

Identity politics and the crisis of working class solidarity

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Dear friends,

We live in a time of intensifying identity-based conflict, where every social and political issue becomes refracted through the lens of personal identity and group affiliation. Look no further than headlines shared here on mind reader every day. The deployment of identity politics –both by the ostensible “left” and the increasingly mask-off right –has become a primary mechanism through which hegemonic power maintains its grip on civil society while forestalling any genuine movement toward working class solidarity (let alone anti-capitalist movements). I think it is worth us spending additional time examining this phenomenon and its implications for building an intersectional movement capable of challenging capitalism’s death grip on our collective future. Because our future is collective, identities be damned.

Identity politics, in its current manifestation, represents both a genuine expression of marginalised groups’ experiences and grievances under capitalism and a tool cynically wielded by power to fragment class consciousness. What began as important movements highlighting specific forms of oppression –from feminist critiques of patriarchy to queer resistance against heteronormativity to racial justice struggles against white supremacy –has been co-opted and transformed by hegemonic forces into battles over representation and recognition that leave fundamental power relations untouched. Capitalism marches on, and indeed, intensifies, subsumes and co-opts in the wake of these divisive rhetorics. The right deploys reactionary identity politics centred on nationalism, whiteness, and “traditional values” (read: rape, plunder, pillage) to redirect working class anger toward marginalised groups, while liberal identity politics often reduces systemic critique to demands for more diverse faces in positions of power. Both varieties serve to obscure the material basis of oppression in capitalist relations. Don’ t @ me.

The emotional power of identity as a mobilising force is incredibly significant in our current political context. The assumptions, roles, and realities of communities are important and they colour how we see the world. Our sense of self, our experiences of marginalisation or privilege, and our community affiliations shape our social epistemology –which is equally shaped by a capitalist ontology. The right understands this viscerally –their appeals to white grievance, xenophobia, and moral panic over gender and sexuality tap into deep wells of fear and anger among their base. The “mainstream media” amplifies these cultural conflicts, with Australia’ s Murdoch-dominated landscape taking particular glee in stoking hatred toward LGBTQI+ folks through endless inflammatory coverage. One need only look at how trans people have been demonised and scapegoated, basic human dignity turned into fodder for manufactured outrage designed to drive engagement and distract from capital’ s continued pillaging of our planet. Oh, and to sell Murdoch’ s rags.

The Australian media’ s complicity in amplifying identity-based division represents a textbook example of manufactured consent in action. By framing every issue through a culture war lens –whether it’ s gender-neutral bathrooms, Indigenous Voice, or immigration –the corporate media ensures that genuine class analysis and critique of capitalism remains off the table. To them, that’ s all this is –a way of keeping “the proles in their jobs, asking no questions, and hating each other” –you can’ t make this shit up. The endless cycle of inflammatory coverage creates a feedback loop where legitimate grievances get twisted into weapons for attacking other marginalised groups rather than challenging the very system that creates the marginalisation in the first place. Headlines about “woke ideology” and “gender ideology” serve as convenient distractions while –in our case, *both* major political parties continue implementing anti-worker policies –and revelling in the hate they have

manufactured to grab more power at the next election.

This devolution into identity-based warfare has devastating consequences for building working class solidarity. Not to mention on the mental and physical health of “minorities” and marginalised peoples across the gamut of the political spectrum (even when they vote for the leopards which eat their own faces). When workers are convinced that their real enemies are immigrants, trans people, or “cultural Marxists” (guilty) rather than the capitalist class stealing the surplus value of their labour, the prospects for unified resistance plummet. And that’s what we’ve seen deployed time and again over the last thirty years, particularly as the Labor party undermines any affective worker movement through its monopoly over (bourgeois) “unions”. The right’s concomitant deployment of reactionary identity politics serves to actively prevent the development of class consciousness, while liberal identity politics often reduces intersectional analysis to performative representation that leaves capitalism’s core operations intact. Both varieties in their pernicious creep into identity battles only strengthen rather than challenge hegemonic power –thereby simply reinforcing the damaging power imbalances that created the issues in the first place.

The cost of this fragmentation falls hardest on those facing multiple, intersecting forms of marginalisation. When movements for social transformation devolve into competing claims of oppression rather than building genuine solidarity, it is invariably the most vulnerable who suffer –Indigenous workers, disabled folks, queer and trans people of colour, and so on. Their specific experiences of exploitation and exclusion demand an intersectional analysis that holds both the particularity of identity-based oppression and the universality of class struggle. We cannot build effective resistance by either ignoring difference or reducing everything to identity –we need an educative praxis that fosters deep understanding across lines of difference while maintaining focus on our shared enemy –capitalism. And this doesn’t mean “reasoning with the right” who are hellbent on running the globe into climate-based destruction just for shits and giggles (masochistic and religious nut jobs alike).

Where might we go from here? The path forward requires developing forms of solidarity that can honour both our differences and our fundamental *commonality* as members of the working class facing extinction under capitalism’s death drive. This means creating spaces for genuine dialogue and political education that help people understand how their specific experiences of marginalisation connect to *systems* of oppression. Only the 1% has “got it made” in this system, and just because someone has a veneer of privilege, does not make them an exploiter –though idly leveraging that privilege for personal benefit is deeply problematic. The panacea isn’t more identity-based battling, or divisive rubbish, but rather building movements that centre the leadership of the most impacted while fostering collective understanding of how capitalism relies on and reproduces multiple, intersecting hierarchies. And, in case I haven’t been clear enough, most importantly, it means maintaining laser focus on the real enemy –not each other, but the capitalist class and their political enablers pushing us toward fascism and ecological collapse.

The tools for this work already exist in our theoretical traditions –from intersectional feminism to social reproduction theory to Gramsci’s insights about building counter-hegemony. What we need now is the collective will to deploy them in service of genuine solidarity rather than allowing our *identities* to be weaponised for capital’s benefit. The ruling class wants us fighting each other over pronouns, level of personal exploitation and disadvantage, and “others that look like you made this system” all while the capitalists steal the future from us, our planet and our children. If you choose the path of lateral violence over identity battles you choose capitalism, the system that oppresses you. An alternate path, one of radical education, deep solidarity, and unified resistance against the death cult of colonial capitalism is *a* panacea for resistance that allows our strengths to shine –not dividing us on our (perceived) identities, labels applied by others to keep us busy.

In closing, friends, none of us are free until all of us are free. The revolution must be

intersectional or it will be bullshit. Platitudes, or action? I think action.

In solidarity,

Aidan