

CAPITALISM AND

ANTI-CAPITALISM



“CAPITALISM, ANTI-CAPITALISM AND POPULAR ORGANISATION” PART ONE



October 2020

International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG)

Room 14, Community House, 41 Salt River Road,
Salt River, Cape Town, South Africa.

info@ilrig.org.za or +27 (0)21 447 6375

www.ilrigsa.org.za

This publication was translated and adapted from a notebook designed and written by Universidade Popular. The first part was based to a large extent on the book *Anticapitalismo para Principiantes* by Ezequiel Adamovsky, edited in Argentina.

English translation & booklet layout: Jonathan Payn

CAPITALISM AND ANTI-CAPITALISM



INTRODUCTION

In South Africa over the last few years we have seen many struggles within workplaces and communities. A feature of these struggles, however, has been the difficulty in maintaining and building organisations that are long-lasting and that are also inclusive and participatory.

In these struggles, new layers of activists have emerged. This booklet aims to introduce these new activists to what capitalism is, how it functions and in whose interests, how society is divided into different classes with differences in power and interests, what role the state plays, and how the state functions in the interests of capitalism and the ruling class. The booklet is a tool to help activists deepen their understanding of the system we live under, how a majority of people are exploited, and how and why a majority of people face forms of oppression. It can also be used as a basis for activists to analyse why they face the problems they do, and the deeper reasons for these problems. The second half of the booklet looks specifically at building a movement.

The booklet is a tool that both new and seasoned activists can use to think more deeply about the elements, values, principles and practices of movement building. We hope it will contribute to the long process of building participatory and directly democratic organisations that can one day become a counter-power to replace capitalism and the state, and thereby end class exploitation, patriarchy and racism in South Africa and internationally.

This booklet was originally written by Comrade Felipe Corrêa for anti-capitalist activists in Brazil. Some of the information regarding South Africa has been added by ILRIG to provide examples of the concepts covered that are South African based.



CAPITALISM AND ANTI-CAPITALISM



What is capitalism? It is a social regime, a form of organising social life. In order for people to live together, humans have, throughout history, organised their lives in many different ways. Capitalism is one of these historic forms, but a recent one – it only started developing 500 years ago.

Capitalism is a social regime, a way of organising social life.

Throughout history, many more or less egalitarian societies have existed but capitalism is a social regime that dominates. To dominate means to obtain the obedience of other people; to force them to do something even if it causes them suffering or discrimination. The dominated may obey because they are forced, although they generally obey because the culture they were educated in – at school, watching television and even from parents – has taught them a ‘culture of obedience’.

A capitalist society dominates and exploits.

There are various types of domination. For example: there is gender domination when men dominate women, making women work for them, receive lower wages or behave in certain ways that men insist on. This form of domination is called patriarchy, and is expressed in society mainly by machismo, or in the belief that men are superior to women.



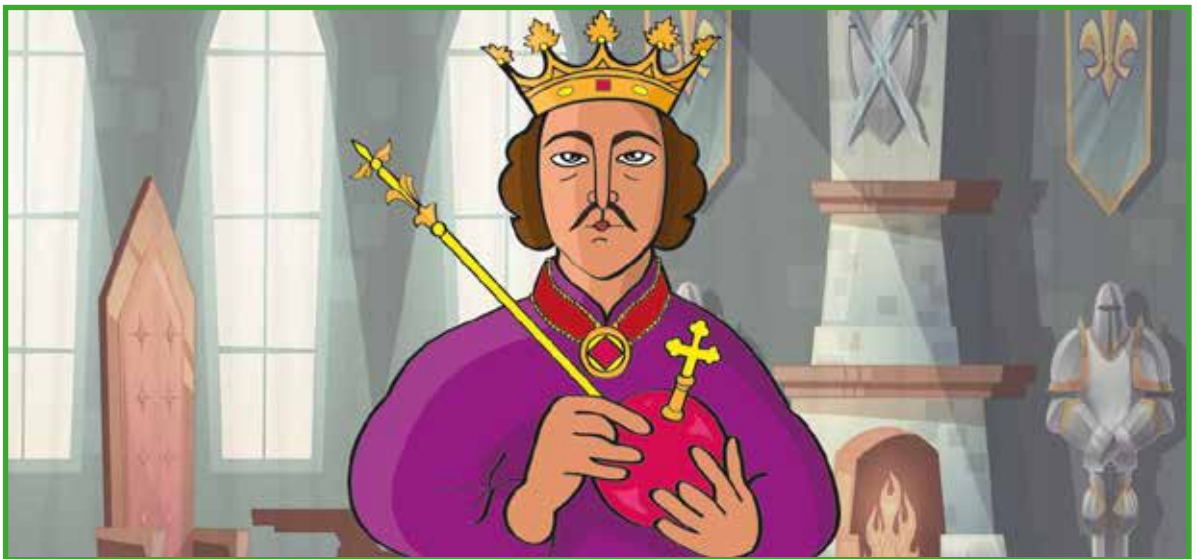
Patriarchy existed in most social regimes of the past and it still exists today. There are other forms of domination. For example, whites dominate blacks, Christians dominate Muslims, and one country dominates another.

The main domination of capitalism is economic. A minority of rich people dominate the poor majority.

Where there is domination, there is exploitation; whoever dominates is the exploiter and those who are dominated are the exploited. Capitalism is a system that dominates people and exploits them economically. It is a class system in which there is one class of people – the dominant class – that has the right to dominate the rest.

Besides dominating people, capitalism also exploits them economically.

Class domination can justify and organise itself through various institutions, norms, habits and ideas. In Europe in the Middle Ages, for example, the kings declared that they were chosen by God, and therefore needed to be treated with privileges. The nobles, or feudal lords, inherited great properties of land that they maintained by imposing taxes. The peasants, the only workers in that society, had a large part of their agricultural production taken by force by kings and nobles. They were dominated by force and by a culture of obedience, primarily taught by religious figures, such as priests. In India, as another example, it was thought that certain people were descended from very important gods, and because of this formed a superior caste served by others who were considered inferior.



The dominant class in a society is the group that directly or indirectly controls the economic and non-economic resources of that society.

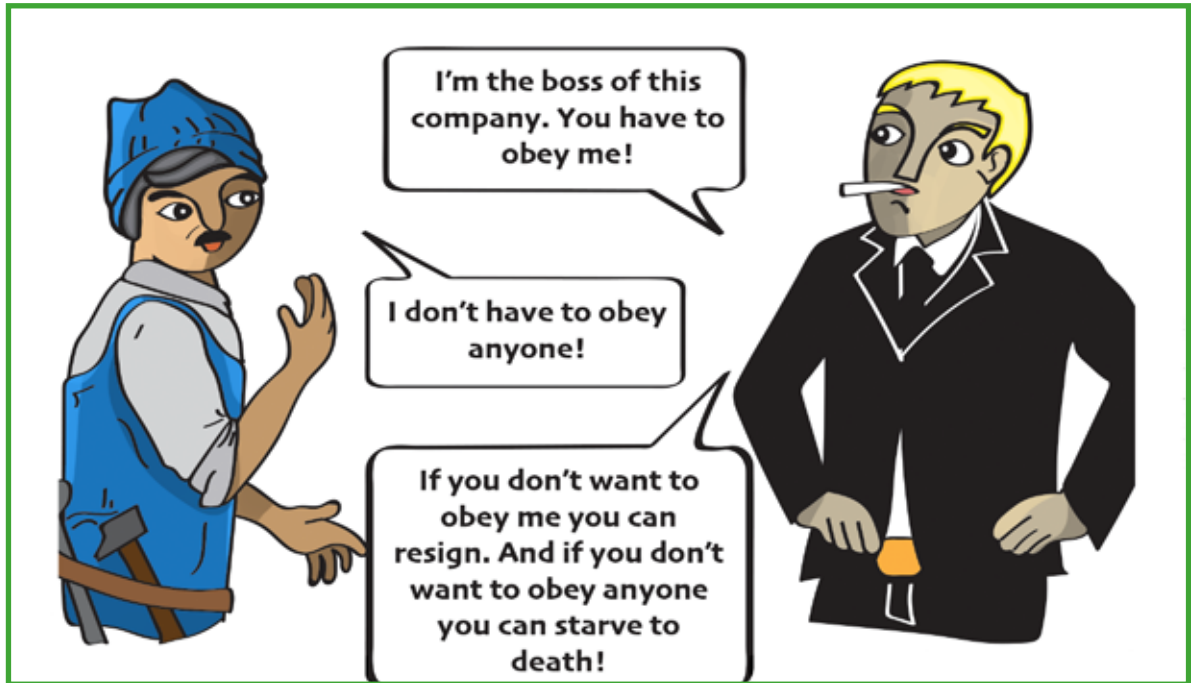
In South Africa, before colonialism, there was also a class system in most of the societies in the country. Chiefs and kings were the dominant class and their positions were inherited through patrilineal custom and according to tradition. The kings and chiefs controlled most of the wealth via control of land and cattle. They could decide who was allocated land, and if someone was allocated land they had to pay tribute in goods (often cattle) to the chief or king. The kings and chiefs lived off the labour of poorer men and women through the tribute system. They would also loan cattle to poorer men for lobola in return for the men performing labour, including caring for the chief's cattle and paying tribute.



In the former Soviet Union, the political chiefs and functionaries maintained that they had the knowledge and authority to command society, and for this reason had to occupy a place of privilege.

In all these cases, the society developed a whole system of institutions, norms and beliefs to organise, legitimate and protect the power of the dominant class. In a capitalist society, however, the power of the dominant class is not determined by birth or by politics.

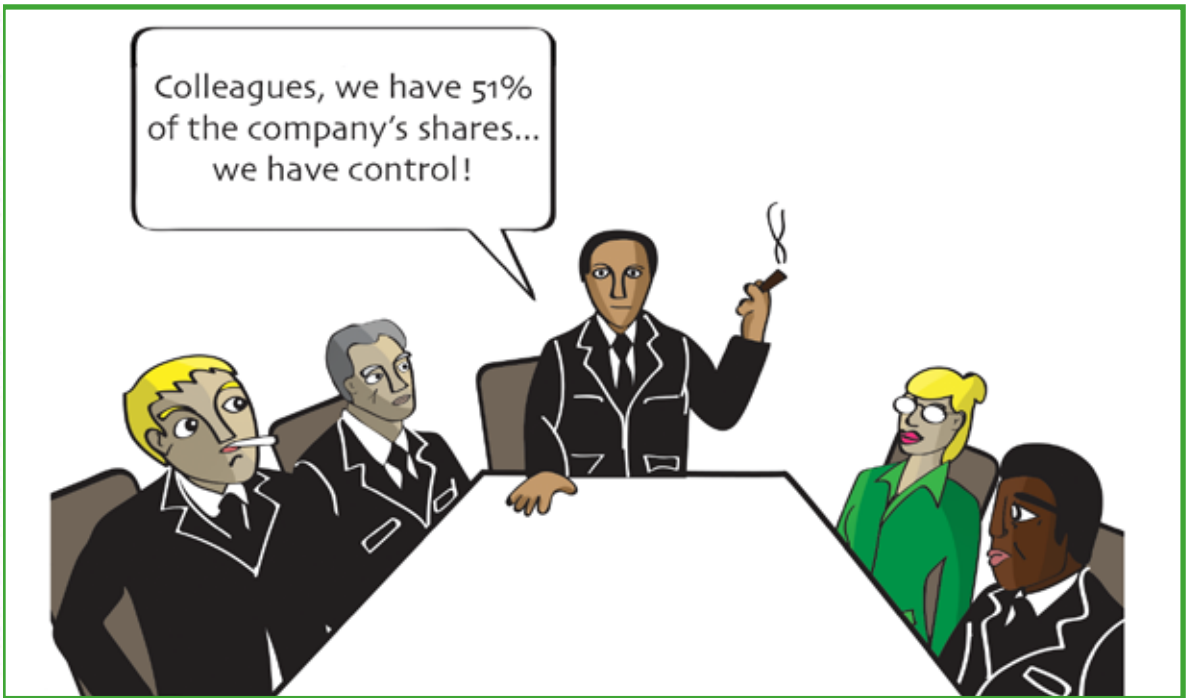
In a capitalist society the power of the dominant class is determined by the economic difference between people.



The dominant class in capitalism is the bourgeoisie, which is defined by the quantity and type of economic resources it controls.

The bourgeoisie appropriates the means of production by means of ownership of the land, of the companies, of the machines, of money, of the banks.

Sometimes, the bourgeoisie can also control economic resources without needing to be the owner, for example, when the shares of a company are divided into thousands of small owners but just one group of big businesses controls the administration. This class, of those in control, can be called the 'managerial class'. To ensure its control of economic resources, the bourgeoisie also needs to control other resources in politics, finance, scientific and technological development, education, the judiciary and the media.



One characteristic of capitalism is that classes are not separated in a permanent and absolute way. There are not only two levels, the extremely poor and the extremely rich. Classes are divided into different and continuous levels of wealth that go from the extremely poor up to the extremely rich. There is not much difference between one level and the next, but the distance between the extremely rich and the extremely poor is enormous, which produces a society of immense social inequality.

A society of immense social inequality

Anti-capitalists often discuss these class and wealth-related questions assuming that everyone acts politically according to the class that they belong to. But then what about the historical fact that teachers and workers from the middle class were great revolutionaries? How was it that some great revolutionaries even came from the upper classes? And why were some workers or poor people conservatives, fascists, apartheid supporters, reactionaries and allies of capitalism?

Identifying which class a person belongs to is only valid up to a certain point. In reality, outside the dominant class, defining social classes can be deceptive if they are thought of as fixed and unable to be modified.



Capitalism is not a static system characterised only by class divisions.

Capitalism is a constant and daily process of separating people into different classes. There are people who say that classes do not exist. They say that class division in the nineteenth century was clearer: there were the bourgeoisie (those who owned the means of production) and the proletariat (the exploited workers). Much has changed today. This definition can't cover all the layers of our society, and they say that class society does not exist and that even the concept of class is outdated. Could this be the case?

Although classes have become more complex and their division more difficult, we can't deny that there are those who are in favour of capitalism (the ruling class) and others who are suffering the consequences (the exploited classes). Some thinkers, arguing for new forms of struggle, claim that today the exploited workers, previously called proletariat, are in reality those who live in rebellion against the capitalist system, many of them even with no place in the traditional productive sphere. It is clear, therefore, that regardless of the class division that we use, it is possible to observe this great difference between the classes.



As a class society, capitalism carries a permanent tension in its heart: the class struggle.

Just as domination and exploitation are present in every corner of society, so too is resistance

Capitalism is implied not only in economic exploitation, but also in taking away from people their ability to do things, their freedom of movement and their ability to decide autonomously how they want to live. For this very reason, capitalism faces constant resistance; a struggle in which the oppressed seek to escape domination and exploitation and regain the ability to move freely in society and to make their own decisions.

The class struggle is this constant fight between domination and the will to free oneself from it.

Class struggle is present when workers go on strike, but also when they leave their jobs, possibly in search of a less exploitative boss. It is present in a great revolt, but also when workers work slowly – due to not having managed to organise themselves with other exploited workers. It is present in conscious and collective actions – for example, in a demonstration of unemployed workers or of homeless or landless workers – but also in individual and unconscious actions: a young person who looks for a type of career that won't put her in the condition of a wage worker; or a poor resident who, out of necessity, pulls an 'izinyoka' to use electricity without paying for it.

The class struggle forces capitalism to permanently develop new forms of dominating, of exploiting and of dividing people. For this reason the power of the dominant class can only be unstable and fragile, and needs to reformulate itself every day. Capitalism is a system that lives permanently in crisis because crises are inherent to it, and continuous. Even if there are technical explanations provided for these economic crises that the system suffers, the real cause is us, our ability to escape, to resist and to rebel against the capitalist system.



What about private property? In capitalism, the dominant class builds its power by means of a series of beliefs and institutions that constantly have to change, adapt, or be eliminated by the class struggle. But there are some that are relatively stable. One of the most important is the idea that some resources that exist in the world can be private property. Private property is also a human invention. Modern humans evolved some 200 000 years ago, but for most of our history there was no private property. Some societies developed systems whereby besides the property of the kings and feudal lords there were large areas of common use. In those areas, the peasants used the land together, dividing the result of the collective work between themselves..

Private property is the right of exclusive use that a person has over any type of resource.



Property is private when someone owns it and deprives others of the possibility of utilising it – for example, when a property owner has a lot of empty houses or land but doesn't allow people to live there. In South Africa, the ruling class under apartheid and colonialism deprived the majority of the people of land by conquest and violence. The land was stolen, and closed off to become the private property of the ruling class. In capitalist society, the right of ownership over land has extended to cover almost everything.

A key institution of capitalism is the commodity.

A commodity is anything that is produced to sell and to make a profit for private person or entity/group. There has also always been the buying and selling of objects in spaces called markets. In capitalism, however, almost everything becomes a saleable commodity. Not just what can be bought in a market (like vegetables or some mealie meal), but also health, education, information and security. To have access to what is privatised it is increasingly necessary to pay, or make a purchase. This includes people's time, which is also turned into a commodity.

The history of the transformation of time into a commodity could be told by the evolution of the watch, a machine seemingly innocent and useful. In the eighteenth century, when capitalism was gearing up for its great rush to the Industrial Revolution, the clock appeared with just the hour hand. In the following century, it was time for the appearance of the minute hand, in order to better split workers' time into fractions. The working days (of up to 16 hours) in the factories could now be calculated precisely. It was no longer day or night that dictated the rhythm of work: workers had to obey the tyrannical beat of the watches. Even before the end of the nineteenth century, in order to satisfy the speed of industrial production, the second hand was then invented.

Today, employers can buy labour time to use for their own benefit in exchange for a wage. The difference between what the workers produce and what they receive as a wage is called surplus value.

In capitalism, the dominant class appropriates the surplus value that the workers and society produce. This is called exploitation.

In pre-capitalist societies, the dominant class was content with demanding a tax or tribute from the population, without also wanting to control their time. In capitalism, the dominant class doesn't demand that anyone pay tribute or work for it. This obligation is indirect; the people robbed of their resources have no choice but to hand over labour time 'voluntarily' to the dominant class for payment, so that they don't die of hunger. This obligation, that seems voluntary, is called economic coercion.

Before capitalism, the large majority of men and women had their own means of production – land, animals, work implements – or divided them collectively with their neighbours. In those times no one would have accepted selling their labour time to another person merely to survive: neither time nor work were considered commodities.

The establishment of capitalism needed a long process of the expropriation of the means of production from the hands of the direct producers. This process of expropriation is called primitive accumulation.

Primitive accumulation is the process of expropriating the means of production from the direct producers.

In historical times it meant the expulsion of thousands of peasants from their lands in Europe and in other parts of the world, in order to force them to become city workers. In South Africa under colonialism and apartheid, the majority of black people – with the exception of some chiefs and kings who collaborated and became local small bureaucrats of the colonial state– were expelled from the land by the state and were forced to become workers for the ruling class in the cities, the commercial farms and the mines.

It also meant the colonial plunder of the riches of the whole world over centuries, the imposition of bloody colonial governments and the destruction of entire ethnic groups that refused to be forced into submission. Some people believe that primitive accumulation was only part of the early phases of capitalist development. Others believe that capitalism is a constant process of primitive accumulation that will only end when the system itself ends.

Although it had started to arise in Europe just five centuries ago, capitalism soon came to influence the whole planet. The possibility of expansion is fundamental for capitalism, its way of resolving its inherent crisis. Without expansion, capitalism would simply collapse.

Among the first creations of capitalism are borders and nation states.

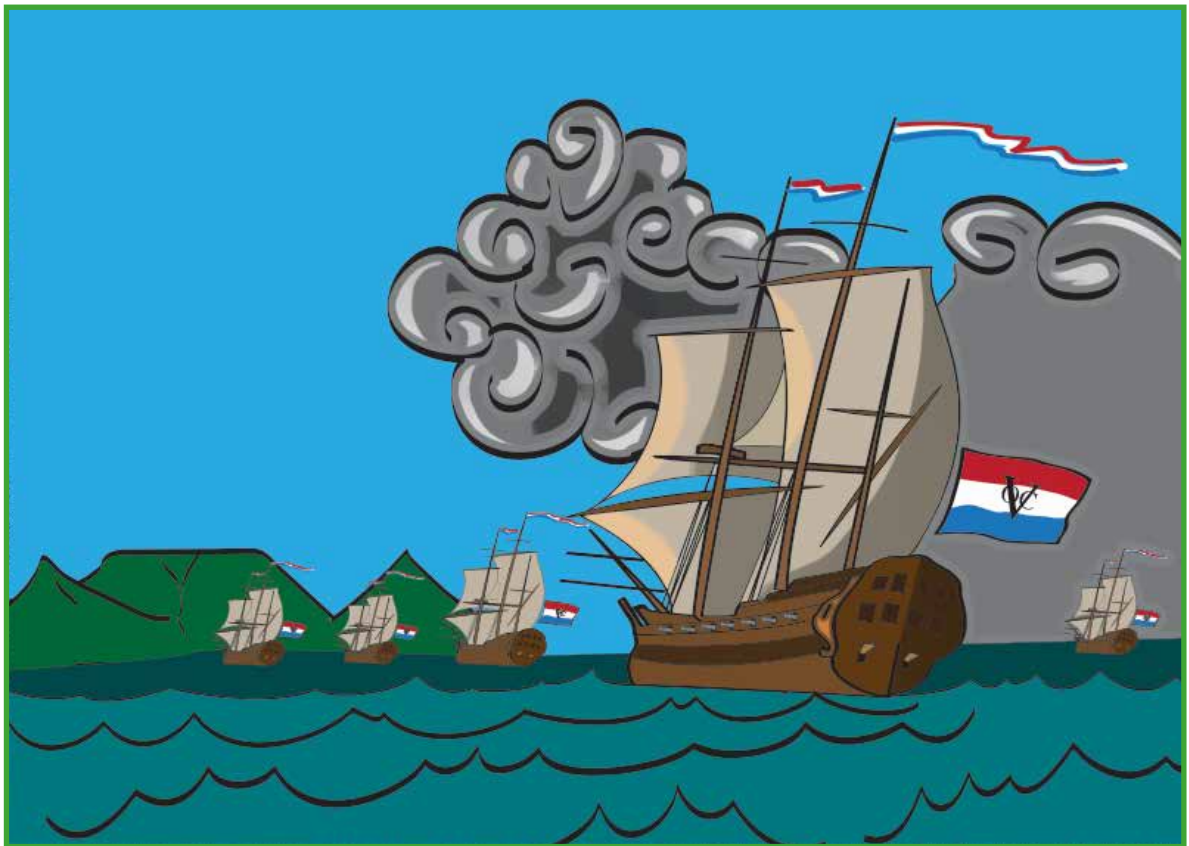
Throughout history, capitalism has expanded, creating institutions and social forms that didn't exist before. Among its first creations are borders and nation states. In Europe, before capitalism, there were only a few cities and, between them, vast feudal territories. These cities did not belong, as happens today, to countries. National borders and states were then invented by the dominant class. The idea that the spaces occupied by a state should coincide with a nation, or with a particular group of inhabitants, or with a single (homogeneous) culture and identity, came later.

The notion that a political authority should fit perfectly with a clearly defined geographic space and with borders is an invention of capitalism.

Capitalism imposes a language and uniform laws and customs on inhabitants of large spaces who previously lived with different ways and cultures. The ideology of nationalism is part of this process. A few centuries ago, national identity didn't exist.

The construction of nations also separated the inhabitants of distinct 'national' spaces. By crossing one of the new borders people became foreigners. This division of people lasted for centuries of wars and state violence and continues until today.

Through imperialism and colonialism the new capitalist nations each appropriated enormous regions of the world.



Starting in the fifteenth century, in a wave of expansion from Europe and through imperialism and colonialism, the new capitalist nations each appropriated enormous regions and forced their inhabitants to work for them. This process also took place in South Africa. The first coloniser in what became South Africa was a capitalist company, headed by a board of capitalists, the Dutch East India Company. It colonised the Cape and its peoples so that its ships could be supplied with provisions on their journeys to Asia. Later, the British state colonised the Cape, and the rest of what became South Africa, on behalf of the dominant class in Britain, in order to ensure they gained a source of cheap labour (by exploiting the dispossessed black population) and mineral wealth.

Motivated by the desire for profit, the capitalists plundered gold and silver from America and Africa, enslaved millions of Africans and Asians, exploited Chinese workers, expropriated Indian peasants and committed many other similar atrocities for 500 years.

Commercial companies, together with nation states, were the main institutions that led this expansion.

Imperialism also produced standardisation; for example, the colonisers imposed European languages and cultures on the colonised peoples. However, there was also a division of people, according to criteria of nationality, religion or skin colour. All the non-whites were considered 'inferior' and able to be exploited and enslaved. This stage of imperialism was also marked by war and state violence, and enormous suffering for most of humanity.

Economic globalisation: the integration of production, distribution and exchange on a global scale.

The third stage of capitalism's expansion is the current one, which some call globalisation. Economic globalisation means a much greater degree of integration of production, distribution and exchange on a global scale. Each part of the same product can be produced in different places in the world. Products are imported and exported. The companies themselves are organised transnationally, but headquartered in powerful capitalist nation states.

In this phase, imperialism and nation states have already completed a good part of their mission and new institutions have emerged to further capitalist expansion. Investments and transnational companies need to move freely without being affected by national borders, and for this it is necessary to standardise certain rules of economic functioning around the world – and, with them, even certain cultural issues.

Nation states can no longer fulfil all of the undertakings directly as they did under colonialism, and transnational institutions that regulate and organise life on a global scale have emerged. Some examples of these institutions are the United Nations (UN), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The reality though is that a small group of powerful nation states control these institutions. Five states – the USA, China, Russia, France and Britain – control the UN through their permanent status on the UN Security Council and each one of them tries to use that status for their benefit. Similarly, the USA, the European Union and China dominate the WTO and each tries to use it to assist the corporations headquartered in their territory. On a smaller scale, the South African state pushed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in the 1990s and early 2000s as an African trade initiative, but in reality it was to assist capitalist and state companies headquartered in South Africa.

With economic globalisation capital has free flow between countries, but people do not. A Mexican worker can be exploited by US companies who can then take all the profits back in the US, but if the same worker wants to go to the US s/he can't do so without having a passport, money and all the necessary papers. This is another reflection of capitalism that favours capital instead of people.

Capitalism doesn't only expand abroad; it also expands within regions that are already capitalist, further intensifying its presence. Rivers and lakes, squares and parks, schools and universities, theatres and spectacles are increasingly turning into commodities, invaded by the presence of advertising in every corner, and by dependency on sponsorship. Increasingly, there are fewer attractive and safe public spaces, and people are forced to go to and pay for, private spaces that are already commodities. Something as simple as a walk through a park is much harder for most people than a visit to a shopping mall.

Capitalism has transformed knowledge into a commodity.

Through the invention of intellectual property, capitalism transformed knowledge, an advance made by the collaboration of humanity, into a commodity. For example, long before current toothpastes, the indigenous people inhabiting what is now Brazil used joá, extracted from a Brazilian tree, to reduce problems with cavities in their teeth. The dominant class stole this knowledge from the people and turned it into a commodity that only they could produce and sell. The propaganda 'teaches' that you need toothpaste to prevent cavities, conditioning everyone to buy this commodity. Maize and soya seeds are natural foods that are being modified by genetic engineering. The dominant class uses technology against the exploited classes, turning something that belongs to everyone into private property. Farmers who reject genetically modified seeds are often affected, their crops being contaminated by the plants of their large landowner neighbours who use 'transgenic' seeds. The oceans, humanity's last spaces of common use, are being increasingly privatised. How many beaches are not already for the exclusive use of big tourism companies? Fish, once free in the oceans, have now become the private property of 'marine farmers', the fishing companies.



Capitalism also increasingly penetrates our minds and our social life. For example, in the way that we work with increasing intensity and for less pay, and where we can only use our time in a way that makes a profit. Even in our free time we often take improvement courses, to increase our technical knowledge and, consequently, our productivity, for the benefit of the bosses.

Expansion – external and internal – is essential for capitalism to survive its permanent crises.

What about the state? One of the aspects of capitalism that is most difficult to understand is how the state functions. The state is not neutral; it is on the side of the dominant class. Before the twentieth century, the state was almost always repressive. The laws that it developed and defended not only served to maintain the privileges of the dominant classes (which they still do) but were guaranteed by an iron fist.

The class struggle that shook the nineteenth and twentieth century's contributed to the emergence of a new form of state characterised by the implementation of 'social welfare' policies that serve as a measure to contain the misery and anger of the exploited classes. We saw this in South Africa where, because of class struggle, trade unions for black people were legalised, and in 1994 a degree of 'social welfare' was won. Thereafter, the state passed some important laws for the benefit of workers, including laws that can occasionally be used even against the bosses.



To what extent does the state depend on the dominant class? Does the state have any degree of autonomy?

Some anti-capitalists think that the state can be a means for the emancipation of the workers (to be reached either by elections or by revolution). Other anti-capitalists however, claim that the state, as an integral part of class society, should be destroyed together with capitalism so that the workers and the unemployed can be emancipated. The history of capitalism and class struggle has shown that the first way has not freed the working class. A telling example is the former Soviet Union, where a 'socialist' state showed itself equally – or more – oppressive than the capitalist state.

The role of the state under capitalism has two main tasks: guaranteeing long-term economic accumulation and ensuring the legitimacy of the system. Without the state, individual capitalists cannot ensure the continuation of their accumulation of profit. For example: without state regulation the capitalist fishing industry would fish until all the fish in the sea are gone. For this reason, the regulation of the economy is an essential function that the capitalist state performs to guarantee long-term accumulation. It may seem like the state harms the individual fishing businessperson when it imposes limits, but in reality it is benefiting the class to which it belongs.

Capitalism is permanently threatened by the class struggle.



The state, therefore, also has to make capitalist society appear legitimate. If the majority of people thought the whole system was illegitimate, they would be much more likely to overthrow capitalism. When legitimacy fails, the state resorts to repression. But no system survives very long if it is based solely on repression. The state must always ensure the legitimacy of capitalist society.

The capitalist state tries to maintain an appearance of neutrality. Even though it is capitalist, the state wants to appear independent of pressure from the rich and powerful. That is why, on many occasions, the state even creates laws that may harm the short-term interests of that elite. It is this appearance of neutrality that confuses many who try to understand how the state works.

As much as we know that the state and society are not the same thing, today's capitalist society relies on the state in order to survive and there is mutual influence between the state and society, changes in one often translating into changes in the other. Just as the class struggle is permanently shaping every corner of society, it also affects the state. For example, many decades ago when some states passed laws for an eight-hour working day this was not only a change coming from the state, but also a change brought about by a society, and more specifically workers, that mobilised. The law of the eight-hour working day – which undoubtedly hurt the short-term interests of the businessmen – reflected the strength that the workers had in order to force the dominant class to accept their demand. The state had to enact this law to ensure the legitimacy of the system, which was in danger because of the anti-capitalist struggles of the time.

Global society, limited rights

The state also separates people into multiple political sovereignties or to put it simply, into countries comprising different states, separated by borders. The citizens only have political rights inside their own states, and lose them if they cross the border. The nationalist ideology typical of capitalism makes us think that the space of society coincides perfectly with that of a state or country. But, we establish relationships between ourselves and with nature, and it is clear that these relationships don't end at the borders of the country in which we live. Although we may not realise it, we are all interconnected in a positive or negative

way. The functioning of production, commerce, the circulation of ideas, fashion and culture all connect people in the global space. There is no such thing as a 'French society' or a 'Peruvian society', as though they were separate and independent entities. The society we live in is global and interdependent.

The second separation that the state makes is between the private and the public. The constitutional and legal system establishes that there is an entire region of social life that society itself cannot touch because it is private. The theory is that no one – not even the state – can legislate on what are considered an individual's private rights. In principle, there is no problem with this – the problem is that under capitalism only certain types of rights have this privilege to be defined as private (or even to be considered rights). The line that separates a right from a mere demand, or what is public and what is private, is not fixed, and has been changed throughout history. For centuries, men and women have struggled to bring private privileges back to the public sphere, so that society can decide democratically whether to preserve them.

Capitalism is an unjust form of social organisation that causes enormous suffering for many people: it produces poverty and exploitation; subjects human beings to passivity and limits their potential; stimulates many forms of discrimination; breeds violence, racism, sexism and fear; is in direct opposition to basic rights and destroys the planet.



Government by the people

Anti-capitalists have been saying this for many years. So why don't we change all this? In reality, we live in a false democracy. In the nineteenth and twentieth century's, when our parents and grandparents began to struggle for democracy, they referred to it in its original sense: government by the people. At this time, the liberal elites strongly opposed the idea of democracy; liberalism has always been an enemy of democracy.

After long decades of struggle the elite were forced to gradually extend the right to vote to everyone, regardless of their social class, gender or race. For example, in the Cape Colony of South Africa in the 1800s the right to vote was only for men who owned property (it was regardless of race, but few black people owned property). By 1910 it was extended to all white men and after 1930 white women could vote, but black people with property in the Cape were removed from the voter's role, and only in 1994 did everyone over 18 get the vote. With the expansion of the right to vote, the liberals only then adopted the word 'democracy', but this was far from its original meaning.

The democracy of today is not government by the people.



When we elect politicians to be our representatives we are giving them the right to govern us. This should mean that they will make the decisions they think best for us, but they rarely fulfil the promises they had made at election time. Instead, they defend their own interests.

Government for the people by the people operates from the bottom up in social movements and in popular struggles – and not by representation by professional politicians who only defend their own interests and forget about we who elected them.

Besides this, the politicians' decision-making power is limited to the national territory and the issues defined as public. Today's democracy does not reach the global level or what the constitutions of countries – inspired by liberal ideology – define as private matters. For example, if a pharmaceutical company registers a new drug that can save millions of lives and decides to set an exorbitant price that the poor cannot afford (and to make a huge profit in the process), this is considered a private matter and the state does not intervene.

Even in the limited cases where our representatives have decision-making power, democracy is very limited. In fact, history shows that democracy and political freedoms end whenever a representative or a political movement intends to go against the interests of the ruling class. For example, when governments in Latin America proposed some political and economic changes they were deposed and the military, along with the United States and the ruling class, engineered military coups that condemned the people to years of bloody dictatorships that followed.

We cannot say that we live in a true democracy. We live in a dictatorship of capital, which allows us to elect some representatives and decide on a few minor issues.

The powerful have many ways of shaping political decisions with legal mechanisms such as donations to electoral campaigns and control of the media, or illegal mechanisms such as bribery. The problem, however, is not only the lack of real democracy. The ruling class does not dominate only by deceiving and repressing us; its greatest power is the transformation of its own ideology into the culture and 'common sense' that we all accept and practice every day.

Capitalism is based on its own ideology, that is, on a more or less organised set of ideas. But an ideology is not only that, it is also a form of false consciousness, a vision that quietly and cleverly conveys the message that society can only be organised in the way of the ruling class.

Liberalism is the ideology of the bourgeoisie.

Liberalism holds that society is made up of individuals and that they have certain natural rights. These rights of individuals have priority over the sovereignty of the people: no decision by society can go against them, so the state should intervene as little as possible and leave things to work without bothering individuals. The state should only intervene when a law is violated, or to offer some minimum basic services.

What makes liberalism an ideology is not what is said, but what is not said. In theory, all human beings should enjoy their natural rights. But liberals don't say that some of these rights are distributed unequally. For example, in theory a person may have the right to own a piece of land, but if all the land is already owned by another person this right means nothing. If someone is about to die of hunger because others have appropriated all the food, no law protects their right to life.

Individualism is part of the culture of capitalism

The reality is that in liberalism the right to freedom means doing whatever you want, without anyone putting any obstacles in your way. But not everyone has the same opportunity to do whatever they want. For example, what does freedom of the press mean when a few people control the large media networks?

The ruling class can only achieve dominant control of society if it can transform its ideology into a general culture for the majority of people. Capitalism exists, in part, because it is in our hearts and minds: we breathe its culture of obedience every day. The individualism of liberal ideology, translated into everyday culture, manifests itself in the strong selfishness that characterises many people today, in their isolation, each locked in their own affairs. Much of the violence and fear that characterises societies comes from this selfishness,

this urge to be better than others. We are afraid of each other because we assume that others can do us harm in order to benefit themselves. A culture like this hampers the development of relationships of solidarity, compassion and care for others. The argument that a person can only enjoy many rights if they have the economic resources to do so is also reflected in a number of other norms in our culture such as a never-ending cycle of work and production, the cult of 'success'(always considered from an economic point of view) and constant consumerism.

The fear of not having the resources for 'success', added to the possibility of using other people as instruments for one's own benefit, is at the root of many traits of our culture – contempt for the poor, for example, and racial discrimination and other forms of discrimination and prejudice. It is difficult for people who were raised in such a culture to value things such as love, friendship, solidarity, companionship and creativity. The liberal idea that there is a 'natural' order that should not be questioned is reflected in the conformity, passivity and valuing of obedience that is characterised, for example, in the education of children.

To exist, the capitalist system needs to transmit and embed these kinds of selfish, discriminatory and conformist values. This is done through education, literature, advertisements and the mass media. The cultures of capitalism spread in a spontaneous and unconscious way, not only because the media belongs to big business but also because we carry this culture in our own minds and transmit it in the words we use, in the expectations we generate in our children, in the things we want to consume and in many other ways.

But no system of domination and exploitation can be total, because there is always resistance. Capitalism has to constantly reinforce its cultural messages and adapt its forms of organisation, precisely because the oppressed end up resisting and creating new values and ways of life that seek escape from domination and exploitation.





 ILRIG SA

 @ILRIG_SA

 @ILRIG