

In Rejecting Columbus, Cities Forge Path Toward System Alternative

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A scene from a 2013 anti-Columbus Day protest in Washington, DC. (Photo: Victoria Pickering/flickr/cc)

As [Minneapolis](#) and [Seattle](#) mark their cities' first-ever Indigenous Peoples' Day, activists are calling for a nationwide revocation of Columbus Day in favor of a holiday that honors the more complicated past of this land's original inhabitants.

In an [interview](#) with Democracy Now!, Seattle city councilmember Kshama Sawant, one of the sponsors of that city's [recently passed](#) resolution, explained the importance of such efforts.

"There's never been a better time for us to be united and fight for socialism, fight against corporate domination."
—Kshama Sawant, Seattle City Council

By rejecting Columbus Day, "we're making sure that we acknowledge the absolute horrors of colonization and conquering that happened in the Americas at the hands of the

European so-called 'explorers,'" Sawant said. Columbus, she noted, was a "prolific slave owner" who was responsible for "mass enslavement and a genocide" that decimated the Native American population.

"Columbus did not discover America," Sawant added. "He plundered it and he brutalized its people."

It's well past time for the U.S. to realize that "Columbus Day is a metaphor and painful symbol of that traumatic past," historian and writer Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz [argued](#) in an open letter to President Barack Obama published last week:

Native American nations and communities are involved in decolonization projects, including the development of international human rights law to gain their rights as Indigenous Peoples, having gained the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which your administration endorsed. It's time for the United States government to make a gesture toward acknowledgement of its colonial past and a commitment to decolonization. Doing away with the celebration of Columbus, the very face of European colonialism, could be that gesture. In its place proclaim that fateful date of the onset of colonialism as a Day of Solidarity and Mourning with the Indigenous Peoples.

[According](#) to Indian Country Today, 16 states are not celebrating Columbus Day this year, as opposed to just three states in 1990.

While the focus is on history, the debate over Columbus Day is still quite relevant to current struggles, said Sawant, a socialist.

"Everything that's happening around us is showing us that more and more people are realizing that in general, this system of capitalism that rests on a history of slavery and colonialism and continues the exploitation and war and violence to this

day is not working for us,” she said. “We need an alternative. There’s never been a better time for us to be united and fight for socialism, fight against corporate domination.”

She continued: “We want this [resolution](#) to be a building block to start...a real debate about why is it that we see such poverty, unemployment, and such brutalization of our indigenous communities even today?”

And by doing so, she said, we can deepen the intersections among oppressed groups. “Our task on the left is to join these movements together and give a much more amplified voice to the struggle of the Indigenous communities by realizing that their struggle is connected to the black struggle in Ferguson; it’s connected to the struggle of women against sexism and sexual violence; it’s connected to the struggle of workers overall for workplace justice.”

See Sawant’s full interview here:

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