

Why Class Matters Most — and Why That Doesn't Mean Ignoring Identity

The Slow Burning Fuse

20.10.25

It has become almost unfashionable to talk about class. In an age where every injustice is translated into the language of identity – race, gender, sexuality, neurodiversity, nationality – the old idea that our society is divided between those who work and those who own feels, to many, outdated. The problem, though, is that capitalism hasn't gone anywhere. It's only become better at disguising itself. Our exploitation still runs along the same old fault line of those who sell their labour to survive and those who profit from it. That's what is meant by class, not a cultural identity, not an aesthetic, but a relationship of power embedded in every workplace, every rent payment, every hour spent producing wealth that someone else owns. And until that relationship is overthrown, no amount of representation, diversity, or inclusion will bring liberation.

But to say that class is primary is not to say that everything is only about class. That's the trap of class-reductionism or the idea that if we just fix class, every other form of oppression will magically dissolve. We know it doesn't work that way. Women were exploited long before capitalism; racism didn't vanish in the Soviet Union; queer and disabled people have been marginalised under so-called communist systems.

The point is not that other forms of oppression are less important. It's that capitalism organises them, feeds on them, and reshapes them for its own survival. To overthrow capitalism, we need to strike at its root. And that root is class.

Class isn't a moral or sociological category, it's a material one. It describes how people fit into the machinery of production. Most of us have nothing to sell but our labour power. We wake up each day, trade our time and energy for wages, and those wages buy just enough to do it again tomorrow. Meanwhile, a tiny minority, the capitalist class, owns the land, the factories, the companies, the data, the infrastructure. They purchase our labour not to meet human needs but to extract profit. That's the relationship that structures everything else.

You can change the faces of those at the top by making them more diverse, more progressive, more inclusive, and the system still runs on the same logic. Exploitation doesn't vanish just because your boss shares your pronouns or your skin colour. The question is never who sits at the table, but why the table exists in the first place. That's why class has to be central in any movement to overthrow capitalism. The working class, broadly understood as everyone whose labour is exploited, has a unique power that no other group possesses – the power to stop the

system from functioning. When workers withdraw their labour, profits stop. The machine grinds to a halt. No amount of cultural awareness training can compete with that kind of leverage.

None of this means that identity struggles are unimportant. Oppression takes many forms, and capitalism uses all of them. Racism, sexism, colonialism, transphobia, these are not side issues, they are essential mechanisms for dividing and controlling the working class. But if we fight them in isolation from class, we end up chasing representation within the very system that oppresses us.

We've seen it countless times, a few individuals from oppressed groups are elevated into positions of power, CEOs, MPs, military officers, while the majority remain exploited and marginalised. The result is symbolic progress and material stagnation. A woman can become a billionaire and still preside over the exploitation of millions of other women. A Black police chief can still preside over a racist institution. Queer soldiers can still enforce imperial domination. Capital is perfectly happy to accommodate diversity, as long as its power is untouched. It thrives on the illusion of inclusion, on selling us images of empowerment while deepening our dependence. So, yes, identity matters, but only insofar as we understand how it interacts with class. Identity politics that ignore class become an endless carousel of representation, who gets visibility, who gets recognition, who gets to speak. But class struggle aims at something different altogether, the abolition of domination itself.

To grasp the full picture, we have to understand that class and identity are not separate worlds. They intertwine in lived experience. Capitalism doesn't just exploit workers in the abstract; it exploits racialised, gendered, colonised workers in specific ways. The cheapness of women's labour, the disposability of migrant labour, the criminalisation of Indigenous and Black communities. These are not accidents, they are strategies of accumulation.

In that sense, struggles against racism, sexism, and colonialism are not distractions from class politics. They are its front lines. The fight for equal pay is a fight against the gendered division of labour. The struggle for land back is a struggle against the commodification of the Earth itself. The demand for trans healthcare is a demand that human needs take precedence over profit. When we locate these struggles within class, they expand in power. They cease to be pleas for inclusion and become demands for transformation. The abolition of private property, of wage labour, of borders and prisons and police, these are not "class issues" separate from identity. They are the conditions of freedom for everyone.

To hold this position is to navigate between two dangers. The first is identity absolutism, the belief that every identity forms its own self-contained struggle, disconnected from the rest. This approach fragments the movement into countless separate campaigns, each fighting its own corner, often competing for recognition or resources. It also tends to moralise politics – oppression becomes a matter of personal experience or guilt rather than collective power. And because it treats identity as the defining political reality, it becomes easy for capital to co-opt. The second danger is class reductionism, or the idea that class explains everything and that we can safely ignore other forms of oppression as distractions. This approach alienates the very people whose liberation the movement depends on. It treats the working class as a homogeneous mass, erasing the real differences in how exploitation is experienced. It forgets that a white man in a union and a migrant woman cleaning offices face the same system, but not the same conditions. A revolutionary politics worth its name must avoid both traps. It must start from the material reality of class while recognising that the ruling class uses identity to divide and discipline. Our task is not to flatten those differences, but to turn them into solidarity.

The beauty of class struggle is that it gives us a common ground without erasing who we are. The factory floor, the hospital ward, the gig economy, the picket line, these are places where people of different backgrounds confront the same enemy. When workers strike together, they don't need to be identical; they need to be united. That unity isn't automatic, it has to be built, consciously and politically, but it's possible because our interests ultimately converge. A class-based movement must therefore be both universal and specific. Universal in its aim to abolish exploitation, and specific in its attention to how oppression is distributed. It must fight for everyone's liberation, but do so with the awareness that liberation won't look the same for all. For some, it means freedom from racialised policing; for others, from gendered violence or economic precarity. But the path runs through the same terrain – the collective struggle against capital.

When we organise in this way, identity struggles don't disappear, they deepen. Anti-racism becomes inseparable from the fight against imperialism and labour exploitation. Feminism becomes inseparable from the fight to socialise care work and end the wage system. Queer liberation becomes inseparable from the fight to abolish the family as an economic unit. In this sense, class is not a competing identity, it's the structure that makes all others intelligible. It's the thread that connects every struggle to the possibility of revolution.

Capitalism can grant recognition, but it cannot grant freedom. It can change the faces of its managers, open its boardrooms to diversity, drape its bombs in rainbows, but it cannot stop being what it is – a system that extracts profit from exploitation. That's why the question of class can't be avoided or postponed. If we want to end patriarchy, we can't stop at demanding that more women become bosses; we have to end the conditions that make bosses possible. If we want racial justice, we can't stop at asking for a more diverse police force; we have to abolish the police. If we want queer liberation, we can't stop at visibility; we have to dismantle the economic compulsion to conform, marry, and reproduce for the market. Only by confronting the class basis of these oppressions can we move beyond the politics of representation to the politics of emancipation. The difference is between asking for inclusion in the master's house and burning the house down.

For anarcho-communists, the goal has always been clear, the abolition of capitalism, of class, of the state, and of every form of domination. That goal is not "classist" in the narrow sense; it's universal. But universality doesn't mean sameness it means solidarity. It means recognising that we are all bound by the same chains, even if they cut differently, and that we can only break them together. When we make class central, we don't erase identity; we give it a foundation. We understand why racism persists, why sexism pays, why nationalism thrives, because division is profitable. And when we fight as a class, we make those divisions less useful to the ruling class. We make it possible to imagine a world where identity is a matter of expression, not oppression. That world, one without bosses, without borders, without money, without prisons, isn't a utopian dream. It's the logical outcome of our collective power. Every strike, every rent-strike, every act of mutual aid, every refusal to obey reminds us that the world runs on our labour, our care, our creativity. And what we make, we can remake.

We must weave every struggle against domination into the fabric of class struggle. We must understand that to abolish class is to make possible the abolition of all hierarchies. The revolution will not be white, male, straight, or cis, but neither will it be reducible to identity. It will be human, collective, and free. That is why class matters most, not because it explains everything, but because it is the ground on which everything can finally be transformed.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



The Slow Burning Fuse
Why Class Matters Most — and Why That Doesn't Mean Ignoring Identity
20.10.25

<https://theslowburningfuse.wordpress.com/2025/10/20/why-class-matters-most-and-why-that-doesnt-mean-ignoring-identity/>

theanarchistlibrary.org