

From Australia to Israel: Smash Settler Colonialism!

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

25/01/2024

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26 January 2024 marks the first Invasion Day since the ‘Voice to Parliament’ referendum. The Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group took the position that the proposed Voice was “a piece of empty symbolism that will do nothing to advance the struggles of Aboriginal peoples for self-determination”. Despite this, we also recognised that the No campaign had been captured by the forces of white supremacist reaction and therefore saw no reason to wish for or celebrate its victory. We argued that a victory for the Yes campaign “would be the least worst outcome” that could be expected.

In our statement we echoed the language of the Blak Sovereign Movement to express our sympathy with the radical critique of the Voice’s limits and reaffirm our support for Indigenous self-determination. We made clear, however, that real self-determination – the capacity for Indigenous people to directly control their affairs, in all areas of life – could only come through a social revolution against the State and capitalism. This clarification is important because we find the concept of Sovereignty to be ill-defined and used to convey conflicting meanings – some of which are not consistent with our principles.

Indigenous and national liberation struggles often think about freedom as something that will be won through constitutional reform or the declaration of a new independent state. But if the State and capitalism are left in place, a national liberation movement which overthrows colonialism will leave in place the domination and exploitation of the major imperialist powers, now ruling through an indigenous ruling class. Decolonisation in Asia, in Africa, and South America has repeatedly shown this to be the case. The direct racist rule of foreign imperialists is ended, but the workers and peasants of these countries continue to live impoverished and unfree lives. Highly repressive regimes of local capitalists continue to allow the plunder of their country by imperialism and profit handsomely in the process.

We all continue to watch in horror as Israel carries out its genocidal assault on Gaza. In the streets we all call for a Free Palestine – but for most, this demand for liberation is tied up with the question of Statehood.

As anarchist communists, we say that freedom means something much more than life under capitalist governments. In supporting struggles against apartheid, colonialism, and imperialism, we argue that the working class must take the lead, with its own methods of struggle. National oppression can only be eliminated by the working class taking power.

Anarchists and Sovereignty

Historically, sovereignty has typically been invoked in the sense of ‘State sovereignty’ – the idea that a government has the right to control the territory and populations within its internationally recognised borders. As opponents of government, private property, and borders, anarchists obviously reject this.

With the struggle of exploited classes against ruling classes, new ideas about sovereignty were born. Some arguments contend that only democratic governments have sovereignty. Others have redefined the concept, arguing that it is only ‘the people’ or ‘individuals’ who can be ‘sovereign’, not government.

There are versions of ‘Indigenous sovereignty’ which reflect the various definitions. For some, it means Indigenous representatives holding power within a government and the transfer of private property to indigenous people. Others have adopted aspects of the conspiratorial, right-wing

‘sovereign citizen’ movement. In some contexts, ‘sovereignty’ is used as a means of exposing the hypocrisy and racism of the settler colonial invaders, who denied its applicability to a continent they declared *terra nullius* – ‘land belonging to nobody’.

But there is also a radical version of ‘Indigenous sovereignty’, which rejects both private property and the idea that political power must take the form of a State. In expressing our support for sovereignty, it is this anti-capitalist version we are talking about.

Rather than redefine a term originally intended to justify State power, we prefer to use the terminology of our own anarchist communist tradition.

We want a society without landlords, bosses, politicians. We want workers to take democratic control of production so we can meet people’s needs – not so commodities can be bought and sold for the ruling class’s profit. We want an end to prisons, police, and armies, which exist to protect the interests of the capitalists and maintain the power of the State. We want to maintain the health of the environment and the land that sustains us – not a system which requires endless, planet-destroying growth.

This kind of social revolution can’t be achieved by Indigenous people alone, but it is the only way to achieve genuine Indigenous self-determination. Such a movement will require the Australian working class building on the kind of solidarity we have seen at the gigantic Invasion Day rallies of recent years. That solidarity must be extended into our workplaces and the union movement. When the power of the organised working class can be linked with the courage and determination of the movement for Black Sovereignty, we will have a force capable of hitting the ruling class where it hurts most: their profits.

Anarchists and Struggles Against National Oppression

Nations are historically fluid groupings, with no fixed genetic basis or inherent qualities. Today, they are constructed, both by ruling groups which want to consolidate their power and through collective experiences of exclusion and oppression. The division of humanity into nations is useful to capitalism because it creates the illusion of a common ‘national interest’, which is supposedly shared by both the poorest worker and the most powerful of the ruling class within a national group. This is the politics of nationalism, and anarchists reject it in every instance. Instead of ‘national solidarity’, we argue that the dispossessed and oppressed of the world should build class solidarity. Class solidarity must extend across all borders and be directed against the ruling classes of every nation. This is the only force which can abolish national oppression and the imperialism that creates it, whether through direct rule or local agents.

Though nations are sometimes invented, and their borders often are, the conflict and hatreds produced by national division can lead to real oppression. When people are denied their most basic rights; when they are driven from their homes; when they are subjected to daily cruelties and humiliation; routinely threatened, harmed, even massacred – they will naturally struggle against this national oppression. As internationalists, and enemies of all forms of domination, anarchists support these struggles.

This is the sense in which we support national liberation. Anarchists support the Palestinian struggle against a regime of racial domination and military rule, but we warn that a new capitalist state would not constitute national liberation. A state beside Israel would be a set of powerless bantustans, where Fatah or Hamas rule on behalf of the imperialist powers and Zionists. It would

enrich only a tiny elite. The Palestinian masses would continue to live in destitution and would still suffer daily humiliation, though at least the police enforcing it would speak Arabic rather than Hebrew.

The end of apartheid in South Africa was a victory that anarchists celebrated – not because it gave Nelson Mandela’s African National Congress (ANC) power in a capitalist State, but because this was only possible in a context where the violent maintenance of white supremacist government had been broken, and the Black majority granted basic civil rights.

Anarchists have always criticised the limits of national liberation struggles which don’t confront capitalism. The ANC needed the power of the working class for apartheid to be smashed: strikes, civil disobedience, and riots – supported by international boycotts and unions refusing to handle South African goods – were essential to making white supremacist rule untenable. But in government, the ANC has maintained much of the economic disparity of the apartheid era, and the government continues to violently suppress working class struggles. An Indigenous ruling class would be no different.

Struggles against national oppression, and for indigenous freedom, should be self-organised on class-lines, using class- struggle methods. All efforts to consolidate power among a privileged leadership must be opposed, and the struggle against national oppression transformed into a struggle for social revolution. Without overthrowing capitalism and the State, national liberation replaces one set of exploiters for another. Through social revolution, the roots of settler colonialism and imperialist war are destroyed for good, and a real universal freedom made possible.

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Retrieved on 30/01/2024 from <melbacg.au/from-australia-to-israel-smash-settler-colonialism>
The following article first appeared in The Anvil Vol 13 No 1, published 25 January 2024

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