

Solidarity has to have teeth

Where's the anti-imperialism that goes beyond lip service in the west?

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A recent *Open Letter to Iran's Political Prisoners* published by the Guardian has gotten lots of attention (criticism and defense). i have some thoughts on this. However, i'm more interested in discussing an ongoing anti-anarchism issue within the western 'anti-imperialist' sphere. Let's get into it.

(Note: the title is a quote from F12 in a recent interview with *The Dugout*)

On the Guardian letter (kinda)

That the Islamic Republic of Iran is, de facto, an anti-imperial State in our present international context is not a question. That carcerality is a defining feature of modern States, a core colonial-imperial infrastructure exported from and upheld to an outsized degree by the west (especially the US and Israel), is not a question. That the Guardian letter does not properly articulate this — that it does not offer a constructive analysis of the resulting tensions nor a useful outlook for anti-carceral international solidarity, insofar as revolutionary internationalism is concerned — is clear. There is no need to defend the letter or its signatories on these points.

It is, however, frustrating that many segments of the western left are sooner jumping to defend the anti-imperial position of the Islamic Republic than to clarify how their anti-imperialist praxis contends with carcerality across contexts and present an alternative anti-carceral outlook within their critique. It's even more frustrating that this is so unsurprising.

The sib X, from HoodSchoolNYC, hit the nail on the head when they penned this:

I think a lot of the western left, and right for that matter, engages politics like sports teams mascots. There's a certain decadence to an "anti imperialism" that never requires a drop of your blood — only statements, open letters and unfounded audacity... It's all so unserious. Safiya Bukhari said, "it could be that, after all, we don't want the same things", maybe that is true. What frustrates me most is that despite freedom dreams or slogans, the proverbial big bad wolf of imperialism sleeps peacefully each night in the house we all live in.

The evident lack of substantive anti-imperialism in the west — that is, the kind which would position progressive and anti-war forces against empire's existence in their 'internationalist' practice — is telling. Where is the solidarity with teeth so needed in this moment?

At present, 'anti-imperialism' in the west largely amounts to sectarian navel gazing, sideline cheering, and moral posturing of the sort we see in the Guardian letter.

'Narrative war' is waged between factions of leftists in a virtual 'marketplace of ideas' in a propaganda economy that metabolizes their open letters and statements — fueling their hostilities and feeding off their content, rendering the bulk of their interventions materially insignificant, relegating them to silos in our current media ecosystem. Here, 'anti-imperialism' is largely assessed by one's rhetorical fealty to whatever stance or analysis their niche of leftists has deemed correct. "Hollow", ironically, characterizes this all quite well.

Criticisms can be pointed at the individuals, groups, media outlets, and social media accounts comprising these factions — many, justifiably so. But at what point does this counterproductive form of practice itself receive greater scrutiny?

At what point do insights from those who have been naming the issues of this approach to 'solidarity', analyzing the conditions from which it emerges and the forces perpetuating it, get

foregrounded? At what point will the work of developing material bases of power at the grass-roots level become the primary site from which revolutionary internationalism is conceptualized and discussed, specifically among ‘anti-imperialists’ in the west?

To these ends, non-statist and anti-statist frameworks (e.g. anarchism, autonomism) have great value. But a pervasive left anti-anarchism is blurring this reality.

Reflection on left anti-anarchism

*(Note: My essay *The Statism Inherent to Fascism* discusses this further)*

Elder Ashanti Alston made multiple crucial points at the 2025 National Black Radical Organizing Conference.

During a panel discussion, anarchism and anti-imperialism had been presented as fundamentally at odds. Having an affinity for anarchism was presented in one case, by elder Ajamu Baraka, as emblematic of one’s unpreparedness “*to subject themselves to the discipline of structure, the discipline of organization.*” He described it as a form of ‘individualism’, that “*plays into the fundamental liberalism of this capitalist, backward society.*”, and which ultimately undermines a truly revolutionary praxis in both national and international contexts.

Ajama’s characterization of anarchism and what prompts many radicals (especially Black and Indigenous) to draw upon it in their praxes was off. In the context of Black radicalism, anarchism has proven especially useful in developing alternative forms of organization and concepts of how our liberation struggle may look, as decentralized and horizontal practice are two of its ideological tenets. This has enabled deeper reflection on and more direct confrontation with how we reproduce (and have upheld) oppressive systems in and through our own movements.

Elaborating this, and anarchism’s utility in this regard, Ashanti said:

We have really got to see ourselves, like Jalil Muntaqim says, as our own liberators... [When] it comes to leadership, the culture of it has to change so that we can really see how the contamination of this empire is in us. That’s that trojan horse, within us. And if we do not factor that in, we will eventually repeat the madness of this empire and defeat our own goals. So it has to change.

He went on, with reference to the ‘People’s Senate’ elder Jihad Abdulmumit presented on, to highlight the urgency of coming together to make practical gains at the local level:

Don’t give up what you do or who you are, but we have got to find a way to be on some common page... so we can do things like a united front, because we all got so much to offer [in practice]. We should not feel like we’re battling, different organizations, because we’re not on some ideological agreement... Where I’m at now, up in Providence, there were beefs between one organization and another over ideological shit. And I said to them, “What block do you control?” What are you beefing about? As if you’re on the precipice of capturing State power tomorrow. Be real.

It’s annoying (at times, aggravating) to watch leftist geopolitical back and forths persist to no end. Especially when these back and forths have little to no impact on (nor basis in) conditions and struggles on the ground, in places those talking live. And even more so, when they fail to think beyond approaches to international solidarity that have proven ineffective time and again.

The posturing of ‘activist’ influencers and academics — projecting radical aesthetics, referencing revolutionary traditions, enlisting the language and imagery of liberation struggle — to bolster their stances in debates steeped in liberal assumptions. The detached spectating and speculating on global realities they, nor those in their audience in most cases, have the capacity to materially impact due to their lack of locally organized power and their neglect of liberation struggles where they are. This routine is tired.

The centering of ‘official’ political arenas, ‘recognized’ political actors, and legality when analyzing our terrain of struggle and talking ‘movement strategy’. The incessant appeals to western governments and institutions, which (we should all be aware) would be destroyed by their own hand and take the whole planet down with them before they would act outside or against their colonial-imperial imperatives. These methods are played out.

The conflation of people with States, and accompanying assumptions of some homogenous position inherent to people in the imperial core, especially those within the borders of the US. The extension of these assumptions to people on the imperial peripheries in relation to the States they live under. The erasure of perspectives and insights from those, both in the core and on the peripheries, whose lives cannot be secured and whose liberation cannot be realized through any State. These analyses are lacking.

The marginalization of people and collectives doing so much necessary work on the ground — building and organizing autonomously where they are, in ways that can cultivate an anti-imperialism with real teeth. The dismissal and demonization of non-statist and anti-statist tendencies, which conceptualize and struggle to materialize internationalism ‘from below’ toward decolonization, abolition, and autonomy. Is this what’s passing as ‘principled anti-imperialism’ now?

What are we doing here? Help me understand.

What value is there in brushing aside radical Black and Indigenous insights on the basis of them resonating with or drawing upon anarchism? In remaining ignorant as to how the internal colonization and slow genocide of Indigenous and New Afrikan peoples/nations persist as the foundations of US settler-empire? In neglecting to consider the ways this reality bears on the ‘hows’ of liberation struggle on Turtle Island; of what those ‘hows’ may mean for revolutionary internationalisms emanating from the imperial core; of why these things unsettle statism as an ideological tenet? There is none.

What is principled about infantilizing and erasing revolutionary ancestors, elders, and contemporaries because their anarchist/autonomist politics unsettle your analytical frame? About alienating radicals in ‘international solidarity’ spaces because their anarchic/autonomous approaches to struggle do not fit in your brand of leftism? About calling on ‘anti-imperialists’ to “*eradicate anarchism*”, as Evan Katsounis did in a Vocal Politics interview earlier this year; saying it “*should not be tolerated*” in formations that “*want to be effective*”; all while anarchists are being actively targeted and repressed to an outsized degree in the imperial core? Nothing.

What serious reason is there to not embrace autonomous struggle within the belly of empire; to not run toward the challenges and possibilities it presents for anti-imperialism? Or to delude ourselves into believing no principled autonomous struggles are being waged by people on the peripheries; to convince ourselves those in anti-imperial States are not developing analyses and strategizing around similar challenges and possibilities therein? There is none.

What good is holding firm to statist lines (reformist or revolutionary) when they are doing nothing to further the development of a substantive anti-imperialism where we are?

“What block do you control?”

What have you organized? Where and with whom? To what ends and by what means? What material impact have your efforts had? These are the questions being displaced by progressives and ‘anti-imperialists’ who insist statism must define the terms of internationalism.

Across the array of Black anarchic radicalisms, outlooks on international solidarity between Afrikans and other globally oppressed peoples against imperialism have been (and are being) articulated. These ought be highlighted more.

In *A Soldier’s Story*, revolutionary ancestor Kuwasi Balagoon laid out a means, grounded in autonomous struggles of internally colonized peoples, through which he believed anti-imperialism must develop within the US settler-empire:

I feel that we [Indigenous and New Afrikan people] must build revolutionary institutions that buttress on survival through collectives, which in turn should form federations. Grassroots collective building can begin immediately... We must begin where we are, with each other and the time we don’t waste. I think that the building of revolutionary collectives and forming of federations of collectives is the most practical and righteously rewarding process of preserving and enhancing life and developing the character of all nations. We can change ourselves and the world.

The Black Autonomy Federation presented a framework of *African Inter-Communalism*, through which anti-imperialism can be conceptualized and materialized ‘from below’:

The Black Autonomy Federation’s / Anarchist ideals lead logically to internationalism or more precisely trans-nationalism, which means beyond the nation-state... [We] must organize for inter-communalism, or world relations between African people and their revolutionary social movements... The Black liberation movement needs an organization capable of international coordination of the Black liberation struggle, a world federation of African peoples... It would involve the masses of people themselves, not just national leaders or nation states.

In *Anarkata: A Statement*, the Afrofuturist Abolitionists of the Americas articulated an “explicitly pan-Afrikan” vision, oriented against western imperialism and the ecological devastation produced by it, as a core component of anarkata politics:

Finally, we take Anarkata politics to be relevant to Pan Afrikan liberation — the liberation of Black peoples worldwide — in an age of massive climate instability. If Black struggle and liberation of the planet are intertwined, then environmental issues force us to center Black/Afrikan people suffering under Western imperialism and neocolonialism. We put Afrika at the center of the extractive processes of capital that uphold global ecocide. Afrika must be emancipated and those who are unjustly domesticated in the belly of the beast, in the imperial core... have a duty to fight against the militarism and imperialism that have pushed the planet to disaster.

These are just a few examples among many from Black anarchic radicals.

Non-statist and anti-statist frames (particularly those of colonized peoples) offer unique analytic and practical clarity around interlocking oppressions in relation to revolutionary internationalism. These frames develop further through the very tensions around anti-imperialism that progressive and anti-war forces in the west are unwilling or unable to contend with head on in principled ways.

The practices they articulate as imperative require us to be embedded in the struggles where we are — accountable to our communities, to the process of acting on our conditions toward revolutionary ends here and now. And the ends they take as objectives necessitate the use of anarchic means, which turn empires ire against us in our struggles insofar as we are effective.

Revolutionary internationalism requires a shared investment in the collapse of empire and the entire international order developed through its lording over the world. It requires unyielding struggle within the core that rejects the sanctity of legality, government, and the infrastructures through which these things are upheld. It requires, as the authors of *Black Armed Joy* put it, “*unmediated and uncompromising conflict with the State and Capital.*”

This conflict, and the autonomous struggles through which it is surfaced, is where anti-statist frames articulate anti-imperialism from — especially as it ought materialize in the imperial core.

Considering this all. What’s the beef about? Really.

In closing

i have no interest in carrying water for anarchism, nor in backing individual anarchists’ positions regarding geopolitics.

i also refuse to pretend anarchism has nothing, or little, to offer concerning revolutionary internationalism. i refuse to pretend contributions have not been (and are not being) made by anarchists and anarchic radicals — especially Black and Indigenous siblings. Any person or group peddling “anarchism bad” narratives is ignorant or confused; either way, they shouldn’t be taken serious on this subject.

No individual, collective, organization, or tendency has it all right. None of us really have this thing figured out. If we did, imperialism wouldn’t be a topic of conversation — nor would carceral systems, capitalism, patriarchy, or anything else of the sort.

Some internal humility and self-criticism from those advocating anti-imperialism surrounding what is really being done — in these back and forths, and on the ground — is sorely needed. For many, dropping the dogged anti-anarchism would be a good start. There are valuable insights being lost and important work being overlooked, for the sake of leftisms that are not meeting the moment we are in.

Tighten up.

“It all goes or it all stays the same. So get going.”
(Anon, 2024)

For those in the west truly committed to bringing US settler-empire to its knees and realizing the liberation of oppressed peoples everywhere. For those who want to materialize a substantive anti-imperialism; who want to develop a revolutionary internationalist praxis where they are — a solidarity that has teeth. Here are three suggestions that may prove useful:

1. Get active locally (if you aren't already) to build power outside and against the State you are in. It doesn't need to be flashy, and you don't need to have the perfect plan. Just get with some other folks with similar commitments, identify an issue or need, and organize around it without roping any 'official' governance bodies in.
2. Question statism. Ask how internationalism may look beyond nation-States, and how it may be developed (or is developing) between oppressed people engaged in autonomous struggle. Consider why such questions may be necessary in our (historic and geographical) context, and who has been asking them longer than you. While doing so, examine internal colonization. Consider how the ongoing colonial oppression of Indigenous and New Afrikan peoples/nations on Turtle Island bears on the terrain of struggle in the imperial core.
3. Learn as you walk. Allow yourself to say "i don't know," and "i'm still thinking through this." Push yourself to ask "Why's that?", "What isn't being considered?", "Who is being left out?", "How can we do this better?", and so on.

Stop trying so hard to be "on the right side of history". Make history. Help write the end of empire through struggle.

"Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that people are already dying who could be saved, that generations more will live poor butchered half-lives if you fail to act. Do what must be done, discover your humanity and your love in revolution." (George Jackson, 1971)

My baseline understandings

1) There is no such thing as a 'revolutionary State', and statism — or State essentialism, in its varying forms — must be rejected to most effectively conceive of and struggle toward liberation. 'States' function to absorb or suppress people's on-the-ground movement; to exert authority over how people within their jurisdiction organize themselves and relate to each other (domestically and abroad), such that a particular social-political-economic arrangement is reproduced and the position/power of a societies' ruling classes is sustained. 'Statism' is a liberal philosophy which conceptualizes States as essential for the (societal scale) organization and protection of a nation/people. There are many complexities in conversations around national sovereignty and international order. These complexities can be most comprehensively and usefully engaged through non-statist and anti-statist frameworks.

2) States also exist in relation to other States and, depending on their position within an international order, they may be anti-imperial in a given context. Their being so does not make them revolutionary, and it does not mean they are vehicles for liberation. It instead signifies their relation to political-economic hegemony in a particular international context — where States function as the recognized subjects (i.e. sovereign political actors). That States have become the recognized subjects shaping national and international concepts of organization and struggle, that statism is a logic undergirding most nationalisms and internationalisms (hegemonic and counter-hegemonic), is a problem of a (neo)liberal/(neo)colonial politics developed through euro-amerikan imposition on the world. These politics define the terms of 'order' in our geopolitical

context. An 'anti-imperial' State or bloc may reconfigure the international order; but so long as the politics remain, liberation is not realized. This is why I'm not invested in an 'anti-imperialism' that cheers on counter-hegemonic States and blocs.

3) i believe in a practice of situating oneself in relation to struggle, and analyzing from where one is at. This is the reason you rarely hear heavy criticisms from me aimed at anti-imperial States, or at revolutionary movements outside US-occupied Turtle Island. i do not believe it is my place to speak in condemnation of such things, nor do i think it is of much consequence given our conditions of extreme disempowerment and popular apathy here. My solidarity is with oppressed peoples in their struggles for reprieve and liberation. My reprimand is for those, especially situated where i am, presenting as authorities on 'anti-imperialism' (or anything else of the sort) while neglecting liberation struggles where they are.

Some reading and video recs

Black Anarchism in the US (William C. Anderson)

The Dragon and The Hydra (Russell "Maroon" Shoatz)

Organization and Spontaneity (Kimathi Mohammed)

Kickbacks, Ancestors, and Wildcats (Nsambu Za Suekama)

Pan-African Revolt for a New Century (Atticus Bagby Williams & Kamau Hawkins)

Anarchism's Future in Africa (Sam Mbah)

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