



# Why is identity politics not conducive to achieving sustained social justice?

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## Abstract

Oppression of racialized and ethnic minorities and women needs to be adequately understood and effectively fought against. Identity politics (IP) appears to take oppression seriously. As an intellectual and political struggle for justice, IP has two inter-related components: recognition/respect and economic distribution for identity-groups, with the first being the predominant component. IP has highlighted the importance of oppression and is right to emphasize recognition as an aspect of social justice. Yet, IP cannot be a good tool for the fight for sustained social justice because of its theoretical and political deficiency. IP's biggest theoretical problem is its inherent neglect of the causal primacy of objective class relations. As a result, it over-emphasizes special oppression as a cause of humanity's major problems. It lacks a rigorous conception of oppression itself as a condition that is common to many different oppressed groups, nor does it have an objective explanation of oppression. IP's theoretical deficiency leads to its political deficiency. The latter is manifested in its neglect of class politics, its overemphasis on linguistic resistance, and its fight for representational politics whereby small groups of people defined on the basis of identity receive some limited material benefits. Based on an empiricist, idealist, individualist, and reformist approach, IP has no strategy to unite all the different oppressed groups based on their objective interests. Just as trade union politics is a bourgeois politics of workers, IP is a bourgeois politics of oppressed groups. A class theory of society recognizing oppression, and a class-based political strategy aiming to eliminate exploitation and oppression constitute the only alternative to IP.

**Keywords** Identity politics · Social justice · Class · Capitalism · State · Radical transformation of society

Oppression based on identities is a form of injustice. It includes inferiorization, discrimination, cultural domination, and exclusion of women and of minorities

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defined in terms of such relations as race, ethnicity, religion, caste, and sexual orientation (Das, 2022a). Oppression is universal. In Britain, for example, BAME (black, Asian, and minority ethnic) families are two to three times more likely to be in persistent poverty (Makoni, 2021). This is partly because of labor-market discrimination that obstructs individuals from ethnic minorities, even those with higher education, from accessing and retaining higher-paid jobs (ibid.). In Indian cities, Muslims, ex-untouchables (*Dalits*) and indigenous people are five times more likely than others to be in poverty (GOI, 2006). Police brutality against black people in the USA (as that against Muslims and indigenous people in India) is real; the Black Lives Matter movement, however inadequate, is primarily a response to police killings. In Britain, black people are nine times more likely to be stopped-and-searched and five times more likely to face the use of force by police than white people (Makoni, 2021). Similarly real is environmental racism—the phenomenon of racialized minorities suffering disproportionately from environmental risks, including dumping of toxic waste, as geographers and other social scientists have shown (Bullard, 2001; Cutter, 1995; Pulido, 2000).

Oppression as a manifestation of social injustice can also be subjective. All humans need to be treated respectfully. Yet, some are not. And, once some men and women are denied respect or recognition, they are often excluded from jobs and from participating in public affairs like others do, including in the fight for social justice (Fraser 2009).

A popular response to such oppression has been identity politics (henceforth, IP). As an intellectual and political struggle for justice, IP makes two inter-related demands: for recognition/respect and for limited economic distribution for identity groups. The first is predominant and influences the second. IP has highlighted the importance of oppression and is right to emphasize recognition as an aspect of social justice. Yet, on the whole, IP cannot be a good tool in the fight for sustained social justice. That is, it cannot ensure that cultural needs (recognition), economic needs, political needs (democratic rights), and ecological needs of oppressed and exploited people are wholly and durably met. This is because IP's intellectual basis is deeply problematic, and its political strategy severely inadequate. I now consider these two aspects in turn.

## IP's theory

IP, especially as it circulates in academia in various disciplines, including in anthropology, human geography, and sociology (Alcoff, et al., 2006; Bernstein, 2005; Keith and Pile, 1993), is generally informed by post-structuralist/post-modernist thinking. This thinking is characterized by the following, among others: resorting to subjectivity (the idea that things exist because individuals think in certain ways); under-emphasis on, or neglect of, the materiality and objectivity of human life; ontological prioritization of the individual or of subjectively/culturally defined groups of individuals, with the individual often treated as oppression's primary site; rejection of a systemic view of society; accent on descriptive narratives at the expense of causal analysis; and seeing society as divided into identity groups whilst

neglecting objective class divisions (Das, 2020; Das, 2022a). Such a problematic framework leads to specific theoretical problems.

### **Fetishism of oppression but no causal explanation**

IP over-emphasizes oppression as a human condition. It fails to recognize that society's major problems—e.g. massive income/wealth inequality, livelihood precarity, grinding poverty, avoidable pandemic mortality, recurrent economic crises, global warming and endless wars—are *not* fundamentally caused by racial, gender, or other identity-based oppression, even if oppressed groups suffer more than others from these problems. IP fails to appreciate that society's major problems, and indeed the processes underlying injustice, are predominantly caused by society's productive resources being controlled by a tiny minority who use them for profit rather than to meet human needs, a process defended by the state (Das, 2017).

Oppression *is* undoubtedly an important aspect of the human condition. But IP cannot point to any objective general (=society-wide) mechanisms driving it. For example: What is it about men, or white people, that gives them the power, and creates in them a need, to oppress women and black people, respectively? Any explanation offered is idealistic: Gender and racial oppression occur because of certain *ways of thinking*. But whence does such thinking come?

IP cannot adequately answer this because it conflates material conditions—"the economic conditions of production" (and social reproduction of human species)—with "social consciousness" (Marx, 1859). How people think *is* important as it can have some influence on material conditions and politics. Yet, one cannot properly "judge an individual by what he [or she] thinks about himself [or herself]," nor can one judge how a society operates merely in terms of individuals' consciousness. Indeed, "this consciousness must be explained from the ...material life" and its contradictions (ibid.). There *are* objective conditions behind the injustice that people experience (e.g., colonialism, slavery). And then there are ideas that make people accept these conditions as "self-evident laws of nature" (Marx, 1887:523) in order to minimize potential resistance against these conditions and the attendant injustice, the ideas (see below) that inform everyday social practices (e.g., racist discrimination). For IP, however, "the cause of discrimination is rooted in the very *identity* of these groups and their difference from the discriminating group" (Lustig, 2020: 248; italics added). Thus, IP conflates *objective* conditions with the *ideas* (that constitute discrimination/prejudice against individuals).

### **Non-recognition of common human condition**

IP's emphasis on the individual and on individual thinking, and thus its neglect of the materiality of human life, leads to it overlooking the fact that all people (of whatever sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, caste, religion, etc.) must 'first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing' etc. (Engels, 1883) before being able to pursue politics, ideology, etc. Consequently, IP disregards the fact that people must produce things to satisfy their needs, that in class societies this production necessarily

happens within exploitative relations of ownership and control in/over production and that the state is bound to defend these relations even at the expense of people's democratic rights and livelihood. Consequently, IP neglects the *common* obstacles (class relations, and especially, capitalism, and the state) to achieving social justice that people of all *different* identities face.

IP mistakenly assumes that oppressed groups—as humans and as members of exploited classes—have no interests cutting across their identity-specific interests. The *systemic* character of social oppression becomes then a matter of how *individuals* uniquely *experience* their everyday lives. Individuals are treated as individuals and not as what Marx calls “ensembles of the social relations” whereby what one individual is, is because of their relations to others. Note Collins' (1990: 234) assertion that each oppressed group has its unique experience; that there are only “partial perspectives, situated knowledges”; and that no one group has a clear angle of vision nor possesses the theory that allows it to discover the general mechanisms of oppression.

Personal experience *is* important: to the extent that (poor) black people are subjected to more police brutality than (poor) white people, the former's experience *is* significant. Moreover, our knowledge of what is happening and why, and our view of what is to be done *are* partly shaped by our own experience of place- and time-specific concrete manifestations/expressions of the structure of oppression. But I would argue that such experience engenders only “spontaneous consciousness” (of oppression) while what is necessary for sustained social justice is theoretical consciousness—i.e., consciousness of the ontologically stratified social totality including its underlying social-material *relations* and causal *mechanisms*. These are class relations and contradiction-ridden economic development processes, which IP neglects. They determine the structure of oppression, which is variously expressed and experienced (see below). Does one have to be lynched by a Hindu or white mob to develop insight into such lynching and to solidarize with experience of being lynched?

### **Intersectionalism no compensation for primacy of class**

Crenshaw (1989) used the metaphor of a crossroads to develop the notion of intersectionality. One road denotes race, another denotes gender, and so on, and they all intersect. This framework is helpful for seeing how distinct axes of oppression compound others (Haider, 2018:7). But ultimately, intersectionality is a scaled-up version of IP. The intersecting roads of single oppressions are all built on sandy surfaces of subjectivity. As an idealist and empiricist framework, IP cannot answer: What is objectively common to the experience of *all* oppressed groups? Pursuing the roads metaphor, what explains the nature of the surface on which different roads of identity intersect and without which there cannot be roads? What explains whether any road is causally (not morally) more important than another, and how/why they intersect?

The main limitation of IP, including in its intersectionalist incarnation, as a theoretical vehicle for the fight for social justice, stems from it ignoring the alternative

theory that social oppression is caused fundamentally by class exploitation and its defense by the state. This theory entails several inter-related aspects. (1) While capital is indifferent to the nature of concrete labor, labor is not, because some kinds of labor are “dirty” (e.g., scavenging) and/or require back-breaking manual exertion. The capitalist system uses oppressed groups to get this sort of work done: The “lowest castes” (*Dalits*) do stinking, scavenging work in India; racialized immigrants do hard manual work (e.g., strawberry picking) in rich countries. (2) Capitalist employers super-exploit oppressed groups by paying them wages below those paid to others and justify this in terms of their purported inferior status—as if a black man or woman possesses less than one unit of labor power of average quality. (3) Similarly, capitalism’s political system denies these groups access to a social wage (government benefits) and/or full democratic rights, because they are seen as unworthy—as if a racialized immigrant possesses less than a unit of citizenship. Now, these mechanisms (see points 1–3) lead to a major consequence: Dividing common people on the basis of identities undermines their ability to fight both class-exploitation and the state power supporting it, as also efforts to obtain material and other concessions promoting social justice. Consequently, working people themselves use IP to compete for resources and jobs in a society, one where the economic realm is effectively beyond their democratic control. Moreover, as Du Bois (1935) would say, they also use IP as a psychological compensation for their suffering.

IP is thus practically “averse” to a serious consideration of objective class relations and to class politics. To the extent that IP considers class at all, its consideration takes four forms, none conducive to the fight for social justice. Firstly, IP, including intersectionalism, sees class idealistically as classism with cultural-social prejudice against working-class people (or “the poor”) treated as parallel to racism and sexism. This reduces class to an identity category. Secondly, IP’s occasional attention to class’s material dimension manifests in its silence about the relations of property and production and consequently in its concern with distribution only because it sees class in terms of some people having less income or fewer use values than others.

This concern with distribution only is evident in Fraser’s (2009: 84) “perspectival dualism” approach to justice where she argues that “redistribution and recognition do not correspond to two substantive societal domains, economy [class relations] and culture.... One can use the recognition perspective to identify the cultural dimensions of ...redistributive economic policies” and “one can use the redistribution perspective to bring into focus the economic dimensions of ...recognition.” Such a perspective is problematic. Not only does Fraser fail to consider property and production relations; her adding redistribution to recognition does not produce a rigorous *concept* that includes necessarily connected mechanisms. Whence does the need for misrecognition ultimately come? Further, Fraser is concerned only with redistribution of consumption resources. She neglects consideration of how the unequal distribution of these resources stems from an unequal distribution of productive resources and from the logic of their use (i.e., for profit making). No redistribution agenda can significantly or sustainably benefit the oppressed unless the property or

class question is addressed alongside considering how the conditions for a lack of recognition are rooted in that question.<sup>1</sup>

Thirdly, IP's gradational-distributivist view sees problems such as those of low income as experienced by the socially oppressed (e.g., black women), i.e., as "problems of the disproportionately poor" (Gimenez, 2018: 105), and not as problems of *all* property-less or property-poor men and women of different races and ethnicities, who constitute the economically bottom 80–90%. In other words, IP decides questions of who gets what in terms not of objective criteria (property/production relations) but of who is *seen* as whom.

Fourthly, by adopting an oppressionist perspective that is empirically Euro-American centric, not only are Asia and Africa's millions of women workers ignored, but the working class is often understood as white (adult) males. This conception devalues women's labor in capitalist production and exchange, both in richer and poorer countries. And it leads to the working class as a whole being regarded as the oppressor. Such a view disregards the working class as the universal liberatory class whose alienation represents that of nearly everyone, and which has no interest in reproducing the current society (Llorente, 2013; Das, 2017: chapter 12).

Fifthly, in the politics of recognition, and given IP's superficial understanding of economic inequality (ostensibly readily addressed by redistributive government policy but without fundamental society-wide transformation of class relations), understanding class's primacy over relations of oppression gets short shrift. Class is treated as merely one of many axes of injustice without class relations being seen as governing non-class axes of injustice. IP (and other liberal/left-liberal approaches) appears unconscious of the analytical faultiness in seeing class merely in terms of distributive inequality redressable through measures of social justice. It begs the question: What would class *equality* mean? Can landlords and peasants, or capitalists and workers, ever be equal?

By over-emphasizing identity, IP is aligned with false empiricist understandings of exploitation and its link to oppression. For example, white workers (who are ostensibly not oppressed) getting higher wages than black workers (who are oppressed) are seen as exploiting black workers. Or, more generally, it is falsely thought, "everyone who isn't experiencing a given form of oppression is complicit in perpetuating it and benefits from it" (Cassell, 2017). In other words, in IP where one individual can freely choose from a basket of identity "commodities," there is identity fetishism. The latter somewhat parallels what Marx (1887) calls commodity fetishism: Relations between, say, white workers and black workers (and indeed between white people and black people) replace relations between exploiters (of different identities) and the exploited (of different identities). Yet to the extent that white (or upper caste) people or men get higher wages than others, the real beneficiary is the exploiting property-owning class. Although more is given from the total wage-fund at a given moment to workers of some groups and less to others (whose super-exploitation is based on their oppressed identity), objectively, the whole class of direct producers is getting only a small part of its net product.

<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that a class focus excludes distribution of consumption resources, or recognition.

## IP's strategy

A strong theory is necessary for strong social justice movements. The *political* implications of IP's *theory* are deeply problematic and cannot promote significant and durable social justice. There are at least five reasons for this.

## Disunity

The political power of the masses (workers and small-scale producers) to fight for justice lies in their class-based unity, but the objective effect of IP is disunity. IP recognizes many perspectives on oppression, all of them partial (e.g., a gender perspective, a race perspective), because each group's experience is treated as unique. Specific experience as a group member is furthermore seen as a prerequisite for a fully committed and representative struggle; for example, only a black person or a *Dalit* can truly lead a movement for racial and caste justice.

As "an individualist method," IP "is based on the individual's demand for recognition, and it takes that individual's identity as the starting point.... [I]t suppresses the fact that all identities are socially constructed. And because all of us necessarily have an identity that is different from everyone else's, it undermines the possibility of collective self-organization" (Haider, 2018:23–24).

Even when IP turns to groups of individuals, it remains faulty. All the numerous oppressed groups, each with its unique views and political demands, compete with one another and cannot find common ground on which to fight against the totality of oppression, let alone class exploitation. IP invites every separate group to assert its rights against another. Logically, in IP, the interests of black women are opposed to those of black men, and the interests of black disabled women are opposed to those of black able-bodied women, and so on.

IP fails to understand that almost *all* workers and small-scale producers, i.e., almost all exploited people, experience oppression in different forms: ageism, sexism, racism, religious sectarianism, etc. All these different forms represent a single process: tyranny, or assault on democratic rights (Das, 2020). Democratic rights of all—the bloc of the bottom 80–90%—must be defended as a part of promoting justice, and not *just* the rights of this or that group *separately*.

## Linguistic and representational struggle

Human wants "spring from the stomach" (material wants) and "from fancy" (cultural/subjective wants) (Marx, 1887:27). All humans, whether they quench hunger by eating "raw meat with the help of hands, nails and teeth" or by eating "cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork" (Marx, 1857) need to be treated respectfully, including in words and gestures, and to be given due recognition for their contribution to society. However, given that, for IP, social oppression becomes *mainly* a matter of how individuals *think* who they and others are, a crucial form of struggle is linguistic political correctness. This strategy is mistaken. Change in words is not unimportant, but it itself cannot fundamentally change the world. For example, how

can mere land acknowledgement, e.g., *saying* that I am sitting on land taken away from a Canadian aboriginal group, help the group improve its conditions of employment and access to safe drinking water and healthcare? If linguistic struggle is important, would IP ever demand that capitalists make a “labour acknowledgement” saying: “our profit comes from your labour”? Recognition is not un-important. But recognition itself is not redistribution, not even of consumption resources.

IP’s main goal is the following: given  $n$  jobs or seats in a university in a given year in a region/country, more of  $n$  should go to the socially oppressed than to dominant groups. Put differently, IP’s main goal is to address unequal distribution—in identitarian terms—of societal wrongs and opportunities. To the extent that IP demands material redistribution and that some concessions are granted due to the pressure of IP, they are very likely to affect a small section within an oppressed group (e.g., employment for a few people who are oppressed by unequal race or gender relations), at the expense of other people, some of whom may be oppressed in other ways. Like state welfare programs based on the redistribution of the working class’s own contribution (tax), IP’s redistribution is *within* the class of workers, and not from capitalists to workers. When IP pressure leads to some black people getting more jobs than otherwise, some white people may get fewer jobs. Consequently, as per the IP’s nature, all these groups fight among themselves for a given pool of jobs rather than fight against the ruling class and its state in order to increase well-paying and secure employment opportunities *for all* right now. IP’s redistributive politics effectively reproduces identity-based divisions among people. These divisions help reproduce the capitalist structure, including its anti-democratic coercive machine that is deployed to keep the oppressed groups in their place within the class of direct producers (wage earners and small-scale producers).

IP from above is often based on a trickle-down theory of oppression (Garnham, 2018). Such an approach, I would argue, parallels the trickle-down theory of neo-classical economics and of neoliberalism. In IP’s trickle-down approach, when a few women or black people achieve top positions, all women or all Blacks somehow benefit. Implicit here is the idea that greater presence of women and other oppressed groups in the public places (e.g., workplaces) “help[s] eradicate or alleviate their oppression” (Cassell, 2017). Yet, as Cassell points out, “oppressed groups are not oppressed because they are underrepresented; they are underrepresented because of systemic oppression in society that create[s] barriers to participation in public life and politics.” Even if the boards of directors of companies include many more black people or women, it would make no material difference to the exploitation suffered by the working class and poor, including black women. For example, in South Africa, “the incorporation of a tiny minority of blacks into the capitalist class has made no difference to the dire poverty suffered by the majority” (Senan, 2015). Indeed, if a woman or a black person who is relatively affluent succeeds in overcoming sexist or racist obstacles to their lives, does this make a significant difference to the lives of *ordinary* women or black people? (Sparrow, 2016). How does the presence of a few more black people or aboriginal people in academia or the government *in itself* eliminate (or significantly undermine) oppression, especially when most black or aboriginal children begin day one of their journey in suffering, alienated from life’s necessities?



Further, why is it necessarily a good thing if many homosexuals or women and black people become exploitative CEOs, war-mongering army generals, and austerity-promoting university administrators? What use is it if lots of black people or women professors are hired even if they may be theoretically “enslaved” to a politics of religious or racist supremacism or to anti-people World Bank policies or to imperialist war-mongering? Is it not cultural essentialism to think that a black person or a woman will automatically champion the fight against oppression of all black people and women? Consider this example from the USA: Joe Biden’s Cabinet includes women and visible minorities whose hands and brains are tainted by actions that have hurt millions in the US and in the Global South. Mr. Biden said in 2021: “This cabinet will be more representative of the American people than any other cabinet in history.” But the question is: Representative of *what* exactly—of what characteristic of Americans? Note, moreover, that when the “liberal” administration plays the politics of race and gender while failing to significantly improve the conditions of oppressed and exploited men and women, the objective effect is to fuel the anger and alienation that create conditions for the growth of the Far Right which plays race- or religion-based majoritarian IP and is even more anti-redistribution than the “liberals.”

The slightly better-off among oppressed groups, for whatever reason (including pure chance), compete for the top posts with those of culturally dominant groups; so they use IP to meet *their* needs and ambition. This suggests that IP as an idea becomes an ideology of these better-off sub-groups. Moreover, applying a political strategy of increasing representation of identity groups in higher echelons of private-corporate or state bureaucracy effectively works as a strategy of hiding, behind an IP screen, all the economic and political violence that the system inflicts on common people of all races, genders, and sexes. One must ask: What is the value of any small positive change that might accrue from IP (e.g., benefit for a few women who get university or corporate jobs; women leaders motivating other women to join politics) relative to the cost of IP in terms of: (a) the divisiveness that it promotes, which impedes movements for justice for the oppressed and the exploited majority; (b) the illusions that IP cultivates about the ability of the system to serve people’s needs durably and significantly; and (c) “fueling” Far Right’s majoritarian IP.

### **Abstraction from class politics, and inherent reformism**

IP is *identity*-based politics because it is not *class* politics. Just as trade union politics limited to trade unionism is a bourgeois politics of workers, IP is a bourgeois politics of oppressed groups. This has many implications.

If, for example, one is serious about fighting police brutality against black people and other oppressed groups (e.g., Indian Muslims), one must react to the interconnected acts of tyranny (e.g., sexism, racism, religious sectarianism, etc.) as they are ultimately rooted in two fundamental processes: capitalist exploitation and the mechanisms of state power that protect such exploitation (Das, 2017). But the IP approach cannot do this. So, it cannot really serve the cause of justice because it fails to accept that the struggles for (i) freedom from racism, sexism, religious

discrimination, casteism, etc., including unceasing police brutality and on-going attacks on democratic rights, and (ii) freedom from material deprivation are necessarily part of, and connected to, the struggles of common people of different identities against capitalist class relations and the capitalist state.

Oppressed groups do face violence disproportionately. IP is right to stress this. But IP has no adequate political response to this because it fails to see police brutality against black people and other such groups as brutality by the *capitalist state* against the working class. IP must consider this: The capitalist state must be in place for state violence against black and indigenous people, and other oppressed groups, to occur. The state's fundamental aim is, however, *not* to inflict such violence against the minorities as such, even if that is an empirical regularity. Its main enemy is a class, the working class (of all races, gender, ethnic and religious backgrounds). One cannot significantly and durably fight police violence against oppressed groups without fighting the capitalist character of the system in which such violence ultimately inheres.

IP assumes that oppression, including police violence against black people and other acts of systemic discrimination, occurs because of the norms/attitudes of certain individuals, groups, and institutions. The political implication is: If one changes certain people in an institution or certain rules (i.e., how a certain institution works) or how people think about identities, things will be fine. No, things will not be fine. This is because state actors and state rules are bearers of predominantly capitalist relations. Similarly, anti-democratic norms and attitudes must be resisted. Their existence and power, it must be recognized, derive from the whole system which is based on private property and production for profit, and which increasingly cannot tolerate basic democratic rights because factors such as massive economic inequality and recurrent crises of profitability reduce the system's ability to grant even meagre concessions and to be conciliatory. IP's failure to recognize all of this means that the objective effect of IP thinking and action is the persistence of police violence against black people and other such groups. IP's neglect of the systemic character of oppression leads to its effective rejection of radical transformation of society, i.e. revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and its state. Moreover, as indicated by the assertion of Nancy Fraser and others, the oppressed *as* oppressed (e.g., women as an oppressed group) can be the main agent of the fight for justice (see Arruzza et al, 2019). Thus, IP, like much Marxist thinking nowadays (e.g. that of David Harvey), overlooks the leading role of the working class—working class men and women of different races and ethnicities—in the fight for justice.

Moreover, IP favors mainly small-scale, often localized and (discursive/linguistic) acts of resistance by a person or groups of persons defined on the basis of identity/identities. A result is that the *form* of struggle that IP advocates does not require a political party of the masses. IP's political media/platforms are transient and constitute ad hoc protest politics through alliances with a "lesser evil" bourgeois party or with the help of NGOs (Karat, 2011). IP's outermost limit is (some mild version of) social democracy (or, a 'new social democracy'). IP generally tends to have much "unreasoning trust" in the state's ability to solve the oppressed's problems, this despite the state being the fundamental mechanism maintaining an exploitative and oppressive system (Das, 2022b). IP may offer criticisms of capitalism and of

lesser evil political party/parties, but such criticisms are only of conjunctural symptoms and systemic excesses and therefore end up serving as safety valves for the system within which there is much anger.

That IP's view of social justice is perfectly consistent with capitalism is evident in the extent to which big companies "spend... their social justice dollars on programs to recruit a more diverse management class and develop a more diverse supply chain for their products" (Brightwell, 2021). Thirty-six percent of S&P 500 corporations made contributions to racial justice organizations' in the USA in 2020 (ibid.). However, what I would call diversity dollars cannot resolve social injustices such as inadequate access to housing, jobs, healthcare, and education as well as policing and criminal justice issues, all of which adversely impact women and minority workers in particular, but also working-class people in general. The capitalist class would not give money without expecting anything in return. Unsurprisingly, a key theme of "corporate social justice" powered by diversity dollars is to promote the idea that Black freedom means Black capitalism (or that *Dalit* freedom means *Dalit* capitalism in India); the former is neatly captured in the slogan "Black Wealth Matters" (Brightwell, 2021).

## Conclusion

Oppression of women and minorities is real. Its existence cannot be denied, neither intellectually nor politically. Sometimes, oppressed groups, richer or poorer, suffer due to society-wide problems (e.g. an economic crisis) just like non-oppressed groups do. Sometimes, they suffer because they are poorer than non-oppressed groups (and they are poorer in part because of their oppressed status). This happens when, for example, a pandemic is mismanaged by the state or interest rates are raised in the name of fighting inflation. In such instances, a policy/event that is color- or gender-neutral may become colored or gendered. Yet, one must recognize that oppression as a process—an attack on certain groups' democratic rights—is ultimately a product of class society and that various expressions of oppression (racism, sexism, etc.) are parts of a single process of oppression (i.e., tyranny or attack on democratic rights of oppressed groups). Seen thus from a class perspective, there can be no intellectual or political basis to support IP as a vehicle for achieving social justice, whether IP is social-democratic (e.g., Nancy Fraser) or "orthodox" (liberal). Allied with bourgeois parties and bourgeois civil society, IP is a form of bourgeois politics (of the oppressed). Anti-oppression politics does not have to be IP.

Under pressure from IP, the system can show some symbolic recognition towards oppressed groups, including by building statues of an oppressed group's leaders/ideologues. It can effect some material redistribution too, for example, by building houses for women or black people (through reducing spending elsewhere). Or it can ensure that a few more women or black people get jobs at the expense of men and whites and apparently equalize conditions between genders and races. But IP, *qua* IP, itself cannot increase, for example, the number of secure jobs *for all* with an inflation-adjusted living wage, or increase access to quality housing, higher

education and decent healthcare *for all*. Even if small numbers of people receive some benefits from IP (e.g., jobs, on the basis of affirmative action, or some forms of recognition), IP hurts the working class as a whole which is the exploited majority of society. Firstly, IP ultimately divides the working class in its fight to abolish capitalism and establish a new society where (a) productive resources are placed under the democratic control of the working class of *all* genders, races, sexualities, and ethnicities and are used rationally to meet everyone's needs, irrespective of their identities, and (b) oppressed groups and areas enjoy the democratic right to self-determination and receive due recognition for their contributions. In that society, the police and other coercive force, now placed under the democratic control of common people and newly armed with the ideology of solidarity, would not dare to kill a common person or to violate their democratic rights, whether or not they are a poor black person or a *Dalit* or a Muslim. Moreover, since significant reforms are by-products of the struggles for revolutionary changes posing a serious threat to the system, IP's undermining of the conditions for revolutionary struggle reduces the possibility for significant and durable reforms in the conditions of the oppressed.

By undermining class politics and by contributing to the reproduction of capitalist class society, IP effectively reproduces the social-material conditions for oppression. Since the reasons for social oppression lie ultimately in class relations, the fight to establish a state controlled by common people and to abolish class relations is a necessary condition for achieving significant and sustainable social justice. IP does not, will not, and cannot fight class relations, so it indeed remains an obstacle in the fight for social justice.

One must pose this question to all who subscribe to IP, including those like Professor Fraser who do pay some attention to the material dimensions of oppression: Are they against the elimination of class relations, including capitalism/imperialism, as well as all forms of social oppression? If not, they should clearly say so and explain their position and not mislead ordinary men and women, by offering a subjective, individualistic, sectorally narrow, and reformist view of social justice. The choice is between i) identity-based politics that seeks a capitalism where at best life is slightly better for oppressed groups and ii) class-based politics that seeks to eliminate capitalism, including its state, and social oppression with it.

The social in social justice is much more than a conceptual and political map of identity groups that essentially define IP. The genuine fight for social justice by all those who are opposed to class exploitation as well as social oppression must surely be guided by the following principle:

*Our concern cannot simply be to modify private property, but to abolish it, not to hush up class antagonisms but to abolish classes, not to improve the existing society but to found a new one. (Marx and Engels, 1850)*

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