

What is a ruling
class? does britain
have one?



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The term Ruling refers to the social class in a society that decides upon and sets their society's political policy. They make the most important decisions that affect the populace of their society; this could be negative or positive.

The Ruling Class is a special sector of the upper class of a society that possesses both the most material wealth and the most widespread influence over all the other classes. The Marxist are of the opinion that for one to be a member of the ruling class in any given society, one must possess most, most importantly, material, wealth. Control the means of production, and then, political power.

However, John. F. weeks opined that the ruling class may not necessarily be the majority; rather in most cases they are the minority; thus he said, " We are ruled by a majority" - a Ruling Class. Minority hence means a few individuals who are organized into a global co-operation and defended by government military machines.

They are the elites of a society - the super-rich, the big businessman, politicians, and government officials who indeed decides what happens to the majority of their society. John believes that even elections cannot shackle them neither can appeal to conscience sway them. And their interests are not affected by elections, rather their policy continues regardless of the party in power.

A good example of where the ruling classes were the minority and not the majority was the Apartheid South Africa; also Nazism exhibited some elements of a " ruling class." Because, those at the echelm of power which

were a minor when compared to the ruled, here, propaganda was used to manipulate the ruled into acquiescence as a means of controlling them.

Though, some scholars and intellectuals believe that the term ruling class is a Marxist concept, but the fact is the term has existed even before Karl Marx. The term was used by the ancient Greek and Roman Historians, and class analysis played a central role in the 18th and 19th century classical liberalism as well. The fact is, there is a ruling class whenever the decisions and actions of the political machinery are largely controlled by a particular group of individuals, especially, if such individuals make decisions to advance their interest and not the interest of the populace. Therefore, the concept “ the ruling class is not a Marxian concept but could be said to be popularized by the Marxist.

Several scholars and intellectuals have defined the term Ruling Class the Marxist, the Libertarians, etc. the Libertarians often define the ruling class as that group of politicians, bureaucrats, lawyers, businessmen, therapists, educators and media people who derive income and position from the state. They opined that as far as these groups of people operate as members of a ruling class, they are parasitic on the efforts of ordinary people. Their position comes from forcing others to act as they would not want to, or by making them not to do what they would have loved to do. Therefore, their ruling class, income is based on forced transfer of wealth.

The Libertarians believe power lies in the state, they believe more on political power than material power, – power gotten from wealth.

The Marxist political economist on the other hand, defines the ruling class, as that segment or class of a society that was the most economic and – only in the second line – political power. Under the Marxist view of capitalism – the ruling class – the capitalist and bourgeoisie – consists of those who own and control the means of production and thus are able to dominate and exploit the working class getting them to labour enough to produce surplus-value, the basis for profits, interest, and rent (property income).

This property income is then used to accumulate more power. In their view, the economic power of a class gives it extraordinary political power which makes the state or government policies to almost always reflect the interests of that class.

Here, power is placed on wealth, that is, the Marxist believes only those that can control the means of production and accumulate so much wealth, can have political power, and then, belong to the ruling class were they make sure most if not all government policies effects their perceived interest. It therefore, means that power does not belong to the state but to the super-rich.

Moreso, the sociologist C. Wright Mills, argued that the ruling class differs from the power elite. The latter, in his view refers to the small group of people with the most political power with many of them being politicians, hired political managers, and military leaders.

Wright Mills definition of the ruling class has some similarities with that of the Libertarians by placing power in the hands of the state. While the main difference between Marxist and Libertarian theories of class is in where each

side locates the source of class power. For the Marxists, class power is derived from ownership of the means of production. Karl Marx and his followers believe that mankind lived at first in a state of primitive communism, in which the means of production were held in common. This ended with the rise of a class that was able to take the means of production into their own possession. This class then set up a state as an executive committee to assist in its domination of everyone else. Since then due to successive revolutions as changes in the means of production have raised other classes to wealth, and these classes have then consolidated their power and leading position by taking over the state.

Therefore, according to the Marxist theory, the source of power lies in wealth, and political power follows after wealth as discussed earlier. However, the proponents of this theory believe that one day either the state when deprived of its due process and limitation will put an end to this class or it will itself wither away.

According to the Libertarian class theory, the source of ruling class power is the state. In their view, the state is not something created by the already powerful. It is instead, something captured by those who want to become powerful – and who cannot become powerful by any other means. To them, without a state there cannot be exploitation. Without a state, the only transactions would be exchanges of value between free individuals from which all parties benefit according to their own conception of their interests. It is the state they opined that can steal and kill, it is the state that raises up or calls into being groups that hope to benefit from the use of these powers, and that then constitute a ruling class.

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While it is more easier to accept the theory of the Marxist, whose opinion of ruling class is wealth then power, it is a little bit difficult to accept the theory of the Libertarian that locates the source of power for the ruling class in the states, because the term state is an empty entity without individuals and the people who becomes the state must possess some characteristics that the other members of that society do not have. Therefore, here is where the Marxian theory explains the ruling class better than the Libertarian, by locating the source of the ruling class in wealth, before political power. We all know that in our present world, wealth commands a lot of influence, to the extent that no matter your achievements in life, as far as there is no wealth you are as less important as anyone else. Even in the feudal society there was also the ruling class who were the feudal Lords, they had power over the vassals because of their control of the fiefs. Thus, give them political and military power over the people.

Roderick T. Long explaining the nature of the ruling class categorized the ruling class into two broad factions, which he called the political class and the corporate class. The political class comprises those who are in direct control of running the state - politicians, civil servants, and the like; the corporate class, on the other hand, comprises the wealthy, quasi - private beneficiaries of state power - the collectors of subsidies, government contracts, and grants of monopoly privilege. These two groups can be simply called the Bureaucrats and the plutocrats.

These two factions of the ruling class have similar interests which are to hold power work together. But their interests are not identical, and each side strives to become the dominant partner in the relationship. Whenever the

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bureaucrats gains the upper hand, it tends toward socialism, and when power passes to the corporate class it tends towards fascism. The present United States of America is a good example of these two factions of the ruling class with its two major political parties. While the Democrats tend to lean toward the Bureaucrats, the Republicans lean more to the plutocrats.

One would say that the ruling class from what have been discussed thus far is that sector or group of individuals who has the final say in all decisions and government gets their power from both material sources.

Wealth, and political power, and in most cases it is when an individual has been able to control the means of production and accumulated wealth, then possess a political power that such individual can belong to a ruling class. They could comprise only a minority of their society, and their policies are always in their interests and not that of the populace. The ruling class exist in almost if not all society, because once it is only a group of individuals that make decisions that affects a society whether positively or negatively, such individuals becomes the ruling class of that society.

DOES BRITAIN HAVE A RULING CLASS?

The question if Britain having a ruling class is a big letter yes to it, when the Marxist definition of the ruling class is considered. Capitalism as it is believed started from Britain; therefore, if Britain is a capitalist state, it then must have a ruling class.

Moreso, Britain in its era of monarchical rule had a ruling class whose members were largely by virtue of birth. They were often related to each other. They shared a common education. They dressed differently and spoke

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differently from those over whom they ruled. Their class consciousness was expressed in countless ways, and was reflected in their language. They were referred to as “ persons of quality” or “ persons of gentle birth”. Although, presently, in England, individual position is no longer rigidly fixed by birth, and it is common for people, wherever they start in life, to rise or sink according to their abilities. Nevertheless there are still families who have always occupied positions within the ruling class. Examples like Toynbee and Gore and Kennedy and Cecil.

The government Ministers, not only have they failed to curb bedroom excesses and actually cashed in themselves, they have vigorously pursued policies which have rigged the market to ensure a widening gap between rich and poor. In Britain even when political powers relinquished the ruling members of the class in a bid not to loose their position stills holds on to their financial power. In 1995 it was shown that 82 percent of Tory MPs hold paid directorships and consultancies and that former cabinet ministers have 40 paid directorships between them. David Meller, who was forced to resign and scandal, now holds 12 paid consultancies, four with defense manufacturers. Tim Yeo, another minister forced to resign, is now a consultant and share holder in a company which looks after the old and the disabled. Thus, the British ruling class consists of both the capitalists of aristocratic descent, whose money now finances international trade through the institutions of the city, and those who have made their fortunes from trade, commerce and industry rather than the ownership of property.

Therefore, there is no gain saying the fact that Britain has a ruling class based on what have been discussed so far, either from the Marxist

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perspective or the Libertarian's. One could then assert that Britain being a capitalist state with the state exercising powers has a ruling class.