

The Revolutionary Intelligentsia

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ABSTRACT

Recently, Marxists and other leftists such as Adolph Reed, Vivek Chibber, Catherine Liu and others have argued that the Left is faltering because it consists largely of professional-managerial class intellectuals, rather than being composed by the working class, whose class interest is more tied to neoliberal identity politics than socialist politics. Thus, according to these Marxists, there is a growing divide between the Left and the working class because the Left is dominated by PMC intellectuals whose class interest is at odds with that of the working class. I argue that while there is a divide of some sort between the Left and the working class, the divide can't be attributed to the Left being dominated by PMC intellectuals because the very concept of PMC is dubious from the standpoint of Marxist theory. Rather than utilizing the concept of the PMC, which was developed in the 1970s by [Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich](#), to explain the divide between the Left and the working class, I argue that it is a recurring problem since the beginning of socialist politics. Lenin attributed this problem to opportunism and overall a political and theoretical failure to be committed to revolutionary theory. I turn to the works of Lenin and Gramsci to explain the role of revolutionary intellectuals and their relationship with the working class. I argue that currently we're in a war of position in which revolutionary intellectuals must

learn to adapt and update revolutionary theory to win consent from the proletarian masses before we're able to have a revolution.

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One of the prevailing criticisms of the Left is that it is dominated by middle class or PMC (professional-managerial class) intellectuals. Marxists and other leftists (both of whom I shall call self-critical leftists) such as [Vivek Chibber](#), Adolph Reed, [Catherine Liu](#), [Barbara Ehrenreich](#), and others all seem to make a similar critique that the Left is faltering because it is dominated by middle class/PMC intellectuals who have more in common with educated, coastal, urban, and cosmopolitan liberal elites than they do with the proletarian masses. These self-critical Leftists argue that not only is the Left's class composition overwhelmingly middle class, but also their class interest is in contradiction with that of the working class, contributing to the growing divide between the Left and the working class. Adolph Reed, for instance, argues that:

“Even when its proponents believe themselves to be radicals, this antiracist politics is a professional-managerial class politics. Its adherents are not concerned with trying to generate the large, broad political base needed to pursue a transformative agenda because they are committed fundamentally to pursuit of racial parity within neoliberalism, not social transformation.”¹

Adolph Reed argues in the above passage that the reason why many self-identified leftists push for objectives that don't directly challenge the capitalist political economy is that their anti-racist politics is essentially professional-managerial politics. In other words, it is in the class interest of these anti-racist “leftists” as professional-managers to reform capitalism within the framework of neoliberalism in order to open up more opportunities for their class. What Reed assumes in his argument is that self-identified leftists under the guise of anti-racist politics are pushing for their own class interest while being indifferent to the interest of the

working class. Decades before Adolph Reed used the concept of PMC to critique the Left, Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenrich argue that the PMC's relationship with the working class is "objectively antagonistic."² How did they reach this conclusion? Let's begin with how the Ehrenreichs define PMC. The PMC consists of:

"salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist social relations."³

In other words, while the function of an average wage worker is to not only sell their labor power but also produce surplus value and thereby help valorize capital, the function of the PMC is to reproduce capitalist culture and ideology through institutions of education, journalism, entertainment, art, public relations, religion (including civil religion), and so on. Furthermore, according to the Ehrenrichs, the origin of the PMC as a class is the historical expropriation of productive skills that were once indigenous to a working-class culture.⁴ For example, skills that were very common in working class households became uncommon or non-existent because those domestic skills were professionalized, restructuring the division of labor. For instance, midwifery as a domestic practice was made illegal by the state in order to be replaced by professional healthcare work.⁵ The Ehrenrichs also use examples of "culture-producers," such as physicians, journalists, teachers, ad-men, and so on, who replace an autonomous working-class culture in which workers used to perform tasks associated with aforementioned "culture-producers."⁶

Overall, when Marxists such as Adolph Reed argue that much of leftist politics is in fact PMC politics, they are arguing that contemporary leftist politics is at odds with the interest of the working class. While I agree that there are cases where what passes off as "leftist" politics can be at odds with the interest of the working class, I don't think the root of the problem is that the Left is dominated by PMC intellectuals because the concept of the PMC is dubious for a couple of reasons.

First, one of the Ehrenrichs' criteria for delineating the PMCs from the working class is that skills once indigenous to the working class culture are expropriated from the working class through professionalization. If we consistently follow this criterion, we would have to conclude that service employees at barbershops are PMCs since their

skills were once common and indigenous to working class cultures but became uncommon due to professionalization. Barbers require a license to sell their labor to perform barbering. While this alone doesn't prohibit people from barbering by themselves in their own home, the professionalization of barbering has largely replaced domestic barbering that exists in working class culture. However, most of us would agree that such barbers don't strike us as "PMCs" or white-collar workers. When most of us think of "PMCs," we think of white-collar workers who work in business offices, academia, government offices, journalism, and so on, but employees from barbershops don't come across as white-collar workers.

Second, another criterion that Ehrenrichs use to delineate the PMCs from the working class is that the former reproduces capitalist ideology/culture and capitalist social relations. However, this criterion is prohibitively broad. For instance, the very act of selling labor reproduces capitalist social relation and by extension capitalist cultures/ideology. Does this make wage workers PMCs? Capitalists who purchase labor power to accumulate capital in the long run are reproducing capitalist social relations, but they aren't PMCs. There are many wage workers who propagate capitalist cultures and ideologies without being formal deputies or functionaries of what Althusser calls an ideological state apparatus⁷. For instance, there are some false-conscious wage workers who are part-time online streamers, TikTokers, or Twitter users that propagate capitalist cultures/ideologies, but does this make them PMCs?

Third, the concept of PMC assumes a very sharp distinction between physical labor and mental labor. However, Antonio Gramsci challenges the sharp distinction between physical labor and mental labor. Gramsci writes:

"Can one find a unitary criterion to characterise equally all the diverse and disparate activities of intellectuals and to distinguish these at the same time and in an essential way from the activities of other social groupings? The most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations. **Indeed the worker or proletarian, for example, is not specifically characterised by his manual or**

instrumental work, but by performing this work in specific conditions and in specific social relations (apart from the consideration that ***purely physical labour does not exist*** and that even Taylor's phrase of "trained gorilla" is a metaphor to indicate a limit in a certain direction: in any physical work, even the most degraded and mechanical, there exists a minimum of technical qualification, that is, a minimum of creative intellectual activity)⁸." (my emphasis).

Gramsci argues in the passage that rather than grouping labor activities according to their intrinsic nature, one should analyze them in the context of an ensemble of social relations. Following this line of reasoning, Gramsci argued that a worker or proletarian is not characterized by their manual or instrumental work, but rather they are characterized as proletarian or worker according to the specific conditions and specific social relations in which labor takes place. In the light of Gramsci's argument, the concept of PMC seems dubious. The concept of "PMC," which is defined as a class of salaried *mental workers*, is used to characterize workers according to the intrinsic nature of their work: mental labor. However, this way of characterizing workers assumes that there are purely (or primarily) intellectual activities performed by salaried workers while there are purely (or primarily) manual labor performed by workers. Gramsci rightly points out that a proletariat is not specifically characterized by the intrinsic nature of their manual or instrumental work, but rather their labor is characterized by performing labor in specific conditions and in specific social relations. Karl Marx makes a similar point in the appendix of Capital. Marx argues that an author such as John Milton who produces his work but sells it by himself is an unproductive merchant (unproductive from the standpoint of capital), but a "literary proletarian of Leipzig" employed by a private publication firm is a productive worker.⁹ A literary proletariat who writes for a publication firm is performing labor that requires mental and physical capacities, but he is a "literary proletarian" by virtue of his labor being performed under "specific conditions" and in specific social relations."

Overall, the concept of PMC as a distinct class from the proletariat is at odds with the Marxist conception of the working class, which is grounded on analyzing labor not in terms of its intrinsic nature but analyzing labor under specific social conditions and specific social relations. Setting aside the theoretical soundness of the concept PMC, it is not necessary to appeal to the concept of PMC to critique the Left. Throughout the history of the (socialist) Left, there has always been an intermittent or recurring

problem of a gap between intellectuals and the working class. Lenin observes this recurring problem from the late 19th century to early 20th century way before the concept of the PMC was developed:

“The separation of the working-class movement and socialism gave rise to weakness and underdevelopment in each: the theories of the socialists, unfused with the workers’ struggle, remained nothing more than utopias, good wishes that had no effect on real life; the working-class movement remained petty, fragmented, and did not acquire political significance, was not enlightened by the advanced science of its time.”¹⁰

The gap between the working class and revolutionary intellectuals, then, is not a contemporary problem that emerged since the late Cold War period, but it is a recurring (though by no means transhistorical) problem of the Left. In Lenin’s case, he attributed this divide between revolutionary intellectuals and the working class to opportunism and social chauvinism prior to and during World War 1. Before World War 1, there were many socialists such as Eduardo Bernstein who radically revised Marxism to justify reformism. During World War 1, there were self-identified Marxists who misuse Marxism to justify their social chauvinism. In the case of the latter, Lenin attributed this problem of opportunism and social chauvinism to the growing labor aristocracy, but this attribution can extend to the former.

Right now there is undoubtedly a divide of some kind between the working class and intellectuals. What gave rise to this divide? Before I attempt to offer an answer, it’s important to understand the role of a revolutionary intellectual from a Lenninist perspective. The critique of the Left as being predominated by PMC intellectuals seems to downplay or ignore the role of revolutionary intellectuals. Explaining the role of a revolutionary intellectual would help rectify this error.

What is the role of the intellectuals with regards to the liberation of the proletariat and the oppressed peoples? In *What is to be Done*, Vladimir Lenin, whose view on this question is inspired by Karl Kautsky, writes:

“We have said that *there could not have been* Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. ***It would have to be brought to them from without.*** The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively

by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia." (my emphasis).¹¹

What Lenin is arguing is that the working class, left to their own devices, will at best develop trade-union consciousness, but they won't necessarily develop "Social-Democratic" consciousness without the help of intellectuals. What Lenin means by "trade-union consciousness" is that in the context of class struggle workers will organically and spontaneously develop trade unions with which they wield against the capitalists to struggle for a living wage, safe working conditions, fewer working hours, and other labor rights. However, trade-union consciousness is *spontaneously developed consciousness* that motivates the working class to struggle against the capitalists, but within the limited framework of wage labor. What is implicit in trade-union consciousness is the acceptance of wage labor as a legitimate and "naturalized" form of labor that wage workers can only reform but not overcome.

This form of consciousness develops spontaneously in that it is based primarily on the immediate experience of the working class with regards to wage labor. In the long run, when experiencing the symptoms of exploitation by capital for a sufficient period of time, wage workers are likely to respond against exploitation by forming unions and thereby exercising their newfound collective bargaining power to struggle for better working and living conditions. However, the experience of exploitation that gives rise to trade-union consciousness is limited to what is the case, wage labor, rather than what is possible beyond observed reality: communism. In other words, trade-union consciousness is conditioned by the immediate experience of the working class with respect to existing reality, but it doesn't look beyond immediate and surface-level experience. This is the limitation of spontaneity of trade-union

consciousness, but nonetheless the development of trade-union consciousness is a necessary stepping stone towards what Lenin calls “Social-Democratic” consciousness.

“Social-Democratic” consciousness is a result of the process of the negation of negation. Trade-unions consciousness negates the previous particular form of servile consciousness of workers who feel that they are powerless in the presence of various socioeconomic forces associated with capital (e.g. competition in the labor market, fluctuation of the price of labor power, prices of commodities necessary for reproduction of labor power, price of rent, inflation, and so on). The sense of powerlessness associated with servile consciousness creates the desire to develop socioeconomic agency for overcoming the seemingly impersonal socioeconomic forces of capital. When the desire grows strong among workers in proportion to the worsening working conditions, workers are motivated to act on their desire and thereby spontaneously develop trade-union consciousness. The activity of workers to modify the reality of wage labor, falling short of complete transformation, negates their servile consciousness, but the desire for socioeconomic agency is elevated to a higher consciousness: trade-unions consciousness.

However, trade-union consciousness is predicated on the acceptance of the “reality” of wage labor. What is implicit within trade-union consciousness is the persistent naturalization or reification of wage labor by workers. Wage labor presupposes the world of commodities that *appears* as a fixed and natural reality that dominates over us. Since trade-union consciousness is ultimately conditioned by the appearance of the naturalized, reified, and fixed world of commodities, workers can’t overcome capital without being conscious of the possibility beyond the world of capital. In other words, for workers to go beyond the surface appearance of the world of capital, they must develop a higher form of consciousness that negates trade-union consciousness. This is “social-democratic” or socialist consciousness.

Workers, left to their own devices, can organically and spontaneously develop trade-union consciousness, but they won’t organically and spontaneously develop a revolutionary theory that offers a comprehensive and radical critique of capitalism. Lenin, following Karl Kautsky, observes that revolutionary theory is developed by the revolutionary intelligentsia, many of whom originate from bourgeois intelligentsia. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels originated from the bourgeois intellectuals. They

synthesize bourgeois intellectual theories from German Philosophy (e.g. Hegel's method of dialectics), English Political Economy (e.g. Adam Smith's and David Ricardo's political economic theories), and French Socialism in order to develop a systematic and radical critique of capitalism that reveals its potential to be transformed into communism.¹² In essence, what Marx and Engels developed is what most of us call *Marxism*. This revolutionary theory originates from bourgeois intellectuals, but it is brought to the proletariat by revolutionary intellectuals. To be clear, revolutionary intellectuals are heterogeneous with regard to their class composition. Revolutionary intellectuals can consist of workers, petite-bourgeoisie, bourgeoisie, peasants, and so on, but what they all have in common is their commitment to revolutionary theory and their task of bringing it to the working class. In another essay, Lenin argues that there needs to be a *fusion* between revolutionary intellectuals and the proletariat:

“At first socialism and the working-class movement existed separately in all the European countries. The workers struggled against the capitalists, they organised strikes and unions, while the socialists stood aside from the working-class movement, formulated doctrines criticising the contemporary capitalist, bourgeois system of society and demanding its replacement by another system, the higher, socialist system. **The separation of the working-class movement and socialism gave rise to weakness and underdevelopment in each: the theories of the socialists, unfused with the workers' struggle, remained nothing more than utopias, good wishes that had no effect on real life; the working-class movement remained petty, fragmented, and did not acquire political significance, was not enlightened by the advanced science of its time. For this reason we see in all European countries a constantly growing urge to fuse socialism with the working-class movement in a single *Social-Democratic* movement. When this fusion takes place the class struggle of the workers becomes *the conscious struggle of the proletariat to emancipate itself from exploitation by the propertied classes*, it is evolved into a higher form of the socialist workers' movement—the *independent working-class Social-Democratic party*. By directing socialism towards a fusion with the working-class movement, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels did their greatest service: they created a revolutionary theory that explained the necessity for this**

fusion and gave socialists the task of organising the class struggle of the proletariat." (my emphasis)¹³

Lenin argues that when revolutionary intellectuals and workers are kept separate from each other, **this separation gives rise to underdevelopment of each**. On one hand Revolutionary intellectuals degenerate into petit-bourgeois academics who treat Marxism as a purely discursive activity. On the other hand, the working class, lacking the necessary social cohesion as the revolutionary class, remains politically fragmented and stuck with the mindset of trade-union consciousness. There needs to be a fusion between revolutionary intellectuals and the working class in the form of a communist party. A communist party is the unity of opposites between revolutionary intellectuals and the working class, constituting *revolutionary consciousness*. The fusion between revolutionary intellectuals and the working class is the unity between theory and practice. The fusion between revolutionary intellectuals and the working class develops both groups into interpenetrating forces that co-constitute revolutionary consciousness as a whole. The co-constitution by revolutionary intellectuals and the working class is materialized in a working class party equipped with a revolutionary political program based on revolutionary theory.

Following Lenin's argument about the importance of revolutionary intellectuals, Antonio Gramsci emphasizes on the role of revolutionary intellectuals, but he develops a theory of intellectuals in general, especially organic intellectuals, as a group who articulates a class outlook for a specific social class that aspires to become the ruling class or maintain their status as the ruling class.¹⁴ On behalf of an aspiring ruling class, intellectuals articulate a class outlook as a *universal outlook* representing all classes in order to obtain consent from them. For example (an example not necessarily used by Gramsci), bourgeois intellectuals (e.g. John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot, and others), prior to and during the French Revolution, articulate and develop philosophical components of liberalism and then present liberalism, a bourgeois outlook, as a universal outlook to help the bourgeoisie obtain consent from the popular classes (e.g. peasants, proletariat, petite-bourgeoisie, artisans, small merchants, and so on). The bourgeoisie, with the help of their intellectuals, obtained consent from the popular classes to overthrow the *ancien régime* and rule over them as their new ruling class with the veneer of freedom and equality.

Just as bourgeois intellectuals help the bourgeoisie obtain consent from the popular classes to create and reproduce bourgeois cultural hegemony, the revolutionary intellectuals can help the proletariat to create and reproduce its own hegemony. Like the bourgeois intellectuals who articulate the political theory of liberalism in familiar terms that would resonate with the bourgeoisie, revolutionary intellectuals must articulate revolutionary theory in familiar terms that would resonate with the proletariat. In this stage of the class struggle, revolutionary intellectuals are engaging in what Gramsci calls the *war of position*. In other words, in the war of position revolutionary intellectuals are engaging in an ideological and “spiritual” struggle against the hegemonic class, the bourgeoisie, to win the minds and hearts of the proletariat. But this war of position requires that intellectuals become familiar with the workers’ collective experience and culture in order to articulate revolutionary theory that would resonate with them. This includes transforming revolutionary theory in its pure abstract and universal form into a concrete universal: a revolutionary political programme. If revolutionary intellectuals succeed in articulating revolutionary theory to teach the proletariat, they transition from the War of Position to the War of Maneuver. The proletariat becomes a socially cohesive revolutionary class, a class-for-itself, that acts as a revolutionary agent against capital.

Overall, both Lenin and Gramsci recognize the significance of revolutionary intellectuals. However, despite the significance of revolutionary intellectuals, it is important to remember that revolutionary intellectuals are not immune to problems. One of the looming and insidious threats is that intellectuals become separate from the proletariat and thereby become insular academics who reduce Marxism into a purely discursive activity. However, a broader and more general problem is that aspiring revolutionary intellectuals, under the insidious, ubiquitous, and systemic influence of cultural hegemony, become intellectuals of the bourgeoisie. In what sense is an intellectual an intellectual of the bourgeoisie? To answer this question I shall briefly discuss what Gramsci means by “intellectual.”

Gramsci writes that “all men are intellectuals” insofar as they possess and exercise their intellectual capacities with respect to their work or independently thereof. Given this broad sense of being an intellectual, Gramsci argued that strictly speaking there is no such thing as a non-intellectual. However, while everyone is an intellectual, in colloquial language what people refer to as “intellectuals” are in fact deputies or functionaries of the bourgeoisie who occupy positions in (bourgeois) civil society.

These deputies of bourgeois civil society play a critical role of articulating and propagating a bourgeois outlook as a universal outlook in order to obtain (or maintain) consent from the popular classes to be ruled by the ruling class. To put it concretely, universities, NGOs/NPOs, mainstream media outlets, think tanks, Churches, and other institutions articulate the bourgeois outlook as a universal outlook for all social classes, especially the most oppressed and marginalized subalterns, to manufacture consent and thereby maintain the hegemony of the bourgeoisie.

There are many different and competing bourgeois outlooks that different intellectuals articulate to obtain and maintain consent from the popular classes. The most successful bourgeois outlook becomes the hegemonic outlook of the bourgeoisie. The ruling class must constantly adapt to capitalism in flux, so they must make adjustments to their class outlook in order to maintain rule by consent from the popular classes. Since the Covid-19 Pandemic, George Floyd Protest, MeToo movement, Climate change movement, indigenous movements, and so on, the ruling class is forced to make significant renovations to their outlook in order to secure consent from the popular classes, especially the most marginalized and oppressed who suffer from white supremacy, settler-colonialism, heteronormative patriarchy, and so on. This means that the ruling class must incorporate concepts and language of radically-sounding theories from universities and professional activism in order to appease the most oppressed and marginalized. For instance, the ruling class will adopt the identitarian-oriented language of intersectionality, feminism, queer theory, and so on in order to present its renovated bourgeois outlook as a universal outlook of "social justice," lending recognition (albeit limited and formal) to the most oppressed and marginalized subalterns. However, in order to accomplish this task, the ruling class depends on the new intellectuals to renovate their bourgeois outlook by incorporating radical-sounding theories into liberalism. These new intellectuals are careerists whose purpose is to renovate the bourgeois outlook into one that reifies and abstracts social justice away from the material reality of capitalism into an abstract and reified universal "social justice." This newfound purpose creates more careers in universities, NGOs/NPOs, mainstream media, popular publication, and so on.

Careers, which naturally come with prestige, fundings, titles, publications, and other forms of bribery, attract aspiring and naive revolutionary intellectuals, turning them

into deputies or functionaries of the bourgeoisie. Many of these aspiring revolutionary intellectuals either outright abandon Marxism for pseudo-radical alternatives or they are “robbing the revolutionary theory of its *substance*, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it.”¹⁵ Ultimately, these new pseudo-radical intellectuals, who consist of self-identified Marxists as well as non-Marxists, make false promises of liberation in the name of “social justice,” but their version of “social justice” is essentially reformism with radical rhetoric.

The intellectuals I describe above are effectively the most successful and desirable intellectuals for the ruling class because they're able to re-articulate the ruling class outlook that resonates with even the most oppressed and marginalized of subalterns in order to secure their consent to govern. However, there are other intellectuals who are objectively intellectuals of the bourgeoisie insofar as they articulate an ideology that is congruent with capitalism, but they fail to undertake the task of articulating an ideology for the bourgeoisie that can obtain consent from the popular classes to rule. What I have in mind are neo-fascists, libertarians, Christian nationalists, neoconservatives, and others who articulate a far-right wing ideology that is formally congruent with capitalism, but incongruent with liberalism. Their ideology is not favored by the ruling class because the latter is convinced that they can continue to rule primarily by consent under the framework of liberalism.

In general, every person is an intellectual. However, in the context of a class society intellectuals inevitably have a class character. In a class society, an intellectual is not merely someone whose occupation requires regular contemplation about ideas, but someone who utilizes their intellectual faculties to articulate a class outlook for either the dominant class or the subaltern class for the purpose of consolidating class power. An intellectual's class character doesn't depend on their class origin, but rather what kind of class outlook they're articulating. For example, Friedrich Engels is from the bourgeoisie, but his class character as an intellectual is proletarian because he helped Karl Marx articulate a revolutionary theory for the subaltern: the proletariat. In contrast, intellectuals who function as deputies of capital in bourgeois civil society have the class character of bourgeoisie even though many intellectuals are proletarian in origin. Intellectuals who originate from the subaltern become deputies of the bourgeoisie by virtue of their position of articulating and propagating a hegemonic outlook to obtain consent from the popular classes for the ruling class. This is not too dissimilar from deputies of the coercive state apparatus, the police,

many of whom are proletarian in origin but have a class character of the bourgeoisie. Thus, there is no such thing as an intellectual who has their own *sui generis* class interest independently of the subaltern class and dominant class. Intellectuals are either of the dominant class or of the subaltern class by virtue of whose class outlook they're articulating and advocating.

Because the ruling class needs to continue to rule even the most oppressed and marginalized subalterns primarily by manufactured consent than by open terror (though this form of rule by manufactured consent is critically supplemented by hidden terror), the ruling class needs to adopt concepts and vocabularies that resonate with the downtrodden subaltern. However, the ruling class is unable to perform this task alone without the help of intellectuals. Consequently, the ruling class recruit intellectuals who are relatively well-versed in the radical and progressive intellectual traditions. These intellectuals are not revolutionary intellectuals, but reformists who seek to preserve liberal democracy in the name of "social justice."

Revolutionary intellectuals must critique this abstract universal of "social justice" that only offers reform, but not real emancipation. The ruling class' conception of "social justice" appears to center on the subalterns. However, under this bourgeois conception the subalterns are not seen as subjects or authors of history but *objects of pity*. The subalterns are seen by the ruling class as passive victims of history who receive rectification and reparations from the ruling class, but revolutionary intellectuals must strive to re-articulate revolutionary theory that portrays subalterns as self-active subjects who make history. Emancipation can never come from above, from the ruling class, but must always be an activity of revolutionary subjects that transform the alienated world of capital into their own authentic image, an image that is effectively being censored by the ruling class through opportunistic intellectuals.

FOOTNOTES

1. Adolph Reed, "Antiracism: a neoliberal alternative to a left," *Dialectical Anthropology* 42 (2018): ↩
2. Barabra Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class," *Radical America* 11 (1977): 17. ↩
3. *Ibid.*, 13. ↩

4. Ibid., 18. ↩
5. Ibid., 17. ↩
6. Ibid., 17. ↩
7. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York City: Monthly Review, 1971). ↩
8. Antonio Gramsci, "Intellectuals and Hegemony," in *Prison Notebook* ↩
9. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 1044. ↩
10. Vladimir Lenin, "A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy," in *Lenin's Collected Works: Volume 4* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964): 255-285. ↩
11. Vladimir Lenin, "Spontaneity of the Masses and the Consciousness of the Social-Democrats," in *What Is To Be Done* (Paris: Foreign Language Press, 2021). ↩
12. Vladimir Lenin, "Three Sources and Three Components of Marxism," in *Lenin's Collected Works: Volume 19* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977): pages 21-28. ↩
13. Vladimir Lenin, "A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy," in *Lenin's Collected Works: Volume 4* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964): 255-285. ↩
14. Antonio Gramsci, "Intellectuals and Hegemony," in *Prison Notebook* ↩
15. Vladimir Lenin, *State and Revolution*. ↩

TAGS

[academia](#), [class](#), [intellectuals](#), [leftism](#)
