

Against the WCAR fraud

Anarchism, Racism And the Class struggle

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WILL EDUCATION END RACISM?

According to South Africa's ruling elite, the problem of racism is basically a problem of ignorance. "Education", according to Barney Pitso, of the Human Rights Commission, "will cure racism".

This argument sounds appealing, but it is inaccurate and misleading.

Most importantly, this view conveniently ignores the role of the CAPITALIST SYSTEM in inventing and perpetuating racism.

Since capitalism emerged in the 1500s, it has committed many crimes against humanity. But few of these crimes are as vile as racism.

Perhaps that is why Barney Pitso - as a defender of capitalism and the ANC government's privatisation policies - wishes to hide capitalism's dirty laundry with his stress on "education".

CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY

Capitalism developed as a world system based on the exploitation of workers, slaves and peasants - black, brown, yellow and white. In the early period of capitalism ("merchant capitalism") in the 1500s and 1600s, capitalism centred mainly on Western Europe and the Americas.

In the Americas, vast plantation systems were set up. Based on slavery, they were capitalist enterprises exporting agricultural goods to Europe.

It was in the system of slavery that the roots of racism are to be found. In the words of the black Caribbean scholar, Eric Williams, "Slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery".¹

In the beginning, the slave plantations were not organised on racial lines. Although the first slaves in the Spanish colonies in the Americas were generally Native Americans, slavery was restricted (at least officially) to those who did not convert to Christianity.

The Native Americans were succeeded by poor whites shipped in from Europe. Many of these workers were only enslaved for a limited period, as indentured servants serving contracts of up to ten years or more. Others were convicts sentenced for "crimes" such as stealing cloth or prisoners of war from uprisings and the colonisation of areas such as Ireland and Scotland.

There were also a large number of long European slaves, and even amongst the indentured, a substantial number had been kidnapped and sold into bondage against their will.²

Conditions on the "Middle Passage" (the trip across the Atlantic) for these indentured servants and slaves were, in Williams' words, so bad that they should "banish any ideas that the horrors of the slave ship are to be in any way accounted for by the fact that the victims were Negroes".³

More than half the English immigrants to the American colonies in the 1500s were unfree indentured servants⁴, and until the 1690's there were still far more unfree whites on the plantations of the American South than black slaves.⁵

SLAVERY AND RACISM

It was in the 1600s that racist ideas first emerged.

In the 1600s and 1700s, the trade in human flesh shifted increasingly from the Americas and Europe ... to Africa.

The main reason for this shift to African slaves was not racism, but the fact - so cheering to the capitalists - that African slaves were cheaper and easily available.⁶

The African elite, which now hides its guilt under a mealy-mouthed "anti-racism," actively collaborated in kidnapping millions of African peasants and selling them to white merchant capitalists at the ports on the East and West coasts of Africa.

"The trade was... an African trade until it reached the coast. Only very rarely were Europeans directly involved in procuring slaves, and that largely in Angola".⁷

In the 1600s, facing pressure from slave revolts and radical grassroots movements in Europe itself, the slave-owners invented the ideology of racism. One of the most important slave-owner groups were the "British sugar planters in the Caribbean, and their mouthpieces in Britain" who used differences in physical appearance to develop the myth that black African people were sub-human and deserved to be enslaved: "here is an ideology, a system of false ideas serving class interests".⁸

Racism, in short, was invented to justify a long-standing system of slavery in the face of demands within Europe and the Americas for equal rights and equal duties for all working people.

The enslavement of Native Americans had been justified as being on the grounds of their "heathen" beliefs; European servitude was justified as being the lot of inferiors from the lower classes; African slavery was justified through racism.

The people who benefited from slavery were not Europeans in general, but the capitalist *ruling classes* of Western Europe. African ruling classes also received major benefits.

Many poor whites were indentured or enslaved, whilst poor white farmers within the Americas lost their land and markets to the slave-owners, whose drive for more land led to poor whites being driven off their family farms.⁹ (The vast majority of Europeans never owned slaves: only 6 percent of whites owned slaves in the American South in 1860).¹⁰

Slavery, in short, benefited the capitalists, to the detriment of working people of Native American, European and African descent.

RACE AND EMPIRE

Racism was thus born of the slavery of early capitalism. However, having been once created, later developments in capitalism would sustain and rear this creature of the capitalist class.

Solidly established in the Americas and Western Europe by the 1700s, capitalism soon became increasingly interested in expanding its operations in Asia and Africa.

Capitalist outposts already existed - often based on slavery, as was the case in the early Cape Colony, which was modelled on American slavery - and conquest was not far behind.

Between the 1700s and early 1900s, most of Asia and Africa were conquered as Western European capitalist governments invaded - hungry for profit from trade, from cheap labour and cheap raw materials, and profit from new markets to sell manufactured goods.¹¹

In the period of imperialism - of the establishment of Western empires in Asia and Africa - racist ideas were pressed into service to justify imperial conquest and rule. It was said that Africans and Asians were unable to govern or develop themselves, and needed to be ruled by



external forces - conveniently, this meant the ruling classes of Western Europe.¹² (Japan, which began to carve out its own capitalist empire in the 1800s, used a similar racism against Koreans, in particular).

Empire did not benefit workers in the colonies, nor in the imperialist countries. The profits of empire went to the capitalist class.¹³ Meanwhile, the methods and forces of colonial repression were deployed against workers in the imperialist countries (most notably, the use of colonial troops to crush the Spanish Revolution), whilst lives and material resources were wasted on imperial adventures.

Today, multi-national companies cut jobs and wages by shifting to repressive Third World client regimes.

SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's history cannot be understood outside of the history of slavery and empire.

When Jan van Riebeck arrived at the Cape in 1652, he did so as an envoy of the Dutch East India Company. Within twenty years, a slave system modelled on the plantation slavery of the Americas was emerging.

In the 1800s, growing British and European interest in the region was justified by an increasingly strident imperialist racism that hid its capitalist motives under the shawl of concern with "bringing Africa out of darkness."

Britain took over the Zulu kingdom in 1879, the Pedi in 1879, Botswana in 1885, Zimbabwe in 1890-3 and Swaziland in 1902. It wrapped up its conquests with the crushing of the Afrikaner republics in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. Germany also got in on the act with the conquest of Namibia in 1884, whilst Portugal maintained control of neighbouring Angola and Mozambique.

It was in this period of British imperialism that all of the key features of Apartheid were developed: segregation, pass laws, restrictions on African trade unionism and the cheap labour migrant system.

These instruments from the heyday of imperialism were refined and perfected under the National Party after 1948, which saw how useful racism was for capitalism.

The capitalist class in South Africa has, in short, benefited from 300 years of racism, which has provided cheap, right-less black labour on demand.

MODERN RACISM

Clearly, capitalism gave birth to racism. Racism as an idea helped justify empire and slavery.

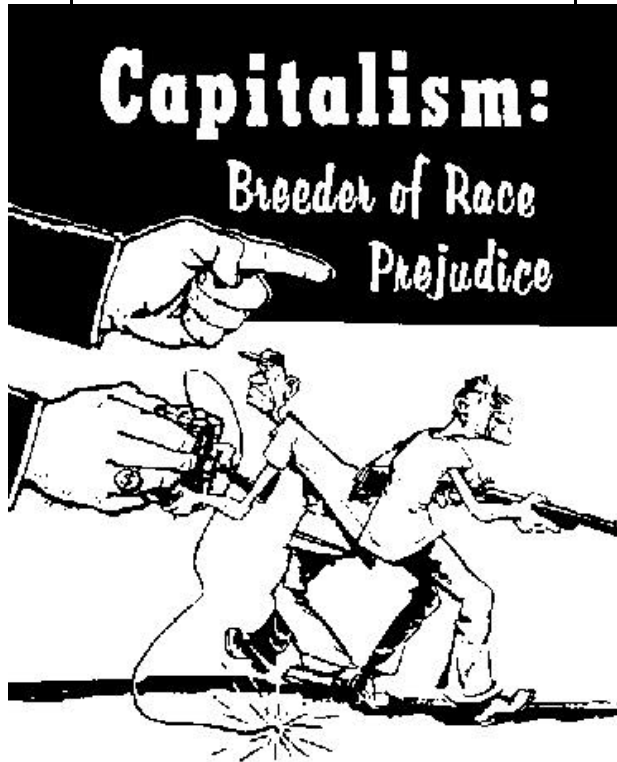
With the collapse of the European and Japanese empires between the 1940s and the 1970s, racist ideas and theory became less and less acceptable.

Why then does racism continue even today within the Americas, Europe and Japan?

It continues because it serves two key functions under capitalism.

First, it allows the capitalists to secure sources of cheap, unorganised, and highly exploitable labour. Immigrants and national minorities are sources of cheap labour that capitalists pit against the rest of the working class.

Secondly, racism allows the capitalist ruling class to divide and rule the exploited classes. Across the planet, billions of workers and peasants suffer the lashes of capitalism. Racism is used to build divisions within the working class to help keep the ruling capitalist class in power.



Praxedis Guerrero, a great Mexican Anarchist, described the process as follows:¹⁴

"Racial prejudice and nationality, clearly managed by the capitalists and tyrants, prevents peoples living side by side in a fraternal manner... A river, a mountain, a

line of small monuments suffice to maintain foreigners and make enemies of two peoples, both living in mistrust and envy of one another because of the acts of past generations.

"Each nationality pretends to be above the other in some kind of way, and the dominating classes, the keepers of education and the wealth of nations, feed the proletariat with the belief of stupid superiority and pride to make impossible the union of all nations who are separately fighting to free themselves from Capital..."

"If all the workers of the different nations had direct participation in all questions of social importance which affect one or more proletarian groups these questions would be happily and promptly solved by the workers themselves."

IMMIGRANTS AND NEO-LIBERALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

Workers, in short, are told to blame and hate other workers - distinguished by culture, language, skin colour, or some other arbitrary feature for their misery.

A classic example is the scapegoating of immigrants and refugees for "taking away jobs and housing". In this way, our anger is deflected onto other workers (with whom we have almost everything in common) rather than being directed against capitalists (with whom we have nothing in common). An "appearance" of common interest is created between workers and bosses of a given race or nation.

South Africa is a perfect example. The capitalist policies of the ANC - privatisation, pension cuts, massive retrenchments - all prove that the ANC is an outright enemy of the African working class.

Because of the ANC's neo-liberal capitalist policies, the legacy of apartheid is not only not addressed... it is worsened. African workers and their families, the victims of apartheid, now become the main victims of neo-liberalism (joined by a layer of Coloured, Indian and white workers).

But the new ruling elite, which is increasingly multi-racial, increasingly plays the race card to fragment us and so consolidate its class rule. Whether it is the ANC's Mbeki or the DA's Leon who plays the race card, the effect is the same: more power to the capitalist class and so, less and less chance of ending the legacy of apartheid.

And so, South African workers are pitted against each other and against African immigrants. And the rich get richer whilst the poor get poorer.

The race card is thus played both in the "West" and the "South" to disorganise the working class.

OUR POSITION

Our position is simple.

As anarchists, we oppose racism, and stand against racism wherever it raises its

ugly head. Racism is not only a crime against humanity, but a direct attack on the working class. Racism divides us, increases capitalist profits, and leads to lower wages for all workers.

White American workers, for example, in no way benefit from the existence of an impoverished and oppressed minority of African American workers who can be used to undercut wages, and working and living conditions.

Therefore we support revolutionary education against racism as part of a programme of developing a non-racial, international, anti-nationalist, anti-racist working class movement capable of crushing capitalism and the governments that defend it. This means every government, because every government - not excluding Cuba and China - is a capitalist instrument, a capitalist trade union.

We aim at the destruction of capitalism and the creation of a libertarian communist society under direct working class self-management of all aspects of society - whether the workplace, the school, the campus or the neighbourhood.

THE UN FRAUD

As anarchists, we consider the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) by the United Nations to be an enormous fraud.

Sitting cosily in expensive hotels, the world's elite - the people directly responsible for racism - will have an all-expenses-paid opportunity to posture as champions of anti-racism.

These elites, drawn from every race, will sit cosily and listen to lectures on the evils of racism... something none of them ever experience. Racism is reserved for the poor: the capitalist elites are protected by their lawyers and money. The UN is a rich-man's club, not a weapon against racism. Like the IMF, World Bank and WTO, the UN serves as an instrument of collective capitalist power against the world's working class and peasantry.

Our own elite, represented by the ANC, will use the opportunity to try and take the tarnish off its six years of anti-working class rule by posturing as a "model" of anti-racism.

CAPITALIST ANC HIJACKS EVENT

For the ANC, the WCAR is a golden opportunity to hide away the fact that privatisation and job loss are accelerating, and that the main victims are African workers and communities.

This is expressed in the march by the ANC Alliance - including COSATU - in support of the conference... only days after COSATU mobilised tens of thousands of workers against ANC policies!

We look instead to the new anti-privatisation movement and the Durban Social Forum as vehicles for moving the fight against racism beyond the bounds of the UN banquets.

REPARATIONS

The demand has been raised for reparations to African peoples for the impact of the slave trade. This is a progressive demand that, if realised, would go a long way towards ending the legacy of slavery in the Americas and West Africa.



However, it is extremely unlikely that reparations can be attained under capitalism.

The capitalists know that if they open the door to reparations for slavery, they will be asked for reparations for every one of capitalism's many crimes.

Furthermore, across the world, whether "West", "South" or "East", the capitalists are bent on crushing working and poor people through the implementation of neo-liberal policies of privatisation, cuts in schools, pensions and hospitals, flexible labour, free trade etc.

It is therefore unlikely in the extreme that the western ruling classes will now reverse the trend and introduce major social reforms. Their aim, for now, is to redistribute wealth from the poor to the rich.

Real reparations for the many crimes of capitalism will only be achieved under libertarian communism. And under libertarian communism, the capitalist elites of the world will be judged harshly for these crimes, rather than rewarded and rewarded and rewarded for evil, as is the case today.

US IMPERIALISM AND THIRD WORLD ELITES

Nowhere is the role of the UN as a rich-man's club made more clear than the bullying role of the US in the run-up to the WCAR. The US, as the most powerful capitalist country, has championed the removal of reparations and the repression of the Palestinians by the Israeli state from the WCAR.

Clearly, the US capitalist class wants to prevent any discussion of the two issues.

In this it is, unsurprisingly, supported by the ruling classes in Africa, who have scrapped the demand for financial

reparations for slavery and colonialism in favour of more debt relief and more free trade.

This move illustrates that Third World ruling classes are complicit in the system of neo-liberal capitalism and imperialism. Our immediate enemy, as South African militants, is not a vague "US imperialism," but the local ruling class which acts as a junior partner in capitalism, which is, after all, modern slavery. The enemy is at home!

The rich will not succeed in setting the agenda for anti-racist and anti-imperialist activism, because it is in the streets that the real demands and actions will take place! Struggle from below will help set out a working people's agenda against racism and imperialism, and the system that creates and recreates these social evils: capitalism.

ANARCHIST DEMANDS

It is our view as anarchists that the key to meaningful freedom for ordinary working and poor people is a struggle against racism, for libertarian (free) communism. The creation of a truly non-racial South Africa requires a social movement against capitalism and neo-liberalism, and for a society based on collective ownership and the principle "from each according to their ability to each according to their needs".

We stress the common interests of all workers across the world, and oppose the nationalists who are trying to use the WCAR as an opportunity to fragment workers and distract attention from the real class war in the streets, workplaces and communities

Our immediate demands are

- * an immediate end to privatisation, which can only increase poverty and misery
- * refusal to pay unfair electricity and water charges
- * an immediate halt to retrenchments
- * trade union independence from all political parties
- * full trade union democracy
- * an election boycott: elections are a fraud that serve only to waste our time and confuse our people
- * reparations for slavery
- * equal rights for immigrants
- * land occupations by self-managed rural collectives
- * factory occupations by the workers and their trade unions
- * freedom for the Palestinians, Burmese, Tibetans and all victims of racism, colonialism and capitalist dictatorship.
- * abolition of the third world debt, which serves as an instrument of capitalist imperialism and the closure of the IMF, World Bank, WTO and UN

In order to implement these demands, we must not rely on liberation from above, which will never happen. We must struggle from below, taking direct action against the bosses, the local councillors and other sectors of the elite, organising ourselves for a social war for the freedom of the working class.

"Anarchism does not derive from the abstract reflections of an intellectual or a philosopher, but from the direct struggle of workers against capitalism, from the needs and necessities of the workers, from their aspirations to liberty and equality, aspirations which become particularly alive in the best heroic period of the life and struggle of the working masses."

P. Arshinov, N. Makhno and others, 1926,
The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists.



From Prague to Seattle, Continue the Battle!

Reverse the Drive to Privatise!

***There is no contradiction between the class struggle
and the struggle against racism. Neither can succeed
without the other.***



1. Eric Williams, 1944, Capitalism and Slavery. Andre Deutsch, p. 17. See also Peter Fryer, 1988, Black People in the British Empire. Pluto Press, chapter 11.
2. Williams does not take sufficient account of the institution of life-long slavery among Whites.
3. Williams, p. 14
4. Williams, p. 10
5. Leo Huberman, 1947, We, the People: the drama of America. Monthly Review Press, p. 161.
6. Williams, pp. 18-19, 23-29
7. Bill Freund, 1984, The Making of Contemporary Africa: the development of African Society Since 1800, Indiana University Press, p. 51.

8. Fryer, p. 64.
9. Williams, pp. 23-26; Huberman, p. 167-168
10. Huberman, p. 167.
11. See Freund for a discussion of the African experience.
12. Fryer, pp. 61-81; Freund.
13. And not to workers as Fryer claims, pp. 54-55.
14. Programa del la Liga Pan-Americana del Trabajo in Articulos de Combate, p. 125-5, cited in D. Poole, "The Anarchists and the Mexican Revolution, part 2: Praxedis G. Guerrero 1882 - 1910, Anarchist Review, No. 4. Cienfuegos Press.



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