

The system in this country is *not* “democracy.”

If you ask people, “What is the system we have in this country?”—almost everybody will say “democracy,” even if many think this “democracy” has “problems,” even very serious problems.

The reason almost everybody will answer this way is because that is how they have been conditioned and propagandized to think, since they were very small—by the educational system, the politicians, the media, and all the other dominant institutions of this country.

Well, “almost everybody” would be *wrong*.

The actual answer to the question—what is the system that rules in this country?—is that it is the system of *capitalism*. The capitalist economy is the *foundation* for the whole system in this country. And the “democracy” that exists is democracy *on the basis of this capitalism*.

In the capitalist system, a relatively small number of people, the *capitalist class*, owns the major *means of production* (land, factories, and the technology and machinery, as well as the raw materials, that are used in production). Those who own these means of production profit from the labor of those who do *not* own them, and are therefore forced to work for those who do. Capitalism is based on *exploitation*. What is this exploitation? Profiting from the labor of *others—working them in conditions that create the greatest profit for the capitalists*, regardless of the effect on these workers. The capitalists themselves are *compelled* to drive the workers this way, because each capitalist is in competition with other capitalists.

(This is the basic situation—the basic nature and relations of this system. I explain this more fully in two articles on [exploitation](#) and [putting an end to exploitation and oppression](#), as well as the article [Commodities & Capitalism—And The Terrible Consequences of this System](#)—all of which are available at revcom.us.)

The *capitalist economy sets the terms* for the system as a whole, including the political institutions, the educational system, the dominant culture and ruling ideas: the “superstructure” of this system. If you have a capitalist economic *foundation*, then the *superstructure* of politics and ideology that exists on the basis of this foundation, will be—*has to be—in line* with that foundation, or the system will not be able to function. This is true of any structure, or any system: *the foundation sets the terms, and the limits, for what the superstructure will be*. Imagine trying to put a wooden roof, with heavy logs, on top of a hut made of straw: *the whole thing would collapse!* And the same applies to the superstructure of the capitalist system: the “democracy” that exists in this country is, and can only be, “democracy” that is based on, serves, and is *limited by*, the capitalist system of exploitation and oppression—or else the system will not hold up, will not be able to function.

Under this system, any “rights” that people have, as well as the law and the “rule of law,” and the political process as a whole: all of this is shaped—and limited—by what will serve the capitalist system of exploitation and the interests of the capitalist class that rules in this system.

Anything or anyone that seriously threatens (or is seen as seriously threatening) the rule of the capitalist class, or the basic functioning and “stability” of the capitalist system, will be *suppressed* by that ruling capitalist class and its institutions of violent repression, especially the armed forces and police, as well as the courts.

In the *capitalist* system—with the capitalist economy as the foundation for the system as a whole—it is formally declared that there is “freedom for everybody” (nobody is supposed to be owned as slaves, and supposedly nobody is restricted by law and custom to certain inferior positions). And there is the principle of “formal equality”: everyone is supposedly “equal,” in terms of opportunity, and “equal before the law.” In reality, of course, things don’t work that way, because “money talks” and people with more money have more influence—and, again, those who have acquired a great deal of wealth, through capitalist exploitation, have power that others do not have.

Most fundamentally, there cannot really be equality between the capitalists who own the major means of production, and those who do not own them and are reduced to working for the capitalists. In a real sense, those who do own the major means of production have *the power of life and death* over those who own no means of production (and also have no specialized skill, or high level of education), because those in this position can only live if they are being exploited by the capitalists: For masses of people, if they cannot get hired by, and exploited by, those who own the means of production, they will be left with no “legal and legitimate” means to live, or provide for a family.

All this is an expression of profound *inequality*—including *inequality* of opportunity: the capitalists who own means of production have the “opportunity” to get rich, while those who do not own means of production (and, again, are without any specialized skill or high level of education) have the “opportunity” to be exploited—or to starve—or to turn to hustling or crime in one form or another.

Further, in this basic relation of exploitation, the *outward appearance* is that there is equality: the capitalists pay a wage to the workers they employ, in exchange for the labor the workers carry out for the capitalist. But the *reality* is this: the wage the workers receive is equal to *only part* of the wealth that they create through their labor—and surplus wealth (*surplus value*) that the workers create, beyond what is equal to their wages, goes to the *capitalist*. That is the “dirty little secret” of capitalist exploitation. It is the basis for capitalist profit—and, in fact, for the functioning of the capitalist system as a whole.

Along with that, where certain “races” and other social groups have historically been discriminated against, there is that whole dimension of inequality.

So, the “formal equality” of the capitalist system covers over a great deal of *inequality*. And the most essential freedom in capitalist society is “freedom” to be dominated by, and to operate within the confines of, the capitalist system.

Even though *individuals* within the exploited and oppressed groups in society may rise to a more privileged and wealthy position (or, in a few cases, even become part of the ruling class) the *masses* of exploited and oppressed people *cannot* do so within the confines of this system of capitalism. The idea that “everybody” can do so is one of the main and most important *illusions* that is constantly propagated by the ruling class, as a means of keeping people loyal to this system—and limiting their vision and aspirations to what is said to be possible within this system.

Next, I will get further into how this system, and its rule *over* the people, actually functions—and specifically why the basic decisions about the direction of society are *not* decided by the people through elections.



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