

CLASS UNITY

Study Guide: Intersectionalism & Anti-racism

Intersectionalism, the highest stage of western Stalinism? [\[link\]](#)

The Political Economy of Anti-Racism [\[link\]](#)

Things to Keep in Mind

Macnair claims that the roots of intersectionalism as an ideology are to be found within the history of the socialist movement in America. The Popular Front of the 1930s, which demanded worker unity, led the CPUSA towards the separation of racism and sexism as political concerns from the overall interests of workers. The Maoist practice of “speaking bitterness” introduced the idea of personal experience (race-, gender-based) as an unquestionable criterion for political relevance, thus allowing special interests to proliferate as concerns for the left. Finally, capitalist ideology proposed that discrimination is bad for business, allowing anti-discrimination efforts to divide worker interests. Macnair thus argues that the intersectionalism propounded by Crenshaw and prefigured by the CRC serves the interests of capital as a basis for dividing the working class, while also contributing to the rise of more obviously right-wing identity politics.

Benn Michaels details the theoretical limits of the type of change that anti-racist politics are able to envision, and thus the segments of society that find it acceptable to take them up.

Guiding Questions

Read these questions beforehand and think about what you think the answers are as you go along. In your notes, indicate key quotes that might be related to each question.

How do both authors think that intersectionality handicaps socialists politically?

In what way are white identity politics the necessary product of intersectional/discrimination modes of thinking?

Mike Macnair

How was intersectionality shaped by anti-discrimination law? Does this indicate that it is a move beyond, or an accommodation to the defeat of the civil rights movement?

Is class more important than race/sex/etc? is class different than these things? Is it an identity? Can it be included in a "matrix of oppression" in a way that addresses capitalism? Why might race/sex/etc not be understood in the same way as class?

Why does it seem to people that "socialism is only about economics"? What is the meaning of economy? What is an economy for liberals? What about for Marxists?

What is the labor aristocracy idea and how does it relate to 1970s New Left assumptions about race, the lumpenproletariat, etc... How does this relate to Second International ideas about what radicalized or deradicalized working class people?

What is the relationship between social being (experience, group membership, etc) and "consciousness" (political positions and outlook)? How does intersectionality relate to the problem of leadership, both "within" and "without" intersectional categories?

Is it possible to delineate between "socialist" and "liberal" intersectionality? Is there an ideological point where the two differ, or perhaps a historical one? Does intersectionality have commitments that block its practitioners from embracing Marxism?

Walter Benn Michaels

What is the distinction between *class* and *classism*?

What is possible politically from the standpoint of identity politics?

What does Benn Michaels mean by horizontal and vertical inequality? Why does addressing horizontal inequality not move you in the direction of addressing vertical inequality?