

No men only kings and gods

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Dear friends,

Just what in the fiery circles of hell is happening.

The United States' Supreme Court has effectively ruled (in a grandiose movement) that Republican presidents can do no crime. What a phenomenal world we live in. But what troubles me even more than the deeply upsetting turn this has taken is that working people support this nightmare scenario.

There are a litany of articles on "middle America" as a decent, relatively "normal" people who are largely under-educated and service deprived. These are the people who vote republican, or at least the largest voting bloc which empowers people such as Trump [1]. And, yes, they vote against their interests – they vote against the interests of humanity. Explanations for this range from bigotry and misandry through stupidity and a vague sense of retribution.

I also want to be clear that the "middle" bloc exists in many countries. This is not a problem unique to the United States. Indeed Australia's "middle" is effectively anything just outside a CBD, though obviously much more sparsely populated. In this country, the Liberal-National Coalition voter is likely more moderate than a "middle American" voter, but not by a great deal. And the technique of recruiting, ensuring continual support, and "rust on" with these people is occurring under a very similar tactic.

For decades there has been unequal development of citizens, particularly in first world countries. This is a fundamental feature of capitalism. To function, capital demands sacrifice from the periphery. In reality this means the 99%. Quite literally 99% of people must sacrifice their labour, power, rights, and capabilities in order to ensure survival of the 1%. After enclosures, the radical transformation of land to private property, the displacement of peoples from their lands and a right to work and live on that land (ignoring briefly tithes to feudal lords, etc.) was removed, replaced instead by, more or less, lifelong debt. While this movement was heralded as the end of slavery and the dawning of human rights, the reality is the rights shifted from Lords who held power through force (i.e., armies) to holding power through owning others' debt and the accumulation of capital.

The process of this extraction –gleaning value from workers by taking from them their production and at minimum taking a cut of sales escalated over time. Here we began to see the deskilling of labour, Marx uses examples of clockmakers and other expert craftspeople whose fine craft skills were in the production of entire finished pieces [2]. By being able to complete a work of value to another, these craftspeople were inherently able to be free of debt (providing they were able to sell their work, and acquire the materials needed to create it at a lower cost). This posed a threat to the capitalist –the new lord, king, or god.

Over time the process of production was abstracted –literally the capability of craftspeople was narrowed down. Rather than being a clockmaker, you would work on a single cog producing thousands of cogs a day, the person next to you would make a different cog, and so on. Fordism in full effect – production lines enabling the rapid produce of goods to be resold (by the capitalist) in return for a "wage". Okay, Aidan, so you're just recapping Capital in an extremely basic way, tell me what's new.

If we imagine that our "middle voters" were, once, responsible for the growth of food, the maintenance of property, and had relative autonomy over their production the process of capital's insertion into the ontology of production displaced these people from relationship with land. Now, rather than owning anything, they are required to work for a wage.

Their land becomes debt, and exorbitant debt such that relocation to a city or town where capitalist production was well underway became vaguely enticing. The mass concentration of people to cities, the removal of people from traditional modes of production, and the fundamental change to economic mode is complete in the country of origin at this point in time.

However, here, capitalism introduces another key operating protocol. Not only are people dispossessed of expert skill and craft, and removed from land by force or coercion, but we arrive at “line must go up” –not by neoliberalism, as contemporary liberal centrists would have you believe, but by natural features of capital itself. For a capitalist to stay in a position of power –for them to retain their position in the capitalist strata they must continually increase profit from the work they steal. Initially this is what drove the growth of industry, and the other features of early capitalism including displacement and alienation as discussed. However this pattern of consumption and growth, not dissimilar from a cancer in biological terms, could not be perpetually fuelled by human labour in a single country. Enter colonialism.

In a very similar pattern of behaviour, attention was turned to the (continued) conquest of global lands. Displacing Indigenous peoples across colonised countries, often in a dually damaging removal of peoples from their land and the enforcement of slavery and continental shift back to colonial nation as even cheaper labour (i.e., free). This process has fed the capitalist machine for decades, and continues to dispossess, degrade, and undermine the labour power, knowledge, skills and practices of Indigenous peoples across the world. Moreover, through the development ever more sophisticated machinery, these extractive processes have left devastating environmental tolls [c.f. 3].

We’ re getting close to being back on topic, I promise.

If we consider that a fundamental feature of capitalism is the exploitation of workers, the extraction of resources, the removal of skill and knowledge from the skilled and knowledgeable, the ongoing displacement of any kind of relationship with lands and waters, and the fundamentally unequal power relations to enable this we can start to get closer to understanding the sense of “loss”–even if this is not explicit and well understood amongst those who feel it. When we add on more sinister features of capital, such as the production of propaganda, the manufacture of consent, and the manipulation, gaslighting, and terrorism of the capitalist class against the working class, we start to understand the tactics used to control people.

These tactics, unfortunately, are incredibly effective. Rooted in fear, disrespect, and inherently a capitalist ontology, the hegemonic control of the working class by the capitalist class remains one of, if not the most, deeply dangerous and destructive instruments of contemporary capitalism. These narratives are so twisted, distorted and psychologically destructive, that the unbridled sociopathy of the capitalist class only continues to escalate. It is interesting, then, to examine the rhetorics of people like Donald Trump as they provide, at least to outsiders, a glimpse of what these control narratives look like.

Understanding how generations of gaslighting, blackmail, extortion, dispossession, and deskilling affect the mind of working people may be a matter for the radical psychologist, however we can see how these dramatic overreaches of power in the name of alleged liberation may offer an appealing narrative to those who have been abused. This doesn’ t help us fix the situation, but we can see the contradiction –the very narratives of control, manipulation, and dispossession turned on, what the “middle” see as the “other” appeals to a sense of revenge or sick justice. Even though the perpetrators of these injustices seek to continue exploiting the middle and the other, because the rhetoric appears focussed on the “other” (who through the manufacture of consent are distanced, abstracted, and dehumanised) this is enough to convince those under hegemonic grips to throw full support in their direction.

Perhaps, though I venture we need a much more fulsome solution, radical and liberatory education is required at this juncture. Not just for critical media literacies, but also to fully understand the role and nature of exploitation and expropriation by the capitalist class. Once we, the working class, share an understanding of this, we can begin to find ways to counter the damaging, uneven, and expropriating nature of capital, and perhaps to assert a new way forward.

In closing, I'd like to be clear that this "middle", whatever configuration that demographic takes, are also responsible for the unequal, intersectionally prejudiced, and unethical work of those capitalists and hegemony they support. Their violence, misogyny, and damage to the rest of the working class is very similar in nature to the strata of middle-managers who's sociopathic lashings of the working class also serve as a tool of the reinforcement of hegemony for no gain. Class traitors, a joy to behold.

Thank you for coming to my 1300 word summary of Capital in 2024.

Roll out the guillotines,

Aidan

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1. <https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520293298.003.0007>
 2. Marx, K. (1990). Capital: A critique of political economy (B. Fowkes & D. Fernbach, Eds.). Penguin Books in association with New Left Review.