

“For the economic policies” : the reason you may no longer have any rights

by Aidan Cornelius-Bell

Published: 2024-11-06

Dear friends,

I accidentally engaged with some US election coverage in the last 24 hours. Amidst flitting between various streaming services, noticing how absolutely appalling US news actually is –dripping with hegemony, the one resounding quote that has stuck in my brain like a shard of glass is: “people voted for Donald Trump this election because above all else, rights issues notwithstanding, they knew the economy was more important”. I mean what an absolutely ratshit interpretation of the platform Trump was running on. Results be damned, there is absolutely nothing in the republican party that signals “good economic management” rather, they run the economy into the ground, punish working folks, destroy the environment, and revoke liberal rights through overactive and deeply “involved” government. I don’ t even FEEL like doing analysis today, but let’ s go anyway:

The media’ s portrayal of *the economy* as both a natural phenomenon and supreme metric of societal wellbeing represents one of the most successful deployments of manufactured consent in modern capitalism. Through relentless coverage of stock markets, GDP figures, and corporate profits –metrics that predominantly measure the wealth accumulation of/for the 1% –corporate media convinces civil society that their existence is inextricably linked to these bullshit numbers. This manufactured narrative serves a dual purpose: first, it obscures the fundamental reality that “the economy” is simply a set of human-created social relations designed to exclusively benefit the ruling class, and second, it provides cover for right-wing parties to enact policies that further concentrate wealth and power while stripping rights from workers –as mentioned, this is how we have arrived at fascism in 2024. When media conglomerates trumpet the “expert economic management” credentials of Republicans or the Liberal-National Coalition, they deliberately mystify how these parties’ policies of tax cuts, deregulation, and austerity serve only to accelerate the upward transfer of wealth while destroying social protections.

This ideological sleight-of-hand creates the conditions for an accelerating cycle of exploitation and dispossession –he literally said he was going to make their lives hard [1]. Right-wing parties, backed by corporate media’ s economic mythology, first target society’ s most vulnerable –attacking welfare programs, workers’ rights, and protections for marginalised groups (if they ever existed). The bourgeois “middle class,” conditioned to believe these attacks won’ t affect them, support or remain silent about these initial assaults on civil society. As wealth becomes increasingly concentrated among the 1%, this same process inevitably comes for the petit bourgeois. And we’ re already there folks, people on \$250k household salaries are “doing it tough” and those idiots think the Liberals or Republicans will save them. Their scabbed labour rights, social welfare safety net, and “self made” economic security are steadily eroded while they continue desperately clinging to the fantasy that they too might one day join the capitalist class. The media’ s role in manufacturing consent for this process cannot be overstated. By continually promoting the fiction that right-wing economic policies serve the common good, rather than acknowledging them as instruments of class warfare, they help ensure the 99% remain divided and unable to recognise their shared interest in opposing capitalism’ s inevitable acceleration toward fascism. If you haven’ t noticed it, it’ s because the water around you is just shy of a rolling boil, yes, you are a frog.

The corporate media’ s self-reinforcing cycle of degradation exemplifies the inherent contradictions of capitalism’ s drive for ever-increasing profits at the expense of quality and

truth. Or frankly anything resembling a human value –as vapid narcissism and bitchy bullshit skyrocket in popularity. While media conglomerates consolidate power and market share, their commitment to actual journalism steadily erodes. Replaced by cheaper content mills, inflammatory opinion pieces masquerading as news, and recycled press releases that require minimal investigative effort. This “enshittification,” in Doctorow’s parlance, accelerates as media outlets chase engagement metrics and advertising dollars rather than pursuing meaningful reporting. The resulting death spiral of journalistic standards creates a vacuum where actual news should be, increasingly filled by sensationalism, manufactured outrage, and thinly-veiled propaganda that serves the interests of the ruling class while further mystifying the real operation of power in society. Identity politics, here it is, with all its disgusting paraphernalia. Through this process more and more right wing, anti-human, and anti-ecological propaganda grips civil society, the manufactured consent around “the economy” , enables media outlets to increasingly abandon even the pretence of critically examining capitalism, quality of living, and what is really happening to people at the margins. Because unlike the latter, the former uncritical repetition of corporate talking points makes the line on the stock ticker go up. Stop the ride –I want to get off.

The algorithmic amplification of extreme content through social media platforms then supercharges this degradation of public discourse. As engagement-driven recommendation systems push users toward increasingly inflammatory and ideologically extreme content, the Overton window of “acceptable” discourse continuously shifts rightward. What begins as standard corporate propaganda evolves into increasingly unhinged conspiracy theories and overtly fascist rhetoric, all while maintaining the foundational lies about “the economy” and “good economic management” that justify continued class warfare against the 99%. The social media giants, themselves massive corporations driven by profit imperatives, have zero incentive to address the radicalising (or indeed neutralising) effect of their platforms - instead, they continue optimising for engagement, washing their hands of the consequences. This creates a feedback loop where traditional media, desperate to compete for attention in the algorithmic attention economy, further degrades their own standards to match the extremism being amplified online. The result is an ever-accelerating race to the bottom which serves to fragment and confuse civil society (again, identity politics) while reinforcing capitalist hegemony through increasingly crude and violent means. And even the left are utterly confounded by this, repeating back utter bullshit from the ABC, 7, 9 and 10. Propaganda has won, folks –and it’s greatest success is that it has successfully masked the death of its own planet. Truly capitalism and its hegemony is cancer of the most savage variety.

Gramsci’s observation, living in prison in fascist Italy, that hegemonic power operates through cultural institutions rather than just direct coercion finds perfect expression in today’s media landscape, where the gradual degradation of journalism serves to mystify rather than illuminate power relations. The genius of modern hegemonic control lies in how it has transformed what should be instruments of democratic accountability into tools that actively undermine class consciousness –not through crude propaganda, but through the subtle erosion of the intellectual frameworks needed for critical analysis. At least in Gramsci’s time there was high quality leftist opinion being written (L’Ordine Nuovo always becomes Ordine Nuovo). When media outlets normalise increasingly extreme right-wing positions while simultaneously degrading their capacity for substantive reporting, they create exactly the kind of ideological conditions Gramsci identified as necessary for maintaining bourgeois control: a civil society that lacks the analytical tools to recognise its own subjugation while actively participating in reproducing the cultural conditions that enable it. This realisation is what Gramsci helped Italians achieve, and capitalism has been running from crisis to crisis since to claw us back to fascism. Naturally, this goes some way to explaining why attempts at building counter-hegemonic movements so often struggle, they must first overcome not just specific false beliefs, but the systematic degradation of the very capacity for critical

thought that the modern media ecosystem engenders.

Chomsky's model of manufactured consent, here in its newest formation, encompassing new and more insidious forms of control in the digital age, aids our analysis further. While the basic filters he identified - ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and anti-communism/fear - remain operational, they now function within an accelerated system of algorithmic amplification that makes their effects both dizzyingly more powerful and harder to resist. The "worthy" versus "unworthy" victims dichotomy he identified operates at hyperspeed, with social media algorithms rapidly determining which stories receive "attention" and which are buried, while the economic pressures of the attention economy ensure that even nominally independent media outlets ultimately serve power rather than challenge it. The genius of this system lies in how it appears to offer more choice and diversity of viewpoints while actually narrowing the range of acceptable discourse -exactly the kind of sophisticated propaganda model Chomsky theorised, but operating with a speed and efficiency that would have been unimaginable when Manufacturing Consent was first published.

Between manufactured consent, right-wing hegemony, and rapidly disappearing human rights -not to mention a burning planet - the fetishisation of the economy stands strong as "the only issue that matters" . Women dying because they are denied life saving care? No worries, but shit the economy is down 0.000000001% today we need Trump! Just kill me now. "The economy" depicted constantly as something so beautiful, special, and important and simultaneously utterly superior to human life and labour represents capitalism' s ultimate victory in rewriting our ontological relationship with reality. What Marx identified as commodity fetishism has evolved into something somehow more grotesque. Not just the mystification of social relations between people as relations between things, but the elevation of abstract economic metrics above human existence itself -what. is. happening. When politicians and media figures speak of sacrificing lives to "save the economy" during crises, they reveal the true nature of capital' s grip on our collective consciousness: a system so deeply ingrained in our way of thinking that even basic survival instincts become subordinate to maintaining the flow of profits to the ruling class. And the whole thing is predicated on lies. Lies that the Liberals, Tories or Republicans are better "economic managers" . Lies that the sacrifice of "a few women" or "a few Mexicans" is worth it to save "the economy" . Lies about the economy being a *real thing*. The utterly perverse prioritisation of abstract numbers over human life *is* the system now. Capital' s need for endless accumulation has dropped any pretence of serving human needs -we' re here for their money, and apparently we' re fucking grateful.

With the currently increasingly shockingly concrete chance of a second Trump presidency, the capitalist death cult is in the headlights -just think back to 2021, Trump' s eagerness to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of lives to maintain stock market numbers during the pandemic? That' s the right' s comfort with openly advocating death for profit - whether through COVID denial, climate change denial, or dismantling healthcare access. It' s, why do I have to keep saying this people, mask-off capitalist sociopathy. If "the economy" is so godly and significant, why does it demand literal human sacrifice? And the capitalists, their cultural institutions, and most of your friends and neighbours serve as its eager priests and proselytisers. "Line must go up" *is* now more important than human survival. We see the full realisation of Marx' s warnings about capital' s inherently anti-human nature. Its just operating at a scale that threatens the continued existence of our species -and worse, the entire ecology of the pale blue dot.

With sorrow and love,

Aidan

-
1. just, look at everything he' s said.