

Noam Chomsky and Marv Waterstone. 2021. *Consequences of capitalism: Manufacturing discontent and resistance*. Chicago: Haymarket Books. 9781642592634; US\$19.95

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Environmental degradation, widespread social injustice, rising income and wealth inequality and the COVID-19 pandemic are all global crises which should be at the forefront of the political agenda. In *Consequences of capitalism: manufacturing discontent and resistance*, Noam Chomsky and Marv Waterstone highlight the connection between these crises and their underlying power structures. The authors aim to achieve two objectives. The first is to connect phenomena that are normally presented as unrelated and frame them as consequences of the predominant capitalist system. This linkage is instrumental to the second objective, which is to create a common ground for coalition among social movements asking for systematic change and solutions to these global crises. The book arose from a series of lectures called *What is Politics?*, a class offered to undergraduates and the broader community at the University of Arizona by Chomsky and Waterstone over several years. Each chapter is structured in two parts: Waterstone provides a theoretical perspective on capitalism and its effects, while Chomsky's discussion connects theory with historical context, drawing heavily from USA domestic and foreign policy.

The book begins by asking readers "how do we know what we think we know about the world?" (Chomsky and Waterstone, 2021, p. 1). This question sets the tone for chapter one which explores the processes through which common sense is created, reinforced and changed, and its relation with power. Following Antonio Gramsci (1985), the authors define common sense as what many people in a particular time and place believe to be the way the world works. Common sense is a constructed and therefore questionable concept: those in power determine what constitutes hegemonic common sense, and seek to maintain the status quo: the way things are the way they should be. However, in times of weakened legitimacy of power, it is possible for alternative world views to supplant the existing ones.

The second chapter deploys common sense to explore capitalist realism (as defined by Fisher 2009). The chapter introduces Fisher's concept after a brief overview of how capitalism works and how it has historically been adopted as the way to organise the political economy of society. Not only is capitalism the prevailing common sense, but it also has successfully been imposed as the immutable natural order: "it is now easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism" (Chomsky and Waterstone, 2021, p. 16). Chomsky and Waterstone argue the illusion of the natural order of capitalism must be maintained. The conditions for its reproduction are pursued through militarism, environmental exploitation, consumerism, and neoliberal globalised markets.

The subsequent chapters examine the connections between the above-mentioned concepts with capitalism and consequential outcomes. Chapter three focuses on the historical and contemporary processes of militarism, understood as aggressive military preparedness, and colonialism, that have allowed capitalism to dominate. Militarism becomes a tool for capitalists to maximise their profits through market expansion; accesses to cheaper and labor; and find favorable regulatory, monetary, and fiscal environments. By providing geopolitical rationales for expansion such as "democracy promotion" (Chomsky and Waterstone, 2021, p. 128), state systems have aided capitalist objective. At the same time, states have successfully shifted popular attention from the lack of economic security in a globalized economy to the threats coming from the outside (e.g. communists, terrorists, refugees, immigrants) and the inside (people of colour, labour unions). The consequences of this partnership between capital and the state include continuous wars, geopolitical tensions, and the threat of nuclear attack.

The fourth chapter analyses how capitalist market economies need to keep growing to avoid collapse, which depletes resources in a finite world, and externalises costs. Goods and services that are produced also need to be consumed. The advertising industry transforms wants into needs and creates planned obsolescence to guarantee a constant stream of profit to capitalists, and waste to the planet.

The fifth chapter shifts to the everyday consequences of living under a capitalist political economy in its neoliberal, globalized and financialized form. Chomsky and Waterstone trace the history of neoliberalism, characterising it as an ongoing project by the elites to privatize government services, deter the formation of labour unions and deregulate markets and the economy. Globalization coupled with militarization allow for neoliberal practices to spread around the globe. The consequences are felt across

the social, political, cultural and economic sphere. Examples discussed include staggering income and wealth inequality, the erosion of social safety nets and services, and the privatization of the commons.

The sixth and the last chapter are dedicated to exploring resistance, and social movements opposing capitalist realism, while also charting elite responses to various forms of resistance and demands for change. Chomsky and Waterstone argue that elites have been successful in exploiting discontent to segment the population and foster populism and nationalism. It is in these chapters that Chomsky and Waterstone's objectives converge.

Throughout the book (and in a postscript on the COVID-19 pandemic) Chomsky and Waterstone show how the social, economic, political, environmental, and health consequences of living in a capitalist society are interconnected, and have become a systematic problem. Each chapter flows seamlessly into the next, progressively building up the arguments to demonstrate the main thesis of the book. Uncovering this linkage is fundamental to creating the rationale for cohesion and coalition among social movements asking for social, economic, political, and environmental justice.

Chomsky and Waterstone's arguments are supported by many references to theory, historical events and facts, which are always very briefly explained and contextualized. This makes the book very accessible for the general public. Phrases like "think about that" or "let's keep that in mind" are frequently used throughout the book, which make the reader feel they are a part of the conversation, and also making the reading experience immersive and dynamic. A reader familiar with Chomsky's writing will recognize many recurrent themes found in his work: the fierce critique of elite power (especially in the USA), the ability to use political history to unmask underlying power relations, and tracing patterns of resistance and opposition. Waterstone's Marxist perspective provides a well-fitting theoretical background.

The book would benefit from critical analysis of the internal workings and power relations within opposition movements. Social movements are described as monolithic entities, a common front against the powerful elites. Exploring the power dynamics *within* social movements would surely warrant another book, but the text glosses over mechanisms of power, injustice and inequality that also exist within the movements themselves. The reasons for movement failure are not always exclusively due to suppression or corruption by outside forces. Still, this text is an excellent analysis of the world's current crises, rooting them in systematic and historical frameworks. An introductory book like this helps readers see the bigger picture and think critically about how the world works, creating a practical common ground for guiding change and ultimately inspiring people to take action. The book's final message is ultimately optimistic and empowering. Waterstone writes: "Even in the face of unassailable hegemony, discourse and practises can be shifted through conscious effort. Understanding that this is possible [...] is a key starting point for progressive change." (Chomsky and Waterstone, 2021, p. 314).

References

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