their friends.

Now it was not just the working class that were being demonised, but it was also ethnic minorities. The neo-liberal reactionaries showed their true colours with anti-immigrant, ethnocentric rhetoric and policies that made life difficult for immigrants in the country. The policy was called the hostile environment in the

UK. That along with the de-funding of local councils, increasing university fees, and benefits reforms responsible for thousands of deaths. The bedroom tax, a fee that council house tenants had to pay for every extra room in their home that was not being used, is the perfect illustration of what reactionary neoliberalism is.

Societies witnessed that the system was not working, and this accumulated in unrest around the world. It could be argued that Occupy was the first symptom to appear, yet the political elites ignored it. Their blindness would cost them dearly. A political space grew in all corners of the globe. People had lost their lack of political agency under neoliberalism, as there really was not much difference between the politicians of the day. Evidence of this is in the British Labour Party's number of votes from 13.5 million in 1997 to 8.6 million in 2010. [22]

Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, Jeremy Corbyn, Podemos, Geert Wilders, Viktor Orban, Boris Johnson, Evo Morales, Marie Le Pen, Syriza, The Five Star Movement, Matteo Salvini, and Law and Justice. Populism of the progressive and reactionary types had landed. They are not going anywhere. Populism is a strategy as opposed to an ideology. It sets out to garner support from the 'people' against an 'elite'. The people and the elite are different depending upon who is preaching to what choir. The *who* in question often has to relate to the people directly and almost always try to frame themselves as one of them. As we can see from Boris Johnson in the UK and Donald Trump, they often aren't.

The election of Donald Trump and Brexit both signalled the changing tides of the world. With decades of neoliberalism hol-

lowing out communities, deindustrialisation, falling living standards, stagnant wages and the financialization of life, populism has plenty to get people angry about. The reactionary form of populism has had many wins, and the progressive branch not so much. In 2016, Trump and the pro-brexite campaign run on a platform of taking back control. Putting the people in charge. Neither has fulfilled this promise.

Trump did give some tax cuts, bombed ISIS, pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement, went back on Obama's positive approach to Cuba, increased military spending and cut some labour and environment regulations. He promised to spend over a trillion dollars on infrastructure improvement, to leave NATO, to clear the country's 19 trillion dollar debt (in fact it went up to 27 trillion), and to build a wall down the border with Mexico and get them to pay for it. None of these promises came true. [23]

Slavoj Žižek criticises populism saying that it has no answers to the problems of the world, phrasing it as 'what happens after the revolution is what really matters'. Thus highlighting that populism so far has been good at whipping up a storm, but not so good at clearing up after. So far, his claim is backed up by Donald Trump's failure to meet a limited number of his promises. Nancy Fraser says that instead Trump has embraced *hyper-reactionary neoliberalism*. Ethnonationalist, anti-minorities and anti-social liberal. Trump switched his target from the economic elites of Wall Street and the Democratic party to the media, progressives and immigrants. He failed to bring back significant manufacturing, reign in financial capital and create mass jobs as he promised.

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Fraser believes that this new hegemonic bloc is unstable and just recreating the space that Trump tried to fill. She said at the time that the only thing to counter it would be progressive populism, yet the dream of this was crushed with the defeat of Bernie Sanders.[18]

In the UK, Jeremy Corbyn failed to stand up for the populist project of Brexit, amongst his unpopularity and four years of inter-party battles, he failed to beat the main figurehead of Brexit, Boris Johnson. With Sanders and Corbyn gone, and the election of Joe Biden as President and Keir Starmer as Leader of the Labour Party, we will see if progressive neoliberalism comes back to fight off its hyper-reactionary cousin or if another form of populism will take place (Yes, things can get worse than Trump).

The world's economy has struggled to grow and stabilise since the 2008 crash, the ruling class know that they cannot make the same mistakes as in 2008 and they will invest. Neoliberalism has marched on like a zombie, but is it still neoliberalism if I feed it lots of money?

The economy has proven during this pandemic that the market alone struggles to provide for its citizens when it needs to. The state is needed, but how the state is used is what will matter most. Even if we were able to gain back the gains of the New Deal era, they would only be slashed or sold off again at the next hint of a crisis. Or is this a turning point where we go further down the individualistic rabbit hole and revert to modern day serfdom?

The capitalist realist cloak will continue to blind us from the contradictions of our current ideology, until it has found its new

form. When it has revived itself, we will continue as we always have done. Things might get better for a while, that is, until the next crash.

Whatever happens, there will also be side effects.

The right-wing authoritarian, and liberal leaning parties are in power over most of the western world. This means minor challenges or changes to the existing economy. They will try to keep it afloat and figure out how they can use it for their own political advantage. Whilst this is happening, the left will also have to mount a challenge. But what about Latin America, China and the middle east, or even Russia? All of these are important but I want to give it some time before I explore how the global ideologies interact. Will Covid alter the course that the USA and China were on before? Will Russia get back up now Trump has gone?

Before 2008 there was little difference between most political parties, but progressive neoliberalism is still around today. But can it stand up to its hyper-reactionary cousin? Even if it does, it does not have the answers to today's problems. Keeping the ideology of old is not the answer. We need to smash the illusion that there is no other choice. This is not the way.

With failed progressive populism, the left, young and old, will be looking to organise and push back against whatever comes next. Maybe they will have more luck in other countries. This is something to hope for.

Joseph Stiglitz, former chief economist at the World Bank and Nobel prize winning economist, suggests that we need progressive markets that regulate capital and make the markets work for the people. He says this is the only way out of this mess. This is also supported by Thomas Piketty, who I mentioned before. He proved that in human history inequality has been continuously growing. The only times that the markets levelled out and inequality shrunk was following the two world wars when taxes on the wealthier were higher. He sees this as a flaw in the economic system and suggests that a progressive tax system is needed to combat the growing levels of inequality. [2] Others want to go further and socialise the economy, making it so that workers and citizens of the state enjoy the profits from companies rather than the corporate monopolies.

This pandemic has made us question what freedom really is. Is it freedom to work in a mask for 8 hours day in a supermarket, risking my health, just so that I can spend 50% of my wages on rent? Why should some have the freedom to flounce rules, go abroad and possibly spread the virus to me. We need to redefine freedom.

We see the symbolic meaning of capitalism losing its definition in the Western world, yet without an other to recognise its failings we are left with a living dead system, one in free fall that thinks it will land safely. This reminds me of the typical scene from a cartoon when the protagonist falling in the sky realises that the parachute is actually his son's school bag. But before making a 12 foot hole in the ground in the shape of his body, he hits every tree on the way down. We are currently hitting the

trees with political, ecological and health crisis after crisis. However unlike our animated friend, we still have not realised that we don't have a parachute and that it will be very hard to get out of any holes.

A new economic system is needed. An alternative to capitalism. Not concessions, not a deal, and not just a return back to the post-war welfare state. We need an economy to reduce inequality, take on climate change, and one that gives workers the profits of their labours. But most of all, an economy that doesn't put profit over people and the planet.

We can have a humane society and economy if we just think past our current system.

There is an alternative we just have to find the political will to find it.

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Thanks for reading. If you enjoyed it please leave a review of this book on a website. Or if you prefer the old fashioned way, recommend it to a friend or book store.

I hope to bring out many smaller books like this.

Before I go, I'd like to thank my wife for supporting me and listening to me even when I start to sound like a Maoist on Mandy.

Alan McGuire

22/7/2021

Leganès, Madrid

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