

# MATERIALIST IDEAS WILL PREVAIL OVER IDEALISM

In previous columns we have talked about the interaction between that thinking and the rest of reality. Reality influences thinking whenever people learn, and thinking influences reality as part of the goals and planning of human labor. The basic idea of materialism is that reality is the dominant side of this relationship. When people learn, they get their ideas from interacting with the material reality that those ideas are about. We can call this reality the material basis of the ideas that are learned. Ideas, at least those that last for a while and are accepted by many people, must have a material basis. A material basis for a certain kind of thinking means something real that influences people to accept it. But ideas can reflect reality in more than one way. This column discusses the concept of ideology, that is, thinking that reflects the outlook of a specific social class.

## What Ideology Is

An ideology is a system of ideas that express the outlook or the interests of some class or social group, in a way that can be completely false. Capitalist ideology contains false ideas that seem to make capitalism more acceptable to its victims. These ideas include that selfishness and greed are natural and healthy, that people of some races are stupid or lazy, that women are less able or less important than men, that capitalism can eliminate poverty and war, that capitalists are generous and kind, that there is a God who rewards those who work hard and don't revolt, etc.

## The Ruling Ideas are the Rulers' Ideas

Capitalists put all the institutions of capitalist society to work propagating these lies and others like them. The newspapers, the TV, the Internet, movies, popular music, schools, universities, government agencies, the military, churches, capitalist political parties, think tanks, etc., have enormous resources dedicated to mislead workers and their allies and dampen resistance to capitalist exploitation. The result of the capitalist monopoly over propaganda is that most people accept at least some capitalist ideology. As Marx and Engels wrote: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force."

Capitalists themselves believe at least some capitalist ideology. They think that a system that is so wonderful for them has to be the best. But their ideology works for them whether or not they believe all of it themselves, since it is essential to keep them in power. They can promote religion, for example, or "shared sacrifice" for imperialist wars even if they don't believe these things themselves.

Capitalist ideology can get in the way of capitalists' understanding of their own system, especially in economics or international conflicts. The myths that capitalist markets regulate themselves or that resistance to imperialism is just a "clash of cultures," which are promoted at elite universities, make it harder for ca-

pitalist theorists to figure out policies to try to fix capitalism.

## The Material Basis of Racism

Some capitalist ideology has a material basis beyond their propaganda machinery. The tremendous racial and ethnic inequalities that capitalism creates and maintains in many countries provides a material basis for racist ideology. In the U. S., for example, capitalist propaganda blames the victims for the lower wages, worse schools, police terror and mass imprisonment that capitalism imposes on black and Latin workers. It promotes the lie that racial inequality is the result of low intelligence or "inferior" culture, while the real cause is capitalism itself. Capitalists in other countries push similar lies about the most oppressed and exploited workers there.

This continuing unequal situation is a material basis for racist ideas. This is also true of the wage system, which promotes the idea that skilled workers or mental workers are smarter or deserve more than unskilled labor. As long as these inequalities exist, they provide a material basis for racist, sexist and other elitist ideas, and continue to generate these ideas. Thus the struggle for the idea of human equality cannot be completely won under capitalism, but only under communism, which ends social classes and racial and gender divisions for ever.

**Next week: Working class ideology.**