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THE FIVE LIES OF CAPITALISM

Abstract

The present paper offers a reflection about capitalist exploitation and the lies this exploitation is based upon. It identifies capitalism's narratives to secure its own existence against criticism from different protest movements and, in addition, shows that the named five lies are contested by larger crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic, the anti-racism protests in the US, as well as the menace of climate change, which unite different protest movements not only against racism or the global ecological exploitation but also against capitalism itself, the force that has been identified as the main menace for humanity and its further existence in the 21st century.

Keywords: *Five Lies of Capitalism, Capitalism, Global Exploitation, Capitalist Exploitation, Marxism*

Introduction

Capitalism is evil, yet still alive. (Amoroso, 2001; Gilpin 2000; Monbiot 2019; Russo 2019) Although many philosophers, political theorists and activists have criticized it for centuries (Walk and Boehme 2002), the 21st century seems to be even more capitalist than before, although the current COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting the different forms of capitalist exploitation in multiple ways. (Haubner 2020) The extensive number of people who have lost their jobs in countries like the United States (Sucheray 2020) and the loss of income for many small- and middle-size companies (von der Brelie, Bešlija, Kiss and Vodénitcharov 2020), while capitalist states are willing to invest billions in taxpayer money to save - without securing jobs or job security - companies whose income in recent years was based on strategies of the global exploitation of labor and the environment alike shows how capitalism works even in times of crisis. (Klay 2020) It seems inevitable that a civil war between the only two classes that will ultimately remain, namely the exploiting and the exploited, will break out this century. (Scheidler 2017) The anger of the latter is already being expressed quite frankly in many different ways, whether it be the protests against race-related violence in the US (Taylor 2020), the Fridays for Future movement across

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the globe (Rucht and Sommer 2019), or the protests against financial exploitation that have occurred again and again, notably represented by the Occupy Wall Street movement (Graeber 2012). However, these protests alone will not be able to end capitalist exploitation or end capitalism itself in the 21st century. We are doomed to fail with regard to this ambition again and again if the masses, who represent the revolutionary potential around the globe, continue to believe in the lies the capitalist system is based upon. The present chapter offers a reflection about the five lies of capitalism that prevent humanity from gaining ultimate freedom and from gaining the power to end the cancer that permeates human society, i.e. capitalism, forever.

1. The Five Lies of Capitalism

1.1. Peace

Francis Fukuyama is a liar in multiple ways, although he has studied the German philosophers quite closely. He was not the first to argue that history ended (Fukuyama 1992), since Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) did so before him, and he failed with this assumption, just like Hegel did (Cooper 1984; Dale 2014, 11-110). The Cold War was not won by a liberalist system based on free trade, which, according to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and later Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), would lead to world peace (Kant 1796, first addition; Carter 2018). And the end of the Cold War also did not create world peace under American leadership. Peace is an imagination of the West, where people tend to believe that the world order they believe in, i.e. capitalism, will protect them from violence and war (Bacevich 2020). This is a lie, as violence is exported by post-Cold War societies who act as producers of violence in different countries by backing regimes either for regional stability or for capitalist interests, e.g. in Syria and Turkey, or by exporting weapons to regions of the world where they are used in civil wars, the repression of political or ethnic minorities, or genocides (including politicides) (Stohl and Grillot 2009, 117-137). People in the West assume that they live in peace, but this lie is only kept alive by the exporting of violence to other regions of the world, where people are exploited and neglected, until the consequences of the crises that are stimulated by capitalist interference cause a direct confrontation with the people who have suffered so long for peace and for the capitalist rise of the Western world (Dankert 2017, 11-18).

Many scholars and revolutionary thinkers have pointed to this circle of exploitation before, but either they were ignored or the actual violence was simply downplayed due to the distance of the capitalist powerhouses from the exploited environments. Peace is consequently an illusion, especially for those who argue

that they are members of peace-loving societies or responsible for world peace. The hypocrisy of this behavior becomes obvious in the United Nations Security Council, whose five permanent members also rank among the top ten weapon exporting countries in the world. How they intend to secure world peace while simultaneously exporting the tools for war is a riddle that needs to be explained, but it would eventually and most probably just highlight that peace is a lie of capitalist countries to pacify protests against exploitation and war worldwide.

1.2. Freedom

Freedom is supposedly one of the fundamental rights of every human being, but, as Hannah Arendt argued, it must naturally also be the aim of every revolution and every revolutionary (Arendt 2018, 38). Considering that most revolutions of the past were corrupted with regard to this tremendously important aspect (Jacob and Altieri 2019; Jacob 2020), one must also highlight that freedom does not exist in capitalist societies. In contrast, people are steadily exploited in multiple and direct as well as indirect ways. Labor is usually one aspect of exploitation because most of those participating in capitalist production processes are exploited with regard to the real value of their labor. While managers receive huge amounts of money that are out of all proportion and stock market dealers use crises to increase income for the exploiting class, the poor suffer particularly extremely in times like the current crisis. However, states tend to tell them that they are protected, but at the same time use taxes paid by the exploited majority to pay for rescue actions while the financial exploiters are protected. States also only tend to intervene in such situations on behalf of the masses, as their non-intervention would damage trust in capitalism per se, the most powerful lie currently existent.

The dependencies created by the assumption that the state is interested in the well-being of its citizens instead of the well-being of the upper class is a simple misrepresentation (Herman 2019). One-time payments are supposed to contain the anger of those who have been underfunded for years (Lex Mundi 2020), especially in health care sectors, which have been opened up more and more to capitalist investors. Healthcare nowadays is a capitalist venture (Chernomas and Hudson 2013; Feiler, Hordern and Papanikitas 2018; Deaton 2020), where workers and patients are exploited at similar rates, albeit through different means. The poor that are exploited in countries that must be considered underdeveloped, in the sense of being underfunded due to the necessity to create profit instead of healthcare coverage for all, die, while the rich exploiters gain not only from their existent privileges in the crisis but also from tax releases that are supposed to help those who suffered from the latter's capitalist policies in re-

cent decades (Pilkington 2020). Freedom is consequently non-existent, as many people are forced to keep their underpaid jobs to secure their own and their families' living. They are consequently never free to choose a different perspective for their lives, an impossibility created by capitalist exploitation channels and further accentuated by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3. Equality

Capitalist societies tend to lie to the people who are exploited, claiming that they are equal in every sense of the word (Tridico 2017). However, a truly equal society, i.e. a socialist or communist society, has never existed although communist or socialist utopias have been preached to exist (Koenen 2017). This is partly a failure of human beings to combine enlightenment and altruism for a better future, but utopian and often revolutionary ideas tended to long for such equality, and the rise of grassroots movements in some parts of the world and social experiments with regard to a social order based on pure equality highlight that people have not given up on their dreams related to this fundamental value and their fight against the capitalist rule of the few (Vergara 2020).

Nevertheless, the inequalities we face in the 21st century seem to be as pressing now as they were in the past. We have not been able to reach gender equality or ethnic equality, not to mention social equality. Classism, or class-related discrimination, continues to shape environments that are supposed to represent social elites all around the globe (Kemper and Weinbach 2020). Especially in academia, classism is a problem, as it helps to recreate incestuous elites that first and foremost define themselves as such according to existent financial capacities, i.e. the possibility to participate in exploitative practices represented in every capitalist environment (Hüttner and Altieri 2020).

Of course, cases of inequality, be they related to gender or ethnicity - I will not use the word race, as there is no such thing as race, and I refuse to use a theoretical concept that was only established to secure white supremacy - are regularly happening in many places every day, but fewer people seem to be willing to buy the lie of equality anymore, especially since ethnic suppression is a daily reality in the capitalist nation state of the world, the United States. The recent protests against police violence after the murder of George Floyd not only emphasize that a large portion of the American public does not share the banality of evil (Arendt 1963) in everyday life anymore, but also that they are willing to take a stand against inequality. Such protests at the same time make it visible that equality actually does not exist in capitalist societies, as exploiters and exploited simply cannot be equal, as their same status would prevent exploitation from happening in the first place.

1.4. Access

The fourth lie that capitalist rule and exploitation are based on is access. According to the capitalist myth, everyone can be an equal part of the capitalist world, with all people sharing the same access to the capitalist top of the world. Consider how many millionaires, and probably even more billionaires, inherited their financial wealth (Heller 2019) and represent themselves as a leading financial class on a global scale. Access is consequently not equally granted, but this is not only the case with regard to top wealth, considering that many academics also belong to an ingroup, which is maybe even more obvious within Ivy League institutions, where Harvard-, Yale- and Princeton-grown academics tend to represent the majority. That access is not granted according to talent and merit becomes obvious when one looks at the existence of so-called “legacy students” (Martin and Blumberg 2019) and statistics that highlight that a high percentage of higher education jobs are given to people with degrees from only a couple of institutions in the country (Jaschik 2013; Kendzior 2015). That access to these institutions, aside from some quota-related numbers, is granted according to the legacy and financial wealth of one’s parents, i.e. possible future donors, highlights the exploitative character of such educational institutions (Economic Diversity 2020). On a more global scale, instead of funding foreign governments with aid money that only is abused for corruption and very often does not stimulate true change, it would be better to make education more accessible for the poor, as education is the only “golden ticket” out of a generational line of poverty. Social advance needs intellectual advance. But the latter, of course, might lead to more resistance against capitalist exploitation, just as it has led to resistance against colonial and imperialist exploitation in the past (Dei and Kempf 2006).

If access really did exist for all, the world would look different. We could only judge by individual merit, not by heritage, social identity, class, or any other category that could be used to create inequalities. However, as long as people believe that a university degree from such exploitative and incestuous institutions provides any information about a person’s individual “value,” the capitalist lie remains successful. As long as a society accepts such categories of inequality while maintaining the lie of equal access, the possibility of the true advance of this society as a whole remains limited. Globally, truly equal access has to be denied for some regions of the world, especially for the populations of various countries who need to be exploited as a source for cheap labor to secure the financial wealth for the exploitative upper class in the 21st century. However, problems that get out of control, like a virus or a natural catastrophe, will intensify the awareness of access not being granted in these regions as well, and revolutionary tendencies and a stronger sense of resistance might be the consequence.

1.5. Future

This brings us to the probably most dangerous lie of capitalism, especially with regard to the 21st century, namely that the future is secure and that there is no reason for questioning the (necessary) existence of capitalism as such. Capitalism does not only exploit people, it exploits nature and the planet itself (Barringer 2002; Burkett 2014; Nibert 2013; Pelling, Manuel-Navarrete and Redclift 2012). Those who warn of the danger, like Greta Thunberg, one of the most famous faces of the Fridays for Future movement, are attacked by the capitalist system and its representatives (Levin 2020) as they try to highlight that the narrative of a secure future is a lie. The continuing exploitation of natural resources and the production of carbon dioxide due to processes related to the global capitalist economy threaten humanity's existence. However, just like in the current COVID-19 crisis, the state and the representatives of high finance capital do everything possible to evoke the idea that there is actually nothing to worry about.

The lie is necessary to prevent the protests of the young activists from reaching a critical mass whose representatives are still undecided about their own course. Do they continue to accept the lies of capitalist interest groups, as well as the belief that they gain from these structures themselves? Or will they realize the actual danger for their own and especially their children's future and become supportive of a movement that demands ecological changes from human societies and, more importantly, industrial production processes. Movements that tried to break up the existent system of capitalism by pointing out the sorrows and menaces of all it produces have so far failed to persuade a majority of people to accept this situation and become active for a new world, a world that should not be built on capitalism. The current COVID-19 pandemic is also threatening the existence of capitalism, as it is becoming clear that the future, especially in similar situations, is only safe for the representatives and those who profit from the existence of a capitalist system, not for the majority of the people, i.e. the poor (Lederer 2020).

Poverty has been often accepted as a necessity for the capitalist system, but capitalist elites have used narratives, whether religious (Jacob 2015) in the past or participatory in more recent decades, to secure the existence of capitalism in the future. The idea that even the poor could participate or become a more powerful actor in capitalism, as a consequence of a social advance, has helped to maintain a capitalist order based on exploitation. Like slaves in antiquity who just wanted to replace their own masters, protests against the capitalist system very often did not demand its end and replacement with an alternative; instead,

protesters often simply demanded better access to privileges, which seem to be exclusive for their “capitalist masters.”

2. What is to be done?

Almost 120 years have passed since the death of Vladimir I. Lenin (1870-1924), who referred to the title of an even older novel (1863) by Nikolay Chernyshevsky (1828-1899), by asking this question: what is to be done? (Chernyshevsky 1952; Lenin 2018) We do not need an avant-garde party that leads a new anti-capitalist revolution but which might eventually just corrupt the revolutionary process again (Wörle 2009). We need the majority of people around the globe to understand that capitalism is evil and that it is based on the five presented lies: peace, freedom, equality, access, and future. Only if this fact is understood and accepted will a revolutionary enlightenment unleash the potential for a process led by the revolutionary masses. But why is such an enlightenment so hard to achieve? It is almost self-evident that these lies, especially those about access and future, are stressed in times of crisis when states will do everything necessary to protect the economy and the ideas that everyone can participate in capitalism and is protected by Fukuyama’s ideal of Western liberalism, i.e. a capitalist world system.

Bertolt Brecht’s (1898-1956) *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (written 1929-1931, premiered 1959) described the capitalist system quite well, namely as a seesaw where those who are on top are only there because others are sat on the side below (Brecht 1988, 197). Capitalism can only exist by exploiting the poor, who are not meant to become aware of it. They must be kept quiet, and the named five lies are used to achieve exactly this. If the masses lose their belief that they could actually change their own position within the existent order, they would have no other choice but to destroy it. Consequently, women, men, and children around the world are allowed to participate in the capitalist dream while their exploitation is fueling this very dream’s existence. It is necessary to awaken the masses and show them that the dreams they all share are nothing more than lies. Like Neo in *The Matrix* (1999), we need more Morpheus-like figures that offer us the red pill. Of course, the realization that there is no peace, no true freedom, no equality for all, no access for everyone, and no future for the planet and humanity itself with the continuation of capitalism will hurt, but change needs this suffering, especially since a better and more united world can only be established by and needs to be based on such a *shared* experience of suffering.

It is important that the lies of capitalism are identified as such. It is important to highlight the necessity for change. And it is important to take the different protest movements more seriously. Young activists around the world feel the

menace to be more intense, maybe because it is their future that we are ruining by our lack of revolutionary activity. Of course, there is no guarantee that humanity will be capable of overcoming the ghost that has haunted it for so long. But it must at least be worth a try. Last but not least, there remains an important question: why should we try to achieve something that so many utopian revolutionaries, so many artists, so many wiser women and men dreamt of but did not achieve in the past? The answer is relatively simple. Because with capitalism in existence, there will be no survival!

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