

Original Paper

Common Sense, Myth, Ideology, and Socialism: A Short Critical Study

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Abstract

In this short study, I describe how the ‘public philosophy’ of common sense, ostensibly self-evident and economically/politically disinterested practical knowledge, has, on the contrary, functioned mythically and ideologically over the years across four continents. In Europe and the US, from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through the decolonisation processes of the twentieth century in Africa and Asia, in the Americas, and through the onset of neo-liberalism in the final quarter of the twentieth century, to the contemporary period, I show how appeals to common sense have served to warrant bourgeois material interests, and the systematic silencing of contrary and socialist voices.

Keywords

common sense, myth, ideology, socialism

1. Introduction

The twentieth century was the ‘bloodiest’ in recorded history, in terms of almost continuous conflicts around the world. However, levels of socio-economic inequality within and between regions actually decreased as the short century progressed. This was largely the result of the destruction of assets and incomes during the First and Second World Wars, but also of progressive taxation and redistributive spending policies implemented in the developed economies in the thirty years after 1945, the so-called ‘Golden Age’ of capitalism. Nevertheless, with the onset of the neo-liberal loosening of regulatory regimes on capital, the privatisation of state-owned assets, and the slashing of taxes on high income and wealth in the last quarter of the century in developed and developing economies, this tendency began to reverse itself (Hobsbawm, 2002; Picketty, 2014).

And as I write, unprecedented concentrations of income and wealth proliferate among the world’s ‘super-rich’, and, as economic influence is a major predictor of more income and wealth for those who wield it, levels of inequality are forecast to increase in the years ahead. For the poorest of the poor, on the contrary, it is a ‘catastrophe’, with hundreds of millions on the brink of starvation, a figure expected

to more than triple in the coming period, with millions already succumbing to hunger and preventable illness every year (Unicef, 2020; Bannerjee & Duflo, 2022; Holmes, 2022).

It is within this context that the ‘public philosophy’ of common sense has significance, as it is routinely invoked to endorse this state of affairs, and to silence voices offering alternatives, myth is significant because misrepresentation is at the core of this process. Ideology is significant because both common sense and myth in so doing promote sectional class-based socio-economic and political interests, and socialism is significant as it is primarily its alternative that is routinely silenced, as we shall see.

In classical Greek philosophy, common sense referred to a coordinating function between the senses of sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch, deemed to operate mechanistically and independently of reasoning. This understanding prevailed up until the eighteenth century, when linked in a nuanced shift to the cognitive, with the Greco-Roman understanding, which has prevailed ever since. That is, as self-evident and economically/politically disinterested practical knowledge (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022; Oxford Dictionary, 2022).

Myth involves fanciful meaning-making, and entails second level significations operating parasitically on those of first level or literal significations, in which denotation becomes connotation, exemplified by Roland Barthes’ illustration of a person of obvious colonial origins enthusiastically saluting an imperialist flag, with the mythical inference that often brutal, and always exploitative, colonial regimes were welcoming places for colonised peoples. While contemporary myths include, for instance, that of socio-economic inequality being primarily a function of geography, where one lives in the world, rather than of social class, with its tendency to veil capitalism’s innate class-based inequalities wherever in the world it operates. And that of the capitalist ‘free market’, given that capital insists on meticulously planning its own internal affairs, and, moreover, depends for its continued viability upon the comprehensive and detailed central planning of all liberal democratic states (Barthes, 1993; Chang, 2011; Bregman, 2018).

Ideology as a concept was first used in late eighteenth century revolutionary France, to refer to the study of ideas arising through contact with the material world, and subsequently acquired ‘negative’ connotations through Napoleon Bonaparte’s criticism of the ‘ideologues’, his political adversaries, whom he considered out of touch with reality, and blamed for his humiliating retreat from Russia in 1812. But it was with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that ideology acquired its vital ‘pejorative’ character, with their insight that the dominant ideas of an epoch tended to be the ‘ideal’ expressions of the dominant material relations of that epoch, and insofar as they specifically promoted sectional interests, Marx and Engels deemed them to be ideological. Indeed, for Marx and Engels, Barthes’ colonial myth, as alluded to above, would have functioned ideologically as well as mythically, to the extent that it promoted the material interests of bourgeois imperialism. While thereafter, in the twentieth century, ‘ideology-theory’ emerged to address issues of ideological form, and to compliment ‘ideology-critique’, with its study of ideological content. And, as such, the material elements of ideology, its generative and distributive networks, ‘ideological state apparatus’, such as schools, and

universities, faith-based, and political institutions, and mass media, were engaged with, as were issues of how ideological content actually worked, how it resonated with people, and how it became internalised in their ‘bodily’ dispositions, among other things (Guess, 1981; Althusser in Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1998; Bourdieu in Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1998; Marx & Engels, 2007; Rehman, 2015).

Scientific socialism is a socio-economic and political philosophy developed by Marx and Engels based on their philosophy of historical materialism, according to which the ‘great moving power’ of the historical process is economic development, powered by technological advance, resulting from contradictions arising from the division of society into social classes, and their struggles over competing material interests. Competition within and between social classes increases productive capacity to the extent that extant social relations of production act as breaks on the further development of society. And just as the bourgeoisie supplanted feudal social relations of production, based on land ownership and corvée labour, with their own, based on private productive property and wage labour. It is the historical task of the productive property-less wage labouring class to supersede bourgeois relations of production, the latter having, in their turn, become fetters on the further development of society, with their own, based on collective ownership of productive resources, and remuneration on the basis of need. With productive forces developed to a level capable of supporting socialism, such a tendency would issue in a qualitatively new form of environmentally sustainable, equitable, and classless socialist society, creating the conditions of possibility for the free and fully-rounded development of all human beings. But, as Marx and Engels readily acknowledged, this is far from inevitable, and there are many obstacles to this eventuality, not least the resistance of the bourgeoisie to changes that threaten their privileges (Engels, 1972; Marx, 2014).

As such, class-based capitalist societies are characteristically exemplified by conflicts of interest between private ownership and control of productive resources, and productive property-less wage labour, an innate inequality which has the effect, once the social surplus product has been distributed according to their respective and unequal claims on it, of segregating the occupants of the distinct strata, not only in terms of how they make their livings, but also in terms of housing, schooling, and social and recreational life, such that their paths rarely, if ever, cross.

And while differential access to economic resources confers material privileges on the class of private owners and controllers of productive assets relative to others, this in turn gives rise to inequalities in social and cultural capital, including symbolic resources, with the ability, for example, to define what is and is not common sense, which are then mobilised by the former across the societal institutions under their sway in a process reflecting the tendency for those who enjoy privileges to want to preserve them, and for the capacity to do just that to be enhanced by virtue of them.

And while there are, of course, many examples of the unproblematic use of common sense, such as cats are not dogs, night is not day, as well as claims that jumping from a great height, and literally playing with fire, presuming one wants to stay well, are contrary to it. The use of common sense to confound

matters of fact with class-based evaluations and judgements, and, in so doing, to endorse knowledge and practice conducive to the well-being of an elite as if conducive to the well-being of all, is not one of them, and problematic.

Thus, in what follows, in the spirit of Marx, Engels, and Antonio Gramsci's critique of common sense, in which Marx characterised such as often implausible and irrational, Engels as antithetical to science-based learning and knowledge, and Gramsci, from the point of view of the subaltern productive property-less, as often confused and contradictory. And in that of Walter Benjamin's claim that critical inquiry is well-served by the light of history, much as flowers are by the light of the sun, I inquire how common sense has functioned mythically and ideologically over the years to promote sectional bourgeois interests, and specifically to silence contrary and socialist voices (Engels, 1878; Marx, 1972; Benjamin, 1989; Gramsci in Crehan, 2011).

Throughout I use the term 'bourgeois' to refer to owners and/or controllers of industrial, commercial, and/or financial capital, and/or their political and cultural representatives, and while acknowledging that socialists have historically distinguished between them, use the terms 'socialism' and 'communism' interchangeably.

All the examples given are from the historical record, subject to my research, and register the scale of the silencing of contrary and socialist voices across four continents by bourgeois appeals to common sense, however, given my limited word space, they represent a fraction of the available evidence, a brief sketch rather than a comprehensive gaze.

To begin I offer a brief account of my philosophical approach.

2. Ontology and Epistemology

This short study is informed by a realist ontology and relativist epistemology. In the course of producing and reproducing ourselves, and the goods and services necessary to this end, human beings engage in productive social practice. Each type of productive practice has its own location in the social edifice, and is hence positioned-practice. The productive links that develop between networks of relatively autonomous positioned-practices constitute social structures, which create the conditions of possibility for continued productive activity. Social structures are therefore both the products of social practice, and the necessary conditions for continued social practice, which they both enable and constrain, and may be reproduced or transformed by such practice in an on-going dialectic. For example, the structural attributes of the positioned-practice of a Medical Doctor characteristically derive from their relative expertise in health-related matters, and the practicalities of such made manifest in the treatment of their patients. On the other hand, the positioned-practice of their patients has structure by virtue of their characteristic lack of expertise in medical matters, their inability to treat themselves, the practicalities of which, in seeking medical help, reproduce the Medical Doctor as an expert in their field. And despite the distinctions, the positioned-practices of both presuppose each other, and endure regardless of the specific identity of either. Indeed, to borrow from Marx in this respect, human beings make their own history, but

they do not do so under conditions of their own choosing, but under those encountered and inherited from the past (Marx, 1969; Bhaskar, 1998).

All social practices have material and symbolic elements constitutive of them, the former include physical means of production, machinery, raw materials, and the social relations involved, the latter the knowledge brought to bear on practice, subject to development and change, but at any particular point in time, accurate or inaccurate, as the case may be, and meaningful interactions between producers in the course of their practice. They also include motivations for practice, constituting reasons for continued practice, and hence causal in the reproduction and/or transformation of the social and institutional structures concerned. The relative weight of the material and symbolic elements varies depending on the nature of the practice, but it is always the case that materiality ultimately moulds the symbolic, pressing it into shape, as it were. A materiality that is independent of our representations of it, such that the latter are not radically contingent, epistemic relativism does not entail judgemental relativism, and we cannot make a goldsmith of a tinsmith, or confuse the factory cleaner with the factory owner. We cannot construct the world as we would like it to be, and simply to assert something does not make it so (Bhaskar, 1998; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1998).

Thus, social practice is a complex interaction between the subjective and the objective, a purposive causality such is the life of our kind, shaping and reshaping our physical and social environments, which, in turn, shape and reshape us. Such causal forces operate as tendencies because they act in the open system of the social, as against the closed system of the laboratory, where they may be isolated and identified, and, as such, by virtue of operating among a myriad of other causal forces, may operate unrealised, that is, have their causality checked by countervailing tendencies, or realised but unnoticed, that is, their causality goes unacknowledged because veiled by that of others. Or they may operate unknown, their causality being ascribed to other tendencies that are not responsible for the effects concerned, or they may be possessed unexercised, as in the case of a potential unfulfilled.

3. Bourgeois Common Sense Origins

In the late eighteenth century UK, the rumblings of the Industrial Revolution, fuelled by commerce resulting from the trans-Atlantic slave trade, began to shift the balance of socio-economic and political power away from the aristocratic patrons of mercantilism, and towards the bourgeoisie. Indeed, among the many accomplishments of the bourgeoisie at this time was the replacement of the legal framework of absolutism with a system of 'contract', a freely entered into and legally binding agreement between employers and employees. This was modelled on the notion of an exchange of equal values, a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, but which actually facilitated, as Marx subsequently explained, the appropriation of surplus value, or unpaid labour, as the ultimate source of bourgeois profits. While parallel with this came a revival of learning, which saw the erstwhile hegemony of the religious worldview challenged by the materialism of philosophers like David Hume and John Locke, among others (Marx, 1977; Webster, 2013).

It was during this time that the bourgeoisie embraced the fused Aristotelian and Greco-Roman notion of common sense, as referred to above, which, while ostensibly self-evident and economically/politically disinterested practical knowledge, thereafter became a tool for promoting their sectional material interests, mythically and ideologically endorsed and diffused by them across the institutions under their sway as the wisdom and knowledge that all reasonable people should aspire to. This was facilitated by the bourgeoisie's dismantling of absolutist censorship and the regulation of dissent, allowing for the emergence of mass media, theatres, coffee houses, and salons in the large towns and cities, which provided fertile opportunities for bourgeois class-based debate, and for the meeting of like minds. Thus, the 'bourgeois public sphere' emerged as the institutional site in which the productive property-owning bourgeoisie, as private people, came together as a public, to challenge the remaining values and norms of absolutism, and to supplant them with their own (Habermas, 2002; Rosenfeld, 2011).

There were, notwithstanding, those within the bourgeois class who opposed such fundamental epistemological change, and 'common sense philosophy' duly emerged from the University of Aberdeen as a vehicle for such opposition. And while the common sense philosophers were characteristically bourgeois in many respects, such as in their opposition to slavery, and support for both American and French Revolutions, they remained wedded to religious 'first principles' which presaged science, and staunchly opposed to the materialism of the likes of David Hume and John Locke. However, their philosophical reservations reflected a form of bourgeois conservatism which became largely incidental to the subsequent rise to economic and political dominance of their class, with its thorough embrace of materialism, technological innovation, and the inexorable economic development to which they gave rise.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic Ocean, on the eve of the American Revolution, in 1776, the notion of common sense took another turn in the short eponymous pamphlet by UK native Tom Paine, in which he argued from 'reason' and 'simple facts' that no advantage accrued to America from its colonial connection with the UK, but that the 'injuries' were many. Paine's concept of America, however, was mythical, an 'imaginary' land of like-minded and similarly-interested 'ordinary' people, serving as ideological cover for the revolutionary agenda of an incipient and capable bourgeois class, who increasingly wanted to run their own affairs (Paine, 1776; Rosenfeld, 2011).

Back in Europe, in late eighteenth century revolutionary France, a radical bourgeois conceptualisation of common sense mobilised to challenge the 'ancien regime' having its origins in materialist philosophy which had crossed the English Channel. However, in the aftermath of the events of 1789, and true to the dialectic, conservative sections of the revolutionary bourgeoisie opposed to what they saw as the 'excesses' of the Jacobin National Assembly, and critical of the likes of Jean-Paul Marat, Georges-Jacques Danton, and Maximilien Robespierre, asserted the antithetical notion of the 'people's common sense'. Aimed at pushing-back the revolutionary tide in the attempt to contain democratic reforms so as to cement their own sectional interests, the mainly Paris-based bourgeois elites mocked the notion of democracy as it applied to the 'lower social orders', or 'sans-culottes' (Rosenfeld, 2011).

And once again in the UK, this was the time of the Corresponding Societies, seminal forums for debate among the productive property-less, crushed by government troops in the service of bourgeois common sense, and of the Combination Acts, 1799 and 1800, which for a generation criminalised wage-workers' attempts to improve their wages and conditions of employment. And while the subsequent Reform Act, of 1832, enfranchised approximately five per cent of the adult male population only, it effectively reproduced the aforementioned bourgeois public sphere in the House of Commons, which thereafter became a site for managing the affairs of the bourgeois class. The bourgeoisie struggled, however, to limit social change to a purely bourgeois affair, as wherever productive capacity increased, polarisations of wealth and poverty appeared. This was the time of the Chartists, radicals who linked bourgeois economic exploitation with bourgeois political domination, and political consciousness to class consciousness. And of the Worker's Educational Society, formed in London, in 1840, for advancing socialism domestically and internationally, a forerunner of the Communist League, which was to commission Marx and Engel's 'The Communist Manifesto' several years later. It was also a time when the term 'Jacobin' was used by conservatives to denigrate radicals with as much contempt as the term 'communist' would be to do similar through bourgeois appeals to common sense throughout the twentieth century, as we shall see (Engels, 2009; Brook & Kipling, 2014).

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution had created an 'universal swirl' of productive activity in the UK, generating huge amounts of surplus capital requiring profitable investment opportunities, such that the Lord Chancellor, the highest legal officer in the land, informed the House of Lords that restrictions in place on profitable financial dealings were contrary to common sense, and needed to be repealed, which they duly were. Moreover, the repeal of the Corn Laws at this time, tariffs on imported grain that guaranteed prices for that produced by domestic land-owners, which Marx referred to as a 'triumph' for the bourgeoisie because it allowed them to reduce wages as the price of bread fell, thereby increasing profitability, was enthusiastically promoted in the House of Commons as being inseparable from common sense. Indeed, by 1870, following the end of the 'Victorian Boom', during which the UK was the 'workshop of the world', surplus capital looking for profitable investment had completely outgrown the domestic economy, acting as a spur for imperialist expansion, whose new markets and raw materials operated as tendencies to maintain capital accumulation, and to offset now declining profitability. However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, with rival imperialist powers threatening the UK's imperialist hegemony, the First World War loomed menacingly on the horizon (Gregory, 1846; Westbury, 1865; Engels, 2009; Marx, 2014).

4. Early to Mid-twentieth Century Bourgeois Common Sense

Following the 'great levelling' of the Bolshevik October Revolution, of 1917, UK Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, claimed that 'Sovietism' was fit only for a 'half-civilised' race, and, moreover, contrary to the common sense of the UK general public. This was a mythical and ideological invocation of common sense under cover of which his government put the Bolsheviks under siege, arming and

training counter-revolutionaries within Russia, sending troops and supplies through the ports of Archangel and Murmansk to support them, and at the end of hostilities in the First World War, invading to such ends. Under cover of which his government violently suppressed political dissent on the streets of major UK towns and cities which were inspired by events in Russia, the radicalism of which had not been seen since the Chartists. And also under cover of which, in the run-up to the General Strike of 1926, socialists were harassed and imprisoned for leading the opposition to employers' arbitrary imposition of lower wages and longer hours of work (Lloyd George, 1920; Lloyd George in Bell, 2016).

Indeed, the inter-war period in the UK was marked by virulent bourgeois common sense anti-communism, corresponding with the latter having their first MP elected in 1922, also the first MP of colour, and being very popular at local government level. This was an era when socialists were excluded from positions of responsibility in the Trade Unions and Trade Councils, and in which bourgeois elites in the National Governments of the 1930's were openly more hostile to socialists than to fascists, including the Labour Party in opposition. Refusing, for example, to support the democratically elected Republican government in Spain against assault by the fascist-backed military dictator General Franco, on account of the former's alleged 'crypto communism' (Davies, 2009; Bell, 2016).

And it was not the Bolsheviks alone internationally who felt the full force of such bourgeois common sense hostility to socialism around this time, but also the Chinese, as during their industrial struggles of 1925-27, the UK, in defending business interests, aided the pro-business Kuomintang to violently suppress strikes by Chinese workers led by communists. While during the long and bitter Chinese Civil War, beginning in 1928, again defending business interests, UK warships and warplanes attacked communists, referred to as 'malignant' by Prime Minister in waiting Harold Macmillan in the House of Commons, while operating a policy of rounding-up and handing-over communists to the Kuomintang for arbitrary execution (Macmillan, 1949; Isaacs, 2010).

While in the US, similar tendencies were in operation. From the events in New York State, in 1920, when members of the Socialist Party were arbitrarily barred from taking their seats in the legislature, through the 'commonsense' anti-communism of conservative trade unionists, to the common sense anti-communism of the early years of the Golden Age and onset of the Cold War. With the exception of a brief period during the Second World War, and drawing on an intellectual tradition of common sense in which slavery was upheld, and the very notion of equality dismissed as nonsense, socialism was depicted by bourgeois elites as a detested thing (Temperley, 2007; Hillquit, 2012; Jacques, 2012; Luff, 2012).

Indeed, during the Great Depression years, and in the run-up to the Second World War, with membership of the Communist Party growing steadily, and with bourgeois elites criticising President Roosevelt's New Deal as a 'communist-inspired' plot, several Federal and State-specific statutes were introduced to prosecute 'subversive' elements, the Smith Act, 1940, and the Voorhis Act, 1940, for

example. Resulting, among other things, in the first peacetime federal prosecution for sedition in US history, and a plethora of similar cases, in which socialists were harangued and imprisoned. While the House Un-American Activities Committee, an investigative arm of the US House of Representatives, relentlessly delved into alleged socialist activities among the famous and not so famous, destroying lives in the process, and complemented latterly by the frenzy of McCarthyism, with Senator Joseph McCarthy using Senate committees to do similar (Hansen, 2014).

5. Golden Age Bourgeois Common Sense

Widespread trepidation among Western bourgeois elites followed the Second World War, given that their economies were centrally planned during the war, and functioned very well. In the UK, for example, with co-operation rather than competition encouraged by the government, and the profit motive set aside for the duration, many enjoyed significantly better diets, in terms of nutritional value, than they had prior to the war. Furthermore, rates of relative poverty were halved, and increases in life expectancy were twice those for the rest of the century, with general levels of camaraderie high, despite the travails of conflict (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010; Klein, 2014).

From the point of view of the bourgeoisie, however, something had to be done to discredit the structures and practices that had worked so well during the war, but were now deemed contrary to their interests. As such, within a year, Winston Churchill made his 'Iron Curtain' speech in the US, decrying former war-time ally, the Soviet Union, to an audience only too willing to hear. This was a re-articulation of the mythical and ideological 'cordon sanitaire' imposed by the French, in 1919, in order to isolate Bolshevik Russia, and to stop the 'disease' of communism spreading. And within two years, President Truman had elaborated the Truman Doctrine to Congress, predicated on what he defined as common sense, and beginning the Cold War (Truman in Shogan, 1997).

As we have seen, bourgeois common sense anti-socialist hysteria in the US was not new, however, the significance of this re-articulation was that it allowed the US, the now undisputed world economic and military power, with its currency the newly installed currency of international commerce, following Bretton Woods, in 1944, to aggressively pursue their imperialist interests under cover of a mythical and ideological worldwide communist threat. Mythical because a threat to the specific interests of the bourgeois class, which socialism constituted by putting human and natural resources beyond the reach of their capital, was presented as a general threat, and ideological because in ensuring this did not happen wherever possible, US and international capital were given free access to the world's exploitable resources. And this in the context of post-war US Marshall Aid helping to reconvene European economies along capitalist lines, on condition that they remained amenable to US capital, the Washington D. C. based World Bank and International Monetary Fund doing similarly worldwide, and the imminent military alliance of NATO overseeing the proceedings with the threat of lethal force.

Thereafter, President Truman advocated US military intervention in global foreign affairs on four continents, sovereign countries notwithstanding, in order to fight socialism which, according to his elaboration of common sense, became a 'crime' of international proportions (du Bois, 2018).

In Europe, for example, immediately following the Second World War, civil war ensued in Greece between communist partisans, who had fought with the allies during the war, and conservative elements, many of whom had collaborated with the occupying Axis forces, but who were now supported in their anti-communism by the UK, and latterly the US. It was the first conflict of the Cold War, involving intervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign country based on common sense opposition to socialism, and one in which Ernest Bevan, the UK Foreign Secretary at the time, declared that troops deployed to such ends were supporting a campaign of 'very great' moral value (Bevan, 1949; Hobsbawm, 1994).

On the African continent, the decolonisation of which unfolded in the midst of the Cold War criminalisation of socialism, while those who helped liberate their countries from imperialism logically assumed the task of setting a particular course for development, their choices were severely trammelled, because if they chose the socialist path, and reached out for help to do so, the full force of common sense hostility to such descended upon them.

In the case of French imperialism in Africa, for example, Frantz Fanon insisted that it was not enough for former colonies to fly a new flag, and sing a new national anthem, without severing the links with colonial economies, and ensuring collective ownership of productive resources. But both Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre understood that for former colonies to develop along socialist lines would not be easy because of international bourgeois hostility to socialist planning. And Fanon noted the tendency for imperialist powers to sympathetically engage with the more accessible 'comrades' when independence loomed, but that this was often a strategy to disarm them, and constituted a 'cloak' for an impending tighter rein (Fanon, 2001; Sartre in Fanon, 2001).

Indeed, such was the strategy of the UK, in Kenya, in the independence struggles of the 1950's, and early 1960's, when they purposefully appeased the fiercely 'anti-communist' Jomo Kenyatta. As the UK House of Commons were informed at the time, a common sense respect for property rights and business interests was fundamental to the UK's policy in Kenya going forward, and, as such, Kenyatta duly became the first President of an independent Kenya, in 1963, agreeing to grant UK and international capital free reign in the new republic (Hurd, 1961; Kelly et al., 2020).

In Angola, when it became clear to the Portuguese colonists that they could no longer contain socialist-led demands for independence, they approached NATO for help, who duly obliged with military assistance on the provision that the Angolan economy be opened up to international capital. And after Angolan independence was finally conceded in 1975, and clear signs appeared that socialist reconstruction was producing real and steady improvements, South African and US-backed forces proceeded to wreak 'havoc' in the country, causing 'enormous' damage to essential infrastructure and fledgling community projects (Egero, 1986).

While a similar story unfolded in the former Portuguese colony of Mozambique, after independence, in 1975, with South African, and Rhodesian, anti-socialist forces, covertly backed by the US, attacking essential civil infrastructure, including schools and healthcare services. Aimed at undermining popular support for the socialist government, and undermining real progress in these areas, these attacks were a 'constant' drain on precious resources that had to be redirected from the purpose of building socialism in the country (Bhagavan, 1986).

On the Asian continent, the Malayan Communist Party, who had led the fight against Japanese occupation during the Second World War, and hence the epitaph 'Red Star over Malaya' for this period, attempted to unite the distinct ethnic groups within the region after the war as a prelude to independence from the UK. In order to prevent this, and again in the context of common sense hostility to socialism, the latter responded with political assassinations, chemical weapons, and the internment of hundreds of thousands in concentration camps, and, in the face of a much-weakened communist resistance, eventually granted independence in 1957, on the basis of Malaya remaining a 'client' state amenable to international capital (Hobsbawn, 1994; Newsinger, 2006).

Around the same time, in May 1951, Mohammad Mossadegh, a democratically elected Iranian leader, supported by the Tudeh communist movement, nationalised UK owned oil assets. The UK responded with a campaign of covert military operations to sabotage the economy and discredit Mossadegh, and when this did not happen, a new policy was formulated. Given that Mossadegh was not a man of 'reason', the House of Lords were informed at the time, a common sense approach was required, translating directly into support for the US-organised military coup, of 1953, which removed Mossadegh from power, reinstated the autocratic Shah of Iran as head of state, and subdivided Iran's oil resources between US, UK, and French capital interests. Mossadegh was to serve the rest of his life behind bars, and the country has not known democracy since (Jowitt, 1952; Silken, 1952; Newsinger, 2006).

And Vietnam was part of French Indo-China prior to the Second World War, immediately after which the French attempted to reassert their imperial authority with the help of UK troops. Indeed, the response of France, the UK, and the US, over the following thirty years to the socialist independence movement, was to 'reconquer' the region using lethal force. Following the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu, in 1954, the country was partitioned along the seventeenth parallel, with the US installing a client regime in the South, and when it became apparent that this regime was also unpopular, and in danger of collapse, the US waged all-out war on the Vietnamese people. Oblivious to the wishes and interests of the people themselves, in a frenzy of common sense anti-communism, the US dropped huge amounts of high explosives and chemical weapons on Vietnam, and the surrounding area, causing a human and environmental disaster, before finally abandoning the country in 1975 (Hobsbawm, 1994; Hastings, 2019).

While similar tendencies unfolded in the Americas and Caribbean, predicated on common sense opposition to socialism. In Cuba, for example, whose economy since independence, in 1902, had been

dominated by foreign capital, under the US-backed Fulgencio Batista dictatorship, from 1952, in the attempt to restore profitability, socialists were removed from trade unions, their political parties banned, and their newspapers criminalised. And while Batista eventually fled the country on New Year's Day, 1959, following a civil war, clearing the way for Fidel Castro and fellow revolutionaries to form a government, the latter's euphoria did not last long, amid an immediate blockade imposed by the US, intended to render the Cuban economy untenable, which remains in place to this day (Chomsky, 2015; Cushion, 2016).

In Chile, a US-backed military coup overthrew the first democratically elected socialist head of state on the continent, Salvador Allende, in 1973, following which the country became a 'vicious' police state for decades under the dictatorship of General Pinochet and his neo-liberal supporters (Pilger, 2006; Chomsky, 2015).

And 'Operation Condor' began in 1975, involving dictatorships in South America, many of which the US had installed through military coups, co-operating in the 'disappearance' of all opposition, socialist and otherwise, to the implementation of neo-liberal business-friendly policies in the region (McSherry, 2005; Tremlett, 2020).

At the same time, in Central America, British Honduras became the subject of debate in the House of Commons because of the growing tendency for socialists within the colony to press for independence. In light of the seriousness of this, and the more general communist threat to UK business interests, the House was informed, it was simply common sense to counter this 'menace' with a military presence in the colony, a presence that remains to this day (Trotter, 1975).

Moreover, US support for Guatemalan dictator, Efraín Ríos Montt, in the early 1980's, predicated on the former's ongoing common sense opposition to socialism, resulted in the near genocide of mainly indigenous Mayans, who had embraced socialist philosophy, and who were deemed a 'contagion' in the region, and a tendency that had to be checked. In its southern neighbour, El Salvador, a bitter civil war raged from 1979 to 1992, between socialists attempting to redress huge levels of poverty and inequality, and a US-backed military dictatorship attempting to maintain the established order. And while the occupation of Honduras in the 1980's, from where the US supported the Nicaraguan Contras' campaign of terror aimed at their civilian population, was justified ideologically by the common sense myth of a general communist threat. On the contrary, the threat was specific to the interests of US and international capital, as the socialist policies of the Nicaraguan Sandinista government had put the country's exploitable resources beyond its reach, and because of the 'good example' shown to other impoverished and foreign capital dominated countries in the region (Hobsbawm, 1994; Curtis in Pilger, 2006; Pilger, 2006).

6. And Neo-liberal Bourgeois Common Sense

By the late 1970's, the post-war Golden Age was over, and Western bourgeois elites were not happy because returns on their capital were diminishing. In order to redress the situation, and reassert a desired level of profitability, a neo-liberal program of 'reform' was proposed, with socio-economic structures and practices needing to be transformed to suit. In the UK and US, unlike in Central and South America, it was a relatively subtle affair, in which institutions of civil and political society, ideological state apparatus, as alluded to above, were used to construct a mythical and ideological common sense link between neo-liberal structures and practices and general social well-being, and between socialism and dystopia (Chomsky, 2007; Harvey, 2007).

In the UK, for example, Margaret Thatcher, Conservative Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990, a key driver of neo-liberal reforms, and personal friend of General Pinochet, while decrying socialism, promised to implement common sense policies going forward, including the lowering of taxes on wealth and income, among other things. With all dissenting voices treated with near hysteria, the message was clear, neo-liberal capitalism was normative and socialism its opposite (Thatcher, 1979).

In the US, think-tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute, among others, used compliant media outlets to encourage common sense opposition to socialism, and 'new leftists' were railed for attempting to destroy the American way of life from the lofty heights of US society. Furthermore, with the onset of the neo-liberal conservatism of the Ronald Reagan administration, in the early 1980's, historical regulations on finance capital imposed after the Wall Street Crash, of 1929, were deemed unacceptable and duly removed. Indeed, three years into his first term of office as President, in his State of the Union address to Congress, in 1984, while arguing for reduced taxation for the wealthy, among other things, Reagan insisted that his neo-liberal policies were common sense, and socialism its nemesis (Reagan, 1984; Crehan, 2016).

And all the while, mainstream media in both the UK, and US, attempted to mythically and ideologically discredit socialist theory and practice, with elements of the former consigning socialism to the 'historical dustbin', and of the latter, invoking historical context, and in stark contrast to eyewitness accounts of both, depicting Bolshevism as 'brutal', and the Paris Commune, of 1871, which had so impressed Marx and Engels with its 'tentative steps' towards communist democracy, as tenable only through mass 'terror' (BBC, 1998; Lissagarey, 2007; Reed, 2010; Gopnik, 2014).

While contemporary philosophers, historians, and economists alike, routinely equate common sense with neo-liberal capitalism and contrary to socialism. Thus, 'common sense realism', while decrying epistemological relativism as a confused parody of Albert Einstein's work, condemns socialism as an 'irrational' doctrine attempting to achieve the 'impossible'. And according to which, but contrary to Einstein himself, a firm believer in socialist planning, the lesson of history is clear, socialism does not work. 'Economic naturalism' attempts to mythically and ideologically explain natural phenomena, such as aspects of evolutionary biology, with recourse to common sense neo-liberal economics, with the clear implication that the latter are absolute and timeless. Others claim that it is long since time we all

moved beyond the ‘sterile’ socialism against capitalism debate, while simultaneously asserting the merits of private productive property and consumerism, and still others that to play the ‘winners game’ of bourgeois self-interest is simply common sense (Einstein, 1949; Frank, 2008; Picketty, 2014; Bogle, 2017; Curry, 2019).

Indeed, these claims echo Francis Fukuyama’s late twentieth century naturalisation of neo-liberal capitalism, and contention that the historical process had clearly shown that capitalism could not be improved upon. Contentions such as these, however, have a long pedigree, and as part of Marx’s mid-nineteenth century critique of the political and social philosophy of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, he identified similar mythical and ideological tendencies emanating from mainstream economists in claims regarding the pre-eminence of bourgeois society. In which all traces of sectional economic interests were elided, constituting a purposeful amnesia erasing the historical process by which the bourgeois class emerged, while promoting a world without the possibility of meaningful social change (Fukuyama in Sim, 1999; Marx, 2014).

7. Discussion

In this short study, I describe how the ‘public philosophy’ of common sense, rather than being self-evident and economically/politically disinterested practical knowledge, has, on the contrary, functioned mythically and ideologically as a tendency to secure bourgeois sectional interests, and to silence contrary and socialist voices within and across national boundaries.

How the Industrial Revolution in the UK shifted the balance of socio-economic and political power away from the landed aristocracy and in favour of the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century, and how the latter cemented their interests through the medium of common sense.

How, in the early twentieth century, the UK attempted to derail the Bolshevik Revolution, how a similar hostility was shown to Chinese socialists from the 1920’s onwards, and how socialists within the UK were treated with intolerance and imprisonment during this period, all under cover of a common sense narrative.

I describe how, in the US, for the most part of the twentieth century, socialism was decried as a detested thing by bourgeois elites, with socialists also harangued and imprisoned for their opposition to the capitalist system, also under cover of a common sense imperative.

How, in the Golden Age of capitalism, following the Second World War, socialism became a ‘crime’ of international proportions, demonised and silenced in the name of an imperialist common sense across four continents.

And how, from the final quarter of the twentieth century through the present period, a common sense link between neo-liberal structures and practices and social well-being, and between socialism and general dystopia, has been constructed across the institutions of civil and political society in the UK, and US, with clear mythical and ideological tendencies to foreclose on social change, and to freeze reality as bourgeois reality.

The bourgeois class have a vested interest in maintaining a capitalist system that confers immense privileges on them, and consequently 'need' it to be the best there is. To these ends, exemplary of Marx and Engels' insight that the dominant ideas of an epoch tend to be the 'ideal' expressions of the epoch's dominant material relations, they have evoked the supposedly self-evident and economically/politically disinterested concept of common sense to aggressively secure their material interests, and to purposefully silence contrary and socialist voices, leaving in their trail a palpable absence and empty space where alternative socialist structures and practices should be. Indeed, disillusionment regarding the existence of plausible alternatives to capitalism among the productive property-less is a powerful mythical and ideological tool in the service of the bourgeois class. Because the former, however despondently and despairingly, consequent on their need to make a living, continue in their practice to reproduce existing social structures, which, in turn, constrain their future practice to within limits manageable and favourable to the latter.

However, as I have argued, materiality ultimately shapes the symbolic, so that we cannot simply define things as we would like them to be, or make something so merely by assertion, and there are clear contradictions within bourgeois common sense, not least in claiming that socialism is unworkable, while making every effort to ensure just that, but likewise in denying the feasibility of practice, such as central planning, which continues to prove its worth when encouraged to so do. The planning of the Second World War economies, for example, with their significant social dividends, and that of former colonies in Africa, promising so much before being sabotaged by hostile forces, and similarly in Central America. Also the detailed and comprehensive central planning of all contemporary liberal democratic states, which help render the capitalist system viable, and the meticulous planning used in the international bourgeoisie's own industrial, commercial, and financial practices, as alluded to above, with similar import.

Indeed, self-contradiction is a difficult balancing act to manage, even when performed 'quietly' beneath a veil of inaccurate, fanciful, and instrumental meaning-making, and when counter-tendencies, such as this study, unveil bourgeois common sense, myths, and ideological tendencies for what they are, and for what they do, this balance is disturbed, consciousness is raised, and that decried previously seen in a very different light.

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