

Let the Tibetans decide their future

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The protests and arrests in Lhasa and the demonstrations and counter-demonstrations around the Olympic torch relay has re-focused the world on the plight of Tibetans. This has, in turn, sparked a debate on the left about whether the Tibetan struggle is a just one, or not what it seems.

The Socialist Alliance national executive decided at its April meeting that the right to self-determination applies as much to the Tibetans as to any other people. It's not for others to decide according to some private benchmark of oppression whether or not the Tibetans are "really" oppressed. Obviously, the protests in Lhasa and other centres reflect deep feelings of discrimination and alienation: these things cannot be manufactured.

In this context it is irrelevant that some in the West, especially high-profile Hollywood followers of the Dalai Lama, believe in the weird delusion that old theocratic Tibet was a Shangri-la that was cruelly destroyed by the "Chinese communist dictatorship". The fact that the Tibetan resistance army up until 1959 was funded and trained by the CIA is also irrelevant.

The recent protests reflect the anger of new generations of Tibetans about the parlous state of their national rights and livelihoods, despite the rights they formally enjoy as a national minority under the Chinese constitution.

Every thinking person has to work out whether oppressed peoples have the right to self-determination, whether that oppression comes from a power that calls itself "communist" or from the much more usual source: the imperialist nations old and new.

The Socialist Alliance is a consistent and principled supporter of the right to self-determination, irrespective of whether the oppressed peoples in question are reckoned "spiritual" or "counterrevolutionary" by some (Tibet), or treated simply as the usual terrorist suspects (Tamils, Basques, Palestinians, Irish etc.).

Many on the left, including great revolutionaries like Fidel Castro, see the Tibetan struggle through the prism of British, Japanese and US imperialism's abominable role in China, before and after the 1949 revolution.

They stress that it was this revolution that finally ended China's status as a country either dominated and ransacked by foreign dynasties and empires or torn apart by warlord infighting. The revolution also finally overturned the abominable rule of the old Tibetan aristocracy and set the country on the path of development.

No left or progressive person would disagree. But does this truth negate the reality that the Tibetans today feel oppressed and marginalised in their own country?

One thing is certain: if left and progressive people decide that the Tibetan national struggle isn't really worthy, it will find its allies where it can — on the right.

Equally obviously, the more the struggle depends on right-wing and reactionary support, the more unpopular it will be with broad masses of people in other countries and the less likely to develop the support needed to prevail.

The left should not be bamboozled by the barrage of verbal condemnation of China from Western spokespersons, including PM Kevin Rudd. This is simply an attempt to appear to stand for human rights while exploiting the issue to delegitimise a rising political and economic rival.

This game is no longer the Cold War “strategy of containment” of communism: now the imperialists’ hand has to be played without endangering an economy that plays an increasingly important role in the capitalist world system (including Australian raw material prices).

It is the shameless hypocrisy of these attacks — which in some mouths have “yellow peril” overtones — that has so outraged Chinese communities around the world, including virulent opponents of the Chinese government.

Why should China not be allowed to enjoy the prestige of staging the Olympic Games, when such criminal violators of human rights as Nazi Germany, the US and Britain hosted them without a word of censure? Is China still somehow not quite deserving of this honour?

The Socialist Alliance supports the Tibetans’ right to decide their future at the same time as condemning anti-Chinese xenophobia.

P.S.

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