

THE CITIZEN

A Supercilious Freedom: Why Do We Idealise Supremacy and Subjugation?

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The world is facing its deepest crisis since the world wars. Political parties are losing the public trust, and people question the legitimacy of states and governments that have become hostage to capitalism and facilitators of it, such that the people live in unfreedom while oligarchs enjoy absolute sovereignty.

These states and governments exhibit authoritarian, fascist tendencies. There has been a huge rise of these forces in politics and society. Decades of wage stagnation or decline, destruction of public goods, privatisation of public resources, removal of protections for the working majority have led to political and economic powers being concentrated in ever fewer hands.

We are witnessing the starkest material inequalities in human history. Economic marginalisation, social alienation and political despondency are three defining products of neoliberalism, which provides life and blood to these forces.

This did not happen overnight. It is neither an accident nor natural. The large-scale acceleration of marginalisation and hierarchy is a product of neoliberalism, a capitalist project that has transformed society by dismantling its collective foundations.

The unadulterated celebration of individualism has given rise to a society where individual actions are shaped by the ideals of self-utility, self-pleasure and self-satisfaction, which become the foundation of idealised individual achievements.

The adoration of “successful self-made men and women” comes to be sold as a gold standard for social, economic, cultural and political acceptance. Selfishness becomes a virtue. The ruling groups and their advocates use these stories to destroy notions of collectivity, or the interdependent existence of societies and species, in our consciousness by which they exercise their illegitimate authority. The resulting loneliness and depression are the net output of neoliberalism.

In this way capitalists have shaped a popular consciousness that is separate from popular material and social realities, detaching people from their own past and present in pursuit of the idea that “there is no alternative” to the capitalist system.

It was their patronage which enabled the rise of conservative religious and cultural forces in

politics. These forces gave new meanings to individual life by promoting the ideals of subjugation, supremacy, deaths and destitutions. In the name of the “national interest” or other fictions, these become a strategy of government and control.

Such governance creates a supercilious freedom on one hand, while diminishing individual liberty on the other. Reactionary forces are called in to assault the very idea of freedom that capitalism claims to promote. Such a repulsive rise of contradictions is an integral part of this project.

Friedrich Hayek in his book *Road to Serfdom* (1944) argued that government planning is destroying individual freedom. Hayekians have taken the argument further by arguing that state and society act as obstacles to individual freedom. Yet a Mont Pelerin Society was supported by millionaires and founded by Hayek to promote neoliberalism as a doctrine. Its legacies continue in the mission, vision and functions of the Cato Institute, American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation in Washington D.C, the Institute of Economic Affairs, Centre for Policy Studies and the Adam Smith Institute in London, and many other neoliberal thinktanks around the world.

These organisations and networks are funded by bankers, industrialists and billionaires to promote neoliberalism in the name of individual freedom and democracy. They promote the idea that freed markets and their culture of consumerism facilitate individual freedom.

In his book *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), Milton Friedman argued in defence of economic freedom in a liberal society under competitive capitalism. His philosophy laid the foundation for market democracy, which is opposed to very idea of democracy itself – people power.

Sacrificing our sovereignty for the sake of “the market” has become the foundation for the growth of capitalism. We must keep busting this myth.

Freedom is not atomised individualism: our freedoms are interrelated and depend on one another. It is a process of collective realisation or collective surrender. We must rescue and articulate this idea of freedom and its collective spirit of sisterhood, brotherhood, alliance, friendship.

“Our” success will depend on our collective desire to learn from the everyday realities of people and their interconnected experiences under different capitalist ruling regimes. The concerns of people, their collectives, the ways they discover to determine themselves as “being” and “becoming” – these need to be articulated freely, and heard.

The realisation of “self-determination” in its individual and collective forms is the foundation of democracy and freedom. But pluralist traditions of freedom and democracy pose an existential threat to the capitalist faith, which depends on mass-produced essentialist and functionalist claims to domesticate freedom and democracy, in service of a myopic and illiberal worldview meant to further the desire for subjugation and supremacy.

The history of neoliberal thinkers shows its affinity with dictators and authoritarian governments. To take only one infamous example, neoliberal economists from the Chicago School provided all

their skills to Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in revamping the Chilean economy that ruined the lives of the masses.

The US political theorist Wendy Brown, in her book *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism* (2019) argues that neoliberalism laid the foundation for anti-democratic politics in the Western world by dismantling the political and social basis of individual life.

Melinda Cooper in her book *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (2017) explores the unholy alliance between neoliberalism and conservative politics, which promotes reactionary family values and moralities to curtail individual freedom and provide dignity to market forces.

Margaret Thatcher once remarked that “Economics is the method: the object is to change the heart and soul” so that heart and soul will not desire to challenge the interests of the owners. In this story, society is a mere collection of self-interested individuals, less than ants. Such a vision destroys democratic solidarity and social cooperation in pursuit of freedom for the owners.

In this way, neoliberalism and unfreedom are intertwined and integral to each other. Democracies are disciplining “their” citizens to pursue the interests of capital. States where the people are sovereign are being transformed into security states to protect the interests of the capitalist classes. Thus our governments are committed to shifting power from labour to the managers of capital. The objective is to continue the dominance of capitalism as an unchallenged global system.

The capitalists’ propaganda machines are in overdrive to transform individuals into consumers, and desires into needs. Such a transformation is important for the survival of capitalism. It resolves the internal contradiction of capitalist overproduction. It liberates capitalists from crisis, and imprisons the working majority within precarity: the precarity of a selfish, hierarchical, desire-based society in search of illusive freedom.