

Original Paper

Ideology and the Flow of History....

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Received: September 2, 2025 Accepted: September 23, 2025 Online Published: October 12, 2025

doi:10.22158/jrph.v8n2p61 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jrph.v8n2p61>

Abstract

In this essay I focus on ideology, defined as representation in the service of sectional interests, and often-times contrary to the evidence, and its social significance in a series of sketches informed by an historical materialist philosophy. Including the Industrial Revolution, in the UK, the trans-Atlantic slave-trade, and slavery in the Americas, the Paris Commune, of 1871, Russia post-1917, Spain post-WWI and 1936-39, Germany post-WWI, and on the Eastern Front during WWII. And contemporarily, post-WWII political economy, the onset of Neo-liberalism, in the early 1980's, the re-emergence of China as a global economic player, and aspects of mainstream economics and of contemporary social 'critiques'.

Keywords

historical materialism, social structure, social practice, social class, ideology

1. Introduction

During the European Enlightenment of the late seventeenth to early nineteenth century, philosophical materialists challenged the formerly hegemonic idealist world-view, while the Industrial Revolution, in the UK, with other countries fast following suit, brought the bourgeoisie, as productive property owners and controllers, to dominance economically and politically. It was in this context that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels inverted Georg Hegel's idealist dialectic and applied it to the material world in the philosophy of 'historical materialism', at once scientific, naturalist and realist. According to which, the 'great moving power' of the historical-life process is economic development, powered by technological advance, resulting from struggles around conflicting material interests. Growing productive capacity to the point where existing social structures and practices become fetters on further progress, and just as feudalism was supplanted by capitalism, the historical role of the proletariat, as productive property-less wage workers, is to replace capitalist social relations with their own, the former having, in their turn, become fetters on further progress (Engels, 1972; Marx, 2014a).

With productive forces developed to a level capable of supporting socialism, a 'higher stage' of humanity would begin, replete with its own organising values and principles, capitalism being the last class-based societal form, replaced by a class-less and ecologically friendly social formation equally welcoming and accommodating of all. Wherein each would contribute in accordance with their capability to do so, and receive according to their needs, and in which further social progress would be facilitated by radical equality and radical democracy energising universal mutual support and co-operation as the order of the day (Marx, 2025; Marx & Engels, 2014b).

However, as Marx & Engels emphasised, although such social change may be possible at a particular point in time given the level of development of the productive forces, this does not make it probable, as class-based elites do not forego their privileges without a struggle. Or as former US slave turned philosopher, Frederick Douglass, remarked, without a 'demand' being put to them. And, as such, the progressive transformation from capitalism to socialism, from the old to the new society, is by no means inevitable (Marx & Engels, 2014b; Douglass, 2025).

Within any given social formation, the relationship between owners and controllers of productive resources and the direct producers, between lord and serf, planter and slave, bourgeois and proletarian, for example, constitutes the 'base' of the entire social edifice, on which a political, legal and cultural 'super-structure' is built. And while no society can rise above its productive limitations, and a degree of autonomy exists between base and super-structure, the characteristic historical role of the latter is to defend the continued viability of the former, through the ongoing management of the contradictions constitutive of it and of itself (Marx & Engels, 2007).

Thus it is that human beings live and produce within certain social relations, or structures, which, as the products of prior productive practice, enable and constrain, but do not determine, further practice. In our productive practice we avail of physical and symbolic resources, raw materials and knowledge, respectively, and although a dialectical process, given the anteriority of the physical world, human consciousness is ultimately a function of materiality, rather than materiality of consciousness, as the idealists would have it. Shaping the way we experience reality and our place in it, such that we cannot simply present the world as we would like it to be, and merely asserting something does not make it so. We cannot claim a common material interest between lord and serf, planter and slave, bourgeois and proletarian, and simultaneously remain faithful to reality, although this has not stopped some trying to do just so in the service of sectional interests, as we shall see (Bhaskar, 1998).

And crucially, such is the causal link between human consciousness, productive social practice, and social and institutional structures, that practice can, because not determined, depending on the 'frame' of mind of the practitioners, transform rather than simply reproduce the social environment concerned. As such, any factor which influences the way the world is understood is a potent force in the constitution of society, with ideology being just such a tendency (Bhaskar, 1998; Marx & Engels, 2007).

Bourgeois ideology, for example, is ‘permanently and unremittingly’ at work upon the proletariat, attempting, among other things, to elide the essential ingredients of capitalism altogether, by creating ‘imaginary’ states of being in which fundamental material contradictions, such as social class, disappear along with all references to bourgeois and proletarian. An ideology of ‘class-lessness’ lent plausibility by the very class-based social divisions it seeks to deny, as the distinct classes rarely, if ever, encounter each other, except perhaps in a professional capacity. While the bourgeoisie do not have to worry overly about being too conspicuous, outside their own social circles, given the dire consequences of class-based income and wealth disparities for public health and well-being generally, such as they are (Mandel, 1977; Barthes, 1993; Davies, 2008b; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2017).

In what follows, in the belief that all truth-claims should be supported by the evidence, that there are important lessons for the present in the past, and with ideology defined as representation in the service of sectional interests, often-times contrary to the evidence. I present a series of sketches to highlight the role and significance of ideological practice, ranging from the Industrial Revolution, in the UK, through to the contemporary period. Including the African slave-trade and slavery in the Americas, the Paris Commune, of 1871, Russia post-1917, Spain post-WWI and 1936-39, Germany post-WWI, and on the Eastern Front during WWII. And contemporarily, post-WWII political economy, the onset of neo-liberalism, in the early 1980’s, the re-emergence of China as a global economic player, and aspects of mainstream economics, and contemporary social ‘critiques’.

2. Historical

2.1 Industrialisation

For tens of thousands of years human beings foraged for survival in small groups as nomadic hunter-gatherers, and although differing slightly depending on ecology, according to the anthropological evidence, such social formations were characteristically egalitarian. However, around ten thousand years ago, these ‘primitive communistic’ forms began to transition - with the domestication of wild plants and animals, it became possible for larger settled communities to sustain themselves, and as methods of husbandry slowly improved, to produce a social surplus product. This gave rise to the oversight and management of the production process and the surplus, assigned individually rather than collectively, and, with the former removed from direct production, to embryonic class-based divisions. While parallel to this came inter-communal tension, and the use of military retainers, or soldiers, to help defend community resources against would-be usurpers (Marx & Engels, 2014; Ember in Hurst, 2020).

Over time, such military retainers evolved into the private armies of the former overseers and managers, whom, by this, had become a ruling class in their own right, having assumed the landed means of production and surplus product as their own private property. While often-times accompanying this practice, in Europe, was the appropriation of the direct producers themselves, such that, in Ancient Greece and Rome, for example, slavery was an essential element of social life. While

this general process of the seizure of the surplus product and landed means of production, by some at the expense of others, was most fully expressed, again in Europe, in the middle-ages, in the rigid estate-based structures and practices between feudal manorial lord and land-less serf.

And upheld ideologically by notions of the 'divine right' of the powerful to do as they saw fit, and subsequently, in the eighteenth century, by the 'rule of law', that is, laws made by the powerful in the furtherance of their own interests (Brewer and Styles, 1985; Reuter, 1997).

As productive capacity continued to increase, feudal lord and serf succumbed to capitalist bourgeois and proletarian, and, likewise, the mode of appropriation of the surplus product from direct or 'corvee' labour to the 'wage' or contract system. And with further prolonged technological advance, production moved into the factory, accompanied by automatised industrialisation and a complex division of labour. Such that, between 1760 and 1840, for example, productivity in UK cotton mills increased one hundred and fifty fold, underpinned by brutal wage labour at home and slave labour in the colonies (Klein, 2017).

Processes accompanied, in their turn, by ideological tendencies which, while seeking to veil their class-based origins, operated in the direct interests of the bourgeoisie....

Thus, while the gender-based domestic roles historically assigned to women preceded capitalism, during industrialisation ideological notions of 'womanhood', for example, further encouraged their presence in the house. Proletarian women, unlike most of their bourgeois counterparts, cooked, cleaned, and washed in their homes to keep their men and children able to work outside them. That this was 'unpaid' labour tended to cheapen 'women's work' generally, allowing bourgeois employers to pay women working in the public sphere less than if men were doing the task, and in the unusual cases where performing similar duties, less for so doing. And most proletarian women, of necessity, did work outside the home, with the vast majority employed in domestic service, as servants, often-times doing the cooking, cleaning, and washing in bourgeois homes. While also comprising the bulk of the workforce in the cotton mills, labouring in the coal and tin mines, in agriculture, as well as in the 'sweated' trades (Davies, 2008a; Evans, 2024).

While proletarian children were to be found working alongside their parents in the mines and mills during the nineteenth century, despite legislation criminalising such practice, which was not properly enforced, and widely abused by bourgeois employers. They were put to dangerous tasks which adults generally could not do because of their size, working long hours, in poor conditions, and were 'frequently' maimed and killed in the process. Their employment was justified ideologically in terms of rendering them socially 'useful', and to enable business to remain competitive. They were, however, central in facilitating the circumvention of the nascent organised labour movement at the time, and in augmenting profitability, being much cheaper than adults to employ, paid a fraction of the rate for female labour, itself a fraction of that for male labour (Humphries, 2003; Baker, 2025).

Mainstream political economy, at this time, was inspired by Malthusian ideology that human populations had tendencies to grow faster than their ability to sustain themselves, and that there were

counter-tendencies abroad to check this, such as, for example, disease and starvation. Conveniently absolving the bourgeoisie of any responsibility for those living in dire conditions as a direct result of the social upheavals from which, as a class, they benefitted so much. Thomas Malthus, a Church of England curate, however, went further, asserting that any relief to the sick and starving should be avoided at all costs, as this would only precipitate the ‘common misery’ of all if allowed to persist, and that, on the contrary, nature should be allowed to take its course (Malthus in George, 1930).

Malthus had his critics, nevertheless, according to whom he confused natural with social tendencies, and whom, in the context of land as a means of production, cited India during the British Raj, wherein the harems of the princes were full of women with raiment so fine as ‘woven wind’. While the ploughs of the many ryots, or peasants, whose labour produced the wealth of the princes, were little more than sharpened sticks. A rigid social hierarchy, encouraged by the Raj, lauding over great wealth and dire poverty, entirely human in origin, such that the misery attributed to over-population was actually the result of social ‘tyranny’ (George, 1930).

Ireland was another, wherein the peasant and cottier, or land-less agricultural labourer, could be turned-out of their one room ‘mud hut’, home for over half the population, according to the 1841 Census, on the whim of the landowner, and cast-out upon the road, forbidden even to pick wild fruit or to trap wild game to ease their hunger. A situation described by Frederick Douglass, a man accustomed to the depredations of the slave cabin, as we have seen, following a trip to Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century, as the worst he had ever seen. Such that the woes of the native Irish were no more a consequence of over-population than the slave-trade was of the over-population of Africa (George, 1930; Gibney, 2017; Douglass in Gibney, 2017).

In all large UK industrialising towns and cities, the conditions of the proletariat were dire, with housing overcrowded, small and dirty, no running water, sanitation, or indeed daylight, conditions which bourgeois ideologues variously attributed to a lack of ‘honour’. And on which, by the mid-nineteenth century, had imposed a national police force to instill discipline outside the work-place, with the truncheon, to complement that instilled inside, with fines and corporal punishment. Predicated on a bourgeois legal system which, while formally acknowledging all as ‘equals’ before the law, abstracted from class-based differences in property ownership, and the distinct life-chances conferred as a result, thereby doing nothing to redress the deprivations giving rise to the practices it ‘criminalised’ (Ignatieff, 1985; Storch, 1985).

The proletarian areas of St. Giles, in London, and ‘Little Ireland’, in Manchester, the first industrial city in the UK, were exemplary in this respect, with the latter a ‘hole’ of around two hundred buildings accommodating four thousand people. Whose immigrant inhabitants had fled hunger at home and crowded into such, wherein competition for work resulted in their selling their labour power for less than the settled community, accustomed, as they were, to living on next to nothing (Young, 1985; Engels, 2009).

A profitable state of affairs for the bourgeoisie, as was migration generally, with immigrants readily providing the labour which the settled community were reluctant to do, the dirty, demeaning and poorly-paid, and, as such, employers were able, contrary to the ideology of a 'fair day's wages for a fair day's work', to lower wages and conditions to a minimum. Moreover, for many already poorly-paid or unemployed in the settled community, the added competition for work, housing, and services, such as they were, was not relished, with the tendency being to generate tensions between the communities, and to undermine their ability to act with common purpose. Another positive for the bourgeoisie (Engels, 1881; Chang, 2014).

2.2 The Slave Trade and Slavery

Although plantation economies were pre-bourgeois, in the sense that no wages were paid to slaves as producers, the material interests of bourgeoisie, planters, and merchants were closely linked. Reaching their peak when merchant bankers associated with slavery, as slave-traders themselves, or as planters in a previous life, the Barings and Barclays, for example, helped finance the Industrial Revolution in the UK, as we have seen.

Whole industries on both sides of the Atlantic flourished around the trans-Atlantic slave-trade, slavery, and the buying and selling of slave-grown produce, including tobacco, sugar and cotton. This trade was market-oriented, with slaves bought and sold therein by their merchant owners, such that, by the eighteenth century, UK merchants were the largest slave-traders in the world. Protected by a formidable naval presence on the trade routes, and, in addition to supplying slaves for the domestic colonies, in the Americas, they did the same for the Spanish and French, the so-called 'African Commerce'. And although European labour was used on the plantations, the tens of thousands of 'rebel' Irish, for example, who were punished thus for resisting British conquest. African slave-labour triumphed for the crucial reason that it was available in the relatively large numbers required, which grew in parallel to the increasing demand for the plantations' products (Gibney, 2017; Williams, 2022). The twelve million African men, women and children enslaved, of whom two million perished on-route to the Americas, were routinely ideologically depicted in super-structural institutions as 'savages', and continental Africa generally as being 'destined for contempt'. Notions such as 'black-lazy' and 'black-scheming' entered the signifying chain, and were used specifically to warrant the violence enacted against them. Similarly, the slave with the strength for hard physical work, but with 'weak' intellect, whom had to be strictly managed for the common good. And while some ideological tendencies were not suited to the immediate situation, that of 'womanhood', for example, did not apply to female slaves as economic expediencies did not require a distinction between the sexes, their mostly doing similar work in the fields. Others were created in their stead, such that the degradation associated with female slavery was warranted, among others, by the ideology of their rampant promiscuity, being similar to the beast in this respect, functioning as a tendency to affirm the appropriateness of the inhuman treatment shown to them (Marx, 1971; Hall, 1996; Fanon, 2001; Davis, 2019; Williams, 2022).

2.3 *The End of an Era*

The UK Reform Act, of 1832, bestowed political influence on the bourgeoisie in proportion to their burgeoning economic influence consequent on the Industrial Revolution, thereby bringing economic and political structures and practices, base and super-structure, into 'accord'. And while planters in the Caribbean slave colonies had strong links to the landed gentry at home, equally comfortable on their large UK estates, and, as such, a powerful vested interest group in their own right. Their long-enjoyed virtual trade monopoly on the seas was now deemed hostile to bourgeois interests and the international market-place - the bourgeoisie wanted such 'restrictive' practices gone, and go they did, following parliamentary legislation, relatively quickly and quietly, replaced by an era of global and comparatively 'free-trade' lasting until the 1870's.

Operating in parallel to this was the nineteenth century production of cotton in the UK's colonies of Egypt and India along capitalist lines, as it quickly became clear to bourgeois and planter alike, that the 'free' labourer was less costly than the slave, more productive, and more easily replaced (Mandel, 2015).

A situation compounded by slave revolts - in the French slave colony of Saint-Domingue, now Haiti, for example, the only Republic ever to be founded on a slave uprising, and in Barbados and Jamaica, among others, rendering slavery as an institution increasingly difficult to manage (Newsinger, 2006).

And not least by the agitation of abolitionists at home.

As such, the UK abolished slavery, in 1833, having abolished the slave-trade, in 1807, but for another twenty-five years at least, its bourgeois and merchant classes continued to trade with slave-based economies, in North America and Cuba, for example, supplying fetters and shackles, and transporting slave-grown goods on their behalf. There was little to be heard, however, from erstwhile abolitionists on this count, and those once so forthright in their criticisms of human exploitation did not exhibit a similar level of concern for those producing the fetters and shackles in the dungeon-like mines and factories of the UK. For whom material conditions were on a par, if not worse, with those of the slave. On the contrary, on issues such as allowing workers' rights, the former champion of the anti-slavery movement, William Wilberforce, for example, was characteristically bourgeois, supporting legislation criminalising all such practices (Davies, 2019; Williams, 2022).

As for the now denuded UK Caribbean planter-class, they received compensation from the public purse to the tune of one hundred billion pounds-plus in today's equivalent. There was nothing, however, for former slaves (Piketty, 2021).

The French abolished the slave-trade, in 1818, and slavery, in 1848, for the second time, having done so, in 1794, during the Jacobin First Republic, but which was reintroduced by Napoleon I, in 1802. In the process of which, they imposed a huge debt on the 'Black Jacobins' of Haiti to pay for compensation to former planters, but with nothing for themselves as former slaves.

And while the Spanish formally abolished the African slave-trade, in 1817, it continued for decades afterwards, to Cuba, for example, wherein slavery was eventually abolished in 1886, and where former

slaves, rather than being re-imbursed for their troubles, were required to labour for years free of charge to compensate their former masters (Schmidt-Nowara, 2013).

2.4 In the US

The US abolished the slave-trade in 1808, while capitalism in the American Northeast and Midwest was gathering apace, fuelled by an abundance of human resources consequent on mass European immigration, and natural resources taken by force and without compensation from Indigenous peoples. Resulting in growing economic and political pressure brought to bear on the plantation economies. It was around this time that the practice of ‘scalping’, the forceful removal of the skin covering the skull with the hair still attached, was ideologically linked with ‘Red Indians’ unilaterally doing so to white settlers. According to the evidence, however, this is not so, practised in Europe long before any contact with the Americas, and therein from around the time Europeans arrived. It was, however, widely used by the settlers themselves, encouraged by elements of the bourgeoisie, against Indigenous men, women, and children, as part of their near-genocidal violence to acquire ‘living-space’ for new-comers. Around one hundred years before something similar was attempted in Europe, on the Eastern Front during WWII, as we shall see (Strobel, 2024).

Slavery in America was likewise dealt a severe blow by bourgeois cotton production in Egypt and India.

As such, the Northern bourgeoisie sought to block the further expansion of slavery, from New England down to the Deep South, for sound economic rather than abstract moral reasons. Indeed, a compromise of sorts was offered by Abraham Lincoln, US president at the time, with compensation forthcoming for planters. However, slavery was deeply ingrained therein, such that, of the fifteen presidents prior to Lincoln, eleven were planters, while following events in Haiti, as we have seen, the American South became the centre of the global plantation economy, with the number of slaves quadrupling in the nineteenth century before 1860. As such, Southern planters, preferring the surety of their own established way of life, declined Lincoln’s approach, and the American Civil War began, in 1861, continuing until 1865. With the Northern bourgeoisie finally triumphant, thereby bringing the dominance of the planters, and their characteristic refusal as a ruling class to forego their privileges, to a violent end (Piketty, 2021).

In the post-war South, during its ‘colonisation’ by Northern capital, with no compensation paid to former slaves, the quality of life for most was no better than before, and for some a lot worse. It was around this time that the ideology of the ‘black-rapist’ entered the signifying chain, commonly invoked as a justification for the lynching and defilement of former slaves with, according to the evidence, more than ten thousand people killed in this manner in the thirty years following 1865. The reasons were primarily economic, as terror performed a key role in keeping them from aspiring to anything better than a source of cheap labour for the bourgeoisie (Davies, 2019).

2.5 *The Paris Commune*

Marx had congratulated Abraham Lincoln after his re-election, in 1864, on behalf of the First International, however, within six months Lincoln had been killed by a pro-slavery assassin, and, in a little over six years, Marx & Engels had changed their minds radically regarding established political structures and practices. Following the Paris Commune, of 1871, they thereafter upheld such as the 'political form' for the 'economic emancipation' of the proletariat, and if they could find fault at all with the Communards, it was for their being too 'magnanimous' with their bourgeois detractors (Marx & Engels, 2014a; Marx, 2018).

The socio-economic context in which the Commune unfolded saw wealth inequality in Paris rising from one per cent owning fifty per cent of all private property, in 1810, to seventy per cent, in 1910. With its immediate context being the French defeat at Sedan, in 1870, in the Franco-Prussian War, and when, in early September of that year, a 'Government of National Defence' was proclaimed by a group of bourgeois former Parisian deputies (Piketty, 2021).

By the end of September, Paris was under Prussian siege, and with the flight of this government to Bordeaux, left to its fate, and it was thus that the socialist-leaning Parisian National Guard organised elections to select a 'Central Committee' to democratically oversee affairs in the city.

In January 1871, the government in Bordeaux, soon to relocate to Versailles, formerly surrendered to the Prussians, and obliged France to pay reparations to them, and to disarm the National Guard, with the two conditions ideological rather than necessary for the peace. Since 1789, bourgeois elites had been wary of Paris as a centre of radicalism, thereafter denying the city the self-governing status granted to other large towns and cities, and would feel this way as long as the National Guard remained. While in order for them to shift the costs of the war away from themselves and other elites and onto the rest, the National Guard again were the problem, as they would not tolerate such a move (Lissagaray, 2007).

Meanwhile, further elections called by the Central Committee produced a Communal Council, following which the 'Commune' was declared.

In the little time available to them, the Communards moved away from the bourgeois market-place and towards structures and practices based upon common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. All responsible administrative positions were subject to regular elections, the incumbents being immediately recallable, and all remunerated similarly. Education was deemed 'communal' and oriented to encouraging mutual support rather than competition, and the separation of Church and State agreed. Moreover, military conscription and the regular Army were stood-down, guillotines publicly burnt, and the Vendome Column taken-down as a symbol of international jealousy (Lissagaray, 2007; Engels, 2014; Marx, 2014b).

In their ideological assault on the Commune, the Versaillese presented Paris as a place of 'villains' and 'brutish drunkards' where 'honest' people dare not walk-out, and in which the finest houses were routinely pillaged. Keen to silence the example the Commune offered, the myth of the 'Petroleuse' was

a favourite point of ideological attack, that is, older women of the Commune supposedly burning the property of the affluent for no reason other than pure spite. And while the national press also spoke of ‘incendiarism’ abounding in Paris, no plausible evidence was ever proffered for any of these assertions. On the contrary, eyewitness accounts of strangers entering the city at the time found everything ‘calm’, with people working together for the common good (Lissagaray, 2007).

In early April 1871, with their justificatory ideological work complete, the physical assault on Paris began amid six weeks of indiscriminate shelling, with Versailles troops entering the city, on May 21, through a gate barred to them under the peace, but conveniently left open by Prussian guards. One of their first acts was to restore the Vendome Column, alongside the mass execution of men, women, and children, with Petroleuses in their rags and hundreds shot on the spot. Indeed, the evidence shows that during ‘Bloody Week’, May 21 to May 28, at least twenty thousand people were summarily executed, three quarters of whom had no role in the Commune at all, and in stark contrast to the relatively tiny number of victims of the Commune (Engels, 2014).

And that after the worst of the killing was complete, still more executions, continuing for years, together with sentences of hard labour for life, and transportation to New Caledonia. Such was bourgeois ‘justice’ at the time.

2.6 Russia

Vladimir Lenin, following Marx & Engels, spoke fondly of the Paris Commune, while he and Leon Trotsky likewise encouraged democracy at all levels, in their Party, the Soviets, the Factory-Shop Committees, and the Trade Unions. The evidence clearly shows that their efforts were directed at convincing a majority of the integrity of their cause through their practice, such that, for example, by way of social ‘levelling’, their abolition of private productive property, in 1918, ensured that it became the property of all and of no-one in particular. And that if violence became an issue, it flowed from elites who, though their time had come, refused to ‘leave the stage’.

Nevertheless, ideological accounts of the Russian Revolution, of October 1917, and the ensuing Civil War, make many wild claims in their haste to discredit. Such as, for example, that the Bolsheviks suffered from an ‘innate’ sense of paranoia, strikes by bank workers at the time attested to their unpopularity, and that Bolshevism was contrary to human nature, and following Winston Churchill, should have been ‘strangled’ at birth (Lenin, 1911; Trotsky, 2004; Cannon, 2014; Figs, 2014; Churchill, 2025).

There were two hundred thousand foreign nationals in Russia at the time fighting to overturn their Revolution, including US, UK, French, and Japanese troops, and, as such, if the Bolsheviks were a little uneasy with strangers it was with very good reason. The strikes among bank workers were encouraged by multi-national corporations and foreign business houses operating in Russia, which created a fund to support them. However, when it became clear that the Bolsheviks did have popular support, their largesse and the strikes collapsed. While the claim regarding Bolshevism as contrary to human nature, as Churchill’s, in their paranoia, serve well to register the degree to which the ‘spectre’

of socialism, as identified by Marx & Engels, in the mid-nineteenth century, had returned in Bolshevik form to 'haunt' elites in the early twentieth century (Reed, 2007; Trotsky, 2011; Marx & Engels, 2014b).

Winston Churchill's birthplace, Blenheim Palace, was a gift from the UK parliament to his relative, John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, for his victory against French and Bavarian forces at the Battle of Blenheim, now part of Germany, in 1704, in the War of the Spanish Succession. It has been the home of the Spencer-Churchill family ever since, and remains the very conspicuous product of privileged elites fighting on foreign soil with their private armies for economic and political gain.

The productive forces in Russia, on the eve of October 1917, though concentrated in several large cities, were not sufficiently developed, in historical materialist terms, to support socialism. However, the effects of the Civil War in de-railing the Bolshevik programme cannot be over-stated. Alongside the marauding foreign armies were the White Guards, counter-revolutionaries comprised of former imperial troops and Cossacks of the Tsar and Tsarinas' private armies, among others, for whom terror was an essential weapon, from the summary execution of civilians, to their well-known use of torture. While the shift away from Bolshevism's radical levelling agenda, reluctantly begun, in 1921, with the onset of the 'New Economic Policy', was precisely to mitigate the damage inflicted by these forces. Moreover, after Lenin's death, in 1924, Joseph Stalin pursued 'socialism in one country' as official state policy, impossible for Lenin and Trotsky, with priority oriented to good relations with the capitalist world. And with the onset of the first Five Year Plan, in 1928, any remaining proletarian input into decision-making ceased, replaced by top-down dictates (Milanovic, 2018, Sparks, 2025).

By the time of the second Five Year Plan, in 1933, and notwithstanding some genuine progress towards social equality, the Bolshevik Party under Stalin's control was dominated by bureaucrats and technocrats who, with their relatively high status, resembled a 'new bourgeoisie'. Such that, not without the 'utmost stretch' of ideological fancy could one imagine a contrast more striking than that between the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, and life in Stalin's Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Trotsky, 2004).

2.7 *Spain*

During the early years of the twentieth century, the expansion of coal, steel and textile industries in Spain, neutral during WWI and benefitting from trade with both sides to the conflict, supported a growing bourgeoisie, and, in parallel, a growing class-conscious proletariat hungry for social change. Such that, by 1918, as the Civil War in Russia raged, two 'hostile' groups confronted each other across the social divide. Uneasy and complex alliances of bourgeoisie, landed gentry and the religious, constitutive of reactionary Nationalism, and proletarians, landless agricultural labourers, and a significant bourgeois Republican tendency, constitutive of progressive Republicanism. Small free-holding peasants were the exception, whom by virtue of their ownership of small plots of land were encouraged by Nationalists to adopt a virulent anti-socialist position, with the latter ideologically depicted as 'rabble-rousing' thieves by the future usurpers of democracy itself. This heated and

often-times violent opposition continued, with sectarian governments and military dictatorships coming and going, until the election of a 'Popular Front' Republican government, in February 1936, which became the siren for the military rebellion of July of that year, and for the 'ocean' of political violence which followed (Preston, 1996).

The military, having the support of the Nationalists at home, were quick to requisition help from abroad, which was equally prompt in its response, with regular supplies coming from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, and moral support from the Vatican, which formerly recognised General Franco, the nominal head of the military, in 1937. While pleas from the overthrown democratically elected Republican government were effectively ignored by the US, UK, and France, who, following events in Russia, and on account of their own citizens' financial investments in Spain, were very nervous of their progressive politics. And while help did belatedly arrive from the USSR, in keeping with Stalin's policy of not alienating the Western powers, as a condition of such, and with few objections from bourgeois Republicans, 'radicals' within Republicanism were purged. With the whole thrust being to 'control and reverse' their tendencies, and to ensure that socialist change did not happen (Hobsbawm, 1994; Orwell, 2000).

The International Brigades commissioned to help Republicanism, in late 1936, consisted of fifty thousand volunteers from fifty countries, including from those whose governments had refused to help, and from those that had helped the Nationalists. The Nationalists also had their volunteers, notably the 'Blue Shirts', under Eoin O'Duffy, a seven hundred strong militia in religious clothes from Ireland fighting against the 'desolation' that a Republican victory would surely bring. With such ideological sentiments openly expressed, without irony it seems, in April 1937, as German and Italian warplanes were busy bombing the Basque town of Guernica, targeting civilians, the first town in history to be destroyed by aerial bombardment. And who later attempted to blame the Basques themselves for the terror, but with the evidence just too strong for their ideological ploy to work (O'Duffy in Preston, 1996).

The Blue Shirts were not in Spain for long, however, for after suffering relatively few casualties, they returned home in the Summer of 1937. Republicans remained-on nevertheless until October 1938, including the 'Abraham Lincoln Brigade', who's African-American volunteers fought alongside all their comrades in Spain, regardless of skin colour, not something seen in the racially segregated regular US military for another thirty years. While for those of them that did make it home, and survived WWII, the ideologically motivated and institutionally racist 'Jim Crow' Laws, and attacks from the House Un-American Activities Committee, were their thanks for confronting Nazism and Fascism, in Europe, just a few years before their own government did similar (Clarke, 2011).

By early 1939, all Spain had fallen under Fascist control, and in the months that followed, their remaining neutral again during WWII, according to the evidence, around ten thousand people were summarily executed, continuing into the 1940's. Hundreds of thousands were imprisoned and used as forced labour, and the proletariat had their trade union rights criminalised and wages cut, such that,

within little over a decade, wages were around half their 1936 levels. Profitable times indeed for the bourgeoisie. And for decades to come, socialism was routinely presented in Spanish super-structural institutions as ‘squalid’, with Marx and Engel’s opposition between socialism and barbarism inverted, and the two equated, in the attempt to ideologically veil the regime’s own practice in this regard (Preston, 1996; Marx & Engels, 2014b).

2.8 Germany

Following its rapid industrialisation, by the onset of the twentieth century, Germany was the largest industrial economy in Europe, with a growing bourgeoisie and large urban proletariat. In order to acquire new markets for its commodities, with production having outgrown domestic demand, like others, it set an imperialist course, thereby arousing the ire of existing imperialist powers, and leading directly to WWI. After losing the war, reparations imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, on behalf of the victors, created severe hardship, compounded by capitalist crisis, and although an improvement, in the mid-1920’s, due to the re-capitalising of the German economy, by a US fearful of social revolution, deep recession followed the Wall Street Crash, of 1929 (Lenin, 2010; Milanovic, 2018).

Indeed, mass opposition to the state of affairs post-WWI had brought Germany to the verge of socialist revolution, and as their erstwhile war-time foes, the US, UK and France, were busy taking sides in the Russian Civil War against the Bolsheviks. The ruling Social Democratic Party in Germany, on behalf of indigenous socio-economic elites, were using mercenary gangs of former soldiers to violently silence their own socialist ‘demons’ at home. The former adversaries now engaged with a common enemy, as it were. With the German economy more than likely able to support socialism, in historical materialist terms, the bourgeoisie and landed gentry had united in their opposition to it, and, through their support for the violence, helped create a political void into which the Nazis enthusiastically stepped. And again, in the early 1930’s, when the majority of Germans were voting either Nazi or Socialist, the bourgeoisie and landed elite actively intervened in support of the former, who were subsequently victorious in the 1932 General Election (Kershaw, 2025).

While initially endorsing anti-bourgeois sentiments to attract socialists who had escaped the violence, in order to boost their electoral chances, Nazi ideology soon shifted to one of contempt for ‘Jewish-Marxism’ and for Slavs, Jews and Gypsies alike. By 1933, with Adolf Hitler as Chancellor, and Fuhrer, a man of great personal charm, according to those who knew him well, the Nazis were the largest party in the Reichstag, and thereafter began to systematically disable all political opposition therein. Such that, any remaining socialist-leaning members refusing to comply with their ideology were purged, with the Gestapo and SS, secret police and political police, respectively, performing similarly in civil society (Clarke, 2011; Speer, 2025).

And thus it was that after gaining political prominence through the democratic process, the Nazis dismantled democracy in Germany.

Following which, the armed forces were modernised, with the Spanish Civil War, as we have seen, providing a good opportunity for them to test their improved capabilities to hurt people, in preparation for the conflict they knew was coming, as they were going to start it.

2.9 The Eastern Front

In June 1941, with Western Europe tamed militarily, 'Operation Barbarossa' was launched by Germany and its allies against the USSR, the largest invasion force in history, comprised of almost four million military personnel, including thousands of volunteers from Fascist Spain, the so-called 'Blue Division' and anti-Bolshevik volunteers from occupied France. It was a huge factor in deciding the outcome of WWII, with the intention being to clear the region to secure 'living-space' for Germanic peoples. However, rather than identifying imperialist rivalries and capitalist crises as ultimately responsible for their woes during and after WWI, Nazi ideology continued to push another way, in Herman Goering's words, to unleash a 'racial' war in order to improve Germany's lot (Hobsbawm, 1994; Goering, 2025).

By September 1941, the Siege of Leningrad had begun, bombed constantly from the air, Guernica style, targeting evacuees as they fled, and lasting for almost two and a half years, with starvation actively used as a military strategy.

Then the battle for Stalingrad, July 1942 until February 1943, in which the Fuhrer took a keen interest, and did not want to hear that the battle for the city was lost, but hear he did.

'Operation Zitadelle' followed, in July 1943, with the Nazi attack on the Kursk Salient, which had been turned into a 'fortress' by the USSR's Red Army. Previously occupied by the invaders until retaken following Stalingrad, it was a 'desperate' place before Zitadelle started at all, while in their attack, the Nazis and their allies precipitated the largest armoured battle ever seen (Clarke, 2011).

Thus, driven-on by an ideology which placed no value on the lives of those they encountered in their colonising quest, the battle of Prokhorovka began on July 12, around fifty miles south of Kursk, with hundreds of tanks facing-off against each other, elite German Panzers and the Red Army's T-34's. On July 23, however, operations were halted following orders from the Fuhrer, the last Nazi offensive in the East was lost, one from which they would not recover. By early September, they were in retreat and the Red Army in pursuit, but at a huge cost after engaging the Nazis and their allies alone in Europe for two years, despite pleas for help from their US, UK, and French allies, which were dismissed as 'impractical' at the time.

It being estimated, with exact figures unknown, that ten million military and seventeen million civilians were lost to the USSR, as a consequence of fighting on the Eastern Front, around ten times the total of all the other Allies combined during the entire war. With the notable exception of China, as we shall see (Clarke, 2011).

At the end of the war, in Europe, in 1945, the former Nazi commander on the Eastern Front, Erich von Manstein, was held in relative luxury as a POW in Wales, in stark contrast to the Nazi death camps, all six of which were in the East in occupied Poland - Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek,

Sobibor and Treblinka. Whose killing operations were either stopped as the Nazi offensive faltered, or were liberated by the advancing Red Army. And where, in addition to Jewish people and others, occurred the ideologically driven slaughter of around three million male and female Red Army POW's (Snyder, 2010).

After mounting pressure from the USSR, von Manstein was eventually convicted of war crimes, in 1949, for which he received eighteen years, but served four. From aristocratic origins, his intense dislike of socialism earned him the admiration of Western bourgeois elites, and when released he was recruited as an adviser to military alliance NATO, created specifically to counter the 'communist' threat five years earlier.

3. Post WWII and Contemporary

Following WWII, the renowned physicist, Albert Einstein, argued that a socially planned global economy was essential if human beings were ever to move beyond the 'predatory' phase of their development. However, he was not listened to on this occasion, and the billions of US dollars given in Marshall Aid to Europe was spent in rebuilding capitalist structures and practices, thereby creating a demand for US goods and services. And, as the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' was announced to New York and the rest of the 'free' world, in violently silencing popular anti-fascist and socialist movements in Greece and Italy, for example. By the late 1940's, following the 'Truman Doctrine' and Churchill's 'Iron Curtain' rhetoric, international capital had re-asserted itself, the USSR's sacrifices forgotten, and, with the onset of the Cold War, now the 'enemy' once again (United Nations; 1948; Einstein, 1949; Chomsky, 2012).

And although, by 1951, twenty per cent of the UK economy was 'nationalised', the main beneficiaries were bourgeois, as only ailing industries were included, whose products, when fed-back into private production suitably subsidised, guaranteed a degree of profitability for private capital (Kishtainy et al., 2012).

Indeed, for almost thirty years, following 1945, the so-called 'Golden Age' of capitalism, 'massive' government subsidies were the norm for the bourgeoisie in many developed economies. Including the 'welfare' spend, anywhere between thirty and fifty per cent of total government outlay, which, by sub-venting low incomes and no incomes at all, provided a prop for the 'free' market, while maintaining a degree of consumer demand, and a counter-tendency to the now falling rate of profit (Chang, 2014).

The US was by far the dominant world economic power at this stage, nevertheless, the ideology of such as a beacon of pluralism was belied by increasing evidence to the contrary. Millions remained in dire poverty, particularly African-Americans, and other minorities, who faced widespread discrimination, as we have seen, but by no means confined to them. Moreover, the onset of the Civil Rights Movement, in the 1960's, gave effect to the evidence, as did vociferous opposition to the increasingly visible and class-based 'power-elite' at the head of the self-serving US 'military-industrial complex,' to use

President Eisenhower's own words. And although poverty rates as a proportion of the population fell from around twenty-five to eleven per cent by the early 1970's, helped by the increasing roll-out of welfare, especially at the Federal level. The so-called 'American Dream', whether understood as an assertion of potential prosperity for any and all if prepared to work hard, or as an ideal of universal social justice, became increasingly discredited - dream-like indeed, without substance for so many (Patterson, 1981; Eisenhower in Hall and Scraton, 1985; Churchwell, 2021; O'Neill, 2024).

By the mid-1970's, the bourgeois 'heyday' was over across the developed economies, with capitalism in crisis once again, and despite the rosy promises at the onset of neo-liberalism, in the early 1980's, as we shall see. For the next thirty years, the large economies of the OECD were lucky to record average annual growth in low single figures, with two and a half per cent considered stagnation by mainstream economists. And since the financial crisis of 2007/8, allowing for Covid-19, and the slow-down of the erstwhile driver of global economic growth, the Chinese economy, even this has been 'elusive' (Harvey, 2007; Chomsky, 2012; Piketty, 2021).

3.1 China

Japan invaded Manchuria, in 1931, armed with their long-held ideology of Chinese inferiority, and by the following year occupied China north of the Great Wall, including the port city of Shanghai, thereby securing abundant natural resources and important trade routes. In 1937, the conflict escalated, signalling the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War, which merged with WWII, in 1940, as Japan joined with the Axis powers, Germany and Italy, against the Allies. During which pro-market Nationalists and Communists, although bitter opponents in the Chinese Civil War, which had begun in 1929, united in their opposition to Japanese brutality. Indeed, in countering the Japanese threat, and in preventing them from opening another front across the long land border between China and Russia, which would have helped the Nazis greatly. The Chinese made a huge contribution to defeating fascism, with similar catastrophic losses to the USSR, although seldomly acknowledged in the context of Cold War ideology (Jacques, 2012; McKenna et al., 2025; Lau, 2025).

Following the end of the Civil War, in 1949, hostilities having resumed, in 1945, with the Communists triumphant, and the Nationalists fleeing to Taiwan region, the market-place was replaced with central planning. And despite an ideologically inspired total trade embargo imposed by the US, the economy grew at between four and five per cent annually, accompanied by significant social improvements, including increased literacy and life expectancy. However, after Chairman Mao's death, in 1976, his successors embarked on a series of arbitrary 'reforms', including the re-imposition of the market-place, and the creation of 'special economic zones' amenable to Foreign Direct Investment. Such that, by the early 1980's, with the neo-liberal lifting of restrictions on the movement of capital across national borders, with its large and relatively cheap labour force, China was an attractive place to do business for foreign-based multi-nationals (Jacques, 2012).

Capital inflow increased exponentially, and China became the largest recipient of Foreign Direct Investment in the world – driven-on by a booming China, by the turn of this century, East Asia's GDP

was larger than that of the US, having been around three times smaller in 1950. While by 2016, in Purchasing Power Parity terms, Chinese GDP alone was larger than that of the US (Maddison in Jacques, 2012; Frankopan, 2018).

Millions have been lifted out of poverty as a consequence, but there has been a huge price to pay socially and environmentally within China, and climatically within and without its borders. Inequality has mushroomed, and as the 'new bourgeoisie' revel in conspicuous consumption, many are unable to afford the basics, healthcare and education, which in Chairman Mao's time were guaranteed for life. Moreover, dire pollution is rife, and China long ago became the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, although the US is still so per capita (Frankopan, 2018).

Thus marking contemporary 'Chinese Socialism', behind the ideological veil, as remarkably akin to authoritarian capitalism.

3.2 Capital Flight

As we have seen, with the onset of neo-liberalism, and with Western economies stagnant, many large corporations took full advantage of the low labour costs in East Asia, typically between four and five per cent of gross revenue, as against twenty and thirty-five per cent in developed economies, as a counter-tendency to the falling rate of profit. With little concern expressed over 'capital flight' at the time, used presently as a pretext for not 'overly' taxing corporations in case they should relocate elsewhere, the process was supported from the political super-structure with claims that there was simply no alternative to it, and that prosperity awaited all as a consequence. However, neo-liberalism has proved to be an adept ideological conduit for the re-constitution of class-based wealth and privilege, with high incomes and wealth redirected and combined in the same people, that is, in the 'already haves'. And with levels of inequality not seen since Edwardian times, the consequences for the majority in the developed economies have been just about the opposite of those promised (Harvey, 2007; Piketty, 2014).

While in terms of climate change, outsourcing to East Asia has ensured that Ultra Large Container Vessels continue to traverse the seas between the US, Europe and Asia, with each burning hundreds of gallons of dirty tar-like 'bunker-fuel' every day, releasing toxic sulphur and carbon as they go, highly harmful to human health, environment and climate alike. And as average global temperatures, in 2024, the warmest year on record, exceeded one-and-a-half degrees above pre-industrial levels for the first time, with the ten warmest years since 1850 being the last ten, this has kept 'green-washing' ideologues very busy.

The market-trading of 'carbon offsets', forests and meadows, for example, an ideologically expedient way for big polluters to continue doing so while 'conjuring-away' their grimy secrets. The fallacy that 'secondary' energy sources derived from fossil fuels, such as hydrogen, are 'renewable' forms. The fancy of a commercially viable (i.e. profitable) green aviation fuel, as the single largest order for new aircraft in aviation history is signed between Air India and Airbus, thereby signalling clear intent to add to the sectors already significant contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. And not forgetting the

language of weather reporting having adapted to normalise climate change, wherein a ‘typical’ autumn and winter in the UK and Ireland now has several named ‘storms of the season’, which, only a generation ago, was very untypical indeed (Klein, 2015; RTE, 2021; Inamdar, 2023; Lear, 2024; Carey, 2024; BBC, 2025).

3.3 Mainstream Voices

The long-standing European Enlightenment opposition to inequality has been abandoned in the contemporary era among elites, and is now celebrated instead, making a virtue of necessity, while mainstream economics has not been found ideologically wanting in this regard. The recent claim by former UK Prime Minister, Liz Truss, for example, echoing Malthus down the years, that all attempts at wealth and income redistribution should be avoided as socio-economic inequality is good for society, simply confirms the views of contemporary mainstream economists, despite ample evidence that the opposite is the case. But then mainstream economics are now neo-liberal, with generations schooled in its orthodoxy at this stage, and while continuing to feign the status of a natural rather than social science, such theoretical changes that have been made in the attempt to render its models more relevant are self-contradictory. That of ‘market-failure’, for example, and its belated acknowledgment that markets can be ‘sub-optimal’, when their optimality remains a central tenet of mainstream philosophy (Chang, 2014; Piketty, 2021; BBC, 2024).

In the developing world, outside of resurgent East Asia, millions succumb to hunger and preventable disease every year, a situation exacerbated by climate change and conflict. And while this may appear to confirm the mainstream tenet of ‘scarcity’, this is not so, as remedial food and medicines are available, and in sufficient quantities, but they come at a price, and always with a profit in mind (Eisenstein, 2011; Moore in Brown, 2013).

Bourgeois markets distinguish between ‘wants’ and ‘needs’ in this respect, with only the former recognised by them, a want being a need with the ability to pay. If there is no ability to pay, there is no need, and hence no want. With this play on words drawing an ideological veil over the incapacity of the market-place to recognise such suffering, with so many lives and potentials lost because of structures and practices that simply will not allow for the full application of existing means. A situation, moreover, by no means confined to the developing world, but present whenever and wherever such considerations frustrate the roll-out of available resources and technologies to people in need of them.

By far the greater proportion of greenhouse gases have been produced in developed economies historically, with the wealthiest one per cent in the world creating more carbon than the poorest fifty per cent presently. Driving climate change, disturbing the rainy seasons, producing more frequent drought-like conditions, and helping to destroy the lives of the poorest on the planet (Piketty, 2021; Ritchie & Roser, 2024).

While all the largest arms dealers world-wide are based in the US, Europe, Russia, and China, producing weapons which logically have to be used to maintain a demand for more, and without which deadly conflicts across the former colonial world and beyond would be untenable (Macchi, 2025).

Other mainstream models are also inconsistent with the evidence, including the claim, for example, that ‘self-interested’ individuals competing in the market-place on the basis of ability and effort provide optimal results for all. When the evidence clearly shows that capital, in both its economic and embedded social forms, accumulates and intersects over time, conferring on those who have them, in contrast to ‘meritocratic’ ideology, a distinct and striking advantage in life. And attested to by the strong tendency for people to remain firmly in the social class into which they are born for their entire lives (Bourdieu, 1986; Milanovic, 2018).

The related ideology of ‘trickle-down’ economics, when the evidence also confirms that enriching the wealthy benefits no-body but the wealthy, while the ‘fortunes’ of the poorest fifty per cent in developed economies remain at ‘almost nothing’, where they have been for hundreds of years (Piketty, 2021; Hope & Limberg, 2023).

However, perhaps mainstream economics’ finest ideological hour inheres in its claim that ‘cost-benefit’ analysis, which shapes product design, with nothing added unless benefits, in terms of how much consumers are prepared to pay, outweigh the costs involved, is actually embedded in the natural world. The presence of this principle in nature is attested to, apparently, and for example, by the fact that male Elephant Seals are much larger than females, consequent on having to compete with other males for their attentions. The benefits of size include exclusive access to females, which helps to explain the enduring size differences, as successful genes are passed on from one generation to the other. On the other hand, the costs are such that the relative bulk of males makes them slower, and hence more vulnerable to predators, with the balance reflected in the surviving males (Frank, 2008).

Nevertheless, the equivalence made here is a fallacy, as economic choices are made by people, whereas natural laws are not subject to the will of humans, or indeed Elephants. However, the ideological significance of the contrived sameness is to falsely imply that, just as nature is non-negotiable, likewise, there is no alternative to neo-liberal capitalism.

3.4 Critical Voices

It is common to find contemporary ‘critical’ voices which, while offering constructive criticism, also have tendencies to compound the mystifications of bourgeois ideology....

Those drawing wild equivalences, for example, between the practices of Vladimir Lenin and Adolph Hitler, contrary to the evidence, while also respecting private productive property and the market-place as part of the solution to societal woes, and, moreover, advocating for general economic ‘de-growth’ (Monbiot, 2018).

If we wish for a world in which people support rather than confront each other, and where everyone has enough to live in comfort and dignity, private productive property and the market-place can have no place therein, because of their strong tendencies to the contrary - linked, as they intimately are, with selfish competition and the individual accumulation of wealth. Furthermore, technologically-driven economic growth is a potential enabler of progressive and environmentally-friendly social change, but while productive practices continue to be oriented around profit maximisation above all else, this is

fundamentally frustrated. With production released from such a requirement, the possibilities for people and planet are huge.

Those claiming a central role going forward for bankers and their ‘beautiful’ uses for money capital, while also refuting the idea of collectivising productive resources altogether, on the basis that productive property is not the issue, which is, rather, the on-going break-down of community (Eisenstein, 2011).

Seemingly oblivious to the central role of money capital and private productive property in precipitating fundamental communal decay, by configuring whole societies, for example, in terms of social class, thereby erecting barriers between the haves and have-nots of this world.

Those asserting a preference for relative rather than absolute measures of income inequality, as the latter, in highlighting increases at the extremes, may add to an already ‘inflammatory’ situation. And claiming that geography, where one lives, rather than social class, lately determines one’s economic status, notwithstanding some ‘unusual’ factors, such as, the inter-marrying of privileged people, which contradict this (Milanovic, 2018).

When it is the role of social scientists, critical or not, to confront truth claims contrary to the evidence regardless. Furthermore, wherever capitalism goes social class contradictions go too, and the poor in developed economies are no less poor in their contexts for being wealthy relative to other poor people in theirs. While regarding the unusual factors, they are as old as capitalism itself, and are class-based solidarities.

And those who claim, thanks to capitalism, that ‘most’ people around today have ‘plenty’, and agree that a certain degree of inequality is optimal in order to incentivise others. Nevertheless, who also claim, consequent on returns from capital being relatively high, and economic growth relatively low, as presently, that inequality is now at ‘unacceptable’ levels. Such that, increased taxes on wealth, a fifteen-hour working week, and minimum wage are needed now to redress this, and to realise our ‘utopia’ (Bregman, 2018).

Marx & Engels were well aware of capitalism’s power to develop productive capacity, as historical materialism explains, the point being that it has now become a brake on further social progress precisely because its capabilities to address real need in this world will not be used if no gain accrues for the capitalist class in so doing, such is the nature of capital, as I have argued. Moreover, and on the contrary, abundance is not an issue for nearly half the world’s people who exist in dire poverty, and it is unclear how the measures advocated here are going to change this. And just as political democracy without economic democracy rings hollow, it is a poor utopia indeed in which social inequalities, with all their negative consequences, as we have seen, remain fundamental, and culpable socio-economic and political structures and practices in place. Unless a neo-liberal of course.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this essay, I have focussed on ideology, defined as representation in the service of sectional interests, often-times contrary to the evidence, and its historical and contemporary significance. Informed by an historical materialist philosophy, I include sketches of the Industrial Revolution, in the UK, the trans-Atlantic slave-trade, and slavery in the Americas, the Paris Commune, of 1871, Russia post-1917, Spain post-WWI and 1936-39, Germany post-WWI, and the Eastern Front during WWII. And contemporarily, post-WWII political economy, the onset of neo-liberalism, in the early 1980's, the re-emergence of China as a global economic player, and latterly mainstream economics and social 'critiques'.

It is difficult to over-state the force of ideological practice throughout. From falsely presenting social structures and practices serving sectional interests as if serving the commonweal. And negative depictions of the 'other', stripped of their humanity and often-times brutalised in the extreme. Through its role as a legitimising tendency in the characteristic refusal of socio-economic and political elites to relinquish their privileges without a violent struggle. To the warranting of the contemporary assertion, amid theoretical self-contradiction and inconsistency, that there is no alternative to neo-liberal capitalism, and nothing to see elsewhere.

Materiality, however, is 'stubborn' and is as it is until such time as changed through practice, and while some would have us believe that it is what it is not, it remains the case that we cannot simply present the world as we would like it to be, and merely asserting something does not make it so. Perhaps Marx & Engels did underestimate the ability of the bourgeoisie to diffuse their ideologies going-forward through super-structural institutions, and that this would likely increase in parallel to the technologies which have rendered socialism itself tenable. But then neither did they have a crystal ball.

Nevertheless, given the centrality of ideological practices for securing the interests of dominant elites, they remain a good place to begin any challenge to them. Whether historical with repercussions in the present, or contemporary, the key is to unveil them for what they are, and for what they attempt to do. To negate their tendencies to false consciousness with counter-tendencies to enlighten and accurately inform based on the available and independently verifiable evidence, and in the process to raise awareness to this effect, as has been my purpose here. So that we are all hopefully better able to recognise pretenders along the way.

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