

Liberate Liberalism from Capitalism and Reclaim Liberal Society

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The political and moral foundation of liberalism as a movement originated as a critique of feudalism, religion, monarchy, and conservative traditions.

Its primary aim was to ensure individual liberty, egalitarian democratic governance based on the consent of the people, and equality before the law.

The struggles of working people and their revolutionary class struggles were instrumental in bringing these liberal and secular ideas to life. However, over time, ruling and non-ruling elites co-opted liberalism, aligning it with market democracy and transforming liberal society into a market-driven society. Such a transformation granted social legitimacy to capitalism, empowering its narrow and authoritarian market forces as well as reactionary social and political elements.

The Lockean social contract was redefined into market contracts rooted in purely economic relations, forming the foundation of capitalism in Lockean Europe. This system was later internationalised through European colonialism across Asia, Africa, the Americas, Oceania, and the Arabian and Middle Eastern regions.

Contrary to advancing liberal and constitutional democracy in the former colonies, **European colonialism reshaped liberalism in a way that transformed egalitarian natural rights into property rights, favouring Europeans' domination over people and their resources in colonies.** However, the struggles of the working class against European colonialism played a pivotal role in establishing democracy. These struggles not only advanced liberal and constitutional democracy in the colonies but also deepened democratic principles and strengthened liberal society within Europe itself.

The erosion of democratic values and the liberal social order in the contemporary world is a result of various forms of capitalist consolidation, further accelerated by technological advancements controlled by a few powerful corporations serving capitalist interests. Capitalism, however, is not inherently aligned with the values of liberalism. As a result, the core principles of liberalism—its democratic ethos, rooted in secular and egalitarian citizenship rights—have been completely undermined by capitalist forces. Citizenship rights have been reduced to mere consumer care, stripped of their original essence as customer rights.

In a cruel twist of ideological bankruptcy, **contemporary liberals have become deeply entangled with various forms of capitalism and its expansion.**

Such an alliance has destroyed both the objective and subjective foundations of liberalism and its moral calibre. However, this illiberal alliance between liberals and their capitalist

counterparts, aimed at building a market democracy, has undermined both democracy and liberalism in society, politics, culture and economy. Market individualism is now represented as a form of liberal ideal of individual rights. The Lockean social contract has been reduced to little more than a consumer warranty card with an expiration date.

Rather than questioning power and authority, liberals have forged alliances with them, contributing to the rise of reactionary, right-wing, and religious forces that have gained social and political legitimacy worldwide. Once champions of individual rights, liberal perspectives now endorse a politics of compromise with monopolistic power in all its forms, eroding egalitarian and secular citizenship rights. This transformation among liberals has rendered their ideas and ideals almost indistinguishable from the various forms, processes, institutions, and structures of capitalism, making true liberalism increasingly invisible and irrelevant.

The rise of a new form of liberalism under neoliberalism, along with its social, economic, and cultural order, has normalised the market and naturalised its culture of consumerism. This shift has effectively undermined both the culture of consumption and the democratic choices available to consumers. Despite the failures of the neoliberal economic order, the processes of “McDonaldisation” have become the new normal, where capitalist mass production continues to decimate small producers and farmers worldwide. The corporatisation of agricultural production and consumption has led to widespread hunger and food insecurity in a world abundant with resources. Similarly, the rise of monopolistic supermarkets has eroded local markets and destroyed the direct relationship between consumers and producers.

Economic policymakers and their political allies continue to pursue and implement illiberal policies to uphold capitalism. Politically, the world is witnessing a forward march of an illiberal order marked by inter-imperialist wars, regional resource conflicts, and the rise of right-wing politics, spanning from the Lockean heartland of Europe to the capitalist core of the United States. Asia, Africa, and Latin America remain trapped in the oppressive grip of this illiberal world order, emanating from the capitalist and imperialist centers of Western Europe and the US.

The illiberal seductions of capitalism and imperialism can no longer hide behind the veneer of liberalism. The contradictions of liberalism—its role as a facade for capitalism in the name of individual freedom and neoliberal democracy—are becoming increasingly unsustainable. Freedom is not a commodity to be bought and sold in the capitalist market; it is both self-realisation and the collective fulfilment of everyday needs and aspirations. True freedom is neither divisible nor a descent into individualistic decadence. Capitalism forces us to forget that our individual freedoms are deeply interconnected and mutually dependent. Genuine freedom emerges from recognising and nurturing these interrelationships, rather than allowing capitalism to reduce them to isolated, market-driven commodity experiences.

‘Limited liberalism’, ‘Liberalism Ltd’,” or ‘selective freedom’ under capitalism is not true liberalism. Instead, it paves the way for the preservation of reactionary social, political, economic, and cultural orders. Therefore, the negotiating power of liberalism and its marginal utility for facilitating capitalist accumulation are rapidly diminishing. Basic civil liberties are increasingly threatened under the guise of protecting nationality and public safety. Political freedoms and citizenship rights are under serious attack, while economic freedoms are eroding with rising unemployment and the constant precarity of livelihoods.

Capitalism, by its very nature, is hostile to the liberal values that uphold life and livelihoods. Its survival relies on nurturing a compliant culture of orderly, passive objects—yet people are not objects; they live and thrive as individuals in communities. To sustain itself, capitalism domesticates individual freedom under the banners of culture, society, religion, and nationalism, reducing individuals to compliant participants in its illiberal system.

In such a situation, it is imperative to reclaim the liberal social order and rescue liberalism from both liberal and illiberal forms of capitalism. Only by doing so, working people can safeguard individual liberty and citizenship rights within a truly secular society. The struggles of the working class remain the only force capable of revitalising liberal values and breathing new life into liberalism. It is the working people who have the power to defeat the tyranny of capitalism's illiberal and imperialist orders. History stands as a testament to the truth in the adage: Vox populi, vox Dei—the voice of the people is the voice of God.

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