

3

Capitalism from the viewpoint of nonviolence strategy

In order to develop a nonviolence strategy against capitalism, it is necessary to analyse capitalism, assessing its assumptions, problems, weaknesses, strengths and driving forces. This is potentially an enormous task. Innumerable scholars and activists have analysed capitalism from various viewpoints, and there is no agreement about the best way to proceed.

The approach here is a bit different since the starting point is nonviolence strategy. This means that the challenge to capitalism cannot use violence or rely on systems of violence and should lead toward an alternative that is not built on violence. In short, nonviolence is both the means and the end. The challenge needs to be a popular, grassroots challenge, since a nonviolent struggle by a small elite has little chance of success. A nonviolence-oriented analysis of capitalism needs to be geared to this strategy. Furthermore, the analysis needs to be one that can be readily understood and implemented by grassroots activists; it cannot be something that is the preserve of a small band of intellectuals.

Of course, it is sensible to draw on insights from various analyses of capitalism and its effects, including Marxism, political economy, environmentalism, feminism, and theories of underdevelopment and neocolonialism, among others. However, rather than starting with one or more of these theories and then developing a nonviolence strategy to implement a strategy based on the theory, the starting point here is nonviolence strategy, with theories of capitalism used to inform it and offer guidance about directions, opportunities, dangers and overlooked areas.

Given the size of this task, this can be only a preliminary assessment. To set the stage, a brief overview of problems with capitalism is given. Some of the strengths of capitalism are mentioned, followed

by capitalism's links with other systems of domination. Finally, three crucial areas are presented: capitalism's links with systems of violence; belief systems; and the need for alternatives.

At the core of capitalism is private control of the means of production, including land, factories and knowledge. This is backed up, ultimately, by the coercive power of the state. Generally speaking, the system of ownership and control encourages individuals and groups to put special interests above general interests. This is responsible for many of the problems with capitalism.

What is called capitalism can be many things.¹ It is typically a system in which a small number of large corporations dominate in most sectors of the economy. This is commonly called "monopoly capitalism" though "oligopolistic capitalism" would be more accurate. Capitalism is never a pure or free-standing system but in practice is always intertwined with other systems of power, including the state, patriarchy and the domination of nature. Free-market libertarians advocate a totally free market, perhaps maintained by a "minimal" state, but such a system is, as yet, hypothetical. "Capitalism" as discussed here refers to "actually existing capitalism."²

Capitalism is not homogeneous. There are major differences between capitalist societies, with adaptations to local political, religious, cultural and other features. The use of the label "capitalism" can tend to obscure the variability in capitalist systems.

Capitalism has shown a remarkable capacity for regeneration in the face of crises. Some Marxist analysts have referred to today's system as "late capitalism,"³ but it is possible that it will, centuries hence, be known as "early capitalism." As capitalist economies move from the industrial era to postindustrial society or information economy and move from national economies to a global economy, what people recognise as capitalism is transformed.

The word "capitalism" is used because the system is based on private control of capital, namely the means of production. To call this a free market system is a misleading euphemism. Markets are quite possible without private ownership. The "free" in "free market" implies freedom from state control, but actually it is the state that protects the conditions that make capitalist markets possible. So the term "capitalism" is used here, with the understanding that this refers to "actually existing capitalism" of the kind involving large corpora-

tions and state support rather than some libertarian ideal market system.

Problems with capitalism

Since problems with capitalism are well known, only a summary is given here. This is the “case against capitalism”; the generalisations do not apply to every circumstance or individual.

- Social inequality is fostered within and between societies: the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. There is nothing in systems of exchange that promotes equality, and in practice countries or individuals that amass wealth can use the wealth to gain advantages over others. One of the rationales for government is to control and compensate for the tendency of markets to generate inequality.

If a person has a serious disability, they may be unable to produce as much as an able-bodied worker, or perhaps unable to obtain a job at all. In a society built around people, the person with a disability would be given support and training to become a productive member of society. Capitalism has no process for achieving this. Similarly, a country that is much poorer in natural resources or skills cannot compete with richer countries. Rather than helping that country, international capitalism keeps it in a dependent position.

- Work is unsatisfying. Under capitalism, work is a means to an end, namely to get money to purchase goods and services, rather than an end in itself.

- Workers are alienated from the product of their labour. Because decisions about products and methods of work are mostly made by employers, workers essentially become cogs in the workplace, often with little personal connection with the ultimate outcome of their labour. This is especially the case when there is a fine division of labour, as when workers in Malaysia produce one component of a car that is assembled in Korea and sold in the US.

- Those who cannot obtain jobs suffer poverty and boredom. Markets do not guarantee jobs for everyone, and employers benefit from a “reserve labour force” of unemployed people, the existence of which keeps those with jobs in line. Since work is one of the things that gives many people their sense of identity, those who are unemployed suffer boredom, greater health problems and loss of motivation as well as poverty.

- Consumers buy goods as substitute gratification in place of satisfying work and community life. Companies make money by selling goods and services and collectively promote a “consumer society.” Advertisers prey on people’s fears and inadequacies to encourage purchases.

- Opportunities for economic gain foster antisocial and dangerous practices, such as bribery, workplace hazards and legislation to protect monopolies. When profits and corporate survival become the prime concern, all sorts of abuses occur. Corporations bribe government officials (legally or illegally) for special favours. To save money, unsafe working conditions are allowed to persist and injured workers fired and given as little compensation as possible. Lobbying and pay-offs are used to encourage politicians to pass legislation to benefit the most powerful corporations, by giving them trade concessions, preferential treatment, government contracts, and guaranteed monopolies.

- Selfishness is encouraged and cooperation discouraged. Since wealth and income are acquired primarily by individuals, capitalism fosters individualism and encourages selfishness. Sharing of ideas and labour is discouraged when only a few reap the benefits.

- Men use positions of economic power to maintain male domination. It is well known that most of the wealthiest owners and powerful executives are men. Capitalism obviously is quite compatible with patriarchy. Similarly, dominant ethnic groups can use economic power to maintain their domination.

- Military and police systems, which are needed to protect the system of private property, are also used for war and repression. This will be discussed further later.

- The profit motive encourages production and promotion of products with consequences harmful to human health and the environment, such as cigarettes, pesticides and greenhouse gases. It is common for products such as pharmaceuticals to be sold even though they have not been adequately tested or are known to have dangerous side-effects, and for efforts to be made to boost sales and avoid paying compensation to victims. Most environmental impacts are treated as “externalities”: their cost to society is not incorporated in the price. Consequently, there is no built-in market incentive to eliminate environmental impacts that are borne by others, and a strong profit incentive to oppose attempts by governments or others

to incorporate these costs in prices of goods. An example is the strenuous efforts by soft drink manufacturers against legislation to require a refundable deposit for bottles. In contrast, there is little or no profit incentive to promote certain options that are healthy and environmentally sound, such as walking to work or sharing goods.

As noted before, this is a stark presentation of the case against capitalism. Obviously not every generalisation applies universally. For example, though work is often unsatisfying, for some workers it is satisfying much or all of the time. The problem is that providing satisfying work is not a goal or design principle of capitalism. Similarly, some owners and managers make decisions for the public interest at the expense of profits. But although individuals can do good things, the capitalist system has no built-in method of encouraging this. The key problems with capitalism are predictable consequences of the way it is organised.

Strengths of capitalism

It is possible to get carried away with the problems of capitalism. Problems always need to be taken in context; especially important is comparison with alternatives. Capitalism may have problems but some other systems have worse ones.

As well as countering one-sided anticapitalist critiques, examination of capitalism's strengths is also important in order to formulate better strategy. By understanding what capitalism does well, it may be possible to avoid unrealistic hopes and plans—such as the expectation that capitalism is on the verge of collapse.

Capitalism has repeatedly demonstrated the capacity to promote great increases in the productive capacities of societies, harnessing individual and social drives for improved living standards.⁴ This is not guaranteed, as periodic recessions, depressions and collapses have demonstrated; also, increased economic productivity is possible in other systems such as state socialism. However, capitalism has an impressive record, with economic growth in numerous countries being far greater globally than in the days of feudalism. Comparisons between North and South Korea and between East and West Germany suggest that capitalism fosters economic growth far more effectively than state socialism. This can be attributed to the harnessing of self-interest, competition and the search for profits,

compared to the bureaucratic constraints of state socialism. True, rampant capitalism growth is responsible for many problems, from inequality to environmental destruction, but the positive side is dramatically increased productivity.

Although capitalism is compatible with dictatorship, it also thrives in societies with representative government in which certain civil liberties are maintained, at least for most people most of the time. The “creative destruction” by which new products and new markets supersede old ones is facilitated by a moderately flexible society in which there is a degree of open dialogue and adaptation to new conditions. Furthermore, representative government provides social supports and opportunities for some citizen participation that can mitigate some of the worse excesses of capitalism, thus protecting the system against itself. For example, a free press and freedom of assembly together can operate to expose harmful products and damaging policies, thus protecting workers and consumers and ultimately ensuring a greater productive capacity.

Although many harmful and wasteful products are produced, capitalist markets are responsive enough to produce and distribute many largely beneficial products, such as vegetables, bricks, beds and recorded music. Indeed, the amazing range of consumer choice is one of the most enticing features of the capitalist system. In buying screws, breakfast cereals, travel packages or building materials, there are options for nearly every taste and requirement. Obviously there are limits to choice: taxpayers are *de facto* consumers of “defence services” but do not have a choice between military troops, conflict resolution services and peace brigades. But where choice is catered for by markets, even a small market segment can attract entrepreneurs, such as book publishers or cleaning services for tiny niche markets.

Capitalism judged by principles for a nonviolent alternative

Any challenge to capitalism needs to have some alternative in mind. In chapter 5, some nonviolent alternatives to capitalism are assessed against five principles, which themselves can be viewed as features of an expansive interpretation of nonviolence. Here is an evaluation of how capitalism rates.

Principle 1: Cooperation, rather than competition, should be the foundation for activity.

Contrary to this principle, capitalism is founded on competition between firms and between workers, and discourages cooperation, except for the purposes of competition. It appeals to people's worst impulses with the claim that pursuing self-interest serves the greater good. However, all available evidence from every field suggests that cooperation works better than competition.⁵

Principle 2: People with the greatest needs should have priority in the distribution of social production.

Capitalism does not operate according to this principle. Instead, the standard idea is that allocation of the economic product is through jobs: people get rewarded for doing the work to keep society going. This is a sort of meritocracy. However, although jobs do some of the allocation, there's far more to the story. What actually determines a large proportion of the allocation of goods and services are:

- ownership of capital (providing profits to owners);
- credentials (providing high salaries to those with the background and opportunities to obtain degrees and enter occupational areas with protection against those without credentials⁶);
- executive salaries and perks (providing high return to managers with more power);
- state interventions (welfare, pensions);
- unpaid work (housework, child rearing).

Within the framework of the regulated market, solutions to economic inequality include reducing working hours, increasing wages, reducing credential barriers, taxing wealth and paying for housework. However, none of these challenges the foundations of capitalism.

Philosophers who look at "just desert" find little justification for unequal rewards.⁷ Why should someone receive more simply because they have rich parents or high natural ability?

There is plenty of production in the world today to satisfy everyone's needs but not, as the Gandhian saying goes, anyone's greed. The problem is distribution.⁸

Principle 3: Satisfying work should be available to everyone who wants it.

Under capitalism, this principle is not fulfilled. People are expected to adapt to fill available jobs, rather than work being tailored to the needs of people.⁹ A job is typically regarded as an unpleasant activity that is necessary to obtain income for a good life.

Compared to a society that distributes goods to those who most need them, under capitalism there is a great deal of inappropriate production, wasted effort and pointless activity, including advertising, planned obsolescence, military production, provision of luxuries for the rich and unnecessary work and jobs that serve only to help justify receiving a share of society's resources.¹⁰ In contrast, there is a great deal of work that is needed but for which there is little or no pay, including child rearing, provision of goods and services for the poor, environmental improvements, and friendship and support for people who are lonely or have disabilities.

Principle 4: The system should be designed and run by the people themselves, rather than authorities or experts.

Contrary to this, capitalism is founded on control by those with the most money and power. Participation by the people is fostered only to the extent that it helps firms compete or maintains managerial control (as in limited forms of industrial democracy).

Principle 5: The system should be based on nonviolence.

Contrary to this, capitalism is founded on the state's use of its police and military power to protect the system of ownership.

Thus, capitalism fails on all five of these principles. Every one of them is a challenge to the capitalist way of doing things.

With this brief background on problems with and strengths of capitalism, it is time to turn to key areas from the viewpoint of nonviolence strategy. Three are outlined here: systems of violence, belief systems and alternatives. These arise from central aspects of nonviolence strategy. First, since the strategy is based on nonviolence, it is obvious to focus on the violent foundations of capitalism. Second, since the consent theory of power underlies nonviolent action, it is valuable to look at how capitalism fosters consent. Third, the other side to nonviolent action's role in challenging oppressive systems is the constructive programme, namely the building of a nonviolent society. This leads to the issue of alternatives, in particular the way in which capitalism destroys or coopts alternatives.

Capitalism's link with systems of violence

From the point of view of nonviolence, a crucial feature of capitalism is its links with systems of violence, notably the military and police. For some capitalist countries, which are run as repressive states, this connection is obvious. But for capitalist countries with representative governments, the connections between the military, police and capitalist social relations are less overt.

For most of the time, overt state violence is not required to defend capitalism, since most people go along with the way things are. If the challenge to capitalism is violent, such as by a revolutionary party that uses bombings or assaults, then police and military forces are used to crush the challengers. But sometimes there are serious nonviolent challenges, especially when workers organise. Troops are typically called out when workers in a key sector (such as electricity or transport) go on strike, when workers take over running of a factory or business, or when there is a general strike. Spy agencies monitor and disrupt groups and movements that might be a threat to business or government. Police target groups that challenge property relations, such as workers and environmentalists taking direct action.

At the core of capitalism is private property.¹¹ Military and police power is needed to maintain and extend the system of ownership, but this is hidden behind the routine operation of the legal and regulatory system, which is seldom perceived as founded on violence. If a person or corporation believes that their money or property has been taken illegally—for example through insider trading or patent violation—they can go to court to seek redress. The court decision, if not obeyed voluntarily, can be enforced by police, for example confiscation of goods or even imprisonment. For most of the time, property rights, as interpreted by the courts and various other government agencies, are accepted by everyone concerned. That goes for billion-dollar share transactions as well as everyday purchases of goods.

Petty theft, big-time swindles and organised crime are not major challenges to the property system, since they accept the legitimacy of property and are simply attempts to change ownership in an illegal manner. Criminals are seldom happy for anyone to steal from them. Principled challenges to property, such as squatting and workers' control, are far more threatening.

Many people, especially in the United States, believe that government and corporations are antagonistic, with opposite goals. When governments set up regulations to control product quality or pollution, some corporate leaders complain loudly about government interference. But beyond the superficial frictions, at a deeper level the state operates to provide the conditions for capitalism. The state has its own interests, to be sure, especially in maintaining state authority and a monopoly on what it considers legitimate violence, but it depends on capitalist enterprises for its own survival, notably through taxation. In capitalist societies, states and market economies depend on and mutually reinforce each other.¹²

In recent decades there has been an enormous expansion of private policing. In the US, for example, there are now more security guards, private detectives and others privately paid to carry out policing duties than there are government-funded police. In the military arena, there are now private mercenary companies ready to intervene if the price is right. However, these developments do not change the basic point that capitalism is built on relationships between people, production and distribution ultimately protected by armed force.

As capitalism is increasingly globalised, international policing and military intervention become more important to protect and expand markets and market relationships. For example, economic blockades, backed by armed force, can be imposed on countries such as Cuba. Usually, though, the lure of the market for elites in weaker countries is more effective than military coercion.¹³ Investment has done more to promote capitalism in Vietnam than decades of anticommunist warfare.

Belief systems

Although capitalism is backed up by violence, in day-to-day operation no coercion is required. Most people believe that the world works according to capitalist dynamics, and behave accordingly. Quite a few of them believe, in addition, that this is the way things *should* work, and exert pressure to bring nonconformists into line.

Here are a few common beliefs in capitalist societies, with comments in brackets.

- Capitalism is superior to alternatives. (Many people assume that success, in other words dominance, means superiority or virtue. Logically, this doesn't follow.)

- Capitalism is inevitable. (In the face of everyday reality, many people cannot easily conceive of an alternative that is fundamentally different.)

- It is fair that people receive what they earn. (The system of jobs operates as a method of allocating the economic product to individuals and groups. This system is arbitrary and built on the exercise of power. There is nothing inherently fair about it.)

- The market is the most efficient method of matching supply and demand. (In practice, many "markets" are artificial constructions, as in the case of copyrighted software. The market is not used for things people hold dearest, such as allocating affection in a family.)

- Selfishness is innate and justified; it makes the profit system operate. (Humans have the potential for both selfishness and altruism.¹⁴ Social systems can foster either.)

- People who are poor have only themselves to blame. (Blaming the poor ignores the exercise of power in creating poverty and denies the social obligation to help those in need.)

- Greater production and consumption lead to greater happiness. (Actually, happiness is not closely correlated with objective measures such as income.¹⁵ Happiness is more related to how people subjectively compare themselves with others, which suggests that inequality fostered by markets reduces happiness.¹⁶)

- Politics is something that politicians do; ordinary citizens are not involved except through voting and lobbying. (If politics is taken to be the exercise of power, then capitalist economic arrangements are intensely political. That workers do not vote to choose their bosses does not mean there is no politics at the workplace, but rather that workplace politics is authoritarian.)

Beliefs do not arise out of nothing: they are an adaptation to the situations in which people find themselves, sometimes challenging these situations. There are three main ways in which beliefs supportive of capitalism develop and are maintained: daily life, schooling and mass media.

First, most people adjust their beliefs to be compatible with their daily life. This is a process of reducing “cognitive dissonance,” namely the difference between reality and thought. If daily life is filled with buying and selling, this makes market exchange seem more natural. If daily life involves working as an employee along with many others, this makes selling one’s labour power seem more natural. If daily life involves noticing that some people are very rich and some very poor, this makes great economic inequality seem more natural.

But just because something seems natural does not necessarily make it positive or desirable. There is, though, a general tendency for people to believe that the world is just. When someone is poor, this is a potential challenge to the assumption that the world is just. One way to cope is to believe that the poor person is to blame.

Of course, for wealthy and privileged people, it is tempting to believe that they deserve their wealth and privilege, and that others deserve their misfortune. Beliefs in the virtues of capitalism are commonly stronger among its greatest beneficiaries.

Part of day-to-day experience is interacting with other people. If others share certain beliefs, it can be hard to express contrary views, and easier to keep quiet or adapt one’s beliefs to standard ones.

A second source of beliefs is schooling. Children learn conventional views about society, learn that they are supposed to defer to authority and learn that they need to earn a living. Just as important as what is learned in the classroom is what is learned from the structure of the schooling experience: pupils are expected to follow the instructions of their teachers, a process that is good training for being an obedient employee.

A third source of beliefs about capitalism is the mass media, especially the commercial media, which “sell” capitalism incessantly through advertisements, through pictures of the “good life” in Hollywood movies and television shows, and in plot lines in which good guys always win. Due to global media coverage, basketball star Michael Jordan became a cult figure even in countries where basketball is not a big sport. Jordan is a symbol of competitive success. He embodies the assumption that someone can become rich and famous by being talented and that being rich and famous is a good thing, worth identifying with and emulating. Jordan thus is living testimony to the capitalist marketplace, even setting aside the products that he endorses. Sport generally is something that is sold through the mass

media, especially television, and used to sell other products, such as Nike running shoes and McDonald's.¹⁷

As well as the beliefs listed above, there are others commonly found in capitalist societies, but of course not everyone subscribes to every one of these beliefs. Nevertheless, the passionate commitment to certain core beliefs by some people (especially those with the most power) and general acceptance by many others makes it possible for capitalism to carry on most of the time without the overt use of force to repress challenges. This process is commonly called hegemony.

There are quite a few contradictions within usual belief systems. Here are some examples.

- The ideology of capitalism is a free market in labour. This implies unrestricted immigration, but all governments and most people oppose this.¹⁸
- Sexual and racial discrimination is incompatible with a labour market based on merit.
- A free market in services implies the elimination of barriers based on credentials. For example, anyone should be able to practise as a doctor or lawyer.

A key group involved in shaping belief systems is intellectuals. Although universities are attacked by right-wing commentators as havens for left-wing radicals, in practice most academics, journalists, teachers, policy analysts and other knowledge workers support or accept the basic parameters of the capitalist system. Through advertising, public relations, policy development and public commentary, intellectuals give legitimacy to beliefs supportive of capitalism. Many of the most vehement intellectual disputes, for example over employment, public ownership and taxation, are about how best to manage capitalism, not how to transcend it.

Destruction of alternatives

For the past several centuries, alternatives to capitalism have been systematically destroyed or coopted. Sometimes this is through the direct efforts of owners and managers and sometimes it is accomplished by the state.

- The family-based “putting-out” system of production was replaced by the factory system. The new system was initially not any more efficient but gave owners the power to extract more surplus from workers.¹⁹

- Workers' control initiatives have been smashed. Sometimes this is at the factory level. In revolutionary situations, such as Paris in 1871 or Spain in 1936-1939, it has been at a much wider scale.

- Provision of welfare from the state, including pensions, unemployment payments, disability and veterans' supports and child maintenance, undercuts community-based systems of collective welfare and mutual support.²⁰ This helps to atomise the community, making state provision seem the only possibility.

- Worker-controlled organising is opposed. Trade unions are often tolerated or cultivated as a way of coopting worker discontent, so long as the unions focus on wages and conditions rather than control over production.

- Left-wing governments have often acted to dampen direct action by workers.²¹

- Affluence and the promotion of satisfaction through consumption have bought off many dissidents, actual and potential.

- Socialist governments, especially those that provide an inspiring example to others, have been attacked by political pressure, withdrawal of investment, blockades, destabilisation and wars.

- International agreements and agencies, including the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organisation, are used to expand opportunities for capitalism, especially through opening national economies to international investment.

- The production and promotion of attractive new products and services make people want to join the consumer society.²² Many commodities appeal to people's wants, including junk food, television, stylish cars and trendy clothes, especially targeting people's worries about relative status.²³ An orientation to commodities serves to displace achievement of human values that are possible without commodities, including friendship and work satisfaction.

Alternatives to capitalism can provide both a material and symbolic challenge. For example, socialist governments provide a material challenge by preventing capitalist investment and reducing markets. The symbolic challenge is that an alternative is possible, and this can be a more far-reaching threat. This is why even small countries such as Cuba and Nicaragua, with little impact on the global economy, may be seen as such a dire threat by elites in dominant capitalist countries. To reduce this symbolic challenge, such governments have been attacked militarily and economically

and by sustained disinformation campaigns designed to reduce their credibility. One way to defend against such attacks is through a more authoritarian socialist government, which then serves to discredit the alternative.

This was the scenario following the Russian Revolution, which occurred without much violence and had significant libertarian aspects. The invasion of the Soviet Union by eight western countries over the period 1918-1920 had the impact of militarising the revolution, helping set the stage for the repression under Stalin and making the Soviet Union a far less attractive model than it might have been otherwise. To this was added an unceasing campaign of anti-socialist propaganda that was only interrupted by the military alliance with the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany during World War II.

Attacking and discrediting alternatives is one approach. Another is cooption, namely incorporating the alternative, or part of it, into the capitalist system, or winning over adherents of the alternative view. This happens frequently at the individual level. Vocal critics of capitalism may seek to rise in the system so as to be more effective in their challenge, only to become much more accepting of capitalism, and sometimes even advocates of it. Cooperatives that are set up as alternatives to commercial enterprises often gradually become more similar to them, with workers becoming employees and cooperative members becoming consumers. Some anti-establishment rock groups become commercial successes, with their iconoclastic fashions and angry lyrics a selling point.

Alternatives do not need to be "somewhere else," namely in another country. There are small islands of noncapitalist practice and belief in the middle of every capitalist society. Public parks and libraries are based on sharing resources rather than buying and selling. Taking care of a friend's children is cooperative rather than individualistic and competitive.

The implication of these and other examples is that a nonviolence strategy needs to both build alternatives and to inhibit the power of the capitalist system to smash or coopt alternatives.

Other systems of domination

Besides capitalism, there are various other systems of domination, including:

- patriarchy;
- the state;
- bureaucracy;
- the military;
- racial domination;
- domination of nature.

(Note that to call something a “system of domination” is to put a label on a complex, ever-changing set of relationships between people and between people and nature. Any such label is bound to be a simplification and can be misleading if it suggests rigidity and permanence. It can be useful if it captures important regularities in relationships.)

The relation between these systems is a matter of some debate. Some argue that one particular system is fundamental, with the others being subsidiary or derivative. Of special interest here is the view, common among Marxists, that class domination is fundamental, with other systems of domination being secondary. The implication is that the central struggle should be against capitalism, with other issues being given second billing until “after the revolution.” Needless to say, this view is not well received by those whose personal concerns are focussed on one of the other areas.

From the point of view of a strategy of nonviolent action, a final resolution of this issue is not essential, since the same methods—namely nonviolent action—can be used directly against all the systems of domination. (In contrast, while armed struggle may be used against the capitalist state, it is never advised as a method to challenge patriarchy.) It is useful, in this context, to outline some of the connections between capitalism and these other systems of domination.

Patriarchy. There was collective domination of men over women long before capitalism arrived on the scene. What has happened is that these two autonomous systems of power have largely accommodated each other, each changing in the process.²⁴ It is a commonplace observation that most wealthy owners and top managers are men. In some societies, women are formally excluded from high level jobs in business; in others there are psychological and structural

barriers including those associated with parental expectations, educational opportunities, job discrimination, expectations for child rearing, sexual harassment and a male executive style. Individual men may be sexist, to be sure, but the main effect comes from the system of expectations, roles and behaviours that prevents or discourages women from succeeding as big-time capitalists.

Down the job hierarchy, male domination is entrenched in many occupations, for example in civil engineering and driving tractors. However, this can change with time and vary from country to country. For example, when typewriters were first introduced, typing was a male occupation. Later it became stereotypically female. Now, with the introduction of personal computers, most users do their own typing. Most job differentiation by sex has little to do with different capabilities and much more to do with advantages for bosses and for men.²⁵ Bosses, by catering for men's interest in having preferment over women for prize jobs, maintain men's willingness to accept subordination to other men.

One way to interpret this is to say that men have used their power as men to prevent women from gaining equality within capitalism. There are some exceptions, especially in the case of inherited wealth. The liberal feminist push for equal opportunity has made significant inroads into male domination in business, though there is a long way to go.

If women gained equality within corporations, would this be a threat to capitalism? Not really, unless women brought different values and behaved differently from men in equivalent positions. All the evidence suggests that women do not behave all that differently: they are much more likely to adapt to the business ethos than to change it.

There is nothing about the system of capitalism that requires men to be in charge. Women can own property and run businesses and in general keep the system going just as well as men. The exception would be if having women in charge was so unacceptable to men that capitalism itself came under attack by men. If capitalism became a uniquely nonsexist system in a sea of male domination, then it could be vulnerable. But this is far from the case. By accommodating women's demands no faster—and often considerably slower—than other sectors of society, capitalism is in a sort of equilibrium or accommodation with patriarchy.

In principle, the expansion of capitalist relations is a threat to male domination. If women can do an equal or better job, then there is more profit to be made by hiring them and promoting them. A full expansion of the market to child rearing would involve massive expansion of paid child care, with most mothers in the paid workforce. Capitalism thus provides some pressures to undermine patriarchy, but again the outcome in practice is more like an accommodation.

The relations between capitalism and patriarchy are thus complex and variable, sometimes mutually reinforcing and sometimes destabilising. (There are important social and cultural dimensions to patriarchy as well as the economic dimension that is emphasised here.)

The state. One definition of the state is that it is a set of social institutions based on a monopoly within a territory over what is considered the legitimate use of force. Legitimate use of force is by police against violent criminals and by troops against invaders. Private militias would be illegitimate use of force, unless sponsored by the state itself. Who decides what is legitimate use of force? The state itself. However, feminists have pointed out that this definition is incorrect, since violence by men against women, especially husbands against wives, has long been treated as legal in most countries. This is violence that the state considers “legitimate” but which it does not control itself.

The key point here is that the state claims a monopoly over collectively organised violence that underpins capitalism.²⁶ This is one of the crucial areas that needs to be addressed in a nonviolence strategy against capitalism, as discussed above.

Marxists have often treated the state as an agent for the ruling class, as in the phrase the “capitalist state.” While it is certainly true that the state serves capitalists in various ways, the state can have its own interests and dynamics, not all of which are supportive of capitalists and capitalism.

One key issue, of special interest to nonviolent activists, is war.²⁷ Wars are primarily engagements between military forces on behalf of states—corporations do not run wars directly, though mercenary operations and other nonstate groups are playing an increasing role.²⁸

Many Marxists, though, claim that wars are driven by capitalist interests.²⁹ The idea is that states engage in war to protect markets. The best example is the Gulf war in 1990-1991, in which the US government organised the military effort to defend Saudi Arabia and

drive Iraqi troops out of Kuwait, which can be seen as ensuring access to oil in the interests of US-based oil companies.

However, the claim that capitalist interests are the driving force behind war looks much thinner in other cases, such as US involvement in the war in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s,³⁰ US and Australian government support for the 1975 Indonesian military invasion and occupation of East Timor, and NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 to drive Serbian troops out of Kosova. There are natural resources in Vietnam, East Timor and Kosova, but there is little evidence that expected profits from these were big enough to justify the enormous expense of war.

Even a purely destructive war has benefits for corporations that produce weapons for the military. But these benefits have to be weighed against costs. If the government is funding massive military expenditures, then there is less money for other functions, including corporate subsidies and consumer expenditures.

The elimination of capitalism is unlikely to eliminate war, if states still exist. After all, there have been wars between socialist states, such as between China and Vietnam in 1979.

The key point is that the state is not simply a tool of capitalists, nor solely an “arena for class struggle,” but in addition has interests of its own. Capitalism and the state system have grown up together and are mutually supportive, but neither can be reduced to a puppet of the other. Hence a nonviolence strategy needs to address both systems of power.

Bureaucracy. The word “bureaucracy” conjures up images of government agencies that cause people headaches with their rules and regulations, commonly known as red tape. Sociologically speaking, though, bureaucracy is a way of organising work based on hierarchy, division of labour, rules defining tasks, and promotion by merit. The keys here are hierarchy and division of labour. In a bureaucracy, a worker is simply a replaceable cog.

Government departments are bureaucracies, to be sure, but so are most corporations. There are bosses at the top, layers of middle management, all sorts of rules, with everyone doing specialised jobs. Many other organisations are organised bureaucratically, including trade unions, churches, professional associations and environmental bodies.

Compared to slavery, serfdom or nepotism, bureaucracy is a great step forward. It offers predictability, reliability and accountability within its own rules and so can compare favourably to informal systems where decisions may be based more on personal favours, vindictiveness or whim (though these play a role in bureaucracies too). For all its advantages over previous systems, though, it is still a system that gives power to a few at the top and subordinates most others. It also makes it easy for outside bodies to control an organisation: only the bureaucratic elites need to be dealt with.

There are various non-bureaucratic modes of social organisation, including families (where individuals are certainly not replaceable cogs!), networks and workers' control (where workers collectively make decisions about how to organise their work and what to produce).

Bureaucracy has become dominant only in the past few centuries, along with the rise of capitalism and the state system.³¹ It is an integral part of both, yet has its own dynamics. Bureaucratic elites operate to serve their own interests, even if this is at the expense of the organisation or its mandate. This is illustrated by the enormous salaries and share packages that many chief executive officers receive. This level of remuneration is seldom required to make the corporation more profitable, especially in cases where the company is losing money but the president gets a larger bonus. It is best explained by the power that organisational elites have to reward themselves, irrespective of the advantages to the organisation.

There is a lot of managerial rhetoric about flat hierarchies, team building, the network organisation and so forth, but the reality is that traditional bureaucratic hierarchy is alive and well. Bureaucracies are similar to authoritarian regimes: there is no freedom of speech, no freedom of assembly, no right to organise opposition movements and no ability to choose leaders.³² It is often said that democratic rights end when you walk in the office door.

Some of the greatest advances for workers have been through organising in order to claim the right to strike and bargain for better wages and conditions. Yet in most workplaces rights are very limited indeed. Aside from legally protected actions, such as strikes—and these are legally protected only in some countries and under specified conditions—nonviolent action by employees is likely to lead to dismissal. Often just speaking out against the boss, or criticising the

organisation on television, leads to harassment, demotion or dismissal. The same fate faces those who refuse to cooperate with instructions, who hold vigils or set up alternative decision-making methods. Most nonviolent action is considered illegitimate when carried out by employees.³³

Other systems of power. As well as patriarchy, the state and bureaucracy, there are quite a few other systems of power worth considering, including the military, racism, industrialism, domination of nature (including domination of nonhuman animals) and heterosexism. In each case, there are strong links to capitalism but the system of power is not easily reduced to purely a symptom of capitalism. These are not issues that can be resolved easily or finally. The main implication, in any case, is that overthrowing capitalism will not necessarily lead to solving other problems. Nor will addressing the other problems necessarily help in the struggle against capitalism.

There is no need to decide which issue is the “most important.” All systems of domination need to be challenged and transformed. Capitalism is certainly one of them, and that is sufficient rationale for developing a nonviolence strategy against it. In order to make this strategy as effective as possible, it is useful to recognise that there are other systems of domination also worth opposing and transforming, and that if possible the struggles against these systems of domination should be designed to be mutually reinforcing.

Other issues

Whether capitalism is about to collapse or actually will collapse cannot be easily predicted. Nor is it obvious that collapse is a good thing. It might open opportunities for grassroots alternatives,³⁴ but it might create a demand for state repression. The collapse of the Russian economy under capitalism in the 1990s—with a 50% drop in gross national product—did not seem to improve prospects for a better alternative. In any case, the possibility of collapse should be taken into account in developing strategy.

Whether globalism is a new phase in capitalist development or simply an extension and revision of national capitalist systems is important,³⁵ but it is not clear how much this should affect the way a nonviolent struggle against capitalism is carried out.

Conclusion

There are many ways to analyse capitalism, so in choosing or developing an analysis it is essential to keep in mind what it is to be used for. The analysis of capitalism in this chapter is for the purpose of improving nonviolence strategy against capitalism. Three areas were singled out: the role of state power, founded in violence, in protecting private property and the capitalist system more generally; the shaping of belief systems to support capitalism; and the squashing or cooption of alternatives to capitalism. Later, in chapters 6 to 12, strategies will be examined to see whether they address one or more of these areas. In this sense, the analysis of capitalism presented here is one made from the viewpoint of nonviolence strategy. Another connection between the analysis of capitalism and the assessment of strategy comes through the five principles for assessing economic alternatives, applied in this chapter to capitalism and in chapter 5 to nonviolent economic models.

It is important to remember that capitalism is not the only system of domination, nor necessarily the one with greatest centrality or priority. Therefore anticapitalist strategies need to be developed in conjunction with strategies against other forms of domination. Nonviolence has the great advantage of being applicable, as both method and goal, to a whole range of systems of domination.

Notes

1 The word “capitalism” is used here to refer to a set of social relations which have significant regularity and are constantly being both reinforced and challenged. At times I refer to “capitalism” as an entity in itself; this is just a shorthand for a persistent set of social relations and should not be taken to imply that these relations are monolithic, unchanging or autonomous. A poststructural approach might avoid the word “capitalism” altogether and refer instead to the multitude of contingent and problematic negotiations, behaviours and the like. My main aim is to raise the issue of nonviolent action as a means of challenging capitalist social relations. No doubt this analysis could be rewritten from a rigorous poststructuralist perspective. However, I doubt that it would be any more valuable in that form.

2 This expression is by analogy to the use of “actually existing socialism” to distinguish Soviet-type societies from the ideal of socialism. See Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* (London: NLB, 1978).

3 Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London: NLB, 1975).

4 See for example David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* (New York: Norton, 1998).

5 Alfie Kohn, *No Contest: The Case Against Competition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986).

6 Randall Collins, *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification* (New York: Academic Press, 1979); Ronald Dore, *The Diploma Disease: Education, Qualification and Development* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976).

7 On the psychological aspects, see Morton Deutsch, *Distributive Justice: A Social-Psychological Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

8 On the way that social and economic changes are causing greater inequality, see Robert H. Frank and Philip J. Cook, *The Winner-Take-All Society: Why the Few at the Top Get So Much More Than the Rest of Us* (New York: Penguin, 1996).

9 There is a large body of writing on the nature of and rationale for work. See for example P. D. Anthony, *The Ideology of Work* (London: Tavistock, 1977); Vernon Richards (ed.), *Why Work? Arguments for the Leisure Society* (London: Freedom Press, 1983).

10 On the enormous surplus of production over needs, see J. W. Smith, *The World's Wasted Wealth 2: Save Our Wealth, Save Our Environment* (Cambria, CA: Institute for Economic Democracy, 1994).

11 Capitalism based on exchange of owned properties may be transforming into a postmodern system of negotiated access in a networked world, such as through borrowing, renting, outsourcing and franchising. See Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Access: The New Culture of Hypercapitalism, Where All of Life Is a Paid-for Experience* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 2000). However, even with such changes, the role of state power in maintaining the system's elements of control remains crucial.

12 Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Nature and Logic of Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 1985), p. 105, says "remove the state and the regime of capital would not last a day." See also Michael Moran and Maurice Wright (eds.), *The Market and the State: Studies in Interdependence* (London: Macmillan, 1991); Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States,*

AD990-1992 (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992). Note that there are areas of obvious friction between state and corporate interests. For example, businesses want secure encryption whereas government spy agencies want only encryption that they can break. The clash is most obvious in total economic mobilisation for war, during which the state overrides the market. See Lionel Robbins, *The Economic Problem in Peace and War: Some Reflections on Objectives and Mechanisms* (London: Macmillan, 1950).

13 Another factor is US policy elites' support for elite-dominated representative government in Third World countries as a better method of domination in a globalising world, using methods that appear more consensual than authoritarian: William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

14 Alfie Kohn, *The Brighter Side of Human Nature: Altruism and Empathy in Everyday Life* (New York: BasicBooks, 1990).

15 Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Happiness* (London: Methuen, 1987).

16 Relevant here is Paul L. Wachtel, *The Poverty of Affluence: A Psychological Portrait of the American Way of Life* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1989).

17 Walter LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 1999).

18 Principled libertarians support unrestricted immigration.

19 Stephen Marglin, "What do bosses do? The origins and functions of hierarchy in capitalist production," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Summer 1974, pp. 60-112.

20 Community-based systems should be distinguished from private charities. The key distinction concerns who controls the provision.

21 Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969). A specific example of the way state-led transformation discourages popular initiative is given by Ed Brown, "Nicaragua: Sandinistas, social transformation and the continuing search for a popular economic programme," *Geoforum*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1996, pp. 275-295.

22 Martin P. Davidson, *The Consumerist Manifesto: Advertising in Postmodern Times* (London: Routledge, 1992).

23 On status and economics, see Robert H. Frank, *Choosing the Right Pond: Human Behavior and the Quest for Status* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

24 Sylvia Walby, *Patriarchy at Work: Patriarchal and Capitalist Relations in Employment* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).

25 Cynthia Cockburn, *Machinery of Dominance: Women, Men and Technical Know-How* (London: Pluto Press, 1985).

26 On the state and the military, see Ekkehart Krippendorff, *Staat und Krieg: Die Historische Logik Politischer Unvernunft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), as reviewed by Johan Galtung, "The state, the military and war," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 1989, pp. 101-105; Bruce D. Porter, *War and the Rise of the State: The Military Foundations of Modern Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1992).

27 On grassroots strategy against war, see Brian Martin, *Uprooting War* (London: Freedom Press, 1984).

28 Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

29 Karl Liebknecht, *Militarism* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1917); Martin Shaw (ed.), *War, State and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1984), especially Michael Mann, "Capitalism and militarism," pp. 25-46.

30 An excellent attempt to explain the US military involvement in the Vietnam war as in the interests of capitalism is given by Paul Joseph, *Cracks in the Empire: State Politics in the Vietnam War* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), but his material suggests that the interests of state managers took priority over the interests of capitalism.

31 Henry Jacoby, *The Bureaucratization of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

32 On bureaucracies as similar to authoritarian states, see Deena Weinstein, *Bureaucratic Opposition: Challenging Abuses at the Workplace* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1979).

33 On nonviolent action within and against bureaucracies, see Brian Martin, Sharon Callaghan and Chris Fox, with Rosie Wells and Mary Cawte, *Challenging Bureaucratic Elites* (Wollongong: Schweik Action Wollongong, 1997; http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/dissent/documents/Schweik_cbe/).

34 L. S. Stavrianos, *The Promise of the Coming Dark Age* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1976).

35 See chapter 11.