

Why class struggle?

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

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It's not uncommon for contemporary Anarchists to say "class struggle is outmoded and isn't how to make a revolution these days" or "the working class is so sexist and racist that we have to turn to radical struggles outside the workplace to get anywhere". The Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group disagrees. We think these views are based on a mistaken idea of who the working class are and a lack of understanding of who has the power in our society.

The Working Class

The capitalist media have a sociological view of class. Their perspective is that the working class is composed of people in blue collar occupations, or people on low incomes. Often, they draw an even worse picture – they portray the working class as a group of straight white men in blue overalls. This suits the interests of the middle class liberals who conceive of themselves as the bearers of social progress and also the reactionary Right who have the same picture of working class people as the liberals, but claim to be on the side of the workers.

But class is not about social stratification. It's about how society is organised economically. If you work for a wage or a salary, you don't have the right to hire or fire and you don't exercise the power of the State like a police officer or a magistrate, you're working class. More broadly, you are working class if you have nothing to sell but your labour and you don't exercise the power of the capitalist class. Class is a matter of what side your bread is buttered on.

Looked at this way, at least 80% of people in Australia are working class. And, far from being composed purely of straight white males, the working class is multi-racial, multicultural and gender diverse. Almost all migrant communities in Australia, particularly those recently arrived, are overwhelmingly working class. Many people popularly regarded as middle class are, in fact, working class. Teachers and nurses, for example, are working class – something proven by the fact that they have joined unions in droves and gone on strike for their rights.

The middle class, by contrast, is composed of two groups, both being the meat in the sandwich between the working class and the capitalists.

The first group is made up of self-employed people who run their own business and work beside any employees they have; the second is middle managers who have the power to hire and fire their subordinates but don't exercise significant power inside their organisation. Altogether, the middle class is a pretty small group, especially when you remove sham contractors who are only technically self employed in order that their bosses can get around labour laws. It should also be noted that, historically, the most politically conservative sector of the workforce is composed of self-employed people in blue collar occupations – people who aren't workers but are often regarded as such by the capitalist media.

The Power of the Workplace

Anarchist Communists advocate a class struggle perspective because the power of the capitalists derives from their control of production in each workplace. The most effective way to defeat the capitalists is for workers to organise to and take the means of production off the bosses and wield its power themselves.

Of course this doesn't mean that forms of oppression outside the workplace are unimportant. We recognise that Australia is built on stolen land and that the Aboriginal people have never

ceded their sovereignty. We recognise that racism, sexism, Islamophobia and homophobia are forms of oppression which can be more intense than that suffered by workers in the workplace. These forms of oppression are the product of class society. Various forms of struggle can reduce those oppressions, but they cannot be eliminated without abolishing capitalism – and that requires the workers taking the workplace away from the capitalists.

This also doesn't mean that Anarchist Communists idolise workers as people whose opinions and actions are always left wing. We are well aware that reactionary politics has its dirty grip on wide sections of society, including the working class. If that wasn't so we would have had the revolution a century ago. Instead, the consciousness of workers is contradictory. It will be when they are struggling for their own interests that they will come to see that racism, sexism and all other forms of special oppression are not only morally wrong but also a practical impediment to their victory. Class struggle drives workers to the left.

The Way Forward

The Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group advocates that Anarchists should orient their strategies to the workplace.

Other areas of struggle are also vital. People can and should struggle against oppression wherever they find it and struggle outside the workplace can win reforms and radicalise people. But unless we take the workplaces off the capitalists we'll never beat them. Our victories will be partial and reversible. Our struggles outside the workplace should also be directed towards building a force that can take its politics inside it. Only the multi-racial, multicultural and gender diverse working class can rid the world of capitalism.

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