

**BEYOND TOXIC MASCULINITY:
A CLASS STRUGGLE
PERSPECTIVE**



The Polar Blast

| | POCKET EDITION | | AUGUST 2025

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In recent years, “toxic masculinity” has become a ubiquitous term in media, education, and politics. While it originally emerged from feminist critiques of patriarchal violence, it has increasingly been absorbed into liberal frameworks that treat gender-based harm as an issue of personal morality rather than structural oppression. In doing so, this framing often isolates toxic behaviours from their material roots – class exploitation, capitalist alienation, and the ideological conditioning that upholds both. “Toxic masculinity,” as it is popularly deployed today, has been transformed into a bourgeois weapon, a means by which the ruling class disorganises, disciplines, and divides the working class.

The Depoliticisation of Gender Critique

Mainstream discourse around toxic masculinity tends to individualise harm. Men are often depicted as inherently aggressive, emotionally stunted, or predisposed to domination. The supposed remedy is moral reform: men must be more empathetic, vulnerable, or “feminine” in their emotional expression. While emotional growth is undeniably important, this psychologised framing strips the issue of its political economy. It assumes that patriarchy exists in isolation from capitalism, and that masculinity itself, rather than specific expressions shaped by capitalist relations, is the core problem.

This individualist lens is not accidental. It reflects the ideological needs of the bourgeoisie. By framing interpersonal harm as a result of bad individual choices or flawed gender roles, liberalism diverts attention from structural conditions: workplace exploitation, housing precarity, racialised policing, and the commodification of care and intimacy. In this way, toxic masculinity becomes a disciplinary discourse. Working-class men, often deprived of access to mental health care, stable employment, or political education—are pathologised

for the very traits that capitalist society inculcates in them: emotional repression, competitiveness, and fear of vulnerability.

Masculinity Under Capitalism

Capitalism produces and sustains patriarchal gender roles not simply as cultural relics, but as functional mechanisms of control. Masculinity under capitalism is a social construct shaped to serve accumulation. Men are conditioned to suppress emotional needs, compete with one another, and derive self-worth from dominance, be it over others, over nature, or over their own feelings. This is not natural. It is ideological training.

Popular figures such as Andrew Tate or Jordan Peterson do not invent these behaviours, they capitalise on them. They represent hyper-visible, commodified expressions of a masculinity that promises men power and identity in an alienated world. But their dominance is only made possible by the emptiness capitalism produces. When people are cut off from community, care, and collective struggle, these reactionary forms of masculinity offer the illusion of control. They promise freedom, but deli-

ver deeper submission to market logic, hierarchy, and violence.

Yet even as mainstream culture vilifies men who exhibit such traits, it continues to rely on them. The state, the police, the military, and the corporate world reward aggression, emotional detachment, and the willingness to use force. Toxic masculinity is condemned in the poor but rewarded in the powerful. The same newspapers that decry “alpha males” lionise violent CEOs, nationalist politicians, and invading armies. This double standard reveals the underlying class dynamic: working-class men are policed and punished for exhibiting behaviours that the ruling class depends on for its survival.

Feminism, Class, and the Limits of Liberal Reform

The co-optation of feminist discourse by neoliberalism has enabled gender politics to serve elite interests. Bourgeois feminism celebrates the ascent of women into positions of corporate or state power while ignoring the continued exploitation of working-class women, especially women of colour. A female CEO is praised as a victory for gender equality, even as she oversees a work-

force of underpaid women in precarious jobs. In Aotearoa, as elsewhere, this contradiction plays out starkly. While some women break glass ceilings, others face violence, economic dependency, and state abandonment.

This version of feminism often conflates patriarchal violence with masculinity itself, rather than understanding violence as a function of power relations. In this view, working-class men become the enemy, while women who succeed within capitalism are cast as role models. This obscures the fact that capitalism is patriarchal not just because of male domination, but because of its exploitation of reproductive labour, much of which falls on women, especially in domestic and caregiving roles.

Furthermore, the focus on individual transformation – men “learning to cry,” women “leaning in” – has replaced collective struggle. The possibility of dismantling capitalism and patriarchy together is rendered invisible. The capitalist system thus inoculates itself against critique by absorbing its opposition and selling it back in safe, commodified forms.

Working-Class Masculinity and Revolutionary Possibility

Rejecting toxic masculinity does not require rejecting masculinity altogether. Rather, we must reimagine masculinity as a relational, political identity that is not fixed or universal, but open to transformation through collective struggle. Revolutionary masculinity is not about dominance or suppression – it is about solidarity, emotional courage, mutual aid, and care. It is about standing against patriarchy not to conform to liberal respectability, but to build new forms of human relationship grounded in freedom and equality.



Historically, working-class men have played contradictory roles in struggles for liberation. They have upheld patriarchy in the home and workplace, but they have also fought against capitalism, colonialism, and fascism. From the anti-fascist partisans of Europe to the miners' strikes in Aotearoa, working-class men have shown immense capacity for collective sacrifice and solidarity. The task is not to shame or marginalise men, but to politicise them and to show that their liberation is bound up with the liberation of women, queer people, and all others oppressed by capitalist patriarchy. In practice, this means creating spaces where men can confront the harm they've caused and the harm they've suffered, not as a therapeutic exercise in self-flagellation, but as part of building revolutionary consciousness. It means rejecting both the stoic "hard man" archetype and the liberal "feminised man" trope, in favour of a masculinity that is accountable, relational, and grounded in class struggle.

Masculinity, Colonialism, and the New Zealand Context

In Aotearoa, any analysis of masculinity must also contend with colonialism. The imposition of British patriar-

chal norms onto Māori communities was a key feature of colonisation. Whānau structures that once centred collective caregiving were displaced by Victorian nuclear families and patriarchal authority. Today, Māori and Pasifika men disproportionately bear the brunt of punitive state systems – incarceration, mental health neglect, and social disconnection.

The criminalisation of Māori masculinity is a colonial continuation, not a postcolonial accident. The state labels rangatahi as “at-risk” while flooding their communities with police. In this context, calls to “fix toxic masculinity” often function as dog whistles for racialised punishment. Working-class and Indigenous men are not only cut off from power, they are pathologised for their very attempts to survive.

An anarcho-communist perspective insists that liberation must be decolonial. That means dismantling the carceral state, restoring mana to Māori communities, and building collective forms of care and accountability that don’t rely on punishment. Masculinity, in this context, must be re-rooted in whakapapa, aroha, and tino rangatiratanga—not neoliberal shame or colonial blame.

The Role of Anarchist Praxis

A revolutionary approach to masculinity must reject both essentialism and liberal individualism. It must affirm that people can change, not just personally, but politically, when conditions allow for collective transformation. Anarchist praxis offers the tools for this change. Through mutual aid, horizontal organising, and direct action, we create new relationships that challenge domination at its root.

Community organising offers opportunities for men to step into roles of care and support, not as heroes, but as comrades. Men can learn to listen, to be accountable, to undo the reflexes of control they've been taught. They can begin to experience power not as something exercised over others, but as something built with others.

Ultimately, the fight against toxic masculinity is not a fight against men, it is a fight against capitalism. And that fight must be joined by all genders, united not in shared guilt, but in shared resistance. Our goal is not to produce better-behaved subjects for capitalism. Our goal is to abolish the wage system, dissolve patriarchy,

and create a world in which all forms of gendered domination are impossible.

Reclaiming Power Without Domination

Toxic masculinity is not the root cause of harm. It is a symptom of deeper structural violence. By treating masculinity as the problem, liberal ideology obscures the material conditions that produce it. In doing so, it weakens solidarity, isolates the working class, and protects the institutions that thrive on domination.



A revolutionary politics must go deeper. It must understand that masculinity, like all social roles, is shaped by the forces of class and capital. It must refuse both moralistic condemnation and liberal reformism. And it must invite all men, especially those discarded by the system, to join in building a world where care, dignity, and collective power replace fear, competition, and control.

This is not simply about rejecting toxic behaviours. It is about reclaiming the right to be human: to feel, to connect, to resist, and to love, fiercely and without apology, in the face of a system that would rather we didn't.

Source:

<https://thepolarblast.wordpress.com/2025/07/01/beyond-toxic-masculinity-a-class-struggle-perspective/>

