



The Anvil



Newsletter of Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group (MACG)

issue 1 * January-February 2007 * free

WHITE AUSTRALIA HAS A BLACK HISTORY

Australia is a country built on stolen land. The indigenous people were in sole possession of the land on 26 January 1788 and have never sold or given away an inch since then. Any land which they do not occupy has been taken from them by force. To this day, the theft continues.

The facts of the dispossession and its consequences are public knowledge and available to anyone who inquires. Through massacre, disease, internment and forced dispersal, land was “transferred” to the Crown, which generously granted its newly-acquired wealth to farmers, pastoralists and other settlers as capitalist real estate. Almost all productive land is now in the hands of non-indigenous people.

After the stolen land came the stolen children and the stolen wages. The story of the stolen children is one of attempted genocide. From the late 19th Century to the middle of the 20th, indigenous people of Australia were called a “dying race”. This was not so much an observation as it was official policy. The ruling class was troubled by a proliferation of “half-castes”, children almost always of indigenous mothers and white fathers. It was (usually unwritten) government policy to remove them and absorb them into white society. Meanwhile, the “full-bloods” were expected to continue to die out, thus eliminating potential future claimants of the stolen property.

The stolen wages are another appalling story, of State policy to defraud indigenous people of their hard-earned wages. It has been most extensively documented in Queensland, but it went on over all of mainland Australia. Indigenous people, under the control of State or Territory governments, were contracted to work on farms or as domestics and their wages were mostly paid into trust accounts under the control of local police, with a small fraction doled out as an allowance. The trust accounts were plundered by the coppers and the pastoralists and the State governments helped themselves to most of what was left. And, to cap it off, child endowment and pensions were siphoned off into State government hands, with the collaboration of the Commonwealth.

Indigenous people in Australia have survived an attempted genocide, but have suffered greatly in the process. As with all injustices, the question is “What is to be done”? The answer is that the working class must champion their cause. This would not be an act of charity. Instead, by taking up the cause of indigenous people, we would be acting in our own interests as well.

We cannot defeat the capitalists unless we are united and anything that divides us, like racism, is poison. Indigenous people are part of the working class as well, so it is

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The veil

We must oppose racism. We must oppose the oppression of women. These are elementary propositions. The media try to use the issue of women's Islamic dress to convince us that we can't do both. As usual, this is a lie. We can, and must, oppose both.

There are several forms of women's Islamic dress, originating in different societies, but they can be collectively referred to as "the veil". First of all, it is necessary to realise that the veil is both **a symbol** of the oppression of women and **an instrument** of it. A story in a British newspaper last year (*The Guardian*, 17/10/06) told the story of a woman journalist who had decided to wear the niqab, a very strict form of Islamic dress, for a day. She discovered the discomfort and the impediment to her own safety and had difficulty breathing. It is a physical limitation on a woman's freedom and ability to act in society. This operates **independently** of what the garment symbolises to the woman wearing it or to anyone else. And it is the highly visible nature of the **physical** bondage of the veil which is the first reason why it is a symbol of the oppression of women in Islam.

Another reason why the veil is a symbol of the oppression of women in Islam can be seen by reflecting on the discussion about women wearing Islamic dress as a refuge from sexual objectification and the male gaze. Here, we find women in the situation where they are burdened with the responsibility to limit their personal freedom because of the poor behaviour of men. In societies where the veil is customary, the assumption is that women are sex objects and a man in the presence of an unveiled woman to whom he is not related cannot reasonably be expected to control himself and keep within the bounds of morality. Women who do not wear the veil are therefore seen as "asking for it". Naturally,

there is little social pressure in Western societies in this direction (the line where women in the West are seen as "asking for it" by dressing in a certain way is drawn at a different point), but it is in the societies where the custom originated that one can see the logic of it and where it fits into overall social relations.

In some societies and some situations, wearing the veil can be a rational choice for a woman to make. This does not, however, remove the obligation to denounce the circumstances which have forced women into making this choice and change the society in question. The question that arises is, therefore, how will these changes come about?

The first thing to say is that you won't succeed by banning the veil. The example of British politician Jack Straw is a case in point. His stance against Islamic dress, whereby he refuses to see women who come to see him unless they remove their veil, is actually a case of the use of political power to reveal a woman to the male gaze – precisely the disempowering experience against which the veil is a defensive measure! Secondly, this doesn't take account of the fact that many Muslim women in Western countries have adopted the veil as a symbol of defiance and cultural identity. Despite its **physical** oppressiveness, they experience it as a liberatory **symbol**. And thirdly, the tactic of banning and discrimination fails to take account of the concrete circumstances in which Muslim women find themselves, where adopting the veil may be a tactic for achieving more personal freedom in other areas as they negotiate with authority figures in their family and community.

Our reaction, therefore, must be to defend a woman's legal right to wear whatever she likes and be free of

harassment or discrimination for doing so. What a woman is wearing should not be the occasion for discrimination in employment, for denying her service in shops or Government offices, for abuse in the street, or restriction on participation in social life in any form. This position, it should be obvious, is just as valid in Saudi Arabia as it is in Australia and, provided it is fought for vigorously and consistently, is even more powerful in Saudi Arabia than in Australia.

Further, we must fight against the anti-Islamic racism that encourages some women to feel they should don the veil as an act of defiance or cultural identification. By defeating racism, we will remove the illusory “liberation” of the veil and make its real physical oppressiveness more obvious. In particular, the War “on” Terror is driving Muslim women in Australia and other members of the “coalition of the willing” into the veil, so defeating the War will weaken this tendency.

Finally, we in the labour movement must fight alongside Muslim women against racism and sexism, so that we are aware of the precise terrain on which they struggle. Although the veil is oppressive, it is not the only oppressive thing in their lives and we must respect their priorities in deciding on what front to struggle at any point in time. Imposing a “no Islamic dress” line from the outside risks having some women put in situations where they have even less personal freedom (e.g. freedom of movement, freedom to socialise), something for which they would not thank us.

What women wear is theirs to decide. When Muslim women discard the veil of their own free will, it will be a great step forward. Forcing them to remove it, however, is oppressive and, in Australia, is racist

DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES

Death of a Tyrant

Saddam Hussein, deposed dictator of Iraq, has been executed. You can't say he wasn't asking for it. His rule was a reign of terror, complete with systematic torture, arbitrary executions and collective punishments. He used chemical weapons on the Kurds and Iranians and destroyed the marshes of the lower Tigris and Euphrates in order to drive out the Marsh Arabs. He was a monster and, according to his own standards, he deserved to die.

Capital Punishment is Barbarism

It would be a grave mistake, though, to finish there. Saddam may have had justice according to *his* standards, but we must live according to our own. His execution was a vindication of his own brutality and will be more fuel for the cycle of cruelty that US imperialism and religious reaction are imposing on Iraq. Indeed, the guards were from Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army and taunted him with sectarian insults. And, just to emphasise what sort of people they were, they released the snuff video. Capital punishment is barbarism. The State has no right to take a life, even when the victim's own standards would endorse it.

The Rush to the Gallows

But there is more. Saddam was not executed to punish him for his crimes, but to cover up the crimes of the United States and other imperialist countries. He received a US-controlled rigged trial in a kangaroo court, charged with one of his lesser atrocities and was hung before he could be

tried for his greater ones. *This was intentional.* If Saddam had been tried for the Halabja massacre of 1988, for example, he could have given chapter and verse about who supplied the ingredients for his chemical weapons and how the US State Department had covered for him by blaming the massacre on Iran. Similarly, prosecutions for other crimes like the invasion of Iran or the massacre of the Shi'ites would have led to the exposure in court of the US officials who had collaborated with him at every point of his criminal career.

A Gangland Hit

Saddam's execution was a sectarian murder by a bunch of cutthroats, but it was also a gangland hit to silence him by far greater criminals who desperately don't want to be held responsible for their own crimes. Only the working class can defeat the United States and other imperialist powers and bring their rulers to justice. Let's get started.

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necessary to take up their issues on the basis of "an injury to one is an injury to all". We must demand the return of the stolen wages, compensation for the stolen children, a settlement for the stolen land and an end to police murders.

Further, indigenous people are in no position to defeat injustice solely through their own efforts. While it is up to them to decide their own issues and priorities, they need allies in order to win. The working class is the only force in society which has both the strength and the motive to win this struggle.

What is Anarchism?

Anarchism is a social philosophy based upon the principles of liberty, equality and solidarity. It is the political dimension of a free society.

What is Communism?

Communism is the principle of "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need". It is the economic dimension of a free society.

What is the Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group?

The MACG is an organisation of class struggle revolutionary anarchists who share political positions, articulated in theory, strategy and tactics. We aim to encourage struggle by the working class for its own interests and, within that struggle, we aim to advance Anarchist ideas as its necessary philosophical basis.

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