

1. Introduction

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Because they (citizens) press for more action to meet the problems they have to face, they require more social control. At the same time they resist any kind of social control that is associated with the hierarchical values they have learned to discard and reject. The problem may be worldwide.

The Crisis of Democracy 1975 Trilateral Commission Report¹

This collection is centred on the fundamental problem of creating legitimacy for capitalism: how can an inherently and profoundly anti-democratic system contain and limit dissent and at the same time present itself as ostensibly 'democratic'? It will examine how ideological and material limits are placed on democratic practice, suppressing oppositional politics and restricting people's freedoms in order to protect the capitalist social order from challenges for greater social, economic and political equality and freedoms. It will argue that these limits are sustained using hollowed out, carefully managed versions of 'democracy', which exploit the popular appeal of democratic ideals while suppressing political dissent. Thus the grand promise of social and political equality is exploited to protect a system which requires gross social and political inequality.

Capitalism is dependent upon its relentless expansion and penetration into new spheres - such as land, resources and forms of labour - and consequently can permit only a very limited degree of popular participation. This is restricted to nominal political 'rights'

which are separated from, and privileged over, socio-economic equality. Thus even while inequality deepens, our legal and social sanctioned political agency is largely limited to choosing between a selection of politically homogeneous parties once every four to five years. These elections have become empty, largely symbolic rituals, in which professionalised marketing campaigns elide any substantial political debate. Meanwhile, our legal avenues to hold our putative representatives to account, or to persuade them to take heed of our demands, are restricted to actions via pressure groups or tame and largely ineffectual protests about specific, isolated issues. This ensures that the capitalist system is able to reap catastrophic damage upon subject populations and the environment, even to the extent of threatening the habitability of the planet, while remaining, for the most part, insulated from public challenge.

Yet it is a widely held belief that, in an inseparable and providential union, democracy and capitalism have, in most countries of the world, defeated the forces of authoritarianism, and granted us universal political freedoms. Some also hold the less positive view that there is no other potential system which could meet our needs, wants and desires, and that 'democratic' capitalism is the least bad option. Such beliefs are crucial to the subtle and insidious processes of organising popular consent to the capitalist social order, and so to containing people's oppositional demands arising from the ever-worsening social polarity and economic oppression. The belief that we live in a democracy is also crucial to the legitimisation of the use of repression, even military interventions to fight for 'democracy', when such demands are not successfully contained; demands which are so often cast as undemocratic and even pernicious.

As the contributions to this volume will show powerfully, a highly limited concept and practice of democracy, with its accompanying rhetoric, has been developed in parallel with the emergence of the capitalist system, to manage and contain dissent, shroud and legitimate the oppression that capitalism requires, and heavily confine our political responses to it. For capitalism requires firm limits on who has political power in order to function, and consequently, our political actions must be channelled into forms which do not fundamentally threaten its operations. Frequently this happens via subtle and obscure processes of co-optation and neutralisation of public opinion and of what is termed civil society, i.e. social institutions that are, at least in theory, in a position to challenge the state or the market. Vital too is the reverse side of co-optation - the marginalisation and repression of those elements which transgress the boundaries of safe, manageable dissent. Thus

'democracy' is *managed*, in order to contain dissent, and ensure it does not threaten transnational capitalism, corporate power and elite interests. *Managing Democracy, Managing Dissent* brings into sharp focus some of these mechanisms, and explores how limited and heavily circumscribed 'democratic' processes and ideology facilitates the organisation of consent, and legitimates the use of coercion when that consent is lacking, in order to constrain our political freedoms.²

Fundamentally, capitalism - the economic and political system by which goods and services are privately owned, commodified and distributed through the market - requires the majority to sell their labour in order to keep generating profits, while also relying upon both women's unpaid work in the private sphere to ensure the reproduction of labour power and the existence of a large pool of labour which remains unenfranchised and unintegrated into the formal wage economy. Such an exploitative system necessitates the majority relinquishing a great deal of their power over the political, social and economic forces that mould everyday life. In modern-day capitalism, political and economic decisions are made largely in the interests of corporations - the institutional managers of the capitalist system - their profit margins, and a transnational class of elites. Governments frequently serve as vital handmaids of the perpetual drive for the profits and resources. They create and maintain the conditions necessary for continual capitalist accumulation, and provides protection from the resistance capitalism inevitably provokes, via the legitimization of capitalism and repression of dissent. From political policing to generous corporate-friendly legislation, from massive bank bailouts to military interventions to secure corporate access to valuable resources and markets, governments protect the functioning of the market and the constant accumulation of capital above all other social or ecological considerations. Wide-ranging political and economic decisions which affect the lives of billions are made in largely unaccountable inter-governmental institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Such anti-democratic forms of governance are necessary to ensure that the corporate engine continues to accumulate profit through new resources, new markets and ever cheaper sources of labour. The socio-political polarity thus intensifies as global capitalist penetration deepens, making the task of its legitimization increasingly difficult. For as social and economic oppression intensifies, so can the clamours for redress, clamours which must be contained. This is the contradiction at the heart of capitalism, and that which demonstrates the lie of democratic capitalism.

It is thus essential that the incompatibility of genuine democracy

and capitalism is disguised, and for the majority to believe that democracy and capitalism are not only compatible but indivisible: that one engenders the other. And if this connection seems not to be quite watertight it is reinforced by the more negative notion that capitalism is the form of social organisation truest to basic human nature, and thus no more equitable, or sustainable system is possible. Together, they help to engender the widely held belief that challenging capitalism is not only misguided but unprogressive, even pernicious, and as a result, deserving of the marginalisation and repression it receives. This ideological perversion of 'democracy' is therefore used to create a hegemonic order in which a set of beliefs which broadly correspond to the 'democratic' nature or at least potential of capitalism becomes so accepted, even internalised, throughout the public mind, that it acquires the status of 'common-sense' or even of a self-evident 'truth', and thus opposing values or ideas are deemed 'illegitimate' or 'unacceptable' or even 'illogical'. Unlike more totalitarian systems, such ideological hegemony does not entail one particular dominant world-view, but allows for a variety of differing opinions as long as they do not transgress particular boundaries of 'legitimate' or 'reasonable' values, opinions and actions. In this way a semblance of plurality and open debate can be created, even though the overall limits can in effect be as rigid as any totalitarian system, but without as much overt policing of thought and action. For if these notions are largely internalised, the need for them to be so visibly policed by overt propaganda or coercion, which would only expose the pretence of democracy, is obviated. The power of ideological hegemony results from its ability to limit or repress the imagination of the possible or even conceivable, thereby facilitating the implementation of policies and systems which might otherwise be deeply unpopular, and the incorporation, recuperation and neutralisation of forms of politics which might otherwise have remained fundamentally oppositional.

The belief in the inevitability, viability and democratic nature of capitalism within civil society leads to popular consent - that is, the majority participate in a social order even though it is inherently incapable of achieving social equality, or meeting our needs and interests, and is an order over which we have very little say. Today, most people have little choice but to sell their labour in return for the minimal freedoms granted by wages, although many others have not been granted even this, hard-fought, concession. Either way, labour provides the profit necessary for the continued accumulation of capital, and the majority are left with a meagre degree of wealth and freedom which suffices to contain antagonism and dissent. In addition, the jobs most of us are permitted are actively connected to the maintenance of capitalist

systems of production, providing surplus profit for employers, providing the social welfare services that train and educate workers and providing services that seek to soften the worst effects of socio-economic inequalities. As the capitalist system is forced to become more coercive to protect the social and public order, so the security industry increases its share of the labour market - the army, police, prison officers, security guards, private mercenaries etc. In return we are 'rewarded' with grossly unequal wages, with which we are compelled to purchase or rent basic requirements for life, such as food and housing, which have all become ensnared by the market. Meanwhile, services such as education and healthcare are becoming even more overtly divorced from our control, increasingly placed in the hands of private companies over which we have even less authority than our governments. The idea of common ownership and entitlement of such provisions has been hacked away at to such an extent that to advocate more democratic control is to risk accusations of naivety or lunacy. Trapped in the capitalist system in which we must participate to gain the money necessary for survival, anti-capitalist, democratic notions contradict the prevalent 'common-sense' and are thus rarely heard, let alone heeded. Instead, we are force-fed the illogical 'truth' that capitalism is inevitable and progressive, and that, in spite of the inherent social limits to capital accumulation, and the obvious finiteness of the planet's resources, it will eventually provide for all; indeed, that it is the only system that ever will.

Of course, this is not to negate the reality of people's conflict with the system. People will continue to fight to improve their lives and the lives of others, in spite of the way economic dependence on work and economic insecurity limits the time and energy available for such efforts. But collective internalisation of the 'truth' of the 'democratic' nature of capitalism and its destiny to engender the best possible life for all, can limit such struggles, and heavily circumscribe their political intent, when they do emerge. For a collective belief in the illegitimacy of challenging the fundamentals of capitalism will engender only reformist political activity - that is, working to make certain changes which even if granted remain compatible with the functioning of the wider social order. Arguably, such actions which can be incorporated within the system actually strengthen the capitalist social order, insofar as they create the impression of a citizenry armed with democratic political freedoms to effect change. And so, great lengths are taken to co-opt resistance struggles, and to keep them within these boundaries, thereby protecting the capitalist system and reproducing the ideology of 'democracy'. And while activities which are not contained in this way, and which do fundamentally challenge that system, are deemed to be morally

illegitimate, it becomes legitimate to use state (or privatised) repression against them, ironically in the name of protecting ‘democracy’.

Today, the processes of managing dissent via the ideology of democratic capitalism are highly developed. Yet as a consequence of many processes, including the deepening globalising penetration of capitalism, the resulting financial crisis and the accompanying imposed austerity measures, the ecological crisis asserting the planetary limits on capitalist expansion, and the structural social limits to capital accumulation (the ability or willingness of workers to keep working and consumers to keep consuming), the hegemonic order is arguably becoming increasingly vulnerable. The myth of ‘democracy’ has to be carefully and constantly (re)created, not only in the media and other information-producing institutions, but also through the influencing, neutralising and outright repression of people’s political agency. From the structures and nature of institutions through which people choose to take political action, to the sources of funding for political groups; from the the circumscription and control of information and culture to which people have access, to the manipulation of the very language we have to describe our realities, much of this channelling and influencing is subtle, insidious and, even covert, taking effect incrementally and cumulatively. But sometimes the process is forced to be more overt, risking exposure, particularly when people resist co-option and containment and so coercion must be applied. The struggles over the meanings and definitions of democracy form a fundamental battleground in the struggle for a just and equitable world. It is thus vital to try and understand this issue, from a theoretical, historical and contemporary perspective.

This volume thus aims to expose some of the overt and covert ways in which democracy is managed to protect unequal power structures of capitalism from the potential force of participatory democracy. It is made up of five sections, which together build a picture of how the hollow promise of capitalist ‘democracy’ is promoted, while our political thoughts and actions are heavily circumscribed through subtle and sometimes not so subtle methods, in order to protect capitalism and forestall genuine democracy. The articles vary in length, style and form, and do not correspond to a single, unified viewpoint, or way of addressing this problem, but we hope they will inspire debate. What they do share is a common critique of the current ideology of capitalist ‘democracy’, and a sense of the urgency with which it needs to be challenged.

The first section explores the relationship between capitalism and democracy, from both historical and contemporary angles. In the

introductory chapter I trace the contradictions which underpin this symbiotic relationship, and continually shape both capitalism and democracy, demonstrating how liberal democracy has evolved into a means of achieving hegemonic control in tandem with the emergence and ongoing expansion of the capitalist system, even while the democratic claims of the capitalist order become ever more untenable. This is followed by David Whyte's exploration of how, as democratic rhetoric becomes increasingly unable to mask the anti-democratic practices and deepening inequalities that neoliberalism requires, naked economic coercion disguised as the public interest, which Whyte terms 'market patriotism', is promoted as an end in itself. William I. Robinson's examination builds on this analysis with an examination of the impact of the financial crisis on the organisation of consent and global hegemony, arguing that it has led to the increased use of coercion, as consensual mechanisms of social control struggle to contain the massive structural inequalities of 21st century capitalism.

Section two provides a closer examination of how public opinion is manipulated to induce obedience to the prerogatives of corporate dominated capitalism. David Cromwell and David Edwards explore how the mainstream media slavishly protects corporate and state interests by ensuring that radical, challenging and systemically critical viewpoints are marginalised, excluded, and delegitimised, creating the sense that it is only 'common-sense' to endorse capitalism and state and corporate power, rather than to expose and challenge their patently destructive and catastrophic effects. This idea of 'common-sense' extends to the definition of democracy itself: the article illustrates how the media has become a crucial weapon in the ideological battle to confirm capitalism as democratic. This theme is broadened out in an interview with Matthew Alford in which he explains how the US entertainment industry has increasingly become effectively one large, multi-billion dollar profit making propaganda machine, in which state interference, corporate advertising and the supremacy of profits strictly, but covertly, police the messages emanating from mainstream film and television companies. In this way the likelihood that these cultural products will include viewpoints which challenge the status quo or capitalist logic is drastically curtailed, thereby providing vast amounts of ideological ammunition in defence of capitalism and US imperialism. Michael Barker then examines the close associations between several media celebrities and elite foundations and corporate and political interests in supposedly humanitarian interventions, exposing the neocolonial and neoliberal agendas this propaganda serves. Finally, James Petras demonstrates how the very language we have to describe our world is

manipulated to hinder attempts to challenge fundamentally state and corporate agendas. He illuminates just how pervasively and perniciously propaganda can police our minds and our imaginations, and insists upon the rejection of euphemistic and deceptive terms and the development of new analytical frameworks which accurately describe the harsh conditions we face and enable radical struggle against them.

Sections three and four explore the subtle mechanisms through which public opinion and action are influenced and policed through the twin processes of co-option and repression, based on the understanding of civil society as a crucial battleground in the struggle to define democracy upon which rests the success or failure of the organisation of consent. This section begins with William K. Carroll and Matthew Greeno's examination of how consent is organised and social movements co-opted via cultural, economic and political processes that divide and rule while emptying democratic content from politics and instilling in us a possessive individualism and a faith in the global market. Sibille Merz's article focuses on the role of NGOs in co-opting, neutralising and disarming radical grassroots dissent, with a case study of the increasing presence of NGOs in Palestine, more precisely, the West Bank towns of Ramallah and al-Bireh. Using on her own fieldwork, she explores the effects of the neoliberal paradigm on the restructuring of social formations through the external funding and promotion of civil society groups, especially NGOs, arguing that neoliberal restructuring of international aid has aimed to transform societies and subjectivities around the notion of 'enterprise', via depoliticised concepts such as human rights, tolerance, and diversity. This has weakened the national resistance movement, diverting it away from collective resistance and towards individualised, depoliticised and professionalised forms of political agency.

Michael Barker continues this line of inquiry and delves into the murky world of corporate and elite philanthropy. His article highlights an often forgotten relationship of power, through which elites use funding to co-opt and de-fang political formations which threaten to disrupt capitalist social relations, with reference to historical examples of how this has been achieved. Edmund Berger pursues this topic further with an exploration into how political foundations seek to co-opt and neuter potentially revolutionary movements both domestically and internationally. The final article in this section is written by The Free Association and argues that stronger forms of political organisation can help mitigate the use of shock (i.e. panic, disorientation and exhaustion) which can discipline our thinking and induce us to fall back on reactionary tropes to try and understand our complicated and fast-

changing world. They argue that stronger, flexible and resilient forms of political organisation are necessary to challenge more effectively neoliberalism's colonisation of the possible, and fight political and social transformation. Meanwhile, Katie Pollard and Maria Young contrast the state and media responses to the UK student protests and the August riots, concluding that the student demonstrations were recognised as a legitimate struggle and were thus more easily recuperated whereas the rioters, who did not make demands or appeal to the putative democratic nature of the state, were unco-optable and consequently received harsher condemnation and repression. Their analysis reveals the existence of fixed, often silent but always powerful, parameters of 'legitimate' and 'acceptable' dissent, which exist to safeguard the 'democratic' capitalist system.

Section four explores how comparable repression is legitimated when co-option does not work or is not possible. Charles Thorpe examines the imposition of an authoritarian, neoliberal model upon the University of California and the police repression of the student protests that these reforms prompted. He explores the university administration's attempts to legitimate its actions by using the language though not the substance of democracy, under which dialogue and political agency is tolerated only within strict parameters. His account provides a illuminating snapshot of the interrelations at one university between neoliberalism, education, co-option and repression. Meanwhile, Tom Anderson explores government attempts to repress dissent in the UK through legislation, extra-judicial measures, violence and the creation of a climate of fear. In doing so, he illustrates how such repression is ironically justified via the evocation of the 'rule of law', which is claimed will bring democracy and freedom. He then explores these issues further in an interview with Verity Smith about the use of undercover police officers to channel covertly and manipulate activists' political activities.

The final section examines the the practice of 'democracy promotion'; that is the deployment by US and European governments and their allies of 'assistance' to mould the political structures, civil society and media industries of countries of strategic interest. Here Edmund Berger examines the network of US organisations involved in democracy promotion, which he follows up with an investigation into how these organisations have used the opportunity provided by the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa to attempt to try and ensure that the emerging political formations will facilitate corporate penetration into the region by acquiescing with US-led transnational elite and corporate interests. Finally, I examine the work of the UK-

based Westminster Foundation for Democracy, a 'democracy promotion' organisation which has received remarkably little scrutiny, but which is integral to the UK government's efforts to shape the political landscapes of regions and countries in pursuance of its foreign policy strategy.

These mechanisms of manipulation, co-option, and coercion work in tandem to manage dissent, using an ideology of 'democracy' as justification. There are of course many other mechanisms and topics which this collection has not had the space to examine. For instance, the processes and impacts of the incorporation of labour movements, particularly trades unions, into structures of governance, have not been covered here. Nor have today's increasingly sophisticated propaganda, marketing and electioneering systems been given adequate attention,³ nor the development of academic discourses which fuel the ideology of 'democracy'. In particular, there has been insufficient space here to detail how 'democracy' has been used to justify horrific levels of coercion, as exemplified in the invasion and so-called 'reconstruction' of Iraq. The ongoing subversion of 'democracy' in the wake of the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East also requires deeper exploration. However, we hope this volume will have provided a snapshot of some of the mechanisms through which democracy is suppressed and consent organised, and will provoke readers' interest and encourage them to read further.

It is important to note that none of the submissions intend to pass judgement on social movements, organisations or individuals for the choices they have made whether or not to engage in powerful elite, state, or corporate institutions or processes; rather the aim is to point out the contradictions and risks of such choices. Nor has it been their intention to preach as if occupying some vantage point from which the obfuscation, propaganda and free-market ideologies are obvious. The book has been written in recognition of the power of propaganda and information control and in full awareness that difficult decisions are made often from compromised, marginalised and vulnerable positions, and also that elite agendas can be subtly subverted to progressive ends. Consent and co-option are far from a clear cut issues, but it is essential to remain constantly vigilant, and be keenly aware of the insidious forces and processes which impinge upon our freedom of choice, behaviour and thought. Such vigilance can help prevent diversion from one's original goals, while rigorous and continued exploration into these issues, and awareness of how others have addressed these thorny questions, can help provide the strength to repel co-option and fight back against repression. This volume attempts to aid this process.

What unites all the submission, and perhaps mitigates their

prevailing pessimism, is an understanding that the consent upon which this repressive social order depends is in fact unstable, built upon a precarious and impossible promise of democratic capitalism. This should inspire hope: the fact that ever greater lengths have to be undertaken each and every day to persuade us to believe in the patently contradictory notion of democratic capitalism in order to secure our participation, exposes the house of cards upon which capitalism is built. That it does so utilising such a grossly distorted version of ‘democracy’ indicates too the universal appeal and thus potential power of fully participatory democracy, in which equal access to political decision-making processes is protected.

We hope that this collection will help expose this fundamental weakness at the heart of the capitalist social order. The disconnection between the promise and the suppression of democracy will only intensify as capitalism becomes more and more coercive and as its claims to ‘democracy’ become increasingly spurious, opening up the possibility of radical challenge and change. This potential rests in our collective reclamation of democracy, from its grossly distorted capitalist form, into a genuinely participatory and egalitarian reality. Like a malevolent Tinkerbell from *Peter Pan*, capitalism only prevails when we collectively believe it can best deliver our wishes, and invest in it our hopes and desires, in spite of the catastrophic human and ecological costs of doing so. In fact, it rests with us, the governed, the consenters, to refuse to believe the fake promise, and instead to create instead genuine democracies - local and global - outside of capitalist relations, through which our voices can be heard and our needs, wants and desires met.

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A Note on Referencing and Spellings

The referencing systems used in this book are not always consistent since they may reflect the system used on articles' first publication or authors' preferences. Similarly, the spellings use reflect authors' use of UK, US or Canadian English.

Notes

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- 1 Michael Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), p. 21.
 - 2 Of course, other ideologies can influence and police our consent and limit our political activity, such as nationalism and cultural superiority, or other systems of power relations such as patriarchy and racism, but these are beyond the scope of this volume.
 - 3 However, I would recommend Gerald Sussman's *Branding Democracy: US Regime Change in Post-Soviet Eastern Europe*, which examines the uses of systemic propaganda in US foreign policy, as a very good starting point.